

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Tell It Like It Is: Television and Social Change, 1960-1980

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

Kathryn L. Flach

Committee in Charge:

Professor Rebecca Jo Plant, Chair  
Professor Luis Alvarez  
Professor Dayo F. Gore  
Professor David Serlin  
Professor Daniel Widener

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Chair

University of California San Diego

2018

## DEDICATION

For my family—Fred, Marylee, Ulices, and Emilio

## EPIGRAPH

“It’s not what they said, it’s how they said it.”  
-Marie Petrucelli

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At UCSD I have also received guidance and inspiration from numerous faculty members. My advisor, Rebecca Jo Plant, has been extremely supportive since I entered the Ph.D. program. I am grateful for all the thoughtful comments and critical feedback on my written work. But most of all, her encouragement over the last seven years has helped me see this project through to the end. In addition to the support she provided me when I was in San Diego, I am extremely grateful that she took the time to “meet” with me over the phone multiple times after I moved to Colorado. Graduate school can be isolating, but it’s even more so when you move away from your community during the last year of a Ph.D. program. At UCSD, I have also had the pleasure to work with Luis Alvarez. As a committee member, he provided me with guidance on my research and professional

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generous with their time and expertise. Special thanks to the archivists at the University of Wyoming's American Heritage Center who suggested materials that were not on my radar based on my research interests, and for mailing additional materials for free after I left Wyoming. Also, Julie Graham at UCLA's Special Collections provided helpful information about various media archives in the greater Los Angeles area. Archivists Christopher Kox at City College of San Francisco and Pamela Jackson at San Diego State University went above and beyond to help me search for what little information I have on the Minority Writers Workshops that I wrote about in my fourth chapter, and I cannot thank them enough. Many thanks to Norman Lear who allowed me access to his personal collection, but even more so to his secretary, Jean Anderson, who was so kind and made the arrangements for me to view his papers—she even sent me two episodes of *All That Glitters* on DVD for no reason other than she thought it might help.

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I would also like to thank Andrew Ditto for burning my first CD when we worked together at the Italian deli when I was in high school. I could tell he was surprised when he asked me which album I wanted, and I gave him a list of my favorite television theme songs. He told me it took longer than expected since *Barney Miller*, *Maude*, *Good Times*, and *The Jeffersons* were probably not top downloads on Napster in the late 1990s. But he found all the songs and even made a sticker of the *Welcome Back, Kotter* cast to put on the cover. I still have that CD and I listened to many times while writing.

Most important, my deepest love goes to my family who have provided endless support since I can remember. My grandfather, John Petrucelli, was a role model and taught me the importance of being kind to people. My grandmother, Marie Petrucelli, encouraged me to work hard and pursue my education. My father, Fred Flach, was my biggest cheerleader and a constant source of love and support. My mom, Marylee Flach, has shown me by example how to be a fantastic parent, and now as an adult I consider her my friend. She is fun, smart, caring, and a true inspiration. She's also a great research assistant. When helping me at the archive in Wisconsin, she held up a piece of fan mail

and loudly proclaimed, “can you believe Twitter replaced this?” She brought a lot of fun to that research trip.

My extended family have also been a support system who helped me to finish this dissertation. My uncle and aunt, Pete and Mary Herschberger, drove me to and from the airport numerous times and opened their home to me while on research trips, and for non-research related visits. The long phone conversations with my aunt, however, and the bond we share is what I love most. Elisabeth Brown and Michael and Elena Herschberger bring so much joy and happiness to my life whenever we are together, they helped me take much needed breaks to enjoy spending time with family throughout this process. Rocky Petrucelli and Jeff Kezman are the two people who make my trips back to Ohio the most fun because of their sense of humor and spirit. Furthermore, I cannot thank my mother-in-law, Maria Piña, enough for welcoming me into the family and showing much kindness. I had one chapter completed before I had my son, Emilio, and it was because she came to Colorado twice for extended visits that allowed me to make significant progress on this dissertation. I was able to be away from home and focus because I knew Emilio was in good hands. I cannot thank her enough for sacrificing her time away from her own home to help me and taking such good care of Emilio.

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## VITA

### EDUCATION

- 2018            Doctor of Philosophy in History, University of California San Diego.  
Chair:            Rebecca Jo Plant  
Major Field:    Modern United States History  
Minor Fields:   Women's/Gender History, Communication.
- 2011            Master of Arts in History, University of Akron.
- 2007            Bachelor of Arts in Education, University of Akron.

### PUBLICATIONS

“Julia.” in *Women's Rights: Reflections in Popular Culture*, ed. Ann Savage. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2017.

Review of M. J. Rymysz-Pawlowka, *History Comes Alive: Public History and Popular Culture in the 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), in the *Journal of Popular Culture* (forthcoming).

### FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

- 2017            Frontiers of Innovation Scholars Program (FISP) Fellowship, University of California San Diego.
- 2016            Summer Graduate Teaching Scholars Program, University of California San Diego.
- 2016            Research Travel Grant, Department of History, University of California San Diego.
- 2015            Research Travel Grant, Department of History, University of California San Diego.
- 2014-2015      Head Teaching Assistant Award, Department of History, University of California San Diego.
- 2012-2014      Chancellor's Interdisciplinary Collaboratory on Gender Inequality Fellowship, Graduate Studies Department, University of California San Diego.

- 2011-2015 Graduate Studies Fellowship, Department of History, University of California San Diego.
- 2009-2010 Graduate Studies Fellowship, Department of History, University of Akron.
- 2009 Presentation Award, Conference for Undergraduate and Graduate Student Research, University of Akron.
- 2001-2007 Dorothy Hassenflue Stein Scholarship, University of Akron.

#### INVITED TALKS

- 2016 “Feminism on Television” invited lecture in COMM 144: American Television in the 1970s, University of California San Diego, La Jolla, CA, May.
- 2015 “Looking Natural: The Iconic Image and Legacy of Angela Davis,” Featured guest lecturer before Angela Davis’ keynote address, Purdue University, Lafayette, IN, February.

#### CONFERENCE ACTIVITY/PAPERS

- 2017 “Angela Davis vs. *Julia*: Television’s Dichotomous New Black Woman, 1968-1970,” Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Gender, and Sexualities. Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY; *presenter*.
- 2017 “‘The Silent Dissuaders’: The Politics of Feminist Television Writers in The Sixties and Seventies,” Western Association of Women Historians 49th Annual Conference. Town & Country Resort and Convention Center in San Diego, CA; *presenter*.
- 2017 “A Feminist Script: Ann Marcus and the Politics of Writing for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*,” American Historical Association Conference. Colorado Convention Center, Denver, CO; *presenter and panel organizer*.
- 2016 “Is Studying Women Not Enough Anymore?: The Future of Women’s History,” Western Association of Women Historians 48th Annual Conference. Sheraton Denver Downtown in Denver, CO; *panel organizer*.
- 2015 “Covering Feminism as a Less Than Newsworthy Crusade, 1968-1970,” Western Association of Women Historians 47th Annual Conference. Hilton Sacramento Arden West in Sacramento, CA; *presenter*.

- 2015 “Teaching Diversity in UC San Diego Undergraduate Classrooms,” Teaching Diversity Conference. University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA; *roundtable presenter*.
- 2013 “Subliminal Messages: Televisual Portrayals of Feminism, 1968-1972.” Gender Beyond Boundaries 1st Annual Conference. University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA; *presenter*.
- 2012 “Feeling Bad: Cultural Narratives of Guilt Across the Lifespan,” National Women’s Studies Association. Oakland Marriott, Oakland, CA; *moderator*.
- 2012 “She Can Be the Mother: Televising Black Motherhood from Mamie Till to *Julia*,” Southwestern Social Science Association Conference. The Manchester Grand Hotel in San Diego, California; *presenter*.
- 2011 “The Historical Legacy of Black Women’s Leadership Faculty Roundtable” in Honor of Angela Davis, University of Akron, Akron, OH; *roundtable presenter*.
- 2010 “Exposing Motherhood: Mamie Till and Televised Femininity,” Graduate Committee for Research on Women/Gender 3rd Biannual Conference. University of Akron, Akron, OH; *presenter*.
- 2009 “Lynching Exposed: Televisuality and the Murder of Emmett Till,” Association for the Study of African American Life and History 94th Annual Conference, Hilton Cincinnati Netherland Plaza, Cincinnati, OH; *presenter*.
- 2009 “Lynching Exposed: Televisuality and the Murder of Emmett Till,” Conference for Undergraduate and Graduate Student Research, University of Akron, Akron, OH; *presenter*.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Tell It Like It Is: Television and Social Change, 1960-1980

by

Kathryn L. Flach

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California San Diego, 2018

Professor Rebecca Jo Plant, Chair

This dissertation investigates the relationship between popular culture and social movements during the 1960s and 1970s. In an era marked by the rise of movements that challenged discrimination and second-class citizenship, TV producers attempted to represent and address societal tensions through the creation of more “realistic” programming that dealt with hot button social issues. With Black Power and feminism at the forefront of these movements, white male producers sought out underrepresented writers—people of color and white women—to translate their experiences to the small

screen. This increased politicization in television engendered anxieties among reactionary viewers who complained that sitcoms and dramas could disrupt the status quo by presenting race and gender advancements in a positive light. Fans who wrote to networks, however, conversely claimed that Americans could learn from “authentic” shows that “tell it like it is.” Drawing on a wide range of sources—production files, correspondence, fan mail, script drafts, magazines, TV series, and writers meeting minutes—I argue that producers and viewers alike considered entertainment programming a tool that could alter social and political discourse.

Scholars of US social movements typically focus on what motivated people to organize and the extent to which they achieved their goals. Analyses of the relationship between activism and media are generally limited to the ways in which print and broadcast news propelled or undermined a movement’s agenda. Studying periods of resistance through the lens of popular culture, however, contributes to our understanding of how everyday people outside of social movements and from various racial and ethnic backgrounds understood the changes that activists demanded. *Tell It Like It Is* places entertainment television at the center of this dialogue to demonstrate how the politicized context in which television shows were produced and viewed during the 1960s and 1970s contributed to the general public’s engagement with current events.

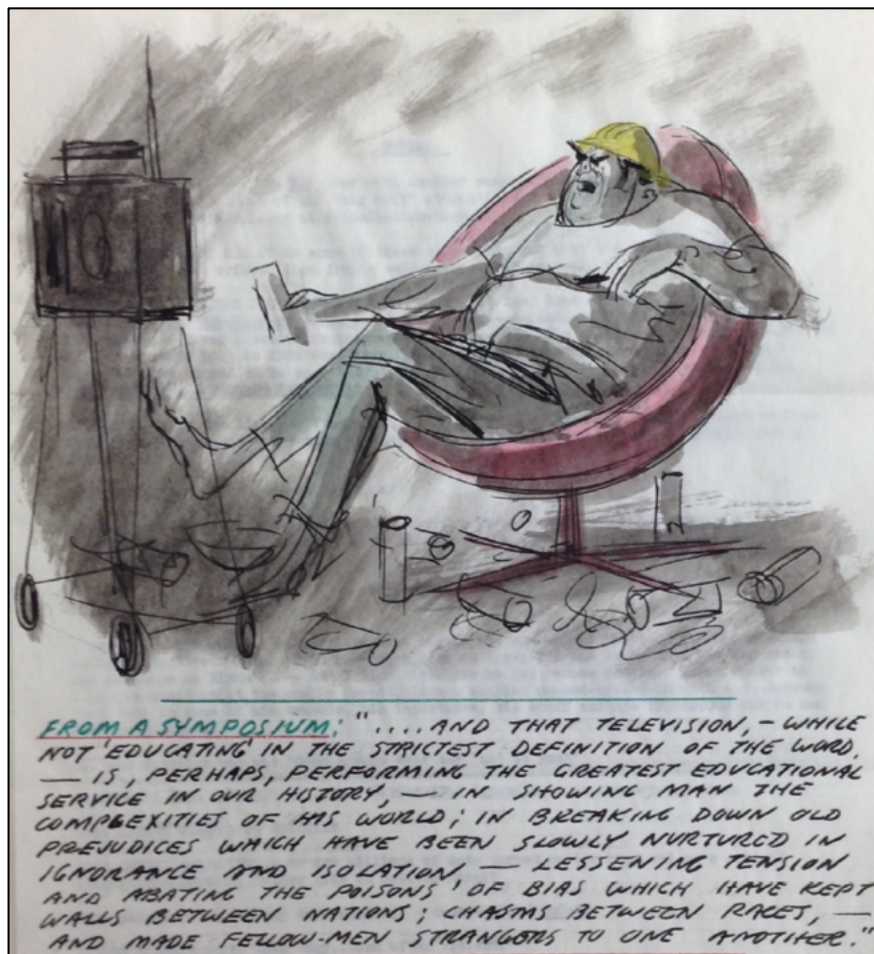
## Introduction

In September of 1970, producer Hal Kanter received a letter from an old friend, Jack, which read more like a stand-up comedy routine than a personal note. At one point, Jack described his reaction to catching a late night airing of the *Dick Cavett Show* and asked, “Does ANYONE watch TV?...or are millions of sets turned on (or kept on) as a sort of blanket background...rather like an optical Muzak?” The question got at the heart of debates about television programming that dated back to the medium’s infancy, referencing arguments that claimed TV provided nothing more than mindless entertainment. But Jack knew that television was far more than an innocuous distraction from life. Sandwiched between an update on his wife’s career and a diatribe about the triteness of TV’s infatuation with doctors and detectives, Jack drew an illustration of a white man wearing a hard hat, watching television from a chair surrounded with beer cans. The man angrily yells at the television directly in front of him, but the image is drawn so that only the backside of the television is visible, making the man himself the focal point. The caption, a quotation from the symposium the man is watching on TV, reads:

...[T]elevision—while not educating in the strictest definition of the word—is, perhaps, performing the greatest educational service in our history—in showing man the complexities of his world; in breaking down old prejudices which have been slowly nurtured in ignorance and isolation—lessening tension and abating the poisons of bias which have kept walls between nations; chasms between races—and made fellow-men strangers to one another.

The illustration and caption reference the divisions that existed concerning television’s social and political role in the mid-twentieth century. From its earliest stage, debates ensued about whether television should function as an educational or entertainment

medium. Jack's drawing depicts this tension with the TV set projecting one side of the argument, as voiced by certain producers, writers, and even political figures, who claimed that the medium could and should influence social and political discourse. The angry white viewer whose hard-hat and beer cans suggest he is part of the working-class Silent Majority, represents all those who opposed attempts to use television to espouse liberal messages or promote political projects like racial integration and women's liberation.<sup>1</sup> This dissertation is a history of these debates.



**Figure 1:** Illustration from Jack to Hal Kanter. 17 September 1970. Courtesy of the Hal Kanter Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives.

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Jack (no last name) to Hal Kanter, 17 September 1970, Box 1, Folder 6, Hal Kanter Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

*Tell It Like It Is* examines the interplay between television and US social movements. More specifically, it traces how television writers, producers, and everyday viewers interpreted social and political change through entertainment programming. Set between the Kennedy Administration's push to improve the quality of America's "vast wasteland" and neoconservative demands for more family-friendly programming almost two decades later, *Tell It Like It Is* examines the transformation of television as an educational medium through an analysis of the production and reception of sitcoms and dramas. By exploring the negotiations made between writers, producers, and networks, what got left on the cutting floor, and the responses from viewers, *Tell It Like It Is* investigates how and why entertainment television mainstreamed liberal conceptions of race and gender while also provoking neoconservative critiques. Contrary to conventional wisdom that presents sitcoms and dramas as largely apolitical, while portraying viewers' political interpretations as purely subjective, I argue that producers and viewers alike considered entertainment programming a tool that could alter social and political discourse.

Competing ideas regarding the politics of television developed during the 1960s and 1970s, when debates about the medium's limitations and possibilities took shape as it became a permanent fixture in American homes. Distinct approaches to how the medium should be used represented the different intentions of television industry personnel, politicians, and the American public. Each had a vested interest in expressing their perspective, because all believed TV could alter the tone of the country and aggravate or ease social tensions. Certain producers thus embedded political messages into their programs in order to teach audiences about topics such as desegregation, class disparity,

and sexism, while simultaneously entertaining them. This move opened the doors for people of color and white women to become television writers who could translate their lived experiences with racism and sexism to the small screen. But this is only one part of a two-sided story. To get a sense of how viewers interpreted the messages they watched on TV, I draw on the extensive collections of viewer mail written to six television shows, totaling over 1,000 letters. These sources help to reveal the politicized context in which television programs were produced and viewed, and how television in turn contributed to the general public's understanding of, and reaction to, current events at a time when various social movements were demanding change.

*Tell It Like It Is* demonstrates that certain writers and producers considered entertainment television an *educational medium* and purposefully constructed representations with the aim of affecting audiences' views and attitudes. This is not to say that writers and producers should be seen as a revolutionary vanguard against racism and sexism in the 1960s and 1970s. For the most part, the television industry was (and still is) homogenous, dominated by white men. Even when they intended to promote progressive change, the ways in which they wrote about characters of color and women were often problematic. They did not think in intersectional terms and therefore did not interrogate how race, class, gender, and sexuality worked together when creating characters and storylines. In fact, when faced with critiques from viewers about this oversight, producers were often defensive in their response. It is worth noting, therefore, that this dissertation does not argue whether television shows portrayed positive or negative representations in their attempt to educate the public. Instead, *Tell It Like It Is* examines the ways in which contemporary political and social movements influenced fictional premises in order to

create more “realistic” sitcoms and dramas, and how viewers negotiated political messages through their praise and criticism.

In addition, although the late-1960s and 1970s represent one of television’s most diverse periods on and behind the screen, producers created sitcoms and dramas with white audiences in mind, even when shows featured all-black casts. This presumed audience influenced the ways in which television shows portrayed topics related to race and gender. A narrative thread that runs through this dissertation is how producers created two types of educational programming: one that taught viewers about social issues, and the other that elicited introspection to encourage audiences to think critically about their own complicit behavior. How a series presented episodes about race, class, and gender along these two lines influenced the way viewers responded to a producers’ intended message. Through letters written by Americans across the country, this dissertation shows how, for the most part, white audiences responded positively to shows that encouraged self-reflection on topics about class and gender, but not race.

### **Historiography**

Studying periods of resistance through the lens of popular culture contributes to our understanding of how everyday people outside of social movements and from various racial and ethnic backgrounds understood the changes that activists demanded. Therefore, on a broader level, *Tell It Like It Is* contributes to the extant literature on the 1960s and 1970s as a period marked by radical resistance to three main cultural institutions: family, education, and mass media. Over the past decade, scholars have woven together narratives that address how social activists challenged traditional race, gender, and sexual norms in relation to the family and education, and how conservatives contested and

created the political notion of “family values” in response. The role of television in this story, however, has largely been understudied by historians. This project fills that gap and examines attempts to create entertainment television that could address social issues within a liberal framework, and how these efforts contributed to a reactionary and racist backlash concerning not only changing racial and gender norms, but also the powerful reach of television.

Historians have studied how alterations to the American family in the mid-twentieth century contributed to anxieties about national decline. Focusing on the 1970s, Natasha Zaretsky links anxieties about national decline to anxieties about the disintegration of the family, thereby connecting the usually discrete subfields of family history and political history. Whereas economic and political factors contributed to some of the changing familial structures, such as increased divorce rates and dual wage earning, most of the conservative finger pointing was directed toward the feminist movement. As women mobilized to promote gender equality and eradicate discrimination in the workplace, schools, and the justice system, they expressed different perspectives on women’s roles in relation to the home that challenged conventional gender norms.<sup>2</sup> In *All in the Family* Robert O. Self provides a much more detailed account of the transformation of the American family and “family values” as part of competing narratives of national identity. Self argues that how Americans conceived of the possibility of improving society is reflected in disputes over gender, sex, and family,

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<sup>2</sup> Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1969-1980* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

which were interwoven with larger political debates concerning “institutions, laws, values, political cultures, and notions of government that constitute civic life.”<sup>3</sup>

Anxieties about national decline in relation to the family pre-date the rise of second wave feminism when examined within the context of popular culture. This dissertation shows that liberal calls to improve the nation’s image during Kennedy’s presidency particularly focused on the negative influence mindless entertainment had on American households during the Cold War. Kennedy and other television advocates of the early 1960s couched their appeals for television reform in arguments about the harmful effects low-quality programming could have on children, both domestically and internationally. By the 1970s, conservatives used a similar line of reasoning in their call for harsher regulation of television’s content. Within the context of the family, liberal reformers in the 1960s made claims about what they thought television *could* do, whereas conservative reformers of the 1970s made claims for what television *should not* do. *Tell It Like It Is* demonstrates how television is discussed in a language of limits or a language of possibilities during various moments in US history to support different political agendas.

This dissertation also documents how feminist programming in the 1970s contributed to concerns about “family values” and national decline. The prevailing narrative is that media did little to propel feminist messages, and in fact, did quite a lot to distort the movement and promote stereotypes and false narratives. Patricia Bradley has noted the difference between the extensive news coverage of civil rights marches

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<sup>3</sup> Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 6

compared to the 1970 Women’s March (one of the movement’s largest events), which did not receive as much reporting. And in the coverage it did receive, reporters included critical commentary.<sup>4</sup> In her book, *Watching Women’s Liberation, 1970*, Bonnie Dow attempts to re-periodize feminism’s “second wave” by analyzing case studies of key media events covered on the nightly news by television’s “Big Three”—CBS, NBC, and ABC. Challenging the narrative that television introduced the feminist movement to national audiences in 1968—Dow notes that, contrary to cultural memory, none of the networks covered the famous 1968 beauty pageant protest on television—she argues that the year 1970 substantially brought feminism to American homes via television. Yet this new media interest in women’s liberation was short-lived and dramatically decreased in the remaining decade.<sup>5</sup> This dissertation contributes to the literature on feminism and media by demonstrating that serials such as *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* and *All That Glitters* were able to teach viewers about sexism and oppressive consumer culture in ways that feminists on the ground were largely unable to do through the news or talk shows. Critics to these two serials did not challenge the accuracy of the messages; instead, they contended that it was the medium’s persuasive capabilities that threatened American familial values.

Historians have also studied schools as politicized sites of resistance, particularly around hot button issues concerning bilingual education, sex education, and busing.

Natalia Mehlman Petrzela has shown that integration and feminism fueled the “moral

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<sup>4</sup> Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 123.

<sup>5</sup> Bonnie Dow, *Watching Women’s Liberation, 1970: Feminism’s Pivotal Year on the Network News*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

crisis” surrounding California public schools in the 1970s, which contributed to conservatives’ use of tax-based arguments to claim authority over public schools.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the use of taxes to claim ownership over education standards was exacerbated during the busing crisis of the same decade. Matthew Delmont claims that whites used “busing” as a coded expression to discuss their discontent with desegregation and allowed for politicians and parents to “support white schools and neighborhoods without using explicitly racist language.”<sup>7</sup>

This dissertation expands upon the historical literature on education in two ways. The first considers television as an educational site of resistance itself. Rather than limit our understanding of education to the confines of schools and universities, I examine the impact of other nontraditional ways in which the general public obtained information about contemporary social and political issues. For example, fans of certain shows argued that Americans could learn from “authentic” programming that succeeded in “telling it like it is.” Conversely, critics complained that programs marred by inaccurate portrayals—or a failure to “tell it like it *really* is”—gave viewers a distorted sense of reality rather than educating them on important issues. As a whole, these claims were rarely focused on small details of a particular episode. Rather, they discussed how television could teach audiences about racism, sexism, and classism for good or ill. The prevailing assumption was that viewers learned from television, and that the messages it

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<sup>6</sup> Natalia Mehlman Petrzela, *Classroom Wars: Language, Sex, and the Making of Modern Political Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Matthew F. Delmont, *Why Busing Failed: Race, Media, and the National Resistance to School Desegregation* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

presented should therefore be accurate, meaningful, and contribute to a well-informed citizenry. Just what information should be offered, however, was highly contested.

The second approach considers how Americans felt a sense of ownership over television's content and therefore considered programs they disapproved of as an infringement on their basic rights. As my third chapter demonstrates, whites interpreted the increased representation of African Americans in the late-1960s as a form of forced integration. And because television sets were in people's private living spaces, and the FCC continuously reminded Americans that they "owned" the airwaves, these viewers believed they should have more control over television's contents. Producers and fans of controversial programming conversely argued that they had a right to tune in, just as much as someone else had the right to tune out certain shows. How viewers engaged in debates about ownership of the air waves illuminates the larger issues they were really arguing about, especially those that involved portrayals of race and gender that challenged the status quo.

Writers and producers of entertainment television critically engaged contemporary social and political issues through the creation of sitcoms and dramas that did, and sometimes did not, make it on the air. When developing storylines, they frequently discussed in correspondence and creative meetings their intentions and the messages they hoped audiences would take away. Viewers also thought of television as an educational medium. Parents prescribed sitcoms and dramas to their children, teachers assigned episodes as assignments, and educators requested scripts and films to air at school functions. Furthermore, fans also wrote to express how shows had helped them to learn about themselves and, more broadly, the world around them. Most media scholars

who have written on the relationship between media and social movements in the 1960s and 1970s examine the ways in which media helped or hindered such movements, or the effects social movements had on expanding representations of women and people of color. *Tell It Like It Is* contributes to this scholarship by broadening its analytical scope to consider how contributors of entertainment television felt a social and political responsibility to educate the American public during these two tumultuous decades.

Media scholars have sought to understand the impact of aural and visual mass media on audiences since the commercialization of photography in the late-nineteenth century and radio and cinema in the early twentieth-century. Approaches to cultural studies advanced by Frankfurt School theorists draw on sociocultural analysis and tend to view television, and “the culture industry” as a whole, very negatively—as a force of standardization that disseminates cultural mediocrity and promotes false consciousness. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer claim that consumers of mass culture are rendered powerless from technology’s influence over society by appealing to consumers’ needs, “producing them, controlling them, [and] disciplining them.”<sup>8</sup> This dissertation is more indebted to scholars like John Fiske and Stuart Hall, who wrote in the 1980s in response to Adorno and the Frankfurt School. Grounded in literary theory and semiotics, Fiske’s *Television Culture* counters arguments that television is “always an agent of the status quo.” Television is part of social change and ideological shifts, he argues, and although it may be incorrect to identify television as the originator of such transformations, it is nevertheless a material, or text, rooted in changing social existence.<sup>9</sup> One of Fiske’s most

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<sup>8</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Hoerkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

<sup>9</sup> John Fiske, *Television Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 35.

prominent claims in the field is that viewers have the ability and power to subvert television's messages and create meanings of their own, a "type of ideological response to dominant ideology."<sup>10</sup> Stuart Hall also emphasizes the need to historicize popular culture and examine mass-produced texts as a "double movement of containment and resistance."<sup>11</sup> Audiences of popular culture are not always passive adherents who accept dominant ideology, he argues, and not all texts serve to reinforce the power of the dominant classes. Consumers of popular culture can resist and negotiate cultural texts, even though cultural industries have the power to "rework and reshape what they represent; and, by repetition and selection, to impose and implant such definitions of ourselves as fit more easily the description of the dominant or preferred culture."<sup>12</sup>

*Tell It Like It Is* contends that television audiences actively interpreted and sometimes challenged television content rather than passively accepting the meanings intended by producers of media texts. Though most television viewers did not record their reactions to what they watched, a significant number did. They sent letters to networks, producers, and critics, which occasionally were published in magazines and newspapers, or, more typically, ended up in archived collection. My dissertation relies heavily on these sources in attempt to document how viewers made sense of what they were watching during a time of great social and political change, and how they participated in debates on race, class, and gender through critiques of television.

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<sup>10</sup> Fiske; On the genealogy of television studies see Horace Newcomb, "The Development of Television Studies," in Janet Wasko ed. *A Companion to Television* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular,'" in *People's History and Social Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 228.

<sup>12</sup> Hall, 232-233; for more on theory and methodology on Cultural and Television Studies see Bodroghkozy, *Groove Tube*.

In the 1980s and 1990s, analyses of television shifted toward examining the business-side of production, concluding that profit-driven motives determined what type of images the medium constructed. Todd Gitlin has argued that television unintentionally generates ideology because the goal of programming is to appeal to popular sentiments.<sup>13</sup> Shifts in television's tone, therefore, are due to network executives' intuition of public moods and how they package their understanding of prevailing sentiments for television consumption. Kenneth J. Bindas and Kenneth J. Heineman support Gitlin's assertion that television reinforces the status quo. They argue that viewers have little say regarding what makes it on the air; instead, advertisers and the government through the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) hold the power to determine what gets televised. Both the FCC and industries that rely heavily on advertising, they argue, "encourage the networks to avoid controversy that could divide the audience and reduce the number of potential viewer-consumers."<sup>14</sup>

While it is true that networks and sponsors control the reins of popular culture, these analyses of the motives behind entertainment television paint the intentions of content creators with a broad brush. The writers, producers, and directors have different hierarchies of power within the industry, and they represent different stakeholders who make sense of what is possible when it comes to creating television. I contend that the motives of content creators are not the same as those of network executives. For the most

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<sup>13</sup> Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 203-211; A few examples of this common argument include Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth J. Bindas and Kenneth J. Heineman, "Image is Everything?: Television and the Counterculture Message in the 1960s," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 22:1 (1994), 22-23.

part, television producers in particular consistently challenged or tried to circumvent network oversight and pushed the limits of broadcast standards. *Tell It Like It Is* demonstrates that certain writers and producers during the 1960s and 1970s felt a social and political responsibility to create informative entertainment and were not solely driven by profits.

### Chapter Outline

*Tell It Like It Is* consists of five chapters that examine how multiple visions of the politics of television took hold between 1960 and 1980. This dissertation follows the rise and fall of a heightened politicization of network sitcoms and dramas, but the overall story is divided by the production and reception of television pre-1968 and post-1968. That year not only marked the beginning of the cultural revolution that challenged the abovementioned institutions—family, education, and mass media—but it also represents a moment when American politicians, television producers, cultural critics, and the general public began to engage in new discussions about the role television should play in people’s lives. Particularly after the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, people looked toward television as a way to explain the chaos, but also as a means to alleviate social tensions.

The first two chapters examine the origins of debates between politicians, broadcasters, and audiences concerning the role television should play in people’s lives in the early-1960s. **Chapter 1** provides an overview of television’s history leading up to Kennedy era FCC guidelines that pushed broadcasters and networks to accept that they had a moral responsibility in regard to the type of programming they aired. Kennedy couched his support for television reform in moral arguments, but his position was mostly

grounded in the context of the Cold War. He was specifically concerned about new technology that would allow US television to air globally, and the negative impression many housewives and westerns would give international audiences. In order to safeguard their licenses, networks began investing in what I refer to as “educational entertainment”—separate from after-school educational shows and documentaries—which became a springboard for socially relevant sitcoms and dramas in decades to come.

**Chapter 2** examines one of the many dramas created as a result of Kennedy’s moral reform, *Mr. Novak* (1963-1965)—a show about the experiences of high school students and a first-year English teacher. Educational entertainment during this period took a direct approach to instructing viewers about current subjects by either solving problems presented in each episode, or dramatizing the lifelong consequences poor decision making in high school could have on an individual. Producer E. Jack Neuman openly discussed how audiences could learn from this type of informative programming. This chapter also analyzes the ways in which members in the media industry considered two different approaches when presenting information to audiences. Television could either be used as a “mirror” that could reflect social issues and elicit introspection among viewers or become a “window” through which viewers could learn about contemporary subjects. These concepts serve as a framework for understanding the different methods used when creating educational television dealing with hot button issues. Episodes about race, for example, could only serve as a window onto larger racial problems so as not to offend white audiences, whereas topics related to juvenile delinquency were allowed to mirror the harsh realities of dropping out of high school in order to persuade whites to stay in school. This approach predominantly engendered praise from viewers, even for

one of the most famous episodes that addressed school integration. Although Neuman claimed he had a social responsibility when producing *Mr. Novak*, an examination of production files illuminate which issues were considered relevant, and which were not. With the civil rights movement making regular headlines, personnel for the show valued episodes about race, but denied women's issues as worthy of addressing.

The third chapter bridges the first and second halves of this dissertation in its examination of *Julia*, a sitcom that debuted in 1968—a moment when ideas about the function of television were shifting. Particularly following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, politicians and TV executives began to consider different ways to use television to mitigate racial tensions. **Chapter 3** chronicles how the first television show to feature a black family portrayed what many considered an outmoded representation of civil rights respectability during a moment marked by the ascendance of Black Power. Although *Julia* received criticism for its unrealistic representation of a widowed black mother raising her son in Los Angeles on a nurses' wage, the show forthrightly depicted African Americans' common experiences with racism in ways that encouraged whites to reflect on their own racial prejudices. The very presence of *Julia*, in addition to 20 other programs that featured black characters that season, put many white viewers on the defensive. By comparing hate mail written to producer Hal Kanter regarding *Julia* to the hate mail written to Angela Davis—someone who had a strong presence in broadcast news, but whose image was far more radical than Diahann Carroll's—I argue that hostile white audiences reacted similarly to *all* images of black women portrayed in non-stereotypical ways. Moreover, I show how these responses suggest greater antagonism

and resistance to black gains than did viewer reactions to the previous decade's images of African Americans engaged in fighting segregation.

The second half of this dissertation examines television in the 1970s—a decade marred by political failures and economic hardships. Expectations for how to create more realistic entertainment programming shifted as audiences looked toward television producers to address social tensions in ways that politics could not. The model and aesthetic of educational entertainment transitioned during the 1970s, away from what I refer to as “problem solving” and toward “problem consciousness.” In **Chapter 4**, I examine how producers and writers of *Good Times* (1974-1979) created telecasts intended to arouse viewer awareness about structural forms of oppression. Although *Good Times* featured the first two-parent black family on network television and is often remembered as a show about black experiences, the sitcom was conceived as a program about class in order to appeal to a larger audience. *Good Times* received some criticism from black viewers, but for the most part black fans wrote in to laud the program for its representation of black issues. Because the show primarily addressed structural factors that contributed to class inequality, however, white viewers more often engaged in dialogue about poverty without acknowledging the significance and implications of race.

**Chapter 5** traces how two soap opera satires, *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* (1976-1977) and *All That Glitters* (1977) presented feminist critiques of patriarchy in a less didactic manner through candid storylines about infidelity, sexual desire, and oppressive consumer culture. Head writer Ann Marcus pulled from her own experiences with sexism when creating both shows, and other writers borrowed from therapy and self-help culture to explore the intricacies of men's and women's unhappiness in traditional

heterosexual relationships. Due to a rising conservative pushback against television's liberal content, as well as a newly implemented "family hour" on all three networks, CBS, NBC, and ABC all rejected the serials as too controversial. Producer Norman Lear therefore sold the programs to local stations. Without network oversight, Lear could get away with pushing television's boundaries. In response, episodes of *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* and *All That Glitters* provoked sustained introspection among viewers, particularly in response to their feminist representations of traditional gender roles. Although both shows received extensive criticism from conservatives for "harming the innocent minds of children," many fans wrote in expressing deep appreciation for what they learned about themselves, their unhappiness, and most importantly, sexism, through television.

*Tell It Like It Is* explores the politics of television, assessing its impact on the American public's understanding of race and gender mores. Once American's transformed their understanding of television as an educational device, they reimagined the medium's function to alter social and political discourse. Debates about the politicized messages educational entertainment sent to millions of viewers, therefore, provides an avenue to explore larger responses to a particular moment—in this case, the turbulent 1960s and 1970s. *Tell It Like It Is* challenges the way we think about how citizens learn about current events and issues. By examining US history through the lens of popular culture, it helps us to rethink how political ideologies are formed, along with the anxieties that contribute to them.

## Chapter 1 The Moral Medium: Television in the New Frontier

“A rising curve of leadership and accomplishment in entertainment, education, and information must be asked of TV if it is to do its part in elevating cultural standards and in helping Americans to cope with the urgencies of the Nineteen Sixties.”

-Jack Gould<sup>1</sup>

“Broadcasting cannot continue to live by the numbers. Ratings ought to be the slave of the broadcaster, not his master.”

Newton N. Minow (FCC Commissioner, 1961-1963)<sup>2</sup>

In the spring of 1961, Newton Minow famously critiqued the status of American television as a “vast wasteland” in his address to the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB). Recently appointed as chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Minow believed that television had an “overwhelming impact” on the American public. Broadcasting, he argued, had an “obligation” to the general public to provide meaningful and educational content, “to communicate ideas as well as relaxation.” In his speech, Minow declared that television possessed “the most powerful voice in America,” and therefore had a “duty to make that voice ring with intelligence and with leadership.” Because its swift growth catapulted the industry from “a novelty to an instrument of overwhelming impact on the American people,” he argued, “it should be making [itself] ready for the kind of leadership that newspapers and magazines assumed years ago, to make our people aware of their world.”<sup>3</sup> Although Minow compared television’s capabilities to print media, he was not critiquing broadcast news, the genre

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Gould, “TV Spectacular—The Minow Debate,” *New York Times*, 28 May 1961.

<sup>2</sup> Newton N. Minow, “Television and the Public Interest” (speech, Washington DC, 9 May 1961) reprinted in Newton N. Minow, *Equal Time: The Private Broadcaster and the Public Interest* (Lawrence Laurent ed., 1964), 45-69.

<sup>3</sup> Minow, “Television and the Public Interest.”

most would associate with “informing” audiences. Instead, Minow directed his comments towards entertainment television.

The FCC’s interventionist approach to the television industry reflected President John F. Kennedy’s New Frontier doctrine, which emphasized cooperation from U.S. citizens towards national development for the greater good of all people.<sup>4</sup> Speaking in these terms, Minow emphasized the need for high moral standards in the production of television, even though impactful programming might not produce economic gains. At one point he even admitted that the average person probably preferred a Western to a symphony or would rather “be entertained than stimulated or informed.”<sup>5</sup> The circular problem Minow identified was that audiences watched the mindless entertainment television offered, so networks continued to create lowbrow programming based on ratings, which did nothing to uplift the public citizenry. Broadcasting solely superficial entertainment, he believed, was not in the people’s best interest despite the profits it yielded. Even if it meant sacrificing sponsors, network executives needed to prioritize informative programming over ratings, sales, and profits.

Kennedy’s election, and the year 1960 in particular, marked a turning point in television history. Kennedy’s media savvy during his campaign against Richard Nixon, in addition to his political policies and friendly relationship with network news during his presidency, has since led to him being dubbed the “television president.” Although Dwight D. Eisenhower became the first presidential candidate to appear in a television commercial in 1952, and he embraced the changes television made to the campaign

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<sup>4</sup> Dustin Tahmahkera, *Tribal Television: Viewing Native People in Sitcoms* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Minow, “Television and the Public Interest.”

process, Eisenhower worked with the preexisting industry.<sup>6</sup> Kennedy's use of television, however, changed politics and how the public interacted with the presidency, while also changing the television industry itself. Kennedy called for television reform—much to the chagrin of broadcasters—at the same time that he gave press access to the White House in never before seen ways. For instance, he organized the first live presidential press conferences, encouraged his staff to engage with journalists, and Jacqueline filmed a tour of the White House. In the 1961-62 television season, the three networks combined ran 254 hours of documentary programming on the White House, including ABC's 1961 documentary series titled *Adventures on the New Frontier*.<sup>7</sup>

Kennedy's unorthodox appointment of Minow—a former lawyer who had no desire to work in the industry—and his political interests in expanding television's reach both domestically and internationally, influenced what broadcasters considered acceptable topics for entertainment TV.<sup>8</sup> Together, Kennedy and Minow believed the medium's role could be transformed to include educational programming that could elevate the American citizenry. Kennedy, television reformers, and other New Frontiersmen advocated for more informative shows, but “educational television” remained an ambiguous concept. As networks and broadcasters experimented with presenting educational content in different forms, such as documentaries and after-school specials, entertainment genres—specifically dramas—unexpectedly had the most success when it

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<sup>6</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Marcus, “Profiles in Courage: Televisual History on the New Frontier,” in *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age*, ed. Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Collins (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 85.

<sup>8</sup> For more on Kennedy as the “television president,” see Mary Ann Watson, *The Expanding Vista: American Television in the Kennedy Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

came to “educating” viewers. Whereas networks previously viewed entertainment and educational programs as mutually exclusive, during the New Frontier era they shifted their perspective to consider how the two genres could work together. Therefore, I argue that networks solicited producers to create “educational entertainment” in an effort to appease FCC regulations while also ensuring profits.

This chapter explores the origins of what I call “educational entertainment” television. During television’s infancy, debates developed regarding regulation and public interests. Educators, politicians, broadcasters, and audiences weighed in on what they thought the medium’s role should play in people’s lives. These debates took shape as early as the 1950s, however, the trajectory that the industry took over the next twenty years began during the New Frontier era. Kennedy couched his appeal to improve the quality of television in moral terms by proposing that broadcasters forgo profits in order to serve public interests; however, his call for television reform was also self-interested, in that it allowed him to implement changes that aligned with his political platform. He appointed FCC Chairman Newton Minow to carry out the New Frontier agenda, but Minow could only enforce broadcast license renewal standards, not dictate how networks and broadcasters implemented the necessary changes to satisfy the FCC. The call for television to become a more impactful medium for viewers dovetailed with the political events of the moment, specifically the Cold War and civil rights movement. I contend that within this political context, Kennedy’s push for more educational programming in the televisual landscape became a springboard for socially relevant entertainment sitcoms and dramas in decades to come.

Using Newton Minow’s famous “vast wasteland” speech as a framework for this

chapter, I examine the context in which the speech was given to analyze the larger political reasons for wanting to transform television. Minow's references to Cold War diplomacy, for example, makes his address as much about foreign policy as it was about television. Moreover, producers took away from Minow's critiques that television should be more realistic in its representation of Americans. With the civil rights movement in the foreground of news outlets, producers associated realism with civil rights and attempted to educate audiences about issues of race. Because print and broadcast media framed women's issues as "soft news," however, producers denied gender topics as worthy of televising. This chapter explores how ideas concerning the politics of television developed and what that meant in terms of race and gender representation.

### **"A Global Village in a Box"**

Debates regarding how television should or should not be regulated were connected to the intimacy of the small screen in people's homes. As Lynn Spigel has documented, in the years following World War II advertisers portrayed television as a medium capable of providing a "global village in a box." That is to say, marketers pitched it as a device that allowed viewers to see the world at a less expensive cost than travel. Moreover, television served as the perfect appliance to accompany the aesthetic of modern suburban architecture by merging both public and private spheres together. Suburbia and television alike offered families the ability to "keep their distance from the world but at the same time imagine that their domestic spheres were connected to a wider social fabric."<sup>9</sup>

Television, therefore, came to represent a vehicle for experiencing different events and

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<sup>9</sup>Lynn Spigel, "Installing the Television Set: Popular Discourses on Television and Domestic Space, 1948-1955," in *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 6-9.

places. Advertisements portrayed men and women dressed up for an evening of television viewing, giving TV the panache of a theater date without having to leave one's home. Compared to cinema, advertisers portrayed the set to offer a kind of hyper-realism since it offered quality sound and picture.<sup>10</sup> Because viewers could experience the world from the privacy of their own home, it had the ability to make people feel more connected to what they watched. One of the most notable—and apropos—examples of this phenomenon is how viewers associated televised events with lived experience when asked: “where were you when Kennedy was shot?”

The proximity of the television set to the public's private spaces provoked critiques among viewers, organizations, and the press regarding the medium's content. To get a sense of what audiences thought about television in 1951, committee members for the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters (NARTB—later NAB) requested the FCC provide complaints the commission received over a seventy-five-day period. Although the FCC only received 967 grievances among the millions of television viewers, the top objections consisted of: too much advertising of alcoholic beverages (255); indecency, obscenity, or profanity (221); misleading advertising (128); lottery schemes (107); and crime and horror programs (73).<sup>11</sup> Critics considered this type of

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<sup>10</sup> Spigel, “Installing the Television Set,” 14-15. Cultural critics have studied the connection between feelings of hyper-realism with the “ideology of liveness,” which is that TV gives an illusion of a person being present with what they are watching through the realistic appearance and immediacy of television. For more on this topic, and on television's role in creating collective memory see Jane Feuer, “The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology,” in *Regarding Television*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (Los Angeles: University of Publications of America, Inc., 1983); George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Barbie Zelizer, *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> Robert D. Swezey, “Give the Television Code a Chance,” *The Quarterly of Film and Radio and Television*, 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1952): 15.

programming an example of how broadcasters abused their power. In an effort to raise broadcasting standards and establish a moral line for TV to follow, the NARTB produced a Code of Practices in 1952. In the preamble, the NARTB emphasized the importance for meeting Americans' needs for "educational, informational, cultural, economic, moral, and entertainment" programming, particularly since "every type of American home" watched television. "It is the responsibility of television," the Code claimed, "to bear constantly in mind that the audience is primarily a home audience, and consequently that television's relationship to the viewers is that between guest and host."<sup>12</sup> According to *TV Magazine's* editor Frank Orme, the Television Code should "establish minimum program standards so that the American people can accept television in their homes without opening them to degrading or otherwise harmful influences, and without turning their living rooms into a huckster's paradise."<sup>13</sup> Although he criticized the Television Code because it teetered on censoring public-owned channels and had the potential to inhibit experimental programming, Orme found the Code's ambiguous terminology prevented it from having much impact. After all, how does one determine what constitutes wholesomeness and thus enforce that principle? Regardless of the position one took in regard to the Code, critics seemed to agree that the closeness of television to American families and its ability to reach multiple audiences spanning various age groups is what made the medium so influential. To demonstrate its transformative effects, Orme pointed out that science created the atom bomb and also television. Of the two, he argued, the

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<sup>12</sup> Swezey, "Give the Television Code a Chance," 19-20.

<sup>13</sup> Frank Orme, "The Television Code," *The Quarterly of Film and Radio and Television*, 6, no. 4 (Summer 1952): 406.

latter was “intrinsicly far more powerful.”<sup>14</sup> It is precisely this power that prompted the NARTB to try to elevate the medium to a higher standard.

By the following decade, critics of television felt that broadcasters had lost sight of what the medium initially intended to do. As Minow noted in his NAB speech, westerns, detective shows, and “totally unbelievable families” permeated 1950s prime-time television and did not accurately depict the contemporary United States. For a device that had the potential to allow audiences to go places, it did not take them anywhere real. The zany fantasy land that millions of Americans spent hours a day watching seemed particularly counterintuitive in the midst of the Cold War and civil rights movement. Television reformers used this context as a platform to support their arguments for more educational programming, while also garnering bipartisan support for this initiative.

The Joint Committee on Educational Television (JCET), for example, sparked public debate over the quality of education as a weapon to fight the Cold War, and ultimately persuaded the government to reserve a portion of the airwaves for educational broadcasters. The outcome, they argued, could address three particular postwar social problems. They claimed that television could teach viewers about high culture, help win the Cold War by closing the “educational gap” between American and Soviet students, and even equalize education between black and white students while maintaining segregated schools.<sup>15</sup> The Atlanta Board of Education also noted that television could “raise the cultural and educational level of the masses of the American people to an

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<sup>14</sup> Orme, “The Television Code,” 412.

<sup>15</sup> Allison Perlman, *Public Interests: Media Advocacy and Struggles Over U.S. Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 13-46.

unprecedented degree within a generation.”<sup>16</sup> Broadcasters disagreed with these arguments put forth by the JCET because they did not think the majority of Americans would watch this type of programming. The FCC contended that even if fewer people watched educational shows, they would still better the nation overall. In an attempt to remain pragmatic, the JCET claimed that although they supported educational television, they had never argued it should replace commercial interests; it was meant to be an alternative and supplement, but not the sole use of television.<sup>17</sup>

Discussions of how federal money should be allocated to support educational television hinged on the assumption that the Cold War had made it imperative that improvements be made to the American educational system. In 1958, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in response to the Soviets’ *Sputnik* satellite. The act’s passage generated public discussions about the quality of education in the US, which led the NDEA to grant federal money for the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB) to conduct research on educational programming. By 1962, the Educational Television Facilities Act (ETFA) provided federal support for the construction of educational television.<sup>18</sup> In his address upon signing the ETFA, Kennedy compared the legislation to the Morrill Land Grant College Act of one hundred years prior, which established an endowment to support higher education, particularly for mechanic arts and agricultural colleges. In order to provide opportunities to working people typically excluded from higher education, the federal government provided land

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<sup>16</sup> Perlman, *Public Interests*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> Perlman, *Public Interests*, 29-30.

<sup>18</sup> Perlman, *Public Interests*, 42.

grants for states to build colleges and universities.<sup>19</sup> “Today,” Kennedy declared, “we take a similar action.” Kennedy explained that the ETFA would provide federal support for educational television stations while assuring state and local operation. He declared that “the Morrill Act reduced old barriers to education and offered new opportunities for learning. This Act gives equal promise of bringing greater opportunities for personal and cultural growth to every American.”<sup>20</sup> Unlike traditional means to education, television offered the possibility to cross class and race lines in its accessibility. Furthermore, Kennedy pitched the ETFA as a piece of legislation that could not only change how audiences interacted with the medium, he also attempted to expand the way people understood what “education” meant to include certain kinds of television.

That same year, the All Channel Receiver Act mandated that all television sets be made to include Ultra High Frequency (UHF) and Very High Frequency (VHF) channels, which extended the number of channels available to viewers.<sup>21</sup> This legislation was supported by Minow, who believed that the root of television’s problems stemmed from lack of competition. With more channels, broadcasters could reach the tastes of a wider audience base and appeal to the masses in addition to more niche markets.<sup>22</sup> These laws ultimately paved the way for the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act, which established the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR).

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<sup>19</sup> Donald A. Downs, “The Purposes of Higher Education: The Morrill Act and Military Science,” in *Service As Mandate: How American Land-Grant Universities Shaped the Modern World, 1920-2015*, ed. Alan I. Marcus (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2015), 164-165.

<sup>20</sup> John F. Kennedy: “Statement by the President Upon Signing Bill Providing for Educational Television.,” 1 May 1962. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Wooley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8628>.

American television remained within the confines of national borders in 1960, but in the vein of John F. Kennedy's New Frontier, Minow spoke of the expansion towards international television in the near future.<sup>23</sup> "What will the people of other countries think of us," Minow asked, "when they see our Western badmen and good men punching each other in the jaw in between the shooting?" He continued: "What will the Latin American or African child learn of America from our great communications industry? We cannot permit television in its present form to be our voices oversea."<sup>24</sup> Minow's concern with how entertainment television represented the US stemmed from the international scrutiny the nation faced for championing itself as the beacon of democracy while denying civil rights to its black citizens. The advent of global communications occurred at the same time countries of old colonial empires achieved independence. What message could entertainment television send to viewers of newly liberated nations about American democracy? Mary Dudziak has shown how news reports of legal and social racism drew international attention to the state of American race relations. US diplomats also grappled with having to respond to the hypocrisy of American democracy being the model for countries struggling against Soviet oppression, when the US discriminated and brutalized minorities within its own country. America's domestic race problems led to tense foreign relations with Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Therefore, efforts to promote civil rights worked in tandem with the central US mission to fight communism. In an attempt to

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<sup>23</sup> Watson discusses the experimental program involving communication satellites that began in January 1961. Kennedy made communication satellites a high priority on his agenda, asking Congress for an additional \$50 million to expedite the use of space satellites for global communication. On 26 July 1961 the first successful satellite launched into orbit. Two years later, Kennedy expressed that in the nuclear age the future hinged on communication, which was the only route to worldwide peace. *Expanding the Vista*, 203-212.

<sup>24</sup> Minow, "Television and the Public Interest."

address civil rights reform between 1946 through the mid-1960s, the federal government attempted to construct a particular narrative about race and American democracy that highlighted progress on race relations. The message told was that the US was a place that made social justice and democratic change possible. Even if these changes occurred slowly over time, it was still better than dictatorial imposition.<sup>25</sup> Reforming television became a way to educate Americans about the Cold War and their responsibility to fight communism, but in doing so, these programs could also circulate portrayals of American democracy as a model for fighting against communist oppression.<sup>26</sup> Dudziak examines how American ambassadors and government-sponsored literature emphasized America's efforts to improve race relations, however, television reform became yet another method to attempt to rehabilitate the US' moral character.

In his address upon signing the Communications Satellite Act of 1962, which made global communication possible, Kennedy stated that space satellites could contribute to "world peace and understanding." In a few years, the benefits of this Act included a cheap and reliable exchange of information via telephone, telegraph, radio, and television. "The ultimate result," Kennedy claimed, "will be to encourage and facilitate world trade, education, entertainment, and many kinds of professional, political, and personal discourse, which are essential to healthy human relationships and international

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<sup>25</sup> Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (2000; repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 3-13.

<sup>26</sup> For more on the intersections of political, corporate, and network officials working to mobilize public opinion in support of America's foreign policy, specifically Kennedy's hand in creating propaganda documentaries see Michael Curtin, *Redeeming the Wasteland: Television Documentary and Cold War Politics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

understanding.”<sup>27</sup> Reforming television while simultaneously expanding global communications presented the possibility of reclaiming the narrative on American democracy and the social and political opportunities it afforded. As it stood, television’s superficiality did nothing to enrich its American viewers, and could only undermine US diplomatic efforts by sending the message that Americans lived in a fantasy world, detached from reality, and ignorant to their own domestic problems, particularly within the context of the growing civil rights movement.

Television represented a way to bridge regional and cultural divides outside and within the US, teaching viewers not just about social and political issues, but also about different lifestyles, landscapes, and perspectives. In a *New York Times* article covering Minow’s NAB speech, television critic Jack Gould broke down Minow’s four main critiques. The first claimed that broadcasters did not offer enough “bright entertainment.” Whereas a program showing Fred Astaire dancing offered cultural enlightenment, local channels that featured lowbrow vaudeville performances did nothing to enrich viewers. Minow’s second criticism highlighted the lack of “diversity” on television. Referring to the popular Western genre, he claimed that continuous duplication of similar programs only devalued show-business, and third that too much violence occupied television. His fourth concern was aimed not at entertainment television, but at the news. Specifically, the lack of coverage. “Here was a reminder,” Gould wrote, “that TV’s mission is to go out into the world, not to try to bring the world to the studio.”<sup>28</sup> Advertisers of early

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<sup>27</sup> John F. Kennedy, Sound recording of remarks upon signing the Communications Satellite Act, 31 August 1962, John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963 White House Audio Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

<sup>28</sup> Gould, “TV Spectacular—The Minow Debate.”

television likened the medium to a “global village in a box,” however, by 1960 it did more to portray American fantasy than reality. By providing mostly mindless entertainment, television fell short of its potential to stimulate a more informed public. Broadcasters had the responsibility to uplift the American polity through educational and informative programming, and in doing so, it could demonstrate to the rest of the world how a democratic nation functioned.

### **Television’s Nadir**

Minow’s NAB speech responded to what social critics of the medium considered a televisual nadir. In the 1950s, the argument goes, popular programming broadcasters became complacent with easy success. Rigged game shows and excessive violence became cheap forms of entertainment that required little creativity on behalf of television producers and came at the moral expense of viewers. The scandal involving NBC’s fixed quiz show, *Twenty-One*, became the most notable event that tainted television’s reputation. Charles Van Doren made a name for himself as a contestant on the show as he became the reigning champion for fourteen weeks until he lost to a “lady lawyer” in March 1957. During his four months on the show, *Twenty-One* producer Al Freedman coached Charles to maintain his long winning streak—a tactic Freedman later admitted was used to boost ratings by building excitement from trying to defeat a reigning champion. Following Charles’ inevitable loss in 1957, he maintained television celebrity by hosting a five-minute educational commentary on *Today* and donned the cover of *Time* magazine as a quiz show champion.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Charles Van Doren, “All The Answers: The Quiz-Show Scandals—and the Aftermath,” *New Yorker*, 28 July 2008, 2-9.

Rumors of the show being rigged, however, began to circulate in 1958. A grand jury investigated the duplicity of television game shows, but networks had already tried to distance themselves from such disgraces by claiming they had no control over quiz shows since advertising agencies representing sponsors were the ones that produced the programs.<sup>30</sup> Over 100 contestants were involved in the fraud and had lied to the grand jury, but only 17 were indicted, arrested, and arraigned, and none were sentenced to jail. In 1959, Van Doren confessed and pled guilty to second-degree perjury for lying to the grand jury about getting answers from NBC producers. His admission and the overall scandal sparked discussions regarding television's role in the decline of American morality.<sup>31</sup>

At the turn-of-the-decade, the state of popular entertainment became a political concern. Included in the 1960 Democratic Platform, also referred to as "The Rights of Man," was the need to restore "America's productivity, confidence, and power" as a national interest, which was more important than the sum of individual American groups. "When group interests conflict with the national interest," the document outlined, "it will be the national interest which we serve." Following in the footsteps of former Democratic Administrations, the new Administration sought to look beyond material goals in order to improve the "spiritual meaning of American society." The platform explicitly addressed television's negative impact on American social mores, and its intent to implement more interventionist policies in the following statement:

We have drifted into a national mood that accepts payola and quiz scandals, tax evasion and false expense accounts, soaring crime rates, influence

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<sup>30</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 71-72.

<sup>31</sup> Van Doren, "All The Answers," 14-16; Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 72.

peddling in high Government circles, and the exploitation of sadistic violence as popular entertainment. For eight long critical years our present national leadership has made no effective effort to reverse this mood. The new Democratic Administration will help create a sense of national purpose and higher standards of public behavior.<sup>32</sup>

The power of television to reach the home of millions was too grand to only feature escapist entertainment, especially during a time of cold war tensions. The Kennedy Administration and other New Frontiersmen believed that television had the capabilities to teach viewers how to be better citizens, especially coming off of a decade that suffered from a moral stain, due in part to the superficial position of broadcasters who assumed viewers valued excitement over enlightenment. Pandering to the presumed low cultural standards of audiences and sponsors in order to gain ratings and make easy money was considered a disservice to the country as a whole.

On 5 May 1961, Kennedy referenced the fixed television quiz shows in his statement to Congress about regulatory agencies and conflict of interests. He referred to the scandal as one of many examples that had injured the “moral tone” of society, which, in turn, had generated concern over the “moral tone of government.” Inevitably, Kennedy stated, “the moral standards of a society influence the conduct of all who live within it—the governed and those who govern.” In order to elevate the ethical standards of government and the citizenry, Kennedy proposed more regulation that established clear guidelines for punishment should agencies fail to meet policy standards, which would set an example for proper business conduct.<sup>33</sup> Standing before the National Association of

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<sup>32</sup> Democratic Party Platforms: “1960 Democratic Party Platform,” 11 July 1960. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Wooley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb/ws/?pid=29602>.

<sup>33</sup> John F. Kennedy: “Special Message to the Congress on Conflict-of-Interest Legislation and on Problems of Ethics in Government.,” 27 April 1961. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American*

Broadcasters just one month later, Minow informed the crowd that he had read Kennedy's address and took his message seriously.

Minow explained his interpretation of the television industry's responsibilities. Because television channels were in the public domain, the medium should act as a representative of the public, therefore broadcasters needed to deliver a decent return to viewers, not just stockholders. Broadcasters, he argued, needed to take advantage of the fact that they held such an influential position amidst the precipice of change that this new decade symbolized. Many referred to this generation as the jet age, the atomic age, and the space age, but Minow argued for an additional description: the television age. He claimed that historians would look back at this era "to decide whether today's broadcasters employed their powerful voice to enrich the people or debase them." How future generations would remember television's legacy depended on the industry's current actions. By placing the onus of the country's future on the shoulders of broadcasters, Minow could then direct them in regaining the upper hand in the relationship between the industry and sponsors. In what he referred to as "a very special mission on behalf of this industry," Minow suggested networks and broadcasters tell advertisers, "This is the high quality we are going to serve—take it or other people will. If you think you can find a better place to move automobiles, cigarettes and soap—go ahead and try." In addition, they needed to remind stockholders "that an investment in broadcasting is buying a share in public responsibility."<sup>34</sup>

The FCC's role was to regulate communications on behalf of "public interests," but

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*Presidency Project.* <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8092>.; President Kennedy signed Executive Order 10939 "To Provide a Guide on Ethical Standards to Government Officials" on 5 May 1961.

<sup>34</sup> Minow, "Television and the Public Interest."

who constituted “the public” remained unclear. Alison Perlman has demonstrated how television reform advocates and policy makers referred to the tenuous term, “public interests,” when arguing for the benefits of educational programming. The concept, however, is a social construct, “something that is produced through social conflict over control of the airwaves rather than something that exists independent of power struggles.” “Public interest” does not have a fixed definition, but instead it is a “device that reflects the interests of the person or community who invokes it, from the policy makers who historically have conflated it with the interest in line with their own political commitments.”<sup>35</sup> Minow acknowledged that “public interest” could be interpreted broadly, and although he could not define it himself, he explained the concept by describing what it was not. Quite simply, public interest was not what interested the public, which is why ratings did not accurately reveal what viewers wanted to watch. Children’s programming was the perfect example. Minow claimed that children under twelve spent as much time watching television as they did in school. Yet the majority of programming produced for children consisted of “cartoons, violence and more violence.” If parents followed ratings, Minow argued, children would have a steady diet of ice cream. To let children’s tastes dictate television’s content was absurd and irresponsible. “Is there no room on television to teach, to inform, to uplift, to stretch, to enlarge the capacities of our children? Is there no room for programs deepening their understanding of children in other lands?”<sup>36</sup> The television industry influenced the next generation’s future; therefore, broadcasters needed to search their conscience and offer better viewing

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<sup>35</sup> Perlman, *Public Interests*, 13-46.

<sup>36</sup> Minow, “Television and the Public Interest.”

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Another element of public interest highlighted by Minow included the need for “diversity” in programming since “the public interest is made up of many interests.” Unable to explain the term any more in his own words, Minow attempted to define the concept once more by quoting NAB president, LeRoy Collins, who stated: “Broadcasting, to serve the public interest, must have a soul and a conscience, a burning desire to excel, as well as to sell; the urge to build the character, citizenship and intellectual stature of people, as well as to expand the gross national product.” Despite his disapproval of television’s state, Minow saw himself as an advocate for the medium and its capabilities. He saw himself as someone who wanted to strengthen and stimulate the industry, not censor it.<sup>37</sup> “What you gentlemen broadcast through the people’s air,” he claimed, “affects the people’s taste, their knowledge, their opinions, their understanding of themselves and their world. And their future.” Although Minow’s NAB speech consisted of mostly harsh criticisms, the chairman imbued his appeals in moral and gendered terms to empower the movers and shakers of television and change the medium to fit Kennedy’s New Frontier vision. Minow positioned broadcasters not as providers of entertainment, but claimed they had a call of duty that only they could fulfill. Positioning television as a weapon of the cold war, he urged the NAB to think of the airwaves as “the cause of freedom” and to “help a great nation fulfill its future.” Borrowing from Kennedy’s inaugural address, Minow ended his speech encouraging the audience: “Ask not what broadcasting can do for you—

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<sup>37</sup> Minow, “Television and the Public Interest.”

ask what you can do for broadcasting.”

### **Television’s New Frontier**

Minow’s NAB speech made him a celebrity in his own right for his critique of American television. His popularity afforded him the opportunity to spread his message beyond just the broadcast trade circuit and garner support from the general public as he made more television and radio appearances than any other member of the Kennedy administration, aside from the president himself, by the end of his first year as commissioner.<sup>38</sup> Popular periodicals also extensively covered his intentions as commissioner, which made his proposal to change the televisual landscape accessible to Americans. Television critic Jack Gould of the *New York Times*, for example, explained that Minow believed that a medium so powerful as to reach over 50,000,000 homes “cannot be allowed to sink to the least common denominator of the national audience merely because that is where survival and profit come most easily.” Under federal law, Gould noted, the public owned the airwaves, which meant that in order to obtain a channel for broadcasting, a federal license had to be issued. When applying for a license, a potential broadcaster needed to outline how their programming would meet “public interest, convenience, or necessity.” The applicant outlined such stipulations, not the FCC, detailing how much programming would be devoted to entertainment, religion, education, news, discussion, and their policy with regard to commercials. Although broadcasters established their own parameters, it was understood that the FCC privileged programming “diversity.” Therefore, it was common practice for broadcasters to propose

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<sup>38</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 26.

to air a variety of different television genres but not fulfill their promise to run as many “diverse” shows. A television license ran for three years, and although a broadcaster had to report what they put on the air compared to what they proposed, former FCC commissioners turned a blind eye when it came to the renewal process.<sup>39</sup>

Minow made it clear to broadcasters and the public that he intended to be stricter when it came to upholding standards of renewal. He informed his audience during the NAB speech, for example, that “there is nothing permanent or sacred about a broadcast license.”<sup>40</sup> Gould reiterated Minow’s position, explaining to readers that:

If a station knows it can operate without regard for its promises, it starts an erosion of standards that can quickly become widespread. If one outlet feels free to cram in commercials, its rival is apt to feel similarly free. If one network concentrates on the most profitable shows, skimps on public service and suffers no consequences, the other chains are induced to follow the same course. If the F.C.C. issues licenses without regard to how they are actually used on the air, then its effort to protect the public interest becomes a hollow gesture.<sup>41</sup>

Although broadcasters interpreted Minow’s position as direct government intervention, Minow did not see himself as a babysitter to the TV industry. He considered the industry old enough to have autonomy in their decision-making process when it came to producing television shows, but he felt passionately that the policies set in place in regard to station renewals should be upheld.<sup>42</sup> To hold broadcasters accountable, Minow proposed having “well-advertised” community hearings when a TV license came up for renewal. “I want the people who own the air and the homes that television enters to tell

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<sup>39</sup> Gould, “TV Spectacular—The Minow Debate.”

<sup>40</sup> Minow, “Television and the Public Interest.”

<sup>41</sup> Gould, “TV Spectacular—The Minow Debate.”

<sup>42</sup> Author unknown, “The Wasteland,” *New York Times*, 14 May 1961; Minow, “Television and the Public Interest.”

you and the F.C.C. what's been going on.”<sup>43</sup> In addition to holding broadcasters responsible, Minow believed, these meetings could also potentially benefit networks by facilitating a dialogue with viewers.

Industry broadcasters and networks responded to Minow's critique in various ways. Immediately following Minow's NAB address, Leonard H. Goldenson, owner of the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), called the speech “courageous” and stated that, by authorizing more outlets in cities with only two TV stations, the FCC could foster more competition. Most broadcasters chose to reserve comment, however, whereas others expressed their anger while maintaining anonymity. The owner of one major network affiliate claimed Minow's speech displayed “arrogance and ignorance,” while another broadcaster referred to Minow's age (he was just 35 when he assumed his position) when explaining television executives' infuriated reactions: “You can't blame us; nobody likes to be spanked by a child.” The *New York Times* synthesized the reactions from an informal poll of broadcasters who claimed that Minow threatened to intrude on free enterprise by dictating the types of programs that should air. Others argued that Minow used his government position to influence the production of programs according to his personal taste. The overall consensus among broadcasters was that Minow was holding their stations hostage by threatening their licenses. Most would comply with his requests rather than jeopardize their franchises, even though many broadcasters claimed that “evolution, not regulation” generated progress. Gould summarized this sentiment: “The stimulating programming admired by the do-gooders simply is not watched by sufficient

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<sup>43</sup> Val Adams, “F.C.C. Head Bids TV Men Reform ‘Vast Wasteland: Minow Charges Failure in Public Duty—Threatens to Use License Power,” *New York Times*, 10 May 1961.

millions to attract sponsors. TV can afford to serve the minority only by first satisfying the majority, which pays the bills.” What added salt to the wound, however, was that broadcasters felt they were being unfairly persecuted compared to books, newspapers, and magazines—mediums that also put “circulation above ethical considerations.” No matter how much critics wanted the masses to rise to a certain intellectual level, they argued, “it does not work out that way.”<sup>44</sup> To support their claims, broadcasters used ratings to gauge the public’s interests. But measuring the public’s taste with ratings only indicated the number of people who watched a show that networks produced, Minow argued. In defense of viewers, he did not accept that the public had such low standards.<sup>45</sup>

Clearly, Minow’s famous speech reached both viewers and industry people and contributed to a national debate on the subject. Although broadcasters did not respond favorably, Minow received more than one hundred positive telephone calls, telegrams, and letters from the public.<sup>46</sup> Clearly, he had his finger on the pulse of at least some viewers’ concerns regarding television’s content. One month prior to Minow’s NAB address, for example, *TV Guide* penned an open letter to the FCC. The editors of the magazine identified six critical problems that affected the public interest, demanding immediate action “in the form of investigations, recommendations to Congress and, most urgent of all, meetings with industry leaders.” *TV Guide* situated the letter as the opening article of the magazine, occupying the entire spread. Issues the magazine addressed included giving stations, not networks, more autonomy to make decisions based on the

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<sup>44</sup> Gould, “TV Spectacular—The Minow Debate.”

<sup>45</sup> Minow, “Television and the Public Interest.”

<sup>46</sup> Jack Gould, “TV: At the Wailing Wall,” *New York Times*, 11 May 1961; Gould, “TV Spectacular—The Minow Debate.”

local community, networks allowed too much violence on television, and that networks and sponsors relied too heavily on ratings. The editors signed off the missive pointing out that the intent of their letter was not to illicit government censorship or control. Instead, the purpose of their demands was to marshal “public opinion to correct practices which are harmful to television—and more important—harmful to the viewer.”<sup>47</sup>

The week following the NAB address, Minow responded to the open letter which *TV Guide* printed. Minow stated that the FCC and President Kennedy were aware of the problems the editors laid out and shared in their concern over television programming. Despite the antagonistic response broadcasters expressed to the *New York Times*, Minow explained that “the National Association of Broadcasters is displaying a responsible approach to the moral and legal obligations of broadcasting to serve our Nation’s interests and to express its highest aspirations.” Minow continued to explain the licensing process before he directed his letter to the public. “If you parents feel the station is emphasizing too much violence, *you* should say so.” He continued:

If informational shows are rarely carried by your station and you want more information and less entertainment, say so. If you think too much attention is paid to the television ratings, come forward with your opinion. Most broadcasters *want* to be responsive to the public and responsible about their use of your air waves.<sup>48</sup>

Minow went on to explain that the FCC was working with a special research group that studied the operation of television networks, particularly how programs were selected and produced. In addition, the FCC and Congress initiated a periodic review of whether the

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<sup>47</sup> The Editors, “As We See It: An Open Letter to Newton N. Minow, New Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission,” *TV Guide*, 8-14 April 1961, 6-7.

<sup>48</sup> Newton N. Minow, “FCC Chairman Replies to *TV Guide*: Newton N. Minow Asks Public’s Help in Improving Programs and Warns TV of its Responsibilities,” *TV Guide*, 13-19 May 1961, A-2-4.

networks' program offerings were in the public interest. Minow danced between discourses that emphasized what the general public needed and what they wanted. By bridging the relationship between viewers and broadcasters, the former could speak for themselves about what they expected out of television and possibly convince the latter they had better taste than assumed. Although the FCC used license renewals for leverage, encouraging audiences to speak out about their disapproval became another way to reach an industry that relied so heavily on ratings.

*TV Guide* and Minow specifically identified sitcoms and dramas as the crux of television's problems, but they also spoke of improving television programming in very broad terms, neglecting to discuss how such reform should be implemented. While Minow argued that television needed to become more educational, he never outlined what it should teach, how it should teach, or its intended audience. Considering that Minow contextualized his critiques by highlighting the contradictory nature of mindless entertainment in the midst of the Cold War, it made sense for networks to produce public service shows that featured more realism or "true stories." Networks therefore responded by increasing the number of documentaries, news reports, and commentary shows, such as *David Brinkley's Journal*, which first aired in 1961. Television documentaries in particular grew exponentially following Minow's NAB speech, in part to satisfy FCC standards, but also because Minow pushed for more advertiser support of non-entertainment programming.<sup>49</sup> In 1962 the big three networks produced over 400

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<sup>49</sup> Watson, *Expanding the Vista*, 135-136. Watson also discusses the extension of nightly news reports from 15 minutes to 30 minutes as a result of broadcast changes influenced by the New Frontier FCC. In 1963, CBS, aired its first half-hour long news broadcast with NBC following suit a few months later. It wasn't until 1967 that ABC also extended their news reporting to 30 minutes, 87.

documentaries, whereas in 1958, not one aired on any of the networks.<sup>50</sup> Michael Curtin has shown how the Kennedy Administration pushed for informative programming through the documentary genre as a way to “mobilize public opinion behind a more activist foreign policy,” while also projecting a positive image of the United States to foreign audiences.<sup>51</sup>

The “golden age” of documentary television, however, was short lived and drastically declined following Kennedy’s presidency due to low ratings. The programs were meant to marshal viewers to support the Kennedy administration’s policies, but instead they mostly attracted an elite audience of about ten million people.<sup>52</sup> Although documentary proved unsuccessful as the genre to uplift the citizenry, FCC pressure to change television’s format remained intact. Television reformers and New Frontiersmen thought of entertainment television as something separate and different from educational programming. Networks, however, needed to fulfill their commitment to television “diversity” while still making a profit. Naturally, they looked elsewhere to achieve both: the drama.

During the 1961-62 season, three successful dramas—*The Defenders*, *Dr. Kildare*, and *Ben Casey*—generated a trend in what Mary Ann Watson has dubbed “New Frontier character dramas.” These programs incorporated “liberal social themes in which the protagonists were professionals in service to society.” The shows’ premises often focused on some occupational ethical dilemma that the new TV hero faced. Character dramas distinguished themselves from other shows by presenting problems that the protagonist

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<sup>50</sup> Curtin, *Redeeming the Wasteland*, 261-266.

<sup>51</sup> Curtin, *Redeeming the Wasteland*, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Curtin, *Redeeming the Wasteland*.

could not always fix, such as poverty, prejudice, drug addiction, and abortion. These programs introduced a new element of realism into entertainment television by dramatizing actual social and political issues. They quickly attracted a large viewer following and made the character drama a popular television genre, which influenced the production of six more series the following season.<sup>53</sup>

The FCC did not outline how networks should implement the changes requested, but it is clear that Kennedy considered documentaries the vehicle to improve television and foster social change. Coming off of the era of quiz show scandals that left a moral stain on the television industry and the US as a whole, Minow tapped into the zeitgeist of viewers who largely desired to change the increasingly popular medium. Altering the state of television, however, was largely left to the interpretation of broadcasters who experimented with different ways to incorporate socially relevant and realistic themes into programming.

### **Educational Entertainment**

The JCET, New Frontiersmen, and other television reform allies pushed for the medium to incorporate more educational television, which they envisioned in the form of public service programs such as documentaries, broadcast news, “live” specials, and children’s shows. Essentially, they considered any sort of “non-entertainment” educational.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, it is important to emphasize that educational television should

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<sup>53</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 43-44; Although the character dramas Watson identifies are also what I would consider educational entertainment, our concepts differ. Watson refers only to programming that aired during the Kennedy administration, whereas educational entertainment extends beyond the 1960s and continues on television today.

<sup>54</sup> Jack Gould, “Stir In A Desert: Hopeful Trends Arise After Minow Talk,” *New York Times*, 18 June 1961.

not be conflated with educational entertainment, such as sitcoms or dramas that contained moral messages. Even viewers did not consider both types of programs synonymous.

Mrs. Billy Watkins from Fairfield, MO, for example, wrote to *TV Guide* in response to the correspondence between the magazine and Minow stating:

We bought our TV set, which we could ill afford, for *entertainment* and *that* alone. Information we get from radio, newspapers and magazines. When it was so we could go out, we went to movies and such for enjoyment and relaxation. Now, after a long, hard day of work, is it asking so much for our stations to provide us with programs of entertainment? Much as you *want* us to be educated, much as we *need* it, it isn't what we bought our TV for.<sup>55</sup>

At the onset of the debate about television's future, changes to include educational content in entertainment programming developed over time as networks chose to create a new genre that could yield profits rather than producing public service shows that used traditional, less successful formats. Minow called for broadcasters to consider ways people could benefit from instructional TV, specifically by looking towards the areas they served and their "local elections, controversial issues, local news, local talent."<sup>56</sup>

Although the Kennedy administration intended for broadcasters to focus on topics related to US government and the Cold War, one pressing issue that occupied most of broadcast news that networks could not ignore included the civil rights movement. Although very few documentaries on the civil rights movement aired prior to 1963, the movement became the first major, recurring network news story.<sup>57</sup> If the FCC pressed broadcasters

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<sup>55</sup> Mrs. Billy Watkins, "Letters to the Editor," *TV Guide*, May 20-26, 1961, A-2.

<sup>56</sup> Minow, "Television and the Public Interest."

<sup>57</sup> In his study on *CBS Reports*, *NBC White Paper*, and ABC's *Bell and Howell Close-Up!*, Michael Curtin found that out of the 147 documentaries those three programs produced between 1959-1964, only 11 of them focused on the civil rights movement, *Redeeming the Wasteland*, 261-266. Mary Ann Watson contends that topics related to race were the most heavily covered topics in documentaries in 1963. Although she does not provide data for this assertion, she did consider more documentaries than Curtin's three flagship programs, *Expanding the Vista*, 99-109. For more on how broadcast news reported on the

to find real topics to educate the public about, nothing seemed more relevant than race relations.

The shift in the televisual landscape to include more education and realism in entertainment programming developed in tandem with the civil rights movement. As television reformers called for more impactful programming, television creators responded with more shows that reflected contemporary social and political issues. Although westerns, private eyes, and zany family sitcoms continued to air, these types of shows no longer dominated prime-time television. Creating more “diverse” programming that could educate the public meant including more diverse subject matter, and sometimes even more diverse casts. Television shows considered unusually realistic often included black actors or were based on premises involving race relations in the US. Broadcasters, viewers, and activists even spoke of television’s inclusion of more “accuracy” and “realism” in racialized terms. Efforts to include African Americans on television, for instance, were often embedded in arguments about the need to create more true-to-life representations of the United States. An example of this is Gillette’s use of black models in their 1962 commercials, which made headlines in the *New York Times*. The ad featured two African Americans riding in a subway car, neither of which had speaking lines; however, Gillette’s president for advertising stated that “the Negro models were included in the commercial to lend it realism.”<sup>58</sup> Civil rights activists also used the language of “authenticity” when arguing for more inclusion in the television industry. In an attempt to push broadcasters to hire African Americans in television and

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civil rights movement see Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

<sup>58</sup> Peter Bart, “Advertising: Negro Models Getting TV Work,” *New York Times*, 7 September 1962, 44.

radio, George Norford, a consultant on “broadcasting and Negroes,” conveyed that demonstrations would ensue if efforts to hire more African Americans in broadcasting did not quickly materialize. Norford argued that protests against the media would again taint the industry’s image, as in the case of the quiz show scandals, because “they will say that broadcasters do not program honestly, that they are not presenting a true picture of American life.”<sup>59</sup>

Norford worked with labor unions, broadcasters, and advertising agencies to encourage more black representation despite fears that such integration would engender complaints from whites and ultimately lead to a loss of sponsors, viewers, and money. It was the advertising agencies and sponsors, Norford argued, that ultimately became “the stumbling block to fuller Negro opportunity.” An anonymous executive for an advertising agency echoed Norford’s sentiment and admitted that eventually this had to change. “After all,” he stated, “art should imitate life, and the Negroes have not been getting a fair representation up to now.” In response to this publicized discourse and the threat of boycotts, each network assigned executives from its “programming, personnel and casting sections to work on Negro employment and on the presentation of the Negro as he appears in American life.”<sup>60</sup> Activists who argued for more accuracy on television couched their appeals in a language that fit under the rubric of Kennedy-era liberalism that emphasized improving the lives of Americans through social engagement, even if it meant sacrificing profits.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) also

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<sup>59</sup> Richard F. Shepard, “Broadcasters Warned to Speed Hiring of Negroes: Told the Urgency of the Time is Forcing Positive Action,” *New York Times*, 25 June 1963, 14.

<sup>60</sup> Shepard, “Broadcasters Warned to Speed Hiring of Negroes,” 14.

advocated for more job opportunities in technical positions and screen acting, but more specifically they argued that movies and television should “truthfully” portray the “richness and diversity” of African Americans’ lives rather than limiting their roles to menial characters. In addition, the NAACP contended that the entertainment industry should increase the amount of black representation to mirror the population in the US.<sup>61</sup> The NAACP and other activists also emphasized the need to include black characters and hire black employees for technical jobs in the industry.

Networks began to make tangible changes by 1963. CBS and ABC hired black news reporters, and it became more common for classified ads in the trade press to announce, “Negro Newsman Wanted.”<sup>62</sup> The call to integrate blacks into the structure of television as a means of attaining greater “realism” helped African Americans break into an otherwise white industry. Still, even if networks were sensitized to the critiques regarding employment discrimination, the inclusion of black characters and the diversity in their roles remained marginal at best. This was due, in part, to the lack of diversity behind the screen, but also because white creators produced shows for white audiences and thought of the airwaves in segregated terms. For example, commercials for Feen-A-Mint, Artra, and Sulfa-8 integrated black actors into their ads, but they were directed toward “a predominantly Negro audience” by airing them only during *TV Gospel Time*.<sup>63</sup> Aniko Bodroghkozy also writes about television’s ambivalence in the telling of America’s racial story through a color-blind lens in what she refers to as “black and white

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<sup>61</sup> Murray Schumach, “N.A.A.C.P. Attacks Movie-TV Unions: 3 Demands on Hollywood Made Prior To Meetings,” *New York Times*, 19 July 1963, 11.

<sup>62</sup> Watson, *Expanding the Vista*, 98.

<sup>63</sup> Bart, “Advertising,” 44.

together.” She claims that networks only “provisionally embraced integrationist civil rights, as long as whiteness and white people (at least non-Southern and non-rural) were neither marginalized nor discomforted.”<sup>64</sup> Therefore, white producers and writers likely had a white audience in mind when creating prime-time programming, even when certain episodes focused on race. Although “the public” remained ambiguous in debates concerning “public interests,” the assumed category of people referred to were white.

In television’s infancy in the 1950s, discourse regarding a medium that allowed viewers to “go places” from the comfort of their own homes unfolded when the possibility of bringing unwanted non-white houseguests into personal living spaces seemed inconceivable. Advertisements compared television sets to personal cinemas during a time when most theaters remained segregated in the US. As portrayals of white families dominated 1950s popular television, the shift toward increased black representation on the news—and later entertainment television—often felt like an infringement on the personal space of many whites. Following the lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmitt Till, for example, a local Chicago news station interrupted *I Love Lucy* to report his body had been found, which Emmitt’s mother, Mamie Till, received hate mail for.<sup>65</sup> For these viewers, reporting on the murder of an innocent black boy did not warrant disrupting even the most innocuous form of entertainment.

Whereas entertainment television and the news remained distinct from one another in the 1950s, sitcoms and dramas of the 1960s began to supplement newscasts by incorporating contemporary situations into their premises. Broadcast news informed

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<sup>64</sup> Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time*, 4.

<sup>65</sup> Mamie Till-Mobley and Christopher Benson, *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime that Changed America*, (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 2003), 130.

viewers of the civil rights struggle, while entertainment TV implicitly and explicitly taught audiences how to respond to those changes the movement sought to achieve. Producers more frequently incorporated black actors into the fabric of American life in color-blind portrayals that showed black and white people coexisting in the background of certain scenes. However, producers also presented civil rights ideology more directly in some episodes that focused specifically on black experiences with racism and segregation. Although these representations attempted to present the harsh realities of bigotry from the black perspective, too often the main protagonist was a white male who helped to right the moral wrongs of ignorant bigots. The black cast member remained a supporting character—either played by a semi-recurring or guest black actor. Producers, therefore, thought they could assuage various constituencies—black activists by incorporating more actors of color, white audiences by showing a white protagonist as the show's hero, and the FCC for presenting educational programming on prime-time television.

## Chapter 2

### Windows and Mirrors: Educating the Public through Realistic Drama

“For years all of us have wanted a vehicle that would reflect back the contemporary society we live in—the good and the bad of it.”  
-E. Jack Neuman<sup>1</sup>

“Controversy is an old and tested method for educating the public. It may even open the way for understanding. But controversy is not a substitute for conflict and confrontation any more than distraction is a substitute for entertainment.”  
-E. Jack Neuman<sup>2</sup>

In the 1950s, advertisers of early television likened the medium to a “global village in a box” that could take viewers places. By the following decade, however, producers and viewers expanded this notion by metaphorically referring to television as a “window” or “mirror,” which extended the small screen’s function to that of providing a more comprehensive representation of society as a whole. In a speech given to the Washington Education Association in 1964, for example, co-creator and executive producer of *Mr. Novak*, E. Jack Neuman, declared that “television should be a window to the world encouraging us to face this very tough decade of our history. I think you’ll agree,” he said to his audience, “that television’s ability to interpret and explain and differentiate is inexhaustible.”<sup>3</sup> Later that year, the Writers Guild of America hosted a roundtable featuring actor-director Frank Silvera, actor Ivan Dixon, and writer James Baldwin to instruct television screenwriters on how “to bring the American image in line

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<sup>1</sup> E. Jack Neuman’s Writer’s Guide for *Mr. Novak* in Chuck Harter, *Mr. Novak: An Acclaimed Television Series* (Albany: BearManor Media, 2017), 330.

<sup>2</sup> St. Louis Suburban Teacher’s Association Speech by EJN, 19 March 1965, Box 28, Folder 5, E. Jack Neuman Papers (hereafter EJN), Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, University of Wisconsin, Madison (hereafter WHSA).

<sup>3</sup> Washington Education Association Speech by EJN, 17 April 1964, Box 28, Folder 9, EJN Papers, WHSA.

with reality.”<sup>4</sup> In a memo advertising the event, the Guild declared, “the function of the writer has been historically defined as that of holding a mirror up to society.” Even though the Black Freedom Movement was one of the most prominent events in America, “the image in our television continues to be that of a white, conflict-less nation,” the memo stated.<sup>5</sup> In a decade when the FCC pushed TV executives to create more impactful programming, the current landscape provided a limited view of American life.

New Frontiersmen and producers such as Neuman felt that television should uplift the citizenry by reflecting the reality of American life rather than facilitating American indifference through superficial entertainment. In this sense, they saw television as unique from other entertainment mediums. Unlike theaters, where audiences sat below a grand screen making them feel small in comparison, television sets were proportional to other living room furniture, with viewers positioned to look directly into the box. It not only had the ability to echo the social reality of the different lives and experiences of Americans across regional, racial, and class spaces; positioning the set within the intimate confines of one’s home provided an experiential viewing that made audiences feel more connected to televised events. As a result, a white viewer living in a segregated suburban community who might otherwise think that the civil rights movement was irrelevant to them could feel affected by representations of race struggles, for ill or good. The small screen’s ability to become a mirror for the movement as well as a mirror for the white

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<sup>4</sup> Writers Guild of America Memo written by Richard M. Powell, 4 December 1964, Box 40, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>5</sup> Writers Guild of America Memo written by Richard M. Powell, 4 December 1964, Box 40, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

viewer, television producers like Neuman believed, meant that they had a critical role to play in helping Americans come to terms with its pressing racial problem.

The “television as window” motif served as a comparable analogy, but in this case the producer was imagined as creating realistic and educational messages, whereas the metaphor of the mirror placed the onus of “truth-telling” on actors from both sides of the screen. With over 90% of American households owning a television set by the early-1960s, producers of programming had enormous power to determine what imagery was broadcast through that window.<sup>6</sup> The author of a political newsletter, for instance, encouraged readers to write their local TV channels in support of the “serious, thought-provoking pseudo-psychological films on the wonderful window called TV.” If viewers failed to express support for such programming, the report stated, producers would soon claim “that the people do not want serious entertainment, or education via TV.”<sup>7</sup> In this sense, television producers were the active creators of entertainment, and in turn, knowledge, with viewers cast as receivers of information.

Cultural critics and television executive’s never defined their usage of the medium as either a window or mirror, but this line of thinking was prevalent enough to divide educational entertainment into two categories. In the early 1960s educating audiences through entertainment was a relatively new concept in the world of television. By looking at episode files and analyzing closely changes to scripts and scripts that got

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<sup>6</sup> Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, Inc. report on “The 1965 Television Audience,” 29 June 1965, Box 40, Folder 5, EJM Papers, WSHA. This report includes data on the number of households that owned television sets from 1950-1965. By 1965, 93% of households in the United States, excluding Alaska and Hawaii, owned televisions. The estimated number that year was 52.6 million.

<sup>7</sup> Anonymous newsletter saved in *Mr. Novak* production files titled, “Talk...A Grass Roots Report from 50 States published monthly in Washington,” January-February 1964, Box 74, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WSHA.

cut, we get a sense of the extent to which certain problems could be portrayed in a manner TV executives hoped they would. On a range of issues, such as dropping out of high school, for example, producers could use the television as a mirror so that viewers could identify with characters and prevent future high school dropouts. Content creators felt they could not present other types of hard issues like unwed sexuality and school integration in the same manner. For example, television could be used as a window to show the injustice of segregation, but it was not okay to show structural racism in a way that made white audience members feel responsible.

*Mr. Novak* aimed to dramatize the root problems of teenage angst and delinquency in an effort to become a moral guide for adolescent viewers while also providing insight as to how adults, both parents and educators, could best handle the situations portrayed on the show. The aesthetic of *Mr. Novak*—a drama that portrayed “real life” topics—was common among many new television programs of its time, such as *Naked City* (1958-1963), *Route 66* (1960-1964), *The Defenders* (1961-1965), *Ben Casey* (1961-1966), and *Dr. Kildare* (1961-1966). Television producers, according to Neuman, could achieve realism by doing two things: extensively researching one’s subject and drawing from one’s personal experiences. The emphasis on realism developed out of the Kennedy Administration’s push to improve the quality of television, but more importantly, this televisual change also occurred in tandem with the increased presence of social activism across the US. By the early-to-mid-1960s, broadcast news continued to highlight the Black Freedom Movement, media sensationalized counter-cultural youth, and popular magazines featured more articles about women’s issues

rooted in second wave feminist discourse.<sup>8</sup> Rather than fill television's lineup with kooky sitcoms and idealistic westerns, Neuman believed, along with Newton Minow, the medium needed to accurately reflect society.

This chapter examines the limits around educational entertainment that encouraged learning or self-reflection among viewers, specifically how producers felt they should present certain kinds of hard realities pertaining to race and gender topics. Neuman determined relevant topics for *Mr. Novak* by taking cues from the Kennedy Administration and print and broadcast news. Conducting research for the show meant extensively interviewing and incorporating the experiences of teachers, administrators, and students into the creative writing process. Integrating experts into the production of entertainment television—whether medical professionals, politicians, social workers, or teachers—presented an alternative way to educate the general public in large numbers. Thus, writers and producers of *Mr. Novack* sought to use the show to inform the American public of the realities of American high schools in the early 1960s. Despite this and similar efforts to produce more serious and socially relevant programming under the aegis of Kennedy's New Frontier, however, the demographics of television creators severely limited the medium's progressive potential. White men largely made up the

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<sup>8</sup> Sasha Torres, *Black, White, And In Color: Television and Black Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement, The History of Communication* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012); Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Groove Tube: Sixties Television and Youth Rebellion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making & Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Melvin Small, *Covering Dissent: The Media and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond The Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," in *Not June Cleaver*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Jessica Weiss, "Fraud of Femininity": Domesticity, Selflessness, and Individualism in Responses to Betty Friedan" in *Rethinking Politics in Cold War America* ed. Kathleen G. Donohue (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).

entertainment industry on the executive and production levels and were the gatekeepers who interpreted how television should mirror society and which issues the medium should become a window for. Specifically, their positionality influenced how they approached programming research and what they regarded as “realistic” when it came to the experiences of students of color and women.

### **The War on Ignorance**

In an interview with E. Jack Neuman, Mary-Blanche Crowley asked the co-creator and executive producer of *Mr. Novak*, whether Neuman’s experience in the television industry altered his conception of writing. It did, he stated. As a writer, Neuman learned to expand within his limitations. With that said, commercial television did not inhibit artistic expression as much as many people assumed. “We say and do things on television that no motion picture screen could or would show. We discuss in detail and depth, many subjects that are not commercial items for...say, the Broadway stage.” Neuman felt that television should both entertain and inform audiences, and that it was the marriage of the two that created a successful telecast. “Drama without information is dull,” he explained, “and information without drama is dull. You combine the two and you get grit and substance that are provocative...that is drama itself.”<sup>9</sup>

*Mr. Novak* aired on NBC during the 1963 and 1964 television seasons. Starring James Franciscus as John Novak, the show featured the experiences of an idealist English teacher during his first year on the job under the guidance of the more seasoned and pragmatic principal, Albert Vane (Dean Jagger). As a situational drama, *Mr. Novak*

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<sup>9</sup> Mary-Blanche Crowley, “A Working Writer in L.A.,” *Westwind*, N.D.

featured regular cast members as faculty and staff, including an African American history teacher, Pete Butler (Vince Howard), and guest characters around whom situations revolved each week. Neuman and Boris Segal created the show with the intent of presenting high school in a different light than its comedic predecessors *Mr. Peepers* (1952-1955) and *Our Miss Brooks* (1952-1956). The former sitcom featured Robinson Peepers (Wally Cox), a bumbling yet kind science teacher who dates the school nurse and ultimately marries her in a later season. The latter show conversely portrayed Connie Brooks (Eve Arden) as a wise-cracking spinster who continuously pursued Mr. Boynton (Robert Rockwell), the school's science teacher, but to no avail.<sup>10</sup> Neuman in particular liked the idea of taking *Mr. Novak* in a different direction and providing a more serious and realistic depiction of high school than had previously aired on television.

Taking the lead on scholastic research, Neuman visited multiple schools in the Los Angeles area to talk with teachers and principals about their everyday experiences. Many of the teachers Neuman met with, however, expressed skepticism about his project, believing that television up to that point had only diminished the role of educators for comedic gains. Neuman acquired their trust and help once he convinced them that his show would portray high school teachers and students in a positive light. In his speech to the Washington Education Association, Neuman reflected that he “was going to try to make a high school teacher the most popular hero ever seen on film.” He continued: “In short, I wanted to see if a man without a gun or a badge or a horse or a stethoscope could

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<sup>10</sup> Mary M. Dalton and Laura R. Linder, *Teacher TV: Sixty Years of Teachers on Television* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 19-21.

capture a few million hearts. I also wanted to put the distorted image of the teenager back into proper, authentic perspective.”<sup>11</sup>

Following the initial stages of research, Neuman and Segal outlined the show’s premise and approached Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Television (MGM-TV) to finance the pilot, which they agreed to do because of Neuman’s stellar reputation within the industry. Neuman’s keen attention to detail when striving for televisual realism led him to arrange for the pilot’s filming at John Marshall High School in the Los Feliz district of Los Angeles. Neuman was particularly interested in this high school because it included students of various ethnic backgrounds from Los Feliz, Atwater Village, East Hollywood, Northeastern Koreatown, Elysian Valley, and Silver Lake. Although this diverse student body was representative of its southern California location, the school building and the over 1,000 students used as extras were meant to portray the fictitious Midwest Jefferson High School—a synthesis of high schools everywhere.<sup>12</sup>

One month after the pilot was filmed, MGM-TV added the series to the 1963 fall television lineup. To prepare for future storylines, Neuman traveled to high schools in New York, California, Colorado, Missouri, Kansas, and Illinois to get a sense of the types of problems teachers and students faced.<sup>13</sup> During a typical visit, Neuman met with someone from the local Board of Education, in addition to counselors and principals from local high schools. He attended an English class, interviewed teachers, and talked with students. At the end of the day, the pilot film was shown to teachers and students from several schools—over 350 attendees in once case—so that Neuman could gauge reactions

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<sup>11</sup> Washington Education Association Speech, Box 28, Folder 9, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>12</sup> Harter, *Mr. Novak*, 30-31.

<sup>13</sup> EJM to John R. Miles, 22 January 1964, Box 27, Folder 9, EJM Papers, WHSA.

from real teenagers and educators. In the evening, Neuman often appeared on local television stations to talk about *Mr. Novak* and his intentions with the drama.<sup>14</sup>

Neuman's rigorous attention to detail continued into script writing. He worked closely with the National Education Association (NEA), which in 1964 consisted of over 903,000 teachers, principals, superintendents, and education specialists. The NEA's Division of Press, Radio, and Television Relations advised and assisted in the production of the show from the earliest stages of its creation. Per Neuman's request, a panel of four teachers and four principals reviewed each script "for authenticity."<sup>15</sup> He also hired a principal and an English teacher as full-time technical advisors, and it was not uncommon for Neuman to send writers to observe high schools, since education, and the problems of the contemporary generation, continuously changed.<sup>16</sup> Discussion of *Mr. Novak's* realistic content circulated within popular and trade publications prior to the show's premier. The *NEA Journal*, as well as other regional education periodicals, encouraged educators across the US to tune in to the weekly drama. They discussed *Mr. Novak's* premise and emphasized the extensive research that went into the program, which lent itself to the creation of a realistic and redeeming portrayal of a high school teacher—unlike Miss Brooks and Mr. Peepers. The summer before *Mr. Novak* debuted, the NEA endorsed the show and screened the pilot to over 9,000 teachers during their annual convention.<sup>17</sup> Rousing support from educators attracted an audience prior to the premier,

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<sup>14</sup> Itinerary for EJM in Kansas City and St. Louis, MO and Chicago, IL, 24 March 1963, Box 72, Folder 9, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>15</sup> Promotional press release from the NEA, 1964, Box 27, Folder 4, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>16</sup> C. J. Skreen, "Educators Award 'Novak' Top Marks," *The Seattle Times*, 3 May 1964; Occasionally Neuman solicited the help of teenagers, as well, to comment on scripts for accuracy. Production Files for "Faculty Follies, Part I, Box 22, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>17</sup> Author unknown, "Meet Mr. Novak," *NEA Journal*, September 1963 issue.

but it also bolstered Neuman's claims regarding the series' authenticity and application for addressing topical social and political problems.

The relatively fast pace of production compared to the stage or cinema allowed television to portray commentary on numerous contemporary issues in unique ways; however, Neuman cautioned aspiring writers from taking shortcuts when creating a screenplay. In order to become successful, he advised them to really study the format of the program and its characters and, most importantly, to "research avidly." He pushed writers "to try to reflect back in all of their writing [of] the modern day society we live in...The experience and the technical ability of the writer is the best judge of whether he's successful in that reflection."<sup>18</sup> In reference to *Mr. Novak*, Neuman expressed a sense of duty during his speech at the annual Washington Education Association assembly: "I talked myself into carrying a banner, a flag, and a cause and I haven't regretted it one minute." He compared television's obligation to that of public schools, "to recognize the needs of the community and to serve wherever, whenever and whatever is best."<sup>19</sup> Although he did not think very many television producers shared his sense of obligation, some did. "The key men, the top men feel their responsibility very keenly, and I think it shows on the films they make and the stories they write" in how they talk "to millions of people once a week."<sup>20</sup>

Neuman echoed President Kennedy's New Frontier philosophy by frequently referring to his sense of responsibility to create impactful entertainment for the masses.

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<sup>18</sup> Crowley, "A Working Writer in L.A."

<sup>19</sup> Washington Education Association Speech, 17 April 1964, Box 28, Folder 9, E. Jack Neuman Papers (hereafter EJN), Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, University of Wisconsin, Madison (hereafter WHSA).

<sup>20</sup> Crowley, "A Working Writer in L.A."

Unlike educational programming that was meant to supplement secondary education, or documentaries that provided in-depth examinations of particular topics, Neuman believed informative content could be woven into the fabric of prime-time drama. While writing for *Dr. Kildare*, for example, Neuman deviated from the former belief that TV writers needed to cater to the lowest common denominator and instead assumed Americans could learn about the medical profession via entertainment. After two months of doing clinical work at Los Angeles County Hospital to research the medical profession prior to writing for the show, the *Chicago Daily News* noted, “The NBC series fairly reeks of authenticity, of the smells and flavor of realism of life in the hospital. Writer Jack Neuman is tossing liberal doses of medical jargon into the script without apology, assuming his audience has intelligence.”<sup>21</sup> Even if some audiences did not agree with television’s messaging, the medium could serve the majority of viewers who did. Neuman did not try to please everybody, claiming, “I don’t even try.” He wrote the show for an audience he assumed to be “sensitive, emotional, mature, adult, and intelligent,” and one deserved “truth and honesty and completeness every week.”<sup>22</sup>

Neuman produced episodes based on the experiences of actual students, teachers, and administrators, but he was also cognizant of issues deemed important by the Kennedy administration. For instance, on 14 February 1963 six days after *Daily Variety* announced that NBC picked up *Mr. Novak* for the upcoming television season, President Kennedy made a special announcement to Congress regarding the state of the nation’s youth.<sup>23</sup> He

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<sup>21</sup> Harter, *Mr. Novak*, 25; Discussion of Neuman’s research that went into writing for *Dr. Kildare* is mentioned in *The Indiana Teacher*, September 1963, Box 27, Folder 6, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>22</sup> Washington Education Association Speech, Box 28, Folder 9, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>23</sup> Harter, *Mr. Novak*, 41.

urged Congress to enact the Youth Employment Act and other proposed legislation to improve or create programs devoted to health, education, and employment. In his address, Kennedy discussed how the increased number of minors—from 46 million in 1945 to 70 million in 1961—had overcrowded the educational system and flooded the labor market. The areas of concern Kennedy highlighted included the rising number of high school dropouts, a diminished, unskilled labor force, increasing cases of juvenile delinquency, and child poverty—all of which stemmed from “a lack of opportunity.”

Attributing racial inequalities to this systemic problem, Kennedy explained that “this lack cannot be cured without a more perfect educational and vocational training system, a more prosperous full employment economy, the removal of racial barriers, and the elimination of slum housing and dilapidated neighborhoods.” In addition to outside factors, family situations directly impacted a child’s opportunity and development, Kennedy claimed. Divorce, desertion, poor physical health, and mental illness contributed to low income families’ struggles and required new types of family welfare programs. One of the final points he addressed was the rapid rise of venereal disease among teenagers. Per his recommendation and the endorsement of Congress, a ten-year program of federal grants and direct action aimed to eradicate the “age-old scourge.”

Kennedy closed his message by declaring a need to bring awareness to the points addressed. “Our past failures to identify, understand and meet the many problems relating to our Nation’s youth” he stated, “cannot be countenanced any longer.”<sup>24</sup> Later that afternoon, in a preliminary statement prior to a press conference, Kennedy briefly

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<sup>24</sup> John F. Kennedy, “Special Message On Our Nation’s Youth,” 14, February 1963, Legislative Files, Series 04, John F. Kennedy’s Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Digital Archive.

restated his message to Congress and cited statistics concerning the estimated 7.5 million students expected to drop out of high school by the end of the decade. Employment opportunities could not only help a growing population improve their lives, but also curb the “host of problems” that “idle youth on our city streets create.”<sup>25</sup> Kennedy spoke directly to Congress to enact legislation, but he was not alone in his crusade. Media executives incorporated similar themes into prime-time programming and, in turn, spoke to millions of Americans about the President’s interests outlined in his address.

All of Kennedy’s concerns vis-à-vis the nation’s youth—high school dropouts, juvenile delinquency, family poverty, racial prejudice, broken families, and venereal disease—made it into the plotlines of *Mr. Novak*, and not by happenstance. Neuman relied on the NEA to help research particular subjects and stay abreast of both educational and political events. For example, during production of “The Exile,” an episode in the first season about the hopeless future of high school dropouts, Neuman requested information on what he mistakenly referred to as the “National Youth Guidance Bill.” In response the NEA sent him materials on the Vocational Education Bill and the Youth Employment Act, which influenced the production of “The Exile,” and also bolstered Neuman’s claims regarding the episode’s importance and authenticity.<sup>26</sup>

Neuman’s strategy of dramatizing issues that the President prioritized proved beneficial in a number of ways. It not only meant *Mr. Novak*’s content fell under the rubric of FCC standards, but it also reassured NBC executives when televising

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<sup>25</sup> John F. Kennedy Press Conference, 14 February 1963, Press Conferences, Series 05, John F. Kennedy’s Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Digital Archive.

<sup>26</sup> Memo from Henry Noerdlinger (NEA) to EJM, 20 November 1963, Box 15, Folder 1, EJM Papers, WHSA.

provocative subjects, while generating publicity for the show.<sup>27</sup> In an attempt to convey *Mr. Novak's* realism to viewers, for example, Neuman, with the help of Roy Wilson of the NEA, Washington, D.C., solicited Jackie Kennedy's endorsement of "The Exile," which dramatized the importance of finishing high school, in a two-minute trailer. The NEA and Neuman corresponded about John F. Kennedy's and Attorney General Robert Kennedy's interest in addressing the increased high school dropout problem. An article in *The Washington Post* circulated among television executives about a recent benefit organized by the Stay-in-School Fund Committee, headed by Ethel Kennedy, Flaxie Pinkett, and Ann Brinkley, for which Jackie Kennedy acted as the honorary chair. At the event, Vice President Lyndon Johnson told his personal story about dropping out of school, and Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz declared a "war on ignorance" in an appeal to aid impoverished children to encourage education completion.<sup>28</sup> In a memo to Richard Weitman (head of TV production at MGM) on 20 November 1963, Neuman explained that he asked Mrs. Kennedy to promote the show "since the President and the Attorney General have initiated strong public awareness of this very urgent problem." He reminded Weitman that "President Kennedy has requested the motion picture industry and motion picture personalities to assist here in making the general public aware of the problem," and asked if MGM-TV could exert any influence to insure Mrs. Kennedy's

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<sup>27</sup> Garnering support from the President, however, did not guarantee network approval. Neuman's efforts to produce an episode about the exponential rate at which teens contacted venereal disease were defeated, despite his letter of support from President Lyndon B. Johnson. "The Rich Who Are Poor" Correspondence, February 1964- May 1966, Box 33, Folder 1, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>28</sup> Dorothy McCardle, "'Dropout' Lyndon Landed on Top," *The Washington Post*, 26, September 1963; discussion of this article can be found in the production files for "The Exile," Box 15, Folder 1, EJM Papers, WHSA.

appearance. Despite such efforts, her endorsement of the program never materialized, because two days later John F. Kennedy was assassinated.<sup>29</sup>

Neuman not only relied on extensive research to legitimize *Mr. Novak* as an authentic representation of contemporary issues, he also argued that marrying realism and drama empowered the medium of television itself because it could reach a wider audience. Whereas informative programming was traditionally reserved for educational shows or documentaries, Neuman believed that when a producer could “tell a good dramatic story and perform a public service within the confines of commercial dramatic program—you are getting somewhere in television.”<sup>30</sup> Neuman became more impassioned with his claim when NBC refused to air certain episodes. For example, NBC cancelled a two-part telecast titled “The Rich Who Are Poor” about a Jefferson High teen who contracts a venereal disease on *Mr. Novak* and is treated on the *Dr. Kildare* show. Neuman solicited the help from President Lyndon Johnson, the US Surgeon General, the president of the American Public Health Association, and dozens of other medical and social welfare professionals who wrote to NBC after having read the scripts, validating the importance and accuracy of these episodes and the need to air them for the greater good of millions of Americans.<sup>31</sup>

Although Neuman generated a wealth of support and interest in the topic from medical experts and in newspapers across the US, his efforts did not persuade NBC to

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<sup>29</sup> Production files for “The Exile,” Box 15, Folder 1, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>30</sup> EJM to Hank Grant from *The Hollywood Reporter*, 4 November 1964, Box 33, Folder 1, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>31</sup> Correspondence for “The Rich Who Are Poor,” February 1964-May 1966, Box 33, Folder 1, EJM Papers, WHSA. Discussion of the medical support behind the shows can also be found in Val Adams, “Surgeon General Pleads for Story: NBC Rules Out Drama About Venereal Disease,” *New York Times*, 17 November 1964.

change their decision, which was based on the concern that discussing venereal disease inevitably meant having to address sexual intercourse among teens. NBC cancelled the two-part episode in the fall of 1964 during a moment when sex education was a particularly contentious topic. In the decade prior, public school sex education was, as historian Jeff Moran claims, “virtually moribund.” Sex education in the early 1960s typically focused on physiology and menstruation, with few teachers trained in sex education. In 1964, however, Mary Calderone cofounded the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) which, although a moderate group of advocates, pushed sex education in a more liberal direction. The advent of SEICUS occurred at the same time as a revitalization of right-wing politics mobilized against sex education.<sup>32</sup> The backlash SEICUS faced is precisely what NBC feared would happen if *Mr. Novak* featured an educational episode about teen sex and VD. Neuman’s shock and anger over NBC’s unwillingness to budge likely stemmed from the fact that *Mr. Novak* already aired an episode about sex education the year prior. The 1963 telecast featured Lillian Gish as an “outspoken spinster who teaches sex education,” but the premise of the episode focused on parent debates about whether sex education should be placed in the hands of educators or parents.<sup>33</sup> The episode itself informed viewers about debates concerning sex education, it did not instruct them about venereal disease and how to cure it. Neuman’s reasoning for why the episode *should* have aired, however, illuminates how much more impactful he considered entertainment television than other genres.

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<sup>32</sup> Janice M. Irvine, *Talking about Sex: The Battles Over Sex Education in the United States*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 17-18; Jeffrey Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 160.

<sup>33</sup> Harter, *Mr. Novak*, 223-225.

Neuman believed that the ability to educate millions of Americans about VD through this particular medium and potentially reduce the number of instances was far too important to ignore. Because of the format and audience base for *Mr. Novak* and *Dr. Kildare*, Neuman claimed that “high school kids would be more impressed if Jimmy Novak and Dick Chamberlain discussed the dangers of VD than they would if Chet Huntley or David Brinkley covered the subject in an *NBC White Paper*.”<sup>34</sup> Producer of *Mr. Novak*, Leonard Freeman, also emphasized the impact entertainment TV could have on the general public. “*CBS Reports* might do a documentary on this problem which would be seen by maybe 8 million people,” he stated. “But on these two shows it could have made as many as 60 million aware of the situation.”<sup>35</sup>

Part of what made entertainment television more effective than documentaries was not just the larger audience, but also the intimate connection viewers felt towards fictional characters such as Mr. Novak and Dr. Kildare that made their message more persuasive. Some critics doubted this potential: Hank Grant from *The Hollywood Reporter* believed that an “unsentimental documentary” was more powerful than drama when it came to something as serious as VD. “A dramatization can only point a warning finger,” he argued. “A documentary can jab that finger right into your guts!”<sup>36</sup> In response, Neuman wrote to Grant, arguing that “unsentimental” documentaries could not “match the effectiveness of familiar personalities like Novak or Kildare...dealing with a very real problem in dramatic terms.” He added that “the documentary still only receives a fragment of audience in comparison to dramatic programs. The Surgeon General and

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<sup>34</sup> Frank Judge, NBC Rejects Top Pleas to Show Drama on VD,” *Detroit News*, 30 December 1964.

<sup>35</sup> Cecil Smith, “Video Sharpens its Blue Pencil,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 November 1964.

<sup>36</sup> Hank Grant, “On The Air,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 2 November 1964.

the APHA and a great many other agencies have attacked the problem [of venereal disease] with documentary films—and failed.”<sup>37</sup> According to Neuman’s logic, documentaries that merely became a window onto the rise of venereal disease among teens were admirable, but not effective. Shows like *Mr. Novak* could better serve the public by mirroring a realistic situation via characters that viewers could relate to, feel a connection with, and maybe see themselves in.

By and large viewers engaged with *Mr. Novak* the way Neuman intended—they took the show very seriously as a teaching tool. In fan mail written to Neuman, audiences expressed a newfound excitement for the fresh approach to weaving educational content into entertainment television. Neuman received some critiques from viewers who mostly complained about one of two subjects: either they disliked scenes where Novak drank alcohol, or from segregationists who opposed integration at Jefferson High School. These complaints were few and far between compared to the extensive laudatory fan mail Neuman received, particularly in response to *Mr. Novak*’s inclusion of episodes about racism and bigotry. In general, audiences from across the US felt the social and political tensions of the early-sixties and considered the program timely in its ability to shine a light on some of the issues of the decade, and have viewers learn something from watching the show.

### **The High School Drop Out: Exile on Main Street**

Creators of *Mr. Novak* thought the program could change real lives. The show’s extensive viewership made it all the more imperative that episodes presented realistic

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<sup>37</sup> EJN to Hank Grant from *The Hollywood Reporter*, 4 November 1964, Box 33, Folder 1, EJN Papers, WHSA.

situations in a way that could impact viewer decision making. *Mr. Novak*'s high school setting, therefore, made it the perfect drama to address real concerns Americans had with the large population of baby boomer teenagers: juvenile delinquency. Kennedy emphasized the importance of addressing problems among America's teens in his Youth Employment Act, but the President's speech only reinforced preexisting concerns. For over a decade, parents, politicians, and journalists expressed concern over increased juvenile crime, the failing education system, and a decline in family values. Popular films in the 1950s such as *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) only exacerbated moral panic. Particularly with scenes from the former film that portrayed violent teens terrorizing their interracial inner-city school destroying school property, attacking administrators, and raping a teacher.<sup>38</sup> Journalists who wrote about the *Mr. Novak* series frequently explained the show by describing to readers what it was not—it was not *Blackboard Jungle*. Neuman himself noted his desire to portray a more honest representation of teenagers that did not depict them in a negative light. With respectful portrayals of teachers and students, Neuman hoped viewers would be more likely to take *Novak* seriously and learn from the show. As identified by Kennedy, and many other Americans, dropping out of high school was the root of many teen's problems. Through the episode, "The Exile," Neuman attempted to teach teens about how difficult life could be without a high school diploma. Neuman referenced some of the same themes from *Blackboard Jungle*, but the predominantly white middle-class setting of Jefferson High

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<sup>38</sup> Daniel Biltereyst, "American Juvenile Delinquency Movies and the European Censors: The Cross-Cultural Reception and Censorship of *The Wild One*, *Blackboard Jungle*, and *Rebel Without a Cause*," in *Youth Culture in Global Cinema*, eds. Timothy Shary and Alexandra Seibel (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2007), 10-11; Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: Juvenilization of American Movies*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 57-60.

allowed him to experiment with an unconventional presentation of juvenile delinquency. He portrayed the high school dropout as a sad and menacing person, someone who audiences could fear and empathize with at the same time.

The significance attached to televising topics intended to alter social norms generated debates concerning the ways in which TV should attempt to inform its audience. Neuman felt he could accurately portray the nuances of teen life by presenting problems that were not easily solved in one episode. Through open-ended storylines, audiences could draw their own conclusions about the harsh realities of bad choices. *Rocky Mountain News* noted this dramatic treatment in its description of Franciscus' character as heroic, but with a lower-case 'h' since not "everything comes up roses for the hero just before the closing commercial."<sup>39</sup> Some critics, however, considered unhappy endings discouraging because they failed to properly instruct the public how to solve the problems *Mr. Novak* depicted. In the case of "The Exile," for example, disagreements ensued about whether the episode should teach viewers about the options available to high school dropouts, or if it should illustrate the forlorn future dropouts faced. Neuman chose the latter. Based on the "real life situation" of a boy from Toledo, Ohio, the premise featured a white twenty-year-old named Charlie Payne (Richard Evans) who returned to Jefferson High School after dropping out three years prior. With the help of Mr. Novak, Charlie wants to return to high school because of the difficulty he faced trying to find work without a diploma. Principal Vane, however, cannot enroll Charlie because he is legally an adult and therefore cannot return to high school.

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<sup>39</sup> Walter Sanders, "A New Breed of TV Hero," *Rocky Mountain News—TV Dial*, 10 November 1963.

Although Vane recommends an Adult Education Program, Charlie is unwilling to enroll in classes since he tried it before and it “didn’t work for him.” After their meeting, Vane tells Novak that Charlie is likely to become “a ward of the state, a financial burden for the taxpayers to support for the rest of his life—because he refused to become educated.” The episode concludes with Novak and two other teachers walking in on Charlie about to assault the school counselor, Miss Scott (Marian Collier). Charlie realizes he’s outnumbered as he gestures toward Miss Scott and tells her he is “just acting adult.” Novak orders the boy to leave and the scene ends with Charlie hopelessly walking off of school premises.<sup>40</sup>

Neuman solicited the professional opinion of the Director of the Project on School Dropouts of the NEA, Dan Schreiber, who read the script prior to filming. Unexpectedly, however, Schreiber thought Charlie’s outcome was a “horrible” representation of a student crying out for help without receiving any assistance from the school. Neuman felt that the episode highlighted the “school’s frustrating inability” to prevent students from dropping out, rather than indicting the education system altogether. He explained to Schreiber that the dropout rate had increased to thirty-seven percent in some parts of the country, and “if this program can do anything to deter any potential dropout then it will be worth the trouble and cost.” Moreover, after watching the episode, “an alerted and informed public” would take the first step toward solving the school dropout problem by asking themselves: “What do we do about it?” Henry S. Noerdlinger, manager of the NEA Motion Picture, TV, and Radio Information Center, echoed Neuman’s sentiments in

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<sup>40</sup> Script of “The Exile” written by E. Jack Neuman, 18 November 1963, Box 15, Folder 1, EJM Papers, WHSA.

a letter to Schreiber explaining that the story of Charlie needed “to be told in a dramatic form with such an impact that it literally ‘jolts’ the audience into the shocking realization of what might happen whether the viewer is a student, a dropout, or a parent.” With this approach, Neuman intended to have an effect over *Mr. Novak*’s thirty million viewers and in turn help the Project on School Dropouts yield more successful results in their mission.<sup>41</sup>

Of the many repercussions Charlie could have faced, Neuman chose to “jolt” audiences by portraying the act of dropping out as equivalent to that of becoming a burden on society. “The Exile” suggests that failing to graduate would de-masculinize Charlie, whose poor choices ensured his fate as either a pathetic dependent or a menacing criminal—hence his attempt to regain his masculinity over Miss Scott. Gordon Wood, a Massachusetts English teacher, wrote to Neuman concerned that the episode told all of the real Charlies of the world that they were destined to become “hapless wards of our society” and therefore took away any “glimmer of hope” for their future. “What possible ammunition are you, as molders of these minds, providing them (or our very society!) in their impending war against unemployment, economic and psychological poverty, and even, ultimately, crime?”<sup>42</sup> In response, Neuman countered that the episode performed a service in making the unfortunate events displayed in “The Exile” real for viewers. If the episode prevented even one potential dropout from leaving school, he stated, “then it accomplished its purpose.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Correspondence between Neuman, Schreiber, and Noerdlinger took place between 21 November 1963-2 December 1963, Box 15, Folder 1, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>42</sup> Gordon E. Wood to EJM, 14 January 1964, Box 74, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>43</sup> EJM to Gordon E. Wood, 3 February 1964, Box 74, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

Because television was so influential to impressionable youth, John R. Miles of the Chamber of Commerce Education Department in Washington, D.C., claimed television producers should present favorable imagery for the greater good of society, even if it was not completely accurate. Miles took issue with the episode depicting Charlie's "tragic failure" instead of his success, which led audiences to erroneous conclusions. "Even if our schools are so inept in handling the dropout problem," Miles claimed, "it would not have been good television to reveal it."<sup>44</sup> In a heated response, Neuman explained the extensive research that went into producing "The Exile," which was "entirely, if harshly, true." Neuman argued that through entertainment programming, *Mr. Novak* could supplement federal, state, and local program efforts that intended to curb the dropout problem in the US. He argued that in nearly "every high school across the land there are anti-dropout committees as well as community, district county and city efforts to handle it. I am also aware—and so are you—that the problem still exists." That is precisely why Charlie's portrayal made for good television, he argued, "since the first step toward the solution of any problem is to give it a voice." Neuman cited the numerous letters he received from principals and guidance counselors across the country who requested copies of the film to show in school assemblies as evidence to support his argument about the effectiveness of this episode. "They are aware, as you and I are, that every undereducated American weakens the national fabric." Moreover, the one thing Neuman was able to do with "The Exile" that educators and government programs could not was "scare the hell out of a hundred thousand potential high school dropouts."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> John R. Miles, 16 January 1964, Box 27, Folder 9, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>45</sup> EJM to John R. Miles, 22 January 1964, Box 27, Folder 9, EJM Papers, WHSA.

Neuman's objective with "The Exile" was not just to inform millions of Americans of the increasing number of dropouts, but to speak to teens who were on the precipice of leaving school and could see themselves reflected in Charlie's character. The show, he believed, would show them how desolate their future would be if they chose such a path.

As critics and supporters alike both emphasized, "The Exile's" ending was important because it had the ability to influence viewer behavior. To what extent the show actually impacted life choices among its audience is unclear; however, extensive mail written to Neuman demonstrates that the show's fan base considered the drama very influential and thought the program could be used as a teaching tool beyond its 7:00 p.m. time slot. A high school teacher from Teaneck, New Jersey, for example, assumed "The Exile" persuaded at least a few hundred teenagers to change their minds about dropping out of high school. The episode was compelling because it showed some of the other contributing factors in Charlie's life that influenced his position, the teacher argued. She especially liked that Neuman did not provide a "conventional happy ending which would have spoiled the vigor of the message."<sup>46</sup> A viewer from Norfolk, Virginia, who taught at-risk junior high students also lauded the "no answer" ending. She felt that the open portrayal resonated with the boys she taught, because, in reality, one singular answer would not address their individual needs. "Each boy's problem is different," she stated, there is no clear-cut, common solution."<sup>47</sup> She closed her letter requesting to borrow a copy of the episode to play for her students.

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<sup>46</sup> Isabelle Tourian to EJM, 16 January 1964, Box 74, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>47</sup> Mrs. L. S. Herman to EJM, 17 January 1964, Box 74, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

Neuman received many requests for a copy of the episode to educate prospective dropouts and those who had already quit school. An instructor and administrator for the Nassau County Jail School of Instruction in Long Island, Philip C. De Julio wrote to inquire about obtaining a copy of the film for his classes. The jail's accredited school, a unique initiative, offered courses for boys (ages sixteen through twenty) that allowed them to earn a New York State High School Equivalency Diploma. De Julio's enrollment prior to "The Exile" was twenty-five students, but if he could acquire a copy of the episode, he was sure it would double. Despite making his greatest efforts, De Julio felt that it was *Mr. Novak* who could truly make "education an aim for our boys here."<sup>48</sup> Likewise, Will H. Voeller of the Motion Picture and Radio Division of the US Navy Recruiting also requested multiple copies of "The Exile" for local recruiting offices to screen in high school auditoriums across the country. Because so many people assumed that one did not need to graduate high school to join the US Navy, Voeller wanted recruiters to confront this assumption and use *Mr. Novak* to educate young boys about the negative repercussions dropping out of high school presented.<sup>49</sup>

Neuman was unable to satisfy the innumerable requests for copies of "The Exile" from organizations and educators. Because of obligations to "labor organizations, commercial sponsors and exhibitors, and the administrative burden" MGM had a strict policy against "releasing prints for such educational use."<sup>50</sup> Although MGM could not distribute *Mr. Novak*, teachers continued to use the show as an educational tool. A high

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<sup>48</sup> Philip C. De Julio to EJM, 15 January 1964, Box 74, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>49</sup> Will H. Voeller to EJM, 27 January 1964, Box 74, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA. The assumption that dropouts could resort to joining the Army or Navy is reflected in fan mail that critiqued this episode for inaccurately portraying Charlie's fate as being unavoidably bleak.

<sup>50</sup> Frederick C. Houghton to Will H. Voeller, 25 February 1964, Box 74, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

school teacher of thirty-three years from St. Paul, Minnesota, for example, found the show “very realistic,” and often discussed episodes with their classes.<sup>51</sup> A class at Fremont School in Alhambra, California, collectively wrote to Neuman about how their teacher assigned students to watch *Mr. Novak* and evaluate the episodes in class.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, multiple students from an all-girls Catholic High School in Jamaica, New York, wrote to Neuman about how every Wednesday morning they had a class discussion about the *Mr. Novak* episode from the night before. “Moral problems of the modern world are brought to light,” one student wrote, “and excellent examples of solutions to teenage problems are presented.”<sup>53</sup>

Neuman received countless letters from teenagers and adults who fondly described *Mr. Novak* as “realistic,” “authentic,” “true-to-life,” “life-like,” and “timely.” Viewers expressed an appreciation for the new TV aesthetic that married educational premises with entertainment, specifically the impact it could have on audiences. In response to a negative review of *Mr. Novak*, for instance, Erwin Feith wrote: “I feel that shows like yours, which try to give us ‘educational television’ in an entertaining form deserve a more constructive reaction from TV critics and support from the public.”<sup>54</sup> A mother of three in Northridge, California, declared *Mr. Novak* “a bright light in TV” and a good example at how the medium could become a “genuine channel of entertainment of the best kind—entertainment plus education.”<sup>55</sup> Fans of *Mr. Novak* found the drama to do more than simply provide moral lessons for young adults, but it had the ability to assuage

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<sup>51</sup> Allan Gower to EJM, 17 October 1963, Box 29, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>52</sup> Class at Fremont School to EJM, 4 October 1963, Box 29, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>53</sup> Patricia Tristano to EJM, 17 October 1963, Box 29, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>54</sup> Erwin P. Feith to EJM, October 1963, Box 29, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>55</sup> Mrs. Dorothy Beerstein to EJM, 29 October 1963, Box 29, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

social tensions and strengthen the nation's moral fiber. Following an episode about white students who harassed their black peers in opposition to integration, Neuman received an influx of mail from viewers who thought the dramatization of this topical subject could mitigate some of America's racial problems. A woman from Topeka, Kansas, for example, felt it was her "duty" to write Neuman and express how more television shows should be as truthful as *Mr. Novak*, because such entertainment would "build a nation and save a nation. TV plays a major part in molding the lives of our young people."<sup>56</sup> Margaret Bowman of Minnesota claimed *Mr. Novak* could "instill a new attitude of responsibility in both young people and adults," whereas Pennsylvanian Evangeline Gray hoped the episode would "mold many peoples' attitudes along lines more in keeping with the principles upon which our nation was established."<sup>57</sup> What made *Mr. Novak* successful, according to a Portland woman, was its believability. A weekly series had "to be one you can identify with," she added. In other words, viewers had to be able to see themselves in the characters and situations portrayed on the screen in order for them to relate.

### **Authenticity vs. Realism: The Limits of Representing Race**

Whereas statistics of the race and ethnic makeup of *Mr. Novak*'s audience are not available, it can be assumed that the majority of the program's fans who wrote into the show were white based on the signifiers writers typically included in their letters. For example, black viewers tend to openly identify as such in their missives, and white viewers often wrote about race issues as a problem other people experienced and that

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<sup>56</sup> Mrs. Carl Roach to EJM, 22 October 1963, Box 29, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>57</sup> Margaret K. Bowman to EJM, 17 October 1963; Evangeline H. Gray to EJM, 23 October 1963, Box 29, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

they could learn about through TV.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, viewers who found *Mr. Novak* “believable” were presumably white. The show’s realism and relatability to white audiences was due in part to the mostly white cast, but also to way the show portrayed topics related to race so as not to discomfort white viewers. Even when an episode featured a non-white student, for instance, Mr. Novak remained the voice of reason who translated the non-white character’s frustration with racism into a purportedly more rational approach to navigating a white world as a person of color. Although the series did give a voice to the experiences students of color may have faced, the series reduced racism to individual instances, rather than as a result of systemic oppression. Episodes that featured black actors also tended to be about race issues, therefore black characters portrayed only unidimensional roles.<sup>59</sup> The type of research that went into writing certain episodes influenced how contributors depicted racism. Whereas Neuman and other writers may have interviewed black teachers, a great deal of their research into racialized topics came from either interviews with white administrators about integration in their school, or from print and broadcast news sources. Therefore, the lack of inclusion of non-

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<sup>58</sup> It seems that few black viewers wrote to Neuman regarding the show. However, for series that aired after *Mr. Novak* that featured black main characters, such as *Julia* and *Good Times*, more black viewers wrote to networks and in those letters they racially identified themselves, which will be discussed in later chapters.

<sup>59</sup> *Mr. Novak*’s contributors’ limited understanding of race is reflective of the general liberal understanding of inequality in the mid-twentieth century. Scholars of welfare policy have studied how liberal ideas concerning poverty typically involved debates on whether disparity stemmed from environmental or innate origins. Therefore, even when white welfare reformers had good intentions to help impoverished individuals, their narrow understanding of how race and gender inequality operated in the U.S effected the construction of social welfare agendas. Although *Mr. Novak* did not address welfare in the series, Neuman, NBC, and the NEA had good intentions when portraying prejudice and bigotry, even if they ultimately presented such topics from a narrow perspective. Their efforts, however, give a sense of how television creators attempted to present liberal ideas through entertainment. Alice O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Jennifer Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare: The Unintended Consequences of Liberal Reform 1945-1965* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

white television writers and NEA experts contributed to the show's ability to identify realistic race issues but address them from a limited perspective.

Civil rights dominated broadcast news in the early-sixties, second only to topics on the Cold War. The growth of the civil rights movement developed in tandem with television's maturation in the 1950s, and as Sasha Torres has noted, the two became allies because, for different reasons, each wanted to establish a new general consensus around issues of race. At the moment when television became a national medium, civil rights activists identified racial terrorism in the South as being at odds with national democratic ideals. At the same time, the television industry's expansion relied on the exploitation of a continuous news story, which it found in civil rights struggles. Therefore, televisual racial representations played a role in altering mores to condemn Southern segregationists as out of step with the rest of the nation, which in turn benefited the civil rights movement and spared networks from the wrath of southern affiliates. Civil rights coverage helped to legitimize broadcast journalism as a reputable news source and bolstered claims regarding the medium's ability to produce "liveness," which is to say that it could transmit images in real time and lend itself to feelings of "being there" for viewers in ways that newspapers could not do. As television transitioned into a more respectable medium for broadcast journalism during the 1960s, it was not enough to be live; to remain cutting edge, it also needed to produce "authentic" portrayals of people and events outside of the news.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Torres, *Black, White, And In Color*, 6-14.

Whereas broadcast journalism emphasized the importance of the Black Freedom Struggle, the entertainment side of television faced scrutiny by black activists for the lack of inclusion behind and on the screen. As Torres points out, news coverage of the civil rights movement coexisted with stereotypical representations in entertainment, such as *Amos 'n' Andy* (which originally ran from 1951-1953 remained in syndication until 1966). Behind the curve when it came to changing standards of representation, producers of sitcoms and dramas grappled with determining the best way to create realistic and inoffensive non-white characters. Because television in the early 1960s blurred the binary that separated information from education, producers naturally looked toward newscasts for inspiration in how to move away from minstrel stereotypes to create more authentic racial representations. Neuman's attempt to portray realistic problems faced by non-white high school students, however, was fraught with complications. Neuman and other writers struggled when writing dialogue for characters of color, and how to address topical issues specific to race in non-stereotypical ways.

By first integrating black actors, and second including subjects related to race, Neuman intended to address very real problems fueled by racism and bigotry in *Mr. Novak*. Yet despite his efforts to dramatize America's race problems, Neuman and the television writers for the show interpreted racialized topics from a white perspective. One of the ways this played out was in the color-blind portrayals of an integrated Jefferson High. Black students were frequently peppered throughout the hallways, in student council committees, and the cafeteria, with no real acknowledgment of their race among their predominantly white peers—despite the politically charged times of the civil rights struggle—or any speaking lines, for that matter. MGM's publicity chief, Robert Vogel,

frequently reminded Neuman to include “minority castings,” black actors in particular, but as background characters only. For example, in a memo on 17 December 1963, he provided “some suggestions for additional negro castings: lunch room cashier, one of the Assistant Editors of school paper, one of girl cheerleaders.”<sup>61</sup> In a more terse memo a few months later, he prompted Neuman again to “consider the casting of Negroes” in regard to a story about an elderly white teacher forced into retirement.<sup>62</sup> Students of color were typically included in scenes at the most marginal level, such as “the pretty colored girl named GINNY” who gets off the bus with the main protagonist of the episode “To Lodge and Dislodge.” Although the objective of *Mr. Novak* was to portray an integrated school, the writers continued to think of black actors as the “other” compared to their white counterparts. In the aforementioned episode, for instance, the opening scene showed “two handsome NEGRO BOYS, carrying the flag and two other boys.” Similarly in “The Senior Prom,” one of the scenes included a shot of the prom committee, which consisted of “Two GIRLS, three BOYS, one Negro.”<sup>63</sup>

Writers understood that it was no longer acceptable to create stereotypical characters of color in entertainment programming, but some still relied on familiar tropes and continued to incorporate racialized vernacular. For example, NBC approved all final scripts prior to filming, and they frequently requested changes regarding the representation of *Mr. Novak*'s black characters. In “The Exile,” the network requested a line change for a minor scene in which students had their yearbook pictures taken. In

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<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Dickson (Assistant to Robert Vogel) to EJM, interoffice memoranda, 17 December 1963, Box 16, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Vogel to EJM, interoffice memoranda, 20 February 1964, Box 17, Folder 1, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>63</sup> Script draft for “To Lodge and Dislodge,” 10 July 1963, Box 12, Folder 1; Script draft for “The Senior Prom,” 15 March 1964, Box 17, Folder 5, EJM Papers, WHSA.

response to Mr. Novak's instructions that Nick, a black student, alter his position for a photo, NBC revised his response from "yas-suh!" to "yes, sir!" In a memo on Program Department approval, NBC executive Ray Dewey explained that "Nick's reply to Novak should not be delivered as mimicry of Negro dialect."<sup>64</sup> The panel of NEA teachers had a similar issue with the script "Boy Under Glass," about Frank (Wayne Grice), a black athlete who privileged baseball over his studies because education did not yield the same outcome for black students as it did for whites, whereas in professional sports he stood a better chance of achieving success. In their report after reading an early script draft, the NEA wrote: "we do not find it right for Frank to use occasional negro speech clichés, such as 'Man...' etc. [...] particularly since he speaks normal English in most instances. The negro characters you have developed in your script do not need to be characterized with what some people believe to be their universal speech habits." NBC's Broadcast Standards Department also requested Neuman revise the script and remove any slang that could be interpreted as a marker of ignorance. They also singled out as problematic Frank's use of the colloquialism "Man," such as: "Man, you'd like to wind up being the most unpopular character in school." In addition, they required changes to his reference to the "fat favor that Mr. Novak done us," as well as Frank's father's comment, "we've got to make sure Frank gets on the ball and passes that midterm come Wednesday, you hear."<sup>65</sup>

Presenting characters in ways that deviated from more common racialized tropes required a collective effort from the writers, NEA, and network as they adjusted to new

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<sup>64</sup> Production files, memos, and script drafts for "The Exile" in Box 15, Folder 1, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>65</sup> Production files, memos, and script drafts for "Boy Under Glass" in Box 21, Folder 1, EJM Papers, WHSA.

standards. Creating more respectable representations became an exercise for television personnel; it challenged their own presumptions about how certain people acted and sounded based on one's ethnic, race, or class status. An example of this is found in an early screenplay for "I'm On the Outside," about Steve Acero (Teno Pollick), a Mexican-American boy who is struggling in school because of the late hours he's putting in as a dishwasher at a local nightclub. Concerned for the student, Mr. Novak makes a home visit where he meets Steve's grandmother, with whom he lives. According to the script, Mrs. Acero (Argentina Brunetti) is a pleasant older woman wearing her best clothes, and her lines indicate that she is well mannered and well spoken.<sup>66</sup> On behalf of the NEA panel of teachers who assessed the screenplay for accuracy, Henry Noerdlinger wrote that they were all pleasantly surprised by this character. Mrs. Acero "makes a rather good appearance and creates a favorable impression," he wrote. "We had expected to meet a warm-hearted, but illiterate woman, who speaks broken English, inserting Spanish words in her speech (or is this taboo due to Mexican viewers)."<sup>67</sup> Clearly The NEA and Neuman were cognizant of not wanting to offend certain viewers, but they did not necessarily understand how to avoid doing so, particularly when it came to presenting authentic representations of people of color. In his study on the clash between advocates concerning black televisual representation, Phillip Brian Harper discusses the debate in the late 1960s over whether entertainment television should portray "mimetic" versus "simulacral" realism. Activists questioned whether popular culture should reflect the realities of "the black experience" in seemingly more "authentic" representations, or if

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<sup>66</sup> Script for "I'm On the Outside," 13 November 1963, Box 15, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>67</sup> Production files for "I'm On the Outside," Box 15, Folder 3, EJM Papers, WHSA.

more aspirational images of African Americans should be presented to influence racial uplift.<sup>68</sup> Similar discussions occurred earlier in the decade, before the integration of black actors in television became more prevalent; however, television personnel in the early 1960s dealt with such issues in a less frontal way, addressing them as part of their larger quest to portray more realistic topics on the small screen. Contributors to *Mr. Novak*, for instance, considered how entertainment television should speak to its viewers of color, and contemplated how to balance realism and respectability so as not to offend audiences. In the case of “I’m on the Outside,” the NEA liked that Mrs. Acero did not appeal to stereotypical portrayals by having an accent or speaking Spanish, but they were unsure if presenting an inoffensive portrayal came at the expense of authenticity.

Portraying racial discrimination and featuring non-stereotypical black characters were new developments in entertainment television, so it is not surprising that networks often erred on the side of caution. In the dispute between Neuman and NBC over the episode “He Grabs a Train and Rides,” for example, the network found the episode objectionable because Jefferson High’s black teacher, Pete Butler, discovers that his younger brother Ricky is addicted to narcotics. According to the script written by Stirling Silliphant, Ricky shows up unexpectedly at Pete’s house having quit college and sold all his belongings. While this is happening, Novak arrives to pick Pete up for the tennis match they have scheduled, but he quickly realizes what is going on and is determined to help. The scene unfolds with Pete refusing to lend Ricky ten dollars, and by the end of the night, Ricky has locked himself in the bathroom looking for anything to curb his

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<sup>68</sup> Phillip Brian Harper, “Extra-Special Effects: Televisual Representation and the Claims of ‘The Black Experience,’” in *Living Color: Race and Television in the United States*, ed. Sasha Torres (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

addiction. Novak insists he can cure Ricky by making him go through complete withdrawal—cold turkey—and orders Pete, his wife, and daughter to leave so that he can help Ricky. Ricky begs Pete not to leave him “with this white boy,” but Pete decides to leave anyway for the sake of his brother. “You know why he’s making such a fuss over me?” Ricky asked Pete. “‘Cause I’m colored. That’s why he’s here—lording around in your house. Makes him feel big—and clean—and innocent. If I was just some white boy in panic, screaming for the spike, he’d whistle cop. Ain’t that one sweet reason to help somebody? ‘Cause he feels guilty!” Pete is saddened by his brother’s response and replies: “the color of your skin is coming between you and yourself.” In the final acts, the script dramatizes Ricky’s struggle with withdrawal. Viewers learn that Ricky has been under a lot of pressure to succeed in college, even though he would prefer to learn a trade. But with increased automation, Pete informs his brother, the economy no longer needed men like him because they have “machines to work the machines.” Pete’s success also weighs on Ricky, especially since he continuously reminds his younger brother how he “has to be better than the white man, just to stand alongside him.” In a separate scene, Pete describes his conflicted feelings over the matter with his wife. He expresses empathy regarding Ricky’s frustration with racism foreclosing so many opportunities to blacks, and how conflicted he feels when Novak steps in to help in a nonjudgmental way. “I reminded myself,” he said to Marge, “there’s no reason we should try to become like white people—no excuse for their lordly assumption they must accept us. The truth is—we must accept them.” The following morning Ricky’s symptoms subsided, and he

reconciled with Novak and his brother.<sup>69</sup> Although the creators of the show were self-conscious about not portraying standardized tropes, the basic plotline still presented a white savior narrative.

The NEA panel responded positively to the story after reviewing the script. “The tensely dramatic play,” Noerdlinger wrote, “carries an important but difficult message which should create the desired psychological impact upon the audience.”<sup>70</sup> Despite the NEA’s enthusiasm, however, the story never made it to production because NBC rejected the episode due to the “somewhat sketchy treatment” of narcotics withdrawal, which they considered unacceptable for a family time slot, “as well as the involvement of racial representations and issues,” specifically the “objectionable stereotype on the part of Ricky.”<sup>71</sup> Despite NBC’s refusal to move forward with the project, producer Leonard Freeman discussed the episode with the press and even circulated the script among reporters. After having read the screenplay, Cecil Smith of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote about the “skillful and sensitive study of a young Negro who turns to drugs out of the frustrations of his own existence in a white world.” In the article, Freeman is quoted defending *Mr. Novak* as a “drama of ideas...it must deal with the pressures of the world we live in.”<sup>72</sup>

NBC rejected the episode based on the explicit portrayal of drug withdrawal and the black drug addict stereotype, but these were two elements Neuman could have

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<sup>69</sup> Storyline and scripts files for unproduced show: “He Grabs a Train and Rides,” Box 26, Folder 9, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>70</sup> Henry S. Noerdlinger to Leonard Freeman, 22 May 1964, Box 26, Folder 9, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>71</sup> Ray Dewey (NBC) to Leonard Freeman (MGM), 23 April 1964 and 27 May 1964, Box 26, Folder 9, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>72</sup> Cecil Smith, “Video Sharpens its Blue Pencil,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 November 1964.

changed had the purpose of the script just been to educate audiences about narcotics addiction. What likely made the network uneasy about this episode was the causal connection drawn between racist barriers that made economic mobility into the middle class more difficult for blacks than for whites and drug addiction. In the episode's storyline upon which the script was based, for example, the series of events unfolded a bit differently. In this version, Pete and Ricky had been arguing all night when Novak arrives at the house the following morning, just as the conversation begins to have "race overtones," with Pete explaining to his younger brother: "the entire honor of the Negro community is at stake in the failure of any single Negro." It is precisely this moment – when Novak overhears the discussion between brothers – that the storyline highlights as "feeling his 'whiteness.'"<sup>73</sup> For television to teach about the effects of racism was one thing, but with Novak serving as the focus of the series for white viewers to identify with, and thus serving as a mirror reflecting how little whites understood about the pressures African Americans lived under, was another. Making certain viewers feel their whiteness appears to have been a bridge too far, requiring more of white audiences than network television was prepared to ask.

Writers tried to present balanced representations of race relations on *Mr. Novak* by presenting the perspective of characters of color opposite to a white viewpoint. In her study on television during the civil rights revolution, Aniko Bodroghkozy refers to the medium's treatment of America's racial story as "black and white together," wherein network programming either situated whites at the center of, or alongside to, respectable

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<sup>73</sup> Storyline by Stirling Silliphant, 15 April 1964, Box 26, Folder 9, EJM Papers, WHSA.

black characters.<sup>74</sup> Dramatizing racism in *Mr. Novak*, therefore, meant that telecasts only highlighted unique problems and did not consider the larger structural factors that impacted racial inequalities. An example of this can be found in one of the series' acclaimed episodes, appropriately titled: "A Single Isolated Incident." Written by Neuman, the premise featured a black student, Marcy Desmond (Gloria Calomee), who was terrorized by twelve white boys and girls while walking to school one morning. The white students threw garbage at Marcy, called her names, and told her they did not want black students at Jefferson High. Principal Vane and faculty arrived at school that morning to police and local reporters, both of whom Vane thought exacerbated the situation rather than mitigated it—particularly because Jefferson High School had been integrated for years without any opposition. Shortly after Vane gets Marcy's testimony, he learns that all of the other black students received threatening phone calls that morning and did not show up to school. By the end of the day, with the help of various students, Vane has caught four of the offenders who harassed Marcy and suspended them. Unable to determine the remaining eight people involved and wanting to assuage tensions between white and black students regarding the remaining unknown culprits, Vane holds an impromptu assembly at which he addresses that morning's event to the entire student body and local press. Rather than speak about the effects this type of behavior could have on Marcy and her black peers, Vane discusses the stain it has left on the school's reputation, specifically the white students, because of the misdeeds of a bigoted few. "I can't clean it up. I can't hide it. I can't deny it happened. But I can deny that you and I

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<sup>74</sup> Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time*, 4.

are responsible. At most there were a dozen people who are responsible... What they did reflects on every one of us. The reputation of our school is in jeopardy. Every good thing we've ever achieved can be forgotten because of this incident."<sup>75</sup>

Neuman received letters from hardline segregationists who hated the episode and considered it "propaganda," or as one person suggested, funded by the NAACP.<sup>76</sup> Other viewers expressed frustration with the amount of attention the media gave to civil rights. As one Texan wrote: "We have had segregation, integration, racial crises fed to us every day for the past few years on the news, press conferences, documentaries, and now on our favorite shows."<sup>77</sup> Neuman reported in *TV Times* that some southern affiliates happened to have a "cable failure" the night "A Single Isolated Incident" aired, preventing audiences from watching it.<sup>78</sup> Following the episode, a local television station in Alabama refused to air *Mr. Novak* altogether, prompting a frustrated teen to write, "What can I do to get to see Mr. Novak. I suppose I could move away from Alabama."<sup>79</sup> The number of positive reactions that Neuman received, however, outnumbered these harsher responses. Audiences most commonly wrote in to assert that "A Single Isolated Incident" should air in high schools across the country. "If all of [us] work together like in your program," one woman noted, "there would be very little disturbance in any school or town."<sup>80</sup>

Specifically, however, they lauded Mr. Vane's speech and how "realistically" he handled

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<sup>75</sup> Changes to "A Single Isolated Incident," 27 August 1963, Box 13, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>76</sup> J. R. Hernot to EJM, 24 October 1963 and "An Ex-Mr. Novak Fan" to EJM, No Date, Box 29, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>77</sup> Author unknown to EJM, 23 October 1963, Box 29, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>78</sup> Harter, *Mr. Novak*, 73.

<sup>79</sup> "An Angry Alabama Adolescent" to Georgia Winters of *16 Magazine*, No Date, Box 29, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>80</sup> Mrs. Eugene Triantafela to EJM, 22 October 1963, EJM Papers, WHSA.

the problem.<sup>81</sup> For example, one woman from Los Angeles commended Neuman for creating “the best informative show” and requested a copy of Vane’s monologue for all of her friends. She added: “His speech should be printed and given to every boy and girl that attends school as well as others.”<sup>82</sup> The principal at Tappan Junior High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan asked for the portion of the script with Vane’s address “regarding the ‘racial incident,’” which Neuman promptly had sent to him.<sup>83</sup> Audiences praised *Mr. Novak* for the timeliness of the episode, specifically the realism of Vane’s address and the answers it provided in grappling with the divisions between white and black Americans.

Vane presented his speech to the teenagers of Jefferson High, but he also spoke to viewers at home using New Frontier language. Racism reflected negatively on the nation as a whole, but portraying racist ideology as belonging to a minority of Americans could comfort a majority of white viewers, while also explaining how black citizens could assume all whites had prejudice tendencies, specifically illuminating how riots are fomented. In his review of the episode, Hal Humphrey in the *Los Angeles Times* considered Dean Jagger’s performance expertly executed in the way Vane dealt “with a delicate situation that [could] teeter him and students into chaos and violence or peace and penitence.”<sup>84</sup> By reducing contemporary race tensions to a “single isolated incident” instead of attributing it to generations of discrimination, Neuman was able to make Vane a hero capable of diminishing white guilt and black rage.

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<sup>81</sup> The Joyce Family to EJM, 25 October 1963, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>82</sup> Mrs. Arthur (Eva) Towne to EJM, 25 October 1963, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>83</sup> Gene D. Maybea to EJM, 25 October 1963, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>84</sup> Hal Humphrey, “‘Incident’ Script Accents Fact,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 October 1963.

Furthermore, Vane provided an explanation that took the blame off both de jure and de facto segregation—he blamed the media. Scholars have noted how tele-journalists established themselves as a weapon of the civil rights movement, however, Neuman’s treatment of media in “A Single Isolated Incident” suggests that reporters exacerbated racial tensions. In response to the episode, one viewer appreciated this treatment and wrote in to laud the “excellent picture...regarding racial problems and the PRESS! The press,” they claimed, “is a worse problem than a race.”<sup>85</sup> Embedded within Vane’s irritation with local reporters for sensationalizing Marcy’s attack, for example, was a larger critique on the role of television in the civil rights struggle. This is demonstrated in the revisions that took place when writing for the character of reporter Jack Patterson (Joe Mantell) from the *Daily News*. In the storyline written for the episode in July of 1963, Patterson is portrayed as menacing, only present to create a storyline and twist Mr. Vane’s words. Vane’s frustration lies in his belief that what happened to Marcy was “an internal problem confined to this school and a few people in it.” Vane tells the reporters on campus that “they are giving the incident much more attention than it deserves,” to which Patterson responds: “A colored girl getting beaten up is not important?” Vane tries to correct Patterson that Marcy was not beaten up, but this opens the door for a series of follow-up questions where Vane is in danger of being misquoted. He proceeds to disparage the press for sensationalizing the event “until the matter is distorted completely out of proportion.” In Vane’s opinion, he tells them, “the incident is a chain-reaction result of exaggerated reports on integration problems elsewhere in the country.” In the

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<sup>85</sup> Mrs. G. P. to EJM, 21 April 1964, Box 30, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

second act, Patterson is still lingering around the school, much to the annoyance of faculty. He approaches Novak during the lunch hour for questions, but somehow, he “spots Patterson as a racist who is anxious to ferment trouble.” Neuman does not explain in the storyline how Novak reaches this conclusion, but the teacher and reporter get into a heated exchange during which Novak threatens to kick Patterson out of the school.<sup>86</sup> In script drafts one month later, Patterson’s character is written in a different light. Although he is still an annoyance to Vane and Novak, he is persistent about covering the story but less vindictive and combative. The biggest change per the request of NBC, however, is that the script did not suggest Patterson was racist, but rather a “headline-hunting reporter determined to exploit the incident.”<sup>87</sup> Even with this adjustment, however, Neuman still portrayed Patterson as a troublemaker—contrary to how actual reporters of the movement presented themselves. Rick DuBrow’s review of the episode found the “offensive caricature of a reporter in the midst of the delicate race story” unforgivable, particularly “when one considers the seriously constructive efforts of a great part of the press in the racial upheaval.” This was especially surprising, DuBrow noted, because NBC prided itself on its news network.<sup>88</sup> Steeped in irony, Neuman condemned journalists in this episode for sensationalizing racial tensions, but more importantly he presented an alternative point of view wherein news reporters played a role in fermenting racial divisions in the US.

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<sup>86</sup> Storyline written by EJM, 23 July 1963, Box 13, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>87</sup> Two memos from NBC on 26 and 30 July 1963 refer to this alteration in the script. The change to Patterson’s character is reflected in the script written by EJM on 23 August 1963, Box 13, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>88</sup> Rick DuBrow, “Desegregation Has Effect on Plots,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 October 1963.

The subjectivity of *Mr. Novak*'s contributors influenced how they researched and interpreted integration for the teleplay, and in turn, their findings sometimes challenged their assumptions about race relations in the US. In the episode's production files, for example, NBC responded to an early version of the storyline in which the reporter, Jack Patterson, asked Vane about a committee that had recently formed to stop integration in Jefferson High's school district. "This seems unusual," John Bushnell of NBC wrote, since Jefferson High was located in the Midwest, "where integration has for years been accepted naturally, without concern." Bushnell's comment was at odds with an article from *Time* magazine that was also included in the episode's production file. The article discussed at length a meeting held in Baltimore, Maryland, among top school officials from Northern cities who gathered to discuss the growing unrest among black citizens actively challenging de facto school segregation, specifically in Chicago.<sup>89</sup> Even though the article refuted Bushnell's assumption about how segregation operated—or didn't—in the Midwest, Neuman ultimately removed the scene. The lack of awareness regarding the state of segregation outside of the South explains another issue the network had with the script. A separate memo from NBC's Broadcast Standards department suggested that Neuman should refer to "the incident" as "a racial problem rather than an integration problem, which it really is not." Although the premise of the episode remained intact, wherein white teens attacked Marcy because they did not want to attend school with black students, Neuman altered the script in accord with NBC's recommendation. On the line that read: "Looks to me like you've got a little integration problem on your hands

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<sup>89</sup> Memo from John Busnell (Manager, Film Programming at NBC) to EJM, 26 July 1963; Al Phillips, "Education," *Time*, 30 August 1963, Box 13, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

today,” he crossed out “integration” and wrote “race” in the margin instead.<sup>90</sup> In the memo’s following bullet point, however, NBC’s concern over producing an episode about integration is more concrete. “Although no radical change in the atmosphere or race relations is foreseeable between now and the air date,” they stated, “there is the possibility that public attitudes in terms of acceptance of integration may drift one way or another before then. We would therefore be well advised to avoid treatment of this issue which might tend to incite, or be inflammatory in character.” Despite such efforts, *Mr. Novak*’s audience understood the episode was about integration even though NBC wanted to portray it as a broader “racial problem”—as if one was not indicative of the other.<sup>91</sup>

NBC reminded Neuman to confer with his consultancy “to insure accuracy” before filming “A Single Isolated Incident.” However, Neuman’s experts may have had a limited perspective on integration, as well. For instance, Neuman frequently referenced the education professionals he consulted when writing for the series, but in his discussion of this episode in particular, he only spoke about the hours spent interviewing the presumably white principal of the integrated school that “A Single Isolated Incident” was inspired after. He never mentioned interviewing the black student who was harassed, nor any black students or teachers for that matter.<sup>92</sup> Although Neuman intended to dramatize

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<sup>90</sup> Memo from Ray Dewey (Editor, Broadcast Standards for NBC) to William Froug, 30 July, 1963; The script reflecting this change can be found in the draft from 23 August 1963, Box 13, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>91</sup> Memo from Dewey to Froug; viewers continuously referred to “A Single Isolated Incident” as “the integration episode” or referred to integration in some form when writing to Neuman. Newspapers also referred to “integration” when discussing the episode, such as DuBrow, “Desegregation Has Effect on Plot” and Humphrey, “‘Incident’ Script Accents Fact.”

<sup>92</sup> Humphrey, “‘Incident’ Script Accents Fact.”

real events with *Mr. Novak*, the way in which he conducted background research continued to yield a limited perspective when it came to producing episodes about race. This was due to various factors that included pushback from NBC who supported discussions about America's racial problems in entertainment television but not at the expense of white viewers' comfort level; the subjectivity of the writers, producers, experts, and executives who contributed to making race episodes as realistic as possible; and the overall inexperience with presenting certain complex topics to the masses. This is not to claim *Mr. Novak* was unsuccessful in its representation of race issues, but the key point that must be noted is the relevancy with which television executives gave to the topic of civil rights. Contributors to the drama grappled with how to accurately portray race issues in the least offensive manner, however, the fact that they found the topic worth grappling at all was a major shift in entertainment television. The turn in television's history to incorporate more realism in fictional programming in an effort to provide educational entertainment meant a change in how viewers engaged with politics through the small screen. This change, however, occurred more slowly for other forms of representation. Whereas television executives found race a topic worthy of dramatizing, the same could not be said in how they thought about gender issues.

### **The Not-So-Silent Dissuaders**

White men wrote the majority of screenplays for *Mr. Novak*, and all of the episodes that dealt with race. Occasionally, however, white women authored scripts – but only when an episode featured a woman as the main protagonist. Whereas NBC, the NEA, and Neuman considered racial prejudice relevant to television drama, gender inequality proved to be a more contentious topic. To be sure, episodes could feature

female protagonists, but TV executives frequently disagreed about the type of issues that audiences could relate to. Scripts premised on situations in which women had made poor choices—leading to teen pregnancy, teen marriage, and drug addiction, for instance—received approval, but television executives disparaged and often changed scripts that examined disadvantages women faced. The industry’s male gatekeepers, therefore, hindered attempts to make television a window or a mirror for women’s issues. Multiple factors could explain why they failed to take gender discrimination seriously. Feminist activists did not attract national media attention the way civil rights leaders had, even though “labor feminists” had been advocating for better job opportunities and equal pay since the 1930s.<sup>93</sup> Because women did not yet have a larger movement similar to the Black Freedom Struggle until the late 1960s, television executives assumed women did not experience prejudice because of their gender.

Executives for *Mr. Novack* may have also associated the rising discontent of an older generation frustrated with housewifery and domesticity irrelevant to the situation of teenage girls. *Mr. Novak* aired the same year Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, a book that identified the “mystique” that sought to convince women they could find fulfillment in marriage and motherhood, and that something was wrong with them if they felt unfulfilled by domesticity. Friedan’s ideas extended beyond those who purchased the book when magazines such as *Atlantic Monthly*, *Reader’s Digest*, *Ladies*

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<sup>93</sup> Dorothy Sue Cobble uses the term “labor feminists” to refer to women laborers from the 1930s-1960s who put working-class women’s needs at the center of a labor movement. She explains that these women did not consider themselves feminist, but they recognized the disadvantages that working class women suffered and they attempted to eliminate sex-based discrimination. Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), 3-8.

*Home Journal*, and *McCalls* featured excerpts from it.<sup>94</sup> While Friedan is credited with identifying “the problem that has no name,” she engaged in a conversation many women already started two decades prior. Eva Moskowitz has noted how postwar magazines and television programs, such as *I Love Lucy* and *The Honeymooners*, depicted women’s domestic restlessness.<sup>95</sup> By the early-sixties, excessive portrayals of happy housewives in popular culture contradicted how many women understood their place in the world. Not only did television sitcoms feature housewives who represented the feminine ideal, but magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal* also wrote about how women “never had it so good” compared to their foremothers. Their ability to control the family’s finances and nation’s wealth, along with having household appliances that gave them reprieve from endless housework. “Indeed, women today are in many respects much better off than men.”<sup>96</sup> Media’s mixed messages bolstered assumptions about women’s capricious nature as always unsatisfied, rendering any critique of gender inequality insignificant.

Neuman and the NEA had their finger on the pulse of New Frontier policies, however they seemed to overlook much of the discourse at the Executive level regarding women’s second-class citizenship. In 1961, for example, Kennedy established a Presidential Commission on the Status of Women to “indicate what remains to be done to demolish prejudices and outmoded customs which act as barriers to the full partnership of women in our democracy.” The Commission’s report was published on 1 October, 1963 and recommended child care services, equal employment and education opportunities,

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<sup>94</sup> Weiss, “Fraud of Femininity;” and Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (Toronto: Random House, 1994), 124-125.

<sup>95</sup> Eva Moskowitz, “It’s Good to Blow Your Top: Women’s Magazines and a Discourse of Discontent, 1945-1965,” in *Journal of Women’s History* (Fall 1996): 66-96.

<sup>96</sup> Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 123.

and urged government support of equal rights for women. Earlier that spring, the Kennedy administration also pushed through Congress the Equal Pay Act, which prohibited wage disparity based on sex.<sup>97</sup> Although a “women’s movement” was not under way according to broadcast news, discourse concerning women’s second-class status was prevalent in the early-sixties. Therefore, a third, more obvious, explanation is the unrecognized sexism that impacted the reactions some of the men had to certain *Mr. Novak* plotlines.

Neuman intended to improve television’s representation of teachers by presenting educators as heroes, which he did with the characters of Novak and Vane. Whereas writers attempted to salvage the teacher’s image through *Mr. Novak*’s male characters, they had a difficult time writing for women’s roles outside of traditional female tropes. Characters who never made it on the screen even fulfilled gendered stereotypes, such as the bad mother who often caused many of Jefferson High’s troubled students’ problems. The overbearing or absentee mother never appeared on the show, but she was often discussed among teachers who searched for answers as to why a student acted out. The tendency to write about mothers in such a way became so prevalent that even the NEA commented on this odd treatment. “In reading the scripts since my association with NEA,” Henry Noerdlinger wrote, “I have become puzzled about the fact that your plays deal with rather singular parental situations; it is usually just a father and no mother. Why is that?”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Commission on the Status of Women, 14 December, 196–October 1963, President’s Office Files. Departments and Agencies, Series 07, John F. Kennedy Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Digital Archive.

<sup>98</sup> Noerdlinger to EJM, 23 August, 1963 Box 13, Folder 3, EJM Papers, WHSA.

The subjectivity of the writer also influenced the representation of women, which is demonstrated in the character descriptions from early storyline drafts. An episode by Herman Miller and John D. F. Black, for example, described the shop teacher, Carl Green, as “a thick-set man in his forties...bull-necked and powerfully built...speaks with a low-pitched, rumbling bass voice that not only demands to be listened to, but seems to wipe out any other sound when he speaks.”<sup>99</sup> In a script by Jerry De Bono, he described the character of student Avery Schaffner as an outsider, “his clothes are rather shabby and out-of-date, he’s ‘artistic,’ and he’s not able to discuss the things that interest the other boys. He’s just different.”<sup>100</sup> Roles for women, however, described less of their personalities and provided more detail about their physical appearance. A screenplay by Milt Rosen opens the scene with twenty-two-year-old student teacher, Ann Beaudry, arriving for her first day at Jefferson High: “She gets out of the car and we see that she is striking and has a nice figure.” In his description of Angie Whipple, Emmet Lavery described a student as “young, tall, innocent—a high school senior with the kind of figure that Solomon liked to dream about, when he was putting that song together...”<sup>101</sup>

Many women characters, both recurring and guest, depicted a fleeting love interest to Mr. Novak, but when the show portrayed someone other than a young woman desperately seeking a date, that woman was typically an old spinster. In the original storyline for “Hello Miss Phipps,” for example, writer John T. Dugan described the title

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<sup>99</sup> Script by Herman Miller and John D. F. Black, “With A Hammer in His Hand, Lord, Lord,” 3 July 1964, Box 19, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>100</sup> Unproduced show by Jerry De Bono, originally titled “Sharper Than a Serpent’s Tooth” and later “Something the Cat Dragged In,” 5 July 1964, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>101</sup> Storyline by Emmet Lavery, “Song of Songs,” 27 September 1963, Box 14, Folder 4, EJM Papers, WHSA.

character as a 64-year-old woman “who has grown ripe.” She was “crotchety, sharply outspoken, old-fashioned in dress and attitude” and impatient with modern pedagogical techniques. The original storyline portrayed Miss Phipps as a petulant teacher forced into early retirement because of parent dissatisfaction with her strict teaching methods, but revisions to the premise resulted in a dramatic change. The revised script portrayed Miss Phipps counseling Rita Donzie (Patricia McNulty), a pregnant student, and the pressure from parents critical of her outspokenness about the importance of teaching sex education which led to her retirement.<sup>102</sup> The NEA lauded the teleplay for its “realistic and honest portrayal” and recommended only minor suggestions. They likely found the script acceptable because it presented a contemporary discussion about whether teachers should educate students about a controversial, but important, subject matter through the characters of Miss Phipps and Rita. The NEA, therefore, approved the script because it portrayed a pedagogical debate rather than women’s experiences in relation to the debate presented.<sup>103</sup>

Certain male writers for *Mr. Novak* had an awareness to women’s issues but were tone-deaf to the realities of women’s second-class status. Therefore, any dialogue about “women’s rights” was always tinged with scornful undertones. An example is a brief

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<sup>102</sup> Storyline by John T. Dugan, 15 March 1963 and script by John T. Dugan, 23 May 1963, Box 11, Folder 1, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>103</sup> Bob Harman (NEA) to William Froug (Producer), 27 May 1963, Box 11, Folder 1, EJM Papers, WHSA. Even though the NEA did not explicitly state that they approved the episode because it highlighted “education” rather than the role gender played in Miss Phipps’ and Rita’s experiences, the way in which the script foregrounded the discussion about sex education explains their support. It is also similar to how other viewers interpreted the episode. Included in the production file, for example, is an article from *The Denver Catholic Register* that praised *Mr. Novak* and noted that it “was not so much the story of the teacher...and the fight to retain her status and position in the school that left one impressed, but rather the way the thinking and basic moral values of these persons in the teaching profession were reflected in the script.” C. J. Zecha, “Teleplay on Sex Education Reflects Need of Guidance,” *The Denver Catholic Register*, 7 November 1963.

reference to gender equality—that was eventually cut—in the storyline for “My Name Is Not Legion.” In a casual conversation between Novak and Home Economics teacher Miss Scott (Marian Collier) regarding their plans to attend a concert, Novak explained he must cancel because he did not have enough money to take her out. Miss Scott replies that she could “strike a resounding blow for women’s rights” by allowing her to pay their way, but Novak is annoyed by this suggestion and quickly replies “no,” and instead he takes her to a less expensive pizza parlor for dinner.<sup>104</sup> This example demonstrates how the idea of “women’s rights” was reduced to something as trivial as allowing women to pay for a man’s companionship, and how Miss Scott’s hubris almost cost her a date with Novak—a brief reminder of the loneliness that accompanied feminists. Most importantly, however, this scene demonstrated how women’s achievement of certain advancements threatened masculine norms. It was better for Novak to take Miss Scott on a humble date than risk losing the power associated with being a financial provider.

A second, more explicit, example that derided “women’s rights” as a farce can be found in the unproduced episode titled “I’d Marry the King of Siam.” Milt Rosen wrote the storyline about Novak’s pursuit of the young student teacher he was assigned to train. The opening scene begins with Ann Beaudry, a beautiful student teacher, in Vane’s office along with Mr. Novak. Vane explains that the teacher whom Ann was supposed to study with has fallen ill, therefore she will have to work with Novak, even though he is junior faculty. Novak protests this assignment because of his limited experience, but Ann assumes he does not want to work with her because she is too attractive. Her looks have

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<sup>104</sup> Storyline by Robert E. Thompson, 15 March 1963, Box 11, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

gotten in the way her whole life, she explains, when all she wants is to be acknowledged for her intelligence. The following scene has Ann observing Novak's class. Afterward she recommends a new technique to get inactive students to participate. To discuss more pedagogical ideas, Novak goes to Ann's apartment, but it's not long before he makes a move on her. "Ann rejects him," Rosen wrote. "Not that she is a cold fish. A slight tension appears as Novak says that he's not rejecting her mind. It's just that there [is] more of her to appreciate. He understands her battle for equality on a mental level but suggests that she needn't keep her superiority in femininity in the freezer." The night ends awkwardly, but not before Novak learns about new teaching strategies. The following day Ann's suggestions prove successful in Novak's classes, and Novak asks her out to celebrate. That night he is interested in more than just talking about teaching methods, even though Ann continuously tries to redirect the conversation back to a professional topic. Novak doesn't listen, and Ann has to remind him that "she wants her mind to be appreciated. Novak appreciates it. But it's such a nice night. Ann doesn't get the message. She is still fighting the war of the IQ's. Novak warns her that he likes her and won't help her. He'll become a saboteur behind her lines. She smiles. She doesn't need his help."

In the following weeks, Ann gets her chance to practice teaching Novak's classes, but she is unsuccessful in executing her own strategies—she's a terrible teacher. After many classes, Novak feels that he must level with Ann and tell her she won't make it in this profession. Fearing that Novak will write a negative report, "Ann suddenly becomes the female and tries to vamp another chance out of him. Novak shakes his head. Now he's really angry. The first time she used her femininity, she had to use it in the wrong

way.” Novak expresses his disappointment in Ann before he leaves to report her incompetence as a teacher to Vane. After their argument Novak finds Ann waiting in the parking lot to talk with him. She admits he was right and decides to look for another career. She asks if he’ll see her again, but Novak is unsure if he wants to. Rosen ends the storyline explaining that Novak had always “appreciated her mind. She just wouldn’t believe it.”<sup>105</sup>

Rosen’s description of Ann as a woman seeking acknowledgement for her intellectual capabilities demonstrates his awareness of women’s rights discourse, but the storyline shows his dismissive attitude toward the idea. Moreover, his portrayal of Ann suggested women made hollow demands for equality, when in reality they relied on seduction and manipulation to get ahead. It is unclear why Rosen’s storyline did not get produced, particularly since NBC’s Broadcast Standards department found it an “acceptable subject to script approval.”<sup>106</sup> The NEA’s response to the storyline is not included in Neuman’s production file, but it can be assumed that the panel of teachers would have responded critically to a script that focused more on Novak’s sexual advances than anything having to do with the dilemmas of high school teachers and students at the time. NEA members considered themselves sticklers for accuracy and opposed superficial portrayals of professional women, but men on the NEA board, in addition to NBC executives, also challenged scripts that sought to highlight gender inequality as out of step with *Mr. Novak*’s aesthetic.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, when women writers

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<sup>105</sup> Storyline by Milt Rosen, “I’d Marry the King of Siam,” 23 July 1963, Box 25, Folder 8, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>106</sup> Ray Dewey to William Froug, 25 July 1963, Box 25, Folder 8, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>107</sup> In NEA comments for multiple scripts, they often criticized unrealistically subordinate behavior by *Mr. Novak*’s female faculty and administrative staff. One example of this is their comment on the role of Miss

created female characters and scenarios that contested some of the aforementioned stereotypical portrayals, the network and NEA members considered the storylines boring or unrealistic.

Much of the documentation left behind on the *Novak* series indicates that NBC and the NEA had more issues with certain scripts and subject matters than any other party on the production team. Although occasionally network executives and the NEA shared the same critiques after reading script drafts, Neuman privileged the NEA's suggestions due to their expertise on education and thought the network's regulations only served to inhibit his creative freedom and the messages he wanted to send. He later described in an interview the ways in which he tried to prevent interference from NBC executives:

I forbade them on the set. I would not allow them to look at dailies, or anything like that. I just said, 'You want it done, this is the way it's gonna be done.' I didn't want their input, 'cause it was usually inept. And they went along with it. They always wanted a thorough treatment of the script before it was written, so they could examine it. And the way I usually did that was, I'd write the script, ask the secretary to draw up a treatment for it, and it was [filmed] by the time they got the treatment, and they went along with that.<sup>108</sup>

In some instances, a response from Neuman indicated his feelings about requests for alterations, but more often the exact reason for certain changes is less clear. We can assume, however, that differences in the script from the original storyline occurred at his hands. Because of his meticulous process in creating *Mr. Novak*, he frequently rewrote scripts to fit his standards and vision for the drama.<sup>109</sup> Revising television scripts is

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Wilkinson (Phyllis Avery) who held the position of vice-principal but functioned more like Mr. Vane's secretary on the show. Henry S. Noerdlinger (NEA) to Leonard Freeman (Producer), 27 May 1964, Box 19, Folder 3, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>108</sup> EJM interview with *The TV Collector*, 1989, in Harter, *Mr. Novak*, 47.

<sup>109</sup> Harter, *Mr. Novak*, 47 and 95.

common practice when producing a television show, but the way in which certain themes received extensive criticism illuminates more than just the vision these producers had for the dramatic series. It also suggests how they understood, or failed to understand, the larger social and political moment of the early 1960s.

Women writers approached certain topics with a particular consciousness of the ways in which women's experiences differed from those of men. An example of this is found in a storyline by Margaret Armen, who based the premise on an event she experienced as a high school vice principal.<sup>110</sup> The episode, "Moment Without Armor," focused on the role of Assistant Principal Miss Pagano (Jeanne Bal), and her struggle to maintain order at Jefferson High during Principal Vane's absence. The original storyline began with Pagano handling a discipline problem in her office with Bill Russell (Michael Walker), an impudent student who keeps getting kicked out of his classes. Bill is unhappy taking orders from a woman and suggests she let him speak with Mr. Vane, since "Miss Pagano isn't the principal." Pagano explains that she is in charge and plans to schedule a meeting with his parents. Bill contemptuously informs Pagano that his father, an influential executive, is out of town. In her frustration to get through to Bill, Pagano walks around her desk to face the student, but he also stands up in response. Bill towers over Pagano, and in an attempt to fluster the Assistant Principal he disrupts her lecture with an insolent personal comment: "There's a button off your blouse, Miss Pagano." In a sudden burst of anger Pagano slaps Bill and he retaliates with a raised fist, "ready to strike her." In the scene, Armen describes a situation in which a woman retreats from a

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<sup>110</sup> EJM to Mrs. Cuddington, 17 April 1964, Box 30, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

man who uses the threat of physical violence to gain control: “Involuntarily she steps back against the desk, frightened by what she sees in his eyes. For an instant they face each other, no longer administrator and erring student, but cowering female and threatening male. In that instant the reins of control slip from Jean Pagano’s fingers. The boy sees the fear in her eyes and knows he’s got her licked.” For the remainder of the episode, Pagano grapples with her unprofessional reaction to Bill and tries to restore her confidence, particularly after she has to deal with two more instances in which boys violated school rules. She becomes overwhelmed. When she finally consults Vane about the situation, she confesses that she “acted like an [*sic*] hysterical woman rather than an administrator.” She wonders whether any woman can handle the job, but Vane assures her that she acted no differently than any man would have. It’s common, he tells her, for every administrator to doubt their decisions and wish they had done things differently.<sup>111</sup>

Bill’s glib attitude toward Pagano, his threat of violence in an attempt to assert power over her, and Pagano questioning her work self-efficacy were all themes many women likely could identify with. NBC, however, found the outline “weak and lacking interest.” Because Armen presented an episode about Pagano’s personal struggles as a woman in her profession, as opposed to framing the episode around the ramifications of her professional life, NBC thought it would be difficult to build off of this story. “The intimidation of Pagano should really threaten the future of her entire career,” NBC stated in a memo, “or the situation will be a good deal less than vital.” Plus, highlighting Pagano’s “professional life or death” situation made for better TV since the network

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<sup>111</sup> Storyline by Margaret Armen, 27 December 1964, Box 17, Folder 3, EJM Papers, WHSA.

thought Pagano fearing a teenage boy seemed invalid. The network gave a general approval of the teleplay, but encouraged producers to take the time to bring the script up “to the level of interest we all want.”<sup>112</sup>

The revised script written after NBC’s suggestions maintained the general premise of the original storyline, but added one extra detail. Rather than opening with Bill intimidating Pagano and diminishing her authority, the script began with someone attacking Pagano and stealing her purse the night before in the school parking lot. The experience upset her so much that it caused her to mismanage the situation with Bill the following morning. Making this change to the plot distorted the message presented in the initial storyline, which explained how women were capable of performing certain jobs despite the harassment they received, and became a play about Pagano’s hysteric response to a specific incident unrelated to being a female vice-principal. Compared to the episodes about race, teleplays about women received very little fan mail, or possibly Neuman chose not to save as many considering that he kept a fraction of the hundreds of letters received each week. Whereas few viewers responded to this episode, the president of the Virginia Council of Administrative Women in Education wrote to express disapproval with the portrayal of “male versus female competence in administration.” The story itself, she complained, was unrealistic since a capable assistant principal would not “go to pieces” as the show depicted. The aptitude of an administrator is not exclusive to any one sex, she argued, yet “there is a current distressing tendency to slam the door on administrative opportunities for female teachers—a flagrant disregard of women’s

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<sup>112</sup> John Busnell (NBC) to James Menzies (MGM), 10 January 1964, Box 17, Folder 3, EJM Papers, WHSA.

right to equal work opportunities.” In Neuman’s response, he subtly argued for the show’s authenticity by citing Armen as the writer and explained that the event happened to her personally. “I’m sure that if you view this same episode when it is re-run on August 11,” he told his critic, “you will find that it is emphasized that administrative competence is not exclusive to men or women.”<sup>113</sup> Perhaps if the original storyline – in which Pagano’s experiences with misogyny influenced her reactions – had played out, instead of a random mugging that caused her to act erratically, the episode’s intended message could have come through to audiences more clearly.

According to NBC’s standards, gendered issues lacked dramatic interest and women’s experiences with sexism were considered unrealistic. In “Fear is a Handful of Dust,” for example, Carol O’Brien wrote about two women who taught Novak about teenage girls’ fears. One of those people, O’Brien wrote in the outline, was Sue Johnson (Brenda Scott), “a painfully shy sophomore who is skinny and small, looks thirteen, wears sloppy clothes, has a bad complexion and appears, in a word, drab.” The other person was Miss Maguire (Cece Whitney), “the Chairman of the Girls Physical Education Department, a bouncy, energetic, and wise woman in her early forties.” The premise involves Novak’s insistence that Sue, a talented cartoonist, join the school newspaper—an extracurricular with all boys. Sue does not want to participate in any school activities, however, because she is shy, which is mostly due to her unpopularity and insecurities with her body and overall appearance. Mr. Novak does not understand why this would inhibit Sue from wanting to use her natural talent and seeks advice from

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<sup>113</sup> Ruth Cuddington to EJM, 1 April 1964 and EJM to Ruth Cuddington, 17 April 1964, Box 30, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

Miss Maguire. In an early script draft, Maguire is the voice of reason who explains to Novak that Sue is just like most girls her age who are both obsessed with looks and scared—of growing up, of boys, of adults—and therefore Novak should not push her too hard. When Novak finds some “pornographic” illustrations Sue has drawn, he again consults Maguire, who informs him that every fifteen-year-old girl “spends eighty percent of her time thinking about sex. Because she’s curious and worried and frightened and confused.” Maguire expresses her surprise that Novak assumes every girl is made of “sugar and spice,” but she challenges him to think about what he would do if he found similar images drawn by a boy student. “Would you be upset? Wouldn’t you just have a quiet man-to-man talk with him and then leave him alone and let him grow up at his own speed?” By the end of the episode, Novak is able to talk Sue into joining the newspaper, but only because he understands her better after talking with Miss Maguire; he knows how to talk to her now. When Novak finally gives Sue some space, she grows up a bit more and can make the decision to join the paper on her own, without pressure.<sup>114</sup>

“Fear is a Handful of Dust” explored peer pressure, coming of age, insecurities about failing to adhere to beauty standards, and girls exploring their sexuality—themes that had been relevant to teenage girls for decades. Henry Noerdlinger, the NEA member who synthesized the panel of teachers’ comments in response to script drafts, however, found the play “totally unrealistic.” In his memo to James Menzies, the story editor for the Novak series, Noerdlinger complained that “once again, an author has written a script thoughtlessly, abusing whatever ‘quarter’ knowledge she has about teenagers and their

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<sup>114</sup> Storyline by Carol O’Brien, 19 November 1963 and script draft by Carol O’Brien, 12 December 1963, Box 16, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

psychology....” Noerdlinger did not seem to think that gender impacted the way in which girls and boys experienced high school differently. Although the script addressed societal misconceptions that “good” girls never thought about, or participated in, sexual behavior, Noerdlinger claimed that this angle was too obvious since most teenagers were already preoccupied with the subject. In reality, Noerdlinger’s statement about girls who think about sex is true, but his inability to see how the screenplay portrayed Sue’s anxiety and guilt about her sexual desires because of gender norms that restrained women’s sexuality caused Noerdlinger to overlook the dramatic qualities of the script. Therefore, an episode about a teenage girl’s sexual curiosity made the episode in general, but the characters of Sue, Novak, and Miss Maguire in particular, unbelievable.

O’Brien’s script also received criticism for portraying two female characters that deviated from typical feminine norms. In his memo to *Mr. Novak*’s story editor, Noerdlinger asked: “Does Sue have to be unattractive to such a nauseating degree?”<sup>115</sup> NBC also commented on Miss Maguire’s temperament as “terribly high-flown,” and suggested producers soften her direct personality by making her an “earthy, warm, gym teacher.” By bringing Maguire’s language down to a “simpler level,” the producers could “enhance the impact of the character.”<sup>116</sup> Revised copies of the script indicate that Sue’s character remained equally shy but more attractive. Producers also did more than just modify Maguire’s persona, they minimized her speaking lines and reduced her character to a marginal role in the episode. In later drafts, they removed all of her speeches about girls’ insecurities and sexuality so that Maguire no longer gave Novak advice. Instead,

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<sup>115</sup> Henry S. Noerdlinger to James Menzies, 21 December 1963, Box 16, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>116</sup> John Bushnell to James Menzies, 3 December 1963, Box 16, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

Novak figured out how to talk to Sue about joining the school newspaper on his own. Whereas O'Brien originally wrote the storyline about two female characters who taught Novak about the struggle teenage girls go through in high school, the modified script featured Novak as the hero to Sue as he encouraged her to develop her natural talent.

All of the women who wrote for *Mr. Novak* presented gender stereotypes and used characters in their storylines to address these assumptions, which is more explicitly illustrated in Betty Ulius' outline for "The Silent Dissuaders," about Shahri Javid (Claudine Longet), a young exchange science teacher from Iran. Part of Shahri's duties include supervising an after-school science lab, which happens to have only boy members. Shahri invites one of her brightest students, Judy Wheeler (Kim Darby), to join the after-school lab, but Judy is unsure because she thinks the boys would "resent a girl coming in." Shahri reminds Judy that she, too, is a girl, and convinces her to join the group. The boys, however, are not too happy about their new member until Judy "proves" herself and eventually becomes "completely accepted." In a separate scene, Shahri looks into some of her best students' records and is surprised to learn that all four of her top boy students are taking the right courses to prepare them for college, but the two highest achieving girls were not. When Shahri asks their counselor, Mr. Bradwell, about the different students' tracks, he becomes defensive in his claim that girls twenty years ago cared about their careers, but not this generation. "You ask these girls in high school what they want most," he stated, "They want to get married." He continues to explain that "they take stop-gap jobs, just until they can get married. And, if they go back to work later on, it's at the same kind of jobs. Even the girls who go on to college...they've got one eye on a textbook and the other on a likely husband. What's the point of making

them break their heads? They don't need trigonometry to make baby's formula!" Unfazed by Mr. Bradwell's comments, Shahri takes the student files to review on her own.

After pulling some strings, Shahri is able to enroll Judy in Math Analysis and an advanced Chemistry course and offers to help Judy get into a good college to study Oceanography. Judy's boyfriend, Scott Lawson (Buck Taylor), however, is unhappy with the amount of time she is devoting to her new courses and after-school lab. He expresses his concern over the state of their relationship to Judy's father. "It wouldn't hurt so bad," Scott explained, "if [his rival] wore pants. After Judy misses Scott's school concert because of her own preoccupations, he is ready to break up, complaining that she's always absent for his "big moments." She tries to console Scott by explaining that she still cares, but "she'd always been just kind of a reflection of him before...now she's doing things herself, things that interested her. What's wrong with that?" Scott, however, is not the only one unhappy with Judy's new career aspirations; her parents are equally concerned and eventually influence Judy to abandon her education goals and marry Scott instead. Surprised by this decision, Judy explains to Shahri: "Getting married, having a home, having kids...it's the only thing that counts! You don't understand, you come from a different country. Here, if you're not married, you're not a woman. You're nothing! You don't belong anywhere!" Shahri is upset by Judy's decision and confides her disappointment in Mr. Novak. He explains that is how it is in America: "A thousand subtle, silent dissuaders work against a girl who is bright and wants to use her intelligence. The boys, the family, the other girls, the whole social climate is against her...Somehow it has become not feminine to be brainy." The following week, Judy announces her engagement. Rather than wait for Scott to complete two years of

community college before they wed, as originally planned, Judy decides to marry Scott the summer after graduation, because her dad has offered him a job. Even though Judy decides not to pursue a career in science, Shahri informs her that she still won the school's science award for the work she did all year. Hearing this news causes Judy to finally break down and confess she does not want to get married. She would rather go to school and marry someone later in life with whom she has shared interests. In the end, against her parents' wishes, Judy breaks up with Scott and decides to go to college.<sup>117</sup>

Judy's struggle to resist social norms must have seemed timely to viewers considering the popularity of Friedan's book the year prior, particularly as she rebelled against the notion that women could only find happiness through marriage and children. A South Dakota woman made this connection after watching the show: "Since I am just now involved with the fascinating book The Feminine Mystique, dealing with the same subject, I particularly appreciated the excellent treatment."<sup>118</sup> Ulius imbedded multiple themes into this storyline, including the threat to men's masculinity when women excelled academically and professionally, as was heavily suggested by Scott's line about preferring Judy to fall in love with another man rather than have her interested in science. Through this story, Ulius, like Friedan, associated marriage with restriction, an institution that inhibited women from independence. Judy's struggle with making the decision to pursue an education and all that she sacrificed—her relationship with Scott, but it also strained her relationship with her parents—illustrated the stranglehold gender norms had on women. Therefore, the person who pushed Judy to challenge the status quo had to be

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<sup>117</sup> Storyline by Betty Ulius, 8 July 1964, Box 21, Folder 3, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>118</sup> Mrs. Walter E. Ulrich to EJM, 17 February 1965, Box 30, Folder 10, EJM Papers, WHSA.

an outsider looking in to clearly see how domestic ideology relegated women to second-class status. Thus, Shahri's character represented women's freedom because of her experience overcoming oppression in Iran, specifically in regard to the veil. In a conversation with Novak early in the storyline, Shahri explained how much she enjoyed her time in the US, especially since American girls could "take for granted their right to learn." She explained that her generation is the first in Iran to resist wearing the chadar and to "emerge from that centuries-old seclusion, the deliberately fostered ignorance, that kept women little more than the property of their husbands." Shahri's character did more than just influence Judy, she also metaphorically represented how women could achieve autonomy through education, particularly during a moment when social standards maintained that women went to college for the sole purpose of meeting a husband. The script adaptation of the storyline expanded Shahri's sentiments concerning American girls and marriage, but it wrote a completely different ending wherein Judy decided to go to college, she lost her nerve to break up with Scott and married him anyway. Even with this change, however, the premise of the plot remained intact: societal pressures impeded young girls' independence by pushing them into early marriages.

"The Silent Dissuaders" echoed some of the themes prevalent in Friedan's book, yet NBC and the NEA felt the script did not accurately portray a social problem relevant to the decade. In a memo to Leonard Freeman, John Bushnell of NBC's Film Programming wrote that "the dramatic suspense of the story needs considerable heightening." Undoubtedly the script presented a "valid sociological problem," Bushnell stated, but the audience had "hardly anything...to be concerned about here." He liked the character of Shahri "in representing female emancipation" but claimed that "she hasn't

anything at stake, however, other than her point of view. Cannot she risk something of value, her career, even her personal values, to accomplish what she thinks is right?"<sup>119</sup> NBC downplayed the importance of Shahri's feminist perspective, but the NEA outright rejected the feminist premise as a topic worth televising for various reasons. Henry Noerdlinger of the NEA, for instance, wrote that "The panelists (among whom the women outnumbered the men for obvious reasons)," considered this a good script, "though it suffers in overstating the case of Shahri, the ardent feminist. In its broad aspect, the message is acceptable; in its specific application, it is biased." Further into Noerdlinger's critique, he became more defensive: "1964 does not represent the age of Susan B. Anthony and in spite of a great and natural desire among young women to find husbands, it is also a fact that the American woman appears to be successfully emancipated... We are aware that women are still being discriminated against in salaries and wages in many employment situations, though efforts are being made to remedy that." He continued to agree that the problem of early marriages existed, but the script presented an "extreme point of view" and should have interrogated the "deep-seated psychological needs" that caused "young people to build their own security in marriage in a very insecure world." Unfortunately, Noerdlinger did not understand that Ulius tried to answer the question he posed, just from a woman's perspective. He also failed to understand the point the writer tried to make, which is that social pressure influenced boys' and girls' behavior and expectations regarding their respective roles in relation to one another. Instead, he considered Judy's character "weak willed" and therefore

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<sup>119</sup> John Bushnell to Leonard Freeman, 18 August 1964, Box 21, Folder 3, EJM Papers, WHSA.

unsuitable “to symbolize the victim of the author’s silent dissuaders.” Furthermore, even though the script portrayed a situation that existed in reality, Noerdlinger stated that the panel felt the episode would “not arouse the audience to become aware of an apparent social problem.”<sup>120</sup>

In addition to the NEA’s dislike of the general premise, they considered the teleplay’s themes antiquated. The script’s portrayal of Judy fearing life as a spinster if she did not marry, for example, was “outdated” and more in line with their grandparents’ generation. “Where in this country today is the typical unmarried woman considered a neuter who doesn’t belong anywhere and is not wanted anywhere,” Noerdlinger asked. He also considered the script’s portrayal of American women as subordinate to men a false representation. In a scene with Mr. Vane, for instance, Shahri expressed her disbelief that so many American girls wanted to marry at such a young age. “Where is the faith in themselves, as human beings,” she asks. “They are not mere appendages of men, they are of men, they are persons!” Noerdlinger, however, claimed that line was an “untrue statement.” He explained that “women, in this country at least, have not been considered mere appendages of men for many a generation. Miss Susan B. Anthony and others saw to that when the National Woman Suffrage Association was organized in 1869.” Despite the NEA’s harsh criticism of the script’s feminist message, they preferred the original ending where “Judy is shown as ‘a girl who has put her own feet on her own path.’”<sup>121</sup> The NEA, therefore, did not oppose storylines that featured women, but they

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<sup>120</sup> Henry Noerdlinger to Leonard Freeman, 21 August 1964, Box 21, Folder 3, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>121</sup> Henry Noerdlinger to Leonard Freeman, 21 August 1964, Box 21, Folder 3, EJM Papers, WHSA.

had issues with teleplays critiquing gender mores because they considered it an irrelevant topic for the current moment.

Seven letters survive that discuss *The Silent Dissuaders*, which is more than the other abovementioned telecasts. Viewers appreciated the episode's "presentation of our present social attitudes toward women."<sup>122</sup> One viewer thought the episode would "hit home to many," while a second considered the show "worthwhile" and suggested that it might "have a more profound effect because" of its "disturbing" ending.<sup>123</sup> Even if the NEA insisted Ulius' feminist script had no real purpose in 1964, in the end, the episode exposed how social mores pushed women into early marriages.

Neuman and members of the NEA intended to depict "realistic" scenarios that could help uplift the citizenry through educational entertainment. Because they saw gender inequality as nonexistent, however, they did not find anything relevant to teach audiences about when it came to women's issues. This not only restricted women's creativity when writing storylines, but critiques that gendered subjects continuously presented unrealistic and boring themes undermined women writers professionally. In spite of the extreme criticism these women faced, their telecasts still made it to the small screen notwithstanding major modifications that often distorted the intended message. Therefore, episodes that featured women protagonists typically presented an issue—such as teen pregnancy, teen marriage, or low self-esteem—absent of any critical analysis of gender norms, and always with Mr. Novak as the hero.

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<sup>122</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Webb to EJM, 17 February 1965, Box 30, Folder 10, EJM Papers, WHSA.

<sup>123</sup> Rachel Latimore to EJM, 16 February 1965 and Mrs. William Farrell to EJM, 16 February 1965, Box 30, Folder 10, EJM Papers, WHSA.

The show's cancellation in 1965 soured Neuman's optimism regarding the direction television was heading. The fact that many other New Frontier dramas were cancelled alongside *Mr. Novak* suggests that television had begun to move in a different direction by the second half of the decade.<sup>124</sup> In a speech to the Association of National Advertisers, Neuman warned that television's power was being threatened by the belief that "any drama that informs and educates is not entertainment and will not sell goods." Nonetheless, Neuman insisted that it was still "possible and practical to create mass entertainment that is significant and challenging." The television frame, he argued, could "mirror truthfully and authentically the problems of society so that the information will allow society to shape itself."<sup>125</sup>

The window and mirror motifs demonstrate the extent to which television executives thought about how entertainment programming could educate viewers. Extensive research conducted for the *Mr. Novak* series gave the show's creators a sense of the real problems faced by high school students and teachers, but they failed to consider the nuances of how race, gender, and class politics played into these issues. Even with the best of intentions, educational entertainment was not without its limitations. Particularly with regard to race, creators of the show struggled to create critical depictions of racism that did not make white viewers uncomfortable, which limited how producers could teach viewers about what the civil rights movement was all about. The content creators of *Mr. Novak* also struggled portraying people of color

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<sup>124</sup> Other programs cancelled include *East Side, West Side* and *Route 66*. *Dr. Kildare*, *Ben Casey*, and *The Defenders* were all cancelled the following year.

<sup>125</sup> Association of National Advertisers Speech by EJM, 5 April 1965, Box 41, Folder 2, EJM Papers, WHSA.

outside of stereotypical representations since they had a difficult time distinguishing “authenticity” from “realism,” and questioned whether achieving one meant sacrificing the other. These shortcomings, however, did not dissuade viewers. *Mr. Novak*’s fan base wrote extensively requesting scripts and films, and adults discussed how they used the drama as a teaching tool in schools and at home. Although the show only lasted two seasons, Americans were starting to see television’s capability to teach the public.

### Chapter 3

#### “This is Education?”: Solving America’s Race Problems with Integration Television

Don Marshall: “What would happen if television were used to educate the people, to, you know, elevate their minds? Do you think it could be done?”

Diahann Carroll: “Of course it could, darling.”<sup>1</sup>  
-*TV Guide* Interview, 14 March 1970.

In the fall of 1969, UCLA President Charles Hitch told an NBC reporter that the beginning of every school year starts with some kind of crisis. That year the “crisis” was “Angela Davis, the black militant teacher who says she is a Communist.” The news segment was the third report out of four that NBC covered of Davis’s nine month battle with UC Regents, which ultimately led to her termination.<sup>2</sup> During the 1969-1970 academic year that Davis taught at UCLA, she received hundreds of threatening calls and approximately 218 documented letters, predominantly hate mail, due in large part to the extensive media attention she received.<sup>3</sup> Many of those who wrote to Davis did not view

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Diahann Carroll; Carolyn See, “‘I’m a Black Woman With a White Image’: Diahann Carroll Explains Some of The Reasons Behind Her Success,” *TV Guide*, 14 March 1970, 26-30.

<sup>2</sup> *NBC Evening News*, 7 October 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive (hereafter VTNA). Angela Davis is most remembered for the court case *The People of the State of California vs. Angela Y. Davis* and her unlawful imprisonment following the Marin County Courthouse shooting on 7 August 1970. However, news networks latched on to the story about Davis following the shooting because she had already spent much of the year prior in media’s spotlight as “the communist teacher” at UCLA. NBC’s first report of the event, for example, aired five days *after* the shootout to announce that the FBI wanted Davis. This chapter focuses solely on the year Davis taught at UCLA, however, when media introduced her to Americans nationwide.

<sup>3</sup> Although newspapers tended to cover the Davis story more frequently than television, periods during which Davis received the most and least amount of letters directly correlated with television news coverage. For example, NBC aired its first report when UC Regents attempted to fire Davis on 30 September 1969, during which Davis received the most amount of hate mail. Print media continued to release stories between October and mid-November regarding the unsuccessful attempt to fire Davis, but broadcast news coverage diminished extensively, and so did her hate mail. The increase in hate mail followed this pattern in correlation with each televised news report. The letters written to Angela Davis (hereafter AD) are located at the Bancroft Library’s Special Collections, Berkeley, California. Specifically, BANC MSS 99/281, folders 23-27, container 39, section XI, Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (hereafter MCLI).

her employment at UCLA as an isolated incident, but considered it part of a broader trend of liberal establishments—such as universities and media—legitimizing the efforts of social activists and movements. Frustration regarding the amount of attention given to such topics is exemplified by a *San Diego Union*'s article titled "So This is Education?" The *Union* reported on a scheduled rap session about Davis at the University of California, San Diego and asked: So why would the university choose to hold a session "about Angela Davis, an avowed Communist who is a fugitive from justice." The article closed by asking its readers: "Is this subject really what the University wants to extend to the citizens of the San Diego area under the aegis of its name and stature?"<sup>4</sup> The content of the brief article echoed the sentiments of those who wrote to Davis in the year prior, frustrated with the fact that she was the topic of discussion. The tangible article itself, however, reveals the larger issue in the eyes of many who found the increased representation of blackness in media discomforting. When the reader turned the page of the *Union*, on the flip side of the Davis article lay a large advertisement for the premiere of the second season of NBC's sitcom featuring the first black family—*Julia*.

*Julia* starred Diahann Carroll as a middle-class widowed mother to Corey (Marc Copage), her six-year-old son. Following the death of her husband in the Vietnam War, Julia took a job as a nurse and moved into an integrated apartment building in Los Angeles, California. The show's premise revolved around Julia's efforts as a working single mother and the good and bad experiences she and Corey faced within the white world in which they lived. Although Julia and Corey had white friends on the show,

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<sup>4</sup>From a newspaper article that was torn out of the *San Diego Union* and saved in Robert Elliott's papers. The author of the article is unknown, "So This is Education?," 15 September 1970, folder 9, box 11, MSS 127, MSCL.

producers presented their experiences with bigotry in a thinly veiled attempt to blend entertainment with teachable moments about contemporary race issues.<sup>5</sup> Prior to the show's debut, producer Hal Kanter explained in an interview with the *Chicago Tribune* that "integration is a big thing in life today in this country," which is why he hoped "to dramatize the humorous, hopefully funny experiences of an intelligent, attractive woman in such a changing world."<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 2:** Newspaper article on Angela Davis torn out of the *San Diego Union* by a contemporary with *Julia* on the flip side. 15 September 1970. Courtesy of Robert Elliott's Papers, UCSD Mandeville Special Collections.

*Julia* debuted during what *TV Guide* dubbed "the year of the Negro" because twenty-one prime-time series in the 1968-69 season included at least one regular black

<sup>5</sup> Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time*.

<sup>6</sup> Clay Gowran, 'TV Today: Producer Tells Aims of First "Integrated" Series', *Chicago Tribune*, 5 July 1968, B11.

cast member.<sup>7</sup> By the turn-of-the-decade, entertainment programs increasingly began to introduce national audiences to black female characters whose respectable femininity resonated with the integrationist ideals of the civil rights movement, such as Denise Nicholas in *Room 222*, Ruby Dee in *Peyton Place*, and Leslie Uggams in *The Leslie Uggams Show*. Conversely, news reports shifted from largely sympathetic portrayals of African Americans as passive and victimized resisters of segregation to more critical depictions of black radicals, such as Angela Davis, who promoted black power and self-defense. The increased presence of African Americans on the small screen indicated a larger political movement towards a more integrated US, but this televisual shift fueled a strong racist backlash among many white viewers. Increased representation of African Americans represented the effects of integration, when clearly delineated spheres, such as urban and suburban, no longer divided whites and blacks on television—and potentially in real life.

Historians have shown that the infamous imagery of segregationists in the 1950s and early 1960s—such as Alabama’s Police Commissioner Eugene ‘Bull’ Connor who turned fire hoses and vicious dogs on black civil rights protestors—engendered sympathy and support from white Americans.<sup>8</sup> This chapter shows, however, that televised depictions of integration by the turn-of-the-decade generated a more negative and hateful

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<sup>7</sup> Julia, Advertisement, 14 September 1968, *TV Guide*; Carolyn See, “The Census Taker Comes to *Peyton Place*...and Finds, Five Years Later, That the Population Has Become Younger and Blacker,” *TV Guide*, 28 September 1968, 24-29. For example, CBS introduced a Black engineer into *The Family Affair* and a Black marine in *Gomer Pyle, USMC*, while NBC also aired *The Flip Wilson Show*. ABC went on to add *The Mod Squad* starring Clarence Williams III; *The Outcasts*, co-starring Otis Young as a Black cowboy; and the Miles family to the last season of *Peyton Place*, a Black family who apparently had lived in the lily-white neighborhood the whole time, “the camera was just somewhere else.”

<sup>8</sup> Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (2000; repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

backlash among whites, many of whom did not consider themselves prejudice. I argue that the growing presence of African Americans on television raised anxieties among many white viewers about their lack of control over the medium's content. Black representation in news and entertainment felt unnatural and forced to many viewers, who frequently claimed that topics related to race were being "shoved down white people's throats."<sup>9</sup> Despite television's efforts to portray Carroll as markedly different from radical black women, hate mail written to both NBC and Davis reflect similar racist perceptions and sentiments among white viewers. Regardless of how networks differentiated between different models of black womanhood, many white viewers continued to see civil rights and Black Power advancements as equally infringing on the rights of white people.

This chapter explores the hate mail written to Davis and Carroll and how responses to both women intersected in two ways. The first critiqued how television acted as a method of forced integration by bringing blacks into white homes. The second argued that the representation of both women reflected a type of "reverse discrimination," wherein black advancement occurred at the expense of whites. These critiques, however, were couched in anxieties among viewers about their inability to control the increasing politicization of television. At the same time, hate mail written to Davis and *Julia's* producer, Hal Kanter, illuminates the intricate connections between television and civil rights.<sup>10</sup> Both news and entertainment programs portrayed integrationist struggles through

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph F. Bush to Hal Kanter, 22 September 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, Hal Kanter Papers (hereafter HK), Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, University of Wisconsin, Madison (hereafter WHSA).

<sup>10</sup> Kanter referenced the average number of letters he received in correspondence, at times a few hundred fan mail per week. However, approximately 170 letters were saved and archived with twice as many women writers to men, which corresponds with the show's viewership as indicated in ratings located in Box 18, Folders 1-5, HK Papers, WHSA.

black femininity during the late-sixties as part of an effort to assuage US racial tensions. In doing so, positive representations of black women garnered harsh reactions from white viewers who felt a personal violation in their homes.<sup>11</sup> Considering that black women were perceived to occupy a certain marginal space, the *real* Davis and fictitious Julia seemed out of place for entering what was perceived as a white world.

Viewers and networks alike understood that television was a tool that could teach audiences. Whereas some people believed that television could help inform citizens on contemporary social and political issues, others thought the medium was controlled by leftists who presented slanted information that fostered a liberal agenda—an agenda that not only conflicted with their worldview, but also undermined their rights. What made television so threatening to conservative critics was the fear that other viewers would imbibe the messages presented, rather than think critically about and reject television’s liberal content.

### **Who is Angela Davis and *Julia*?**

In 1968 Angela Davis was a graduate student at the University of California, San Diego, but by 1969 she became internationally known as “the communist teacher” at UCLA. It all began just one month after UCLA hired Davis. *The Daily Bruin* ran an article on the Philosophy department’s new Communist professor, which led to the UC

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<sup>11</sup> Scholars have analyzed media representation of civil rights and Black Power struggles but have given little consideration to how people responded to the cultural effects of such advancements through television—an oversight that this chapter addresses. For example, Aniko Bodroghkozy’s influential book examines the role network television played during the civil rights movement and how viewers made sense of news and entertainment television. Whereas Bodroghkozy provides a more expansive analysis on the myriad themes present in fan mail written to Kanter in her chapter on *Julia*, this article provides a closer look at the anti-integrationist responses to the show and gives a broader historical context to the role popular culture played in the neoconservative push of the late 1960s and 1970s. Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement (The History of Communication)* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

Regents' inquiry regarding her political affiliation.<sup>12</sup> On 5 September 1969, Davis confirmed accusations of her membership in the Che-Lumumba Club, an all-black branch of the Communist Party. The Regents, led by Governor Ronald Reagan, directed UCLA President Charles Hitch to notify Davis that her appointment would be terminated by 29 September unless she requested a hearing before the Privilege and Tenure Committee. As the Regents sought to have Davis fired, media coverage garnered contempt from racist and anticommunist community members, as well as support from faculty and students across various US campuses. Davis took her case to court and won based on previous Supreme Court rulings declaring that the government could not fire a person merely because of their membership in the Communist Party.<sup>13</sup> Although the academic controversy settled down after the Fall Quarter, when it came time to renew Davis' contract for a second year (as she was originally offered by the University), the Board of Regents voted against renewing her employment on 19 June 1970.<sup>14</sup>

That night, NBC's news anchor, Don Oliver, explained that Reagan voted to terminate Davis' position not because "she is a communist, but because she is unprofessional," due to her activism, which Governor Reagan referred to as "incit[ing]"

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<sup>12</sup> William Tulio Divale, "FBI Student Spy in CPUSA Answers Criticism," *UCLA Daily Bruin*, 1 July 1969.

<sup>13</sup> Davis' attorney referred to two court decisions to support the argument that firing Davis based on her membership in the Communist was unconstitutional. The first was Supreme Court case, *Keyishian v. Board of Regents*, 385 U.S. 589 (1967), which repealed New York statutes that permitted the disqualification of a teacher at a public institution based on their membership in the Communist Party. The second decision was the California Supreme Court case, *Vogel v. County of Los Angeles*, 68 Cal. (1967), which invalidated the section of the California Constitution that required public employees to disclaim membership in any organization that supported the overthrow of the Government. Bettina Aptheker, *The Morning Breaks: The Trial of Angela Davis*. (New York: International Publishers, 1975).

<sup>14</sup> Statement distributed to UC Faculty by Donald Kalish, "A Statement of Facts Concerning the Appointment and Threatened Dismissal of Professor Angela Davis, Provided by the UCLA Department of Philosophy, 29 September 1969," folder 2, box 11, MSS 127, Robert Elliott Papers, Mandeville Special Collections Library, University of California, San Diego (hereafter MSCL).

trouble on other campuses.” At the very moment that the Regents voted to terminate Davis’ contract, she was a few blocks away protesting. Initially shown pacing among a group holding signs while smoking cigarettes and calling for an “end to political repression in the prisons,” the camera narrows in on Davis so that her face and afro occupy most of the television screen, exposing only the lapels of her military jacket clad with protest pins. When asked about the Regents’ decision, Davis replied, “I’m going to keep on struggling to free the Soledad brothers and all political prisoners because I think that what has happened to me is only a tiny minute example of what is happening to them. I suppose I just lost my job at UCLA as a result of my political opinions and activities.” Don Oliver closed the report stating that Davis’ supporters “say there is no doubt that Davis was fired because she is a Communist.”<sup>15</sup> Claiming that her termination was due to her lack of professionalism was an excuse that the general public did not buy, since NBC—in addition to many major newspapers—had originally reported that the Regents fired Davis because she was a communist. However, the fact that Davis was a black woman no doubt also played into Reagan’s determination to see her fired. Davis’ appointment at UCLA occurred during a time when Reagan, the UC Regents, and the police were continuously at odds with African Americans (Black Panthers especially), white liberals, and students at California universities. Davis served as the perfect target for Reagan to publicly denounce and continue his crusade to remove black political figures from the California school system, because he could use her affiliation with the Communist Party as a ruse to overshadow the conservative public’s more pressing

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<sup>15</sup> *NBC Evening News*, 19 June 1970, VTNA.

concern—that a female black radical was educating mostly white students at an elite public institution.

In popular memory, Davis is most remembered for the court case *The People of the State of California vs. Angela Y. Davis* and her unlawful imprisonment following the Marin County Courthouse shooting. Although this political moment and the worldwide “Free Angela Davis” campaign that developed during her imprisonment merits historical focus, the events at UCLA that led up to the courthouse protest have been grossly overlooked as a component of the FBI’s interest in Davis in the first place. While Davis had many leftist white and black supporters, conservative whites found the image of female black radicalism in general, and Davis in particular, highly objectionable.<sup>16</sup> Based on the letters these critics sent to Davis, what most infuriated whites, aside from her commitment to communism, were Davis’ Afro hairstyle and her employment at UCLA. Their extraordinarily racist and misogynist attacks on Davis and her personal appearance were paired with demands that she leave “our” university and “our” country altogether. Such appeals reflect more than just anti-Communist rhetoric, they suggest these writers considered Davis’ race and gender as out of place at UCLA and higher education altogether.

Angela Davis became an easy target for viewers to critique by couching racist sentiments in anticommunist rhetoric. Julia, however, represented the epitome of middle-

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<sup>16</sup>Materials regarding the events at UCLA that led to Davis’ termination can be found in Donald Kalish’s personal papers. Included in Kalish’s papers are numerous letters of support for Davis from academics across the United States, in addition to extensive correspondence between the UC regents and Davis and other faculty. These sources can be found in folders 1/1 and 1/2, box 1, series 1, Angela Davis Academic Freedom Case & Trial and Defense Movement Records, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles (hereafter SCLSSR).

class respectability, and in a sense, that is what made the show so threatening. The sitcom presented a positive portrayal of successful integration wrapped up in a neatly produced, entertaining, and sponsor supported package that reached the homes of millions. During *Julia*'s three seasons, Kanter received a myriad of fan mail that reflected both positive and negative reactions. In his replies to viewers who wrote him, he continuously stated that he intended to foster a sense of brotherhood among his audience. At one point, Kanter even referred to this objective as his "thesis." In other letters he defended *Julia* against criticism of the show's racial messages by claiming that he chose to include such plot lines because they were realistic, or even based on the real experiences of some of the show's black writers. Kanter clearly wanted to make a specific statement with *Julia* about the possibilities of social harmony, but as his responses to criticism about the show's inauthenticity reveal, he lacked a full understanding of the complexities of race. In response to those who critiqued the show, he often simply stated *Julia* could not be an unrealistic representation of a black family since he employed black writers.

Even before the first episode aired, debates emerged about *Julia*'s accuracy and relevance. Due to the racial climate of the late-1960s, Kanter anticipated receiving praise from black viewers but not white viewers, or vice versa. Understanding that Americans wanted more control over television, Kanter quipped in an interview, "If we start picking up viewers in one part of town and not the other, maybe we could bus audiences."<sup>17</sup> Although Kanter seemed prepared for criticism of the show's progressive premise, he reacted more hostilely to the critique presented by one anonymous TV editor who

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<sup>17</sup>Gowran, B11.

claimed the show was too conservative. The representation of integration was “late” and should have aired three years ago, the critic argued, since *Julia* debuted in 1968, when black leaders were increasingly moving away from integrationist goals and toward separatism. The problem with claiming that *Julia* was “late,” Kanter retorted, was that “three years ago, I don’t think we could have gotten it on the air.”<sup>18</sup> His intentions with *Julia* were to entertain audiences “and to make a positive statement about brotherhood among all people,” he explained.<sup>19</sup>

Although the sitcom attempted to portray lighthearted situations concerning race issues, viewers wrote to Kanter protesting that *Julia*’s representation of a middle-class single black mother living in a posh apartment on a nurse’s wage did not accurately portray the “real” black experience. Many white viewers contested the accuracy of *Julia*, claiming that the lead character demeaned white motherhood because she was portrayed as more beautiful and smarter than Marie Waggedorn, *Julia*’s white neighbor. In contrast, black women argued that *Julia* seemed unrealistic, in that Carroll’s character did not illustrate the race struggle that many blacks were fighting to overcome. Many also contended that presenting *Julia* as a widow undermined the role of black men in the family, and society in general, perpetuating the stereotype of black households being fatherless and run by overbearing matriarchs.<sup>20</sup> Although Kanter aimed to introduce the

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<sup>18</sup> Gowran, B11; the TV critic mentioned in this article was not named.

<sup>19</sup> HK to Cedric Kehoe, 3 December 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed synopsis of the favorable and unfavorable fan mail Kanter received, see Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time* and Aniko Bodroghkozy, “Is This What You Mean by Color TV?: Race, Gender, and Contested Meanings in NBC’s *Julia*,” in *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1992); *Julia*’s representation of a black fatherless family concerned some black viewers, particularly since the 1965 Moynihan Report stated that the rise of families headed by a single mother contributed to a cycle of poverty and prevented black progress. Many viewers considered *Julia*’s portrayal of a single black mother a gross oversight considering the well-known Moynihan Report. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case of National Action*, (Washington D.C.: Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor, 1965).

first show about African Americans, critics claimed he overlooked some harsh realities of black family life, especially those which involved gender and class factors.<sup>21</sup>

### **“Black Is The Color Of Our New TV”**

In the late 1960s, Davis and *Julia* were introduced to audiences across the United States during an unprecedented moment when television featured more sitcoms, dramas, news and special reports featuring topics on black America than ever before. In great numbers, many whites expressed anxiety over the diminished overrepresentation in the television landscape and equated black integration in the television industry to forced integration in their personal homes.<sup>22</sup> On a broader scale, backlash over integration stemmed from political advancements such as the decree that segregation in education is unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), and the passage of the Civil Rights (1964) and Voting Rights (1965) Acts—particularly Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which declared it unlawful for employers to discriminate based on “race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.”<sup>23</sup> Many whites viewed the “fairness” that the Civil Rights Act demanded as an assault on Americans’ personal liberty, which they believed gave citizens the right to include some while excluding others in their hiring practices, even if the determining factors for exclusion were race-based. Whites defended their right to not hire black workers based on claims of incompetence, and even before passage of

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<sup>21</sup> Although this is a broad overview of the myriad letters Kanter received, I focus mostly on the anti-integrationist sentiments for the purpose of this chapter.

<sup>22</sup> Luke Charles Harris uses the term “diminished overrepresentation of whites” when analyzing debates about affirmative action and structural racism. My use of this term within a television context is borrowed from his essay, “Beyond the Best Black: The Making of a Critical Race Theorist at Yale Law School,” *Connecticut Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 5 (2011).

<sup>23</sup> Nancy MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 8-9.

the Civil Rights Act had condemned pressures to hire blacks over whites as a form of “discrimination in reverse.”<sup>24</sup> Claims that black social and economic advancements resulted from undeserved opportunities based solely on race, at the expense of whites with greater aptitude, echoed the language peppered throughout the mail written to Davis and *Julia*. Viewers felt that television tried too hard to satisfy integrationists’ demands to increase black representation, to the point that it disenfranchised whites and made them feel like strangers in their own home.

The effects of integration were felt at the most intimate level of people’s homes due to the dramatic shift in black representation on television. Not only did twenty-one entertainment television programs incorporate regular black cast members into their shows, but more attention was given to black interests and stories related to race relations across all televisual fronts. In the summer of 1968, following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., television networks turned their attention toward the violence and mourning after King’s murder, in part to assuage black citizens while also educating whites. *TV Guide* reported that FCC Commissioner Nicholas Johnson had a discussion with producer Hubbell Robinson about Johnson’s desires for television to “do something ‘really constructive’ [...] to ease racial tensions.” It was this conversation that led Hubbell to pitch an idea to his bosses at ABC, resulting in the network’s production of six one hour-long telecasts featuring unrehearsed live “confrontations between blacks and whites.”<sup>25</sup> One such special report, for example, documented African Americans and Mexican Americans in Houston, Texas, having a conversation with local police in an

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<sup>24</sup> MacLean, 35-75.

<sup>25</sup> Richard K. Doan, “The Doan Report: Late Shift for Evening News?,” *TV Guide*, 25 May 1968, A-1 and Richard K. Doan, “The Doan Report: TV Mirrors Nation’s Upheaval,” *TV Guide*, 20 April 1968, A-1.

attempt to “overcome initial hostilities and come to understand each other.”<sup>26</sup> A later segment titled “Can White Suburbia Think Black?” investigated white suburbanites in New Rochelle, N.Y. who claimed to be “color-blind” and not see certain black people as “Negroes.”<sup>27</sup> The purpose of these candid portrayals was an attempt at conflict resolution, both for those being filmed and for the viewers at home who potentially shared similar sentiments to the protagonists filmed, whether white, black, or brown. This was meant to become a learning experience for everyone on both sides of the screen.

CBS featured their own summer documentary, titled *Of Black America*, a seven-part series that focused on the “black side of American history,” specifically “the Negro in the U.S.—from his African heritage to his American future.” According to producer Perry Wolff, the purpose of this series was to change the contemporary racial dialogue by showing the historical roots of racial intolerance, addressing what Wolff called “an inheritance of ignorance.”<sup>28</sup> Topics addressed in this series included an examination of the black soldier as “America’s invisible defender,” the myth of racial acceptance and integration in sports, and the struggle for freedom in Ghana juxtaposed to the United States, with a particular focus on education and the role of black women in both societies.<sup>29</sup>

Local television stations also showed greater interest in addressing African Americans’ experiences in the United States. Local news ran their own special reports

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<sup>26</sup> *Time for Americans: Prejudice and the Police*, Advertisement, 15 July 1968, *TV Guide*, A-37.

<sup>27</sup> *Time for Americans: Can White Suburbia Think Black?*, Advertisement, 29 July 1968, *TV Guide*, A-35.

<sup>28</sup> *Of Black America*, Advertisement, 2 July 1968, *TV Guide*, A-52-A-53.

<sup>29</sup> These three topics are explained in detailed descriptions of each special advertised in *TV Guide* during the summer of 1968. In order they are printed in the magazine on 9 July 1968, A-63; 30 July 1968, A-53; 16 July 1968, A-57.

that focused on regional poverty, political injustice, and the motives behind riots and militant groups. Television's shift to integrate more black people on television became a topic discussed as much as the shows themselves. In the *TV Guide* article, "Black Is The Color Of Our New TV," author Martin Maloney argued that black Americans had been virtually invisible on television prior to 1968. Taking note of the plethora of entertainment television shows that introduced black actors to their casts that year, Maloney claimed that it was the "unsettled spring and summer of 1968" that resulted in the surge of documentaries and specials "about and for blacks." He claimed that the possible reason for local and national networks to produce the only original "black special" programs was to "ease a potentially dangerous season." Despite network efforts to ameliorate racial tensions through its programming, Maloney argued that the black-white division among US audiences was too wide for television to bridge together.<sup>30</sup>

Self-identified audiences of the "silent majority" aired their grievances through letters denouncing news coverage of the counterculture, anti-Vietnam protestors, black radicals, and feminists. They argued that the news gave these movements a platform for promoting liberal issues when many conservatives wanted very much to delegitimize their efforts. Audiences expressed frustrations to *TV Guide* magazine's editor after the article "The 'Silent Majority'" asserted that television programming did not appeal to a wider conservative audience. One month after news coverage of Angela Davis first began, Anne Davis from New Smythe Beach, Florida asked, "Why not, for a while, completely eliminate 'coverage of militant radical groups'? We have had more than our

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<sup>30</sup> Martin Maloney, "Black Is The Color Of Our New TV: One Observer Comments On a Significant Trend," *TV Guide*, 16 November 1968, 7-10.

share of such coverage.”<sup>31</sup> In the same issue of *TV Guide*, Edgar H. Shenkel from Monaca, Pennsylvania, also asked, “Has the love affair with radicals, kooks and militants finally reached the saturation point? Is it possible that the TV executives have descended from their penthouses long enough to observe the average American’s disgust with irresponsible news coverage? There may be hope yet.”<sup>32</sup>

Compared to the candid discussions and historical education of the summer news specials, *Julia*’s message about brotherly love and social harmony seemed like a less threatening way to discuss America’s race problems. Yet viewers were still frustrated with the perceived over-representation of black people on television. As one woman put it in her letter to Kanter shortly after *Julia* first aired, “After the riots and network filled ‘Black Americans’ shows all summer, white people aren’t feeling to [*sic*] kindly toward colored people shows. You are ahead of the times on this one.”<sup>33</sup> In a short note to Kanter, someone from Levittown, NY also wrote, “Only the negro wants integration and it causes hate and trouble. We want segregation! It’s peaceful and right, safer. Not racist or bigots, just want our rights. Segregation!!” They ended the letter asking Kanter, “Is this what you mean by color T.V. ugh. Click!!”<sup>34</sup>

### **Not In My Living Room!: Integration TV**

Many viewers who wrote to Kanter as fans of *Julia* claimed that the show did have the potential to mitigate racial tensions, but a great deal of people conversely wrote claiming the show actually broadened the racial gulf by forcing integration upon

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<sup>31</sup> Anne Davis, “Letters” to the editor, *TV Guide*, 18 October 1969, A-4.

<sup>32</sup> Edgar H. Shenkel, “Letters” to the editor, *TV Guide*, 18 October 1969, A-4.

<sup>33</sup> Lucy Shepherd to HK, 20 September 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>34</sup> J. Goaber to HK, 9 October 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

audiences. Yet despite the show's very moderate approach, many correspondents still reflect frustration with the over-representation of black people on television. One Ohio correspondent wrote to Kanter before the first episode of *Julia* even debuted, claiming that the fall television lineup was introducing "another racist show or should I say another integration T.V. show."<sup>35</sup> After *Julia*'s premier, one writer claimed they "had so much color shoved down our throats on special programs this summer it's enough to make a person sick."<sup>36</sup> Cedric Kehoe from Hollywood, California also wrote to complain about the oversaturation of black representation:

So a few weeks ago, after watching 'Mod Squad' (in which the Negro member was trying to prevent another black boy from killing a few 'whiteys' (on account of what they done to us for 250 years) I switched, as is my custom, to channel 7. But this turned out to be about a Black Dictator with a black mistress, and as it was obviously going to be an all black evening, I turned to 'Julia'—just in time to see a stock white bigot (straight out of Jules Dassin or Charles Martin movie) get it from Julia—'We've been here for 250 years etc' but having already heard this bit, I had to switch elsewhere.<sup>37</sup>

Correspondents expressed anger that integration on TV infringed on their personal space by bringing blacks into their homes. Having only watched the previews for *Julia*, a man from South Carolina wrote that he felt angry producers tried to push race "down white people's throats." He signed off the letter stating, "Blacks don't belong in our living room or otherwise."<sup>38</sup>

Dennis Grant from Los Angeles identified the effects of integration when he wrote to Kanter classifying *Julia* as part of a larger change taking place with TV

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<sup>35</sup> Author unknown to HK, 5 July 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>36</sup> V. Reid to HK, 19 September 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>37</sup> Cedric Kehoe to HK, 3 December 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph F. Bush to HK, 22 September 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

attempting to elevate the status of African Americans. In trying to achieve this goal, Grant claimed, certain television shows disenfranchised whites who preferred to maintain the status quo. Conversely, television glamorized African Americans and portrayed a version of integration that—in Grant’s eyes—was grossly inaccurate and unfairly made anyone opposed to integration a “racist.” He wrote:

Recently Americans have witnessed a startling shift in TV programming, emphasizing to build up the career and image of the black American. He is considered the so-called star, sports hero, and a persecuted individual whom we must elevate, and assume all the responsibility of the black man’s problem. Negroes are always the ‘good guys’ and people like myself who object to this, since this is not the way it usually is, are labeled ‘white racists,’ prejudiced ‘bigots’ whom all good people should detest. In my opinion your program is designed to instill a guilt complex within all white people.

[...] You probably live in a white affluent neighborhood and advocate integration. I’ve worked with blacks and lived in the Crenshaw-Adams area, believe me I know the evils of integration. It’s about time you stop telling people how good it is—when you personally haven’t faced the problem.<sup>39</sup>

For Grant, the normalization of integration through television meant an end to the culture of exclusion to which whites were accustomed.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, this disruption of a racialized order, Grant believed, came at the hands of wealthy white liberal elites who had idealized notions of integration because they could afford to remain segregated from black communities. It was the working-and-middle-class whites who felt the effects of liberal media idealizing integration while lambasting segregation.

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<sup>39</sup>Dennis Grant to HK, 12 March 1970, Box 22, Folder 10, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>40</sup>MacLean describes the “culture of exclusion” as the mainstream white culture that dominated the U.S up until the mid-twentieth century. It was a culture that afforded the best jobs, education opportunities, and banking interests to white men while punishing those who were denied access to these institutions as second-class citizens. *Freedom Is Not Enough*, 6-8.

Frustrations with the influence of white liberals and radicals on college campuses and in the media also rang loud and clear in mail written to Davis. Many correspondents aired their grievances about Donald Kalish—UCLA’s white Philosophy Chair, who hired Davis and was a well-known anti-Vietnam War activist. As one California writer claimed, the public “school system is loaded with ultra-liberals with no counter balancing conservative segment.” The reason people had “lost their faith in our school system,” the writer continued, is because “Kalish and company takes his political views into the classroom with him.”<sup>41</sup> Another correspondent assumed that faculty who supported Davis were indicative of a more widespread form of group think pervasive on university campuses. “Academic support of Davis,” they wrote, is just “mob reflex,” and that Kalish “doesn’t even need a ring in his nose, he trots along so obediently.”<sup>42</sup>

What made matters worse was that television appeared to give those who advocated for social justice a platform accessible to audiences world-wide. Therefore, much of the anger expressed in the missives to both Davis and Kanter was directed to the white liberals who orchestrated media’s focus on race issues and its positive portrayal of African Americans. One New Jersey man, for example, wrote to Kanter stating that the US has been “polluted and raped by the Hollywood and New York entertainment [...] programs in our homes and theatres.”<sup>43</sup> What made television’s powerful reach so ominous was that it had the potential to alter racial beliefs by instilling guilt and fear among whites and, in turn, indoctrinating them to support integration.

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<sup>41</sup> David Hernandez to AD, 15 January 1970, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 26, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>42</sup> Author Unknown to AD, ND, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 26, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>43</sup> Milton Doe to HK, 31 July 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

If Davis' critics expressed concern that she would indoctrinate young whites who willingly chose to attend her class, *Julia*'s critics found the sitcom threatening in part because they believed it forced an integrationist message upon its viewers whose options were mainly limited to the Big Three networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC). A Connecticut woman, for instance, reacted to the tenth episode of the first season, "Paint Your Waggedorn," with fury. The premise reflected the aesthetic of the overall series; in which race is always at the center of the show, yet never presented as a problem too big to solve over the course of one episode. In this telecast, neighbors who live in the same apartment building as Julia and Corey, Mr. and Mrs. Bennett, have their granddaughter visit them. Guest star Susan Olsen, known primarily for her role as Cindy Brady on *The Brady Bunch*, played Pamela Bennett. Because of her grandparents' disapproval, Pamela is only allowed to play house with Corey and his white friend Earl Waggedorn if Earl, not Corey, plays the part of the husband. When Mr. and Mrs. Bennett see that someone has vandalized one of the walls in the apartment lobby with crayon, Julia overhears them complaining that the building is turning into a "tenement" since "those people" had moved in, and that it would not be long before it became a "ghetto." In a later scene, Corey admits to his mother that he thinks Mrs. Bennett does not like him. Julia explains that Mrs. Bennett thinks that she and Corey, and people with darker skin in general, are "different." Corey responds, "Yeah, Mrs. Bennett says we move into nice clean places and make them dirty." Julia explains that it is up to her and Corey to teach Mrs. Bennett and other "prejudiced people" how wrong they are, because "prejudice is what causes all the trouble in this world." Corey gets up to walk away but stops and turns around to ask, "Mama, why do white people put oil on them and lay on the beach to try to get dark like

us?” The audience and Julia laughs, to which she responds, “maybe it’s because they know black is beautiful.” The show ends with Pamela choking on a crayon in an attempt to hide the evidence of her vandalism, revealing her as the culprit of the hallway drawing, leading the Bennetts to apologize to Julia for judging her and Corey.<sup>44</sup> The Connecticut woman who wrote in response declared that she had enjoyed the show until this episode but would never watch *Julia* again. “The black racial propaganda,” she claimed, “was just too much. Everyone I saw the next day was boiling mad. You have lost a large audience here.”<sup>45</sup> In response, Kanter said he was sorry the show’s portrayal of prejudice did not meet her approval but explained that he and the writers felt the message needed to be made public, even if that meant losing a few viewers.<sup>46</sup>

Other viewers similarly took umbrage at being subjected to the show’s anti-racist messages. A Texas woman argued that the show was not very good, due in large part to the preaching being too obvious,<sup>47</sup> while “a housewife” from Gary, Indiana, claimed she was “so sick of being preached at” through plotlines featuring racists and bigots.<sup>48</sup> Viewers who maintained that the show pushed an ideology of racial equality, or even black superiority, often intimated that programs such as *Julia* caused or exacerbated racism, placing the onus on African Americans fighting for civil rights rather than on structural racism or bigoted whites. As one Texan noted, “You are jamming [Carroll] and her race down people’s throats. If we are trying not to be biased and accept all of this, you are ruining the ones that are trying to accept. I believe your show started all of

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<sup>44</sup> “Paint Your Waggedorn,” 26 November 1968.

<sup>45</sup> Mrs. Edward Thomas to HK, 29 November 1968, Box 17, Folder 3, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>46</sup> HK to Mrs. Edward Thomas, 2 January 1969, Box 17, Folder 3, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>47</sup> Mrs. Carmen Reyes to HK, 18 September 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>48</sup> Mrs. Robert H. Clements to HK, 18 September 1969, Box 17, Folder 3, HK Papers, WHSA.

this.”<sup>49</sup> Another viewer who characterized *Julia* as one of many “integration T.V.” shows, ended by stating, “P.S. No wonder there are riots and racial hate.”<sup>50</sup> Responses to *Julia*’s forced integration resembled white southerners’ view of “outside” NAACP organizers during the civil rights movement, whom they blamed for stirring up trouble in local communities. In other words, these viewers felt real African Americans were becoming restless not because of oppression, but because of how media portrayed a false narrative of black superiority over whites.<sup>51</sup>

The repositioning of African Americans as “heroes,” “good guys,” and “stars,” as writers frequently wrote about, called into question the ideological foundation of segregation. Not only did television present white segregationists in a negative light, but as Grant argued, it glamorized African Americans in such a way that distracted white viewers from the harsh realities of integration. Letters to Davis also reveal concern over media’s ability to disseminate positive images of African Americans and in turn make not just black actors but also black radicals famous role models. When newspapers first began to cover the story regarding Davis’ employment at UCLA, for example, they included a synopsis of her curriculum vitae in nearly every report. The *Los Angeles Times* introduced Davis to its readers by asking:

Who is Angela Davis? On first meeting, she is an attractive, tall, bronze-skinned woman of 25 with a natural hair-do. She is direct, soft spoken and self-possessed. She majored in French literature at Brandeis University, where she did undergraduate work, taking her junior year abroad at the Sorbonne in Paris. She was graduated from Brandeis, magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa, in 1965. From 1965 to 1967, she did graduate work in the field of German idealism at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, West Germany. Later in 1967 and in 1968 she continued her studies at

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<sup>49</sup> THE SILENT MAJORITY to HK, ND, Box 18, Folder 6, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>50</sup> Author unknown to HK, 5 July 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>51</sup> Aniko Bodroghkozy also discusses this comparison in her analysis and entertainment television in *Equal Time*.

UC San Diego under famed “New Left” philosopher Herbert Marcuse, becoming a teaching assistant there in the 1968-69 school term.<sup>52</sup>

Media portrayals of Davis as beautiful and intelligent set the stage for white youths to find her appealing, particularly those who took her classes. Many whites, therefore, found journalists’ impartiality when reporting on “a communist” objectionable and considered such positive portrayals threatening to impressionable audiences.

Americans were introduced to Davis for weeks via newspapers, but the first national news report that showed live coverage of Davis speaking about the events aired on 7 October 1969 on NBC’s nightly news. A little under three minutes long, the report began by showing Davis walking amongst a group of black women to her first lecture. All of the women have afros, but Davis stood out among the crowd, as she is the tallest and appeared the youngest in her fashionable mini-dress. Reporter Jack Perkins explains that Davis is about to teach Philosophy 99, even though the Regents decided that students could not take her class for credit. Despite opposition from the Regents and Governor Reagan, Perkins states, the “student body overwhelmingly support Miss Davis,” as did with faculty, who proposed to withhold grades until Davis’ course was accredited. As Perkins explains that “an overflow crowd” attended Davis’ first class, the camera cuts to an image of a handmade poster advertising Davis’ lecture in Royce Hall at 3:00 p.m. with “Support Angela Davis” written prominently at the top. The segment then moves to an interview with Davis. “Before I proceeded to lecture today I asked the students whether or not they wanted me to teach,” she explains. “They indicated that they did and therefore

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<sup>52</sup> Kenneth Reich and William Trombley, “Explosive Academic Freedom Case Confronts UC Regents,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 September 1969, 18.

I lectured.” A reporter follows up, asking Davis if she will continue to teach. She looks over at the reporter (who is never shown on camera), her expression reflecting annoyance with the question. “Will I continue to teach?” she retorts, emphatically answering before the reporter can respond: “yes.”<sup>53</sup>

It appears as if the interview has ended, yet the camera closes in on Davis’ face for a few seconds in silence before relaying commentaries from three students who attended the lecture and who laud Davis for being a “fine speaker” and presenting “extremely interesting and provocative” lecture.<sup>54</sup> The students remain racially indeterminate, as the camera remains on Davis as she sits quietly, looking around seeming unsure what to do next. The segment’s fixation on Davis draws the attention towards her and away from the student voiceovers. Focusing on her expressionless face while excluding images of the students speaking, literally and metaphorically places Davis in the foreground and the students in the background. The camera lingering on Davis not only emphasizes her importance in the story over the students, but it also seems designed to satisfy viewers’ unseemly fascination with her body, which the letters written to her show so clearly.

Following the first broadcast news segment that actually presented Davis to its audience, the amount of hate mail she received increased along with critiques on her appearance, diction, and education in addition to anticommunist remarks.<sup>55</sup> Many

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<sup>53</sup> *NBC Evening News*, 7 October 1969, VTNA.

<sup>54</sup> *NBC Evening News*, 7 October 1969, VTNA.

<sup>55</sup> Newspapers covered the Davis story more extensively than television, but Davis received more letters in response to television news coverage. For example, NBC aired its first report when UC Regents attempted to fire Davis on 30 September 1969, after which she received the largest influx of hate mail. By mid-November, broadcast news coverage had diminished extensively, as had her hate mail, despite the fact that print media continued to release stories regarding the unsuccessful attempt to fire Davis. In mid-March 1970,

Americans wrote to Davis indicating they watched her on television and commented on characteristics that were less visible in newspapers, stating that they laughed at her “buck teeth,”<sup>56</sup> while another referred to her “choppers, or are they fangs?”<sup>57</sup> The most objectionable characteristic about Davis, however, was her Afro, which many viewers equated with uncivilized primitivism. A writer from Glendale, California referred to Davis as an “Ubangi from out of captivity,”<sup>58</sup> while another writer suggested she get a haircut because she looked “like a Zulu—bet you cook “WHITEY” in a pot for your Sunday dinner.”<sup>59</sup> An anonymous person penned a vitriolic note, which stated: “With your arrogant mouth you arouse hostility and start a witch hunt [...] Your teeth need fixed up. Only the more primitive tribes in Africa wear that stone-age ape hair. The fuzzy-wuzzys.”<sup>60</sup> One woman also made the racist association between blackness and primitivism with the annotated newspaper clipping she sent to Davis, on which she drew a ring through her nose with bones in her ears and bottom lip. She placed the image below a statement that read, “you look like a Zulu,” and demanded that Davis, “Go back

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when Davis’ case went to the State Supreme Court, nightly television coverage increased again, as did the correspondence. When the news reports diminished, Davis received very few letters until mid-May, when it was finally announced that the UC Regents had overruled the university’s decision to keep Davis on staff for another year. At this juncture both TV coverage and so Davis’ hate mail increased again. This pattern shows the outsized importance of television over print. Television’s ability to display Davis in a way that print could not, contributed to the extensive criticism she received that focused on her body.

<sup>56</sup> Author unknown to AD, 6 November 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 25, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>57</sup> Author unknown to AD, 17 December 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 25, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>58</sup> Author unknown to AD, 26 October 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 23, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>59</sup> Author unknown to AD, 22 May 1970, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 23, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>60</sup> Author unknown to AD, ND, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 25, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

to the cannibals from whence you came.”<sup>61</sup> Finally, Michael Knight from Newport Beach, California wrote:

Because you are an intelligent and well-educated person it is rather surprising that you want to be known as a Communist...But Miss Davis you are not African. You are an attractive American women [*sic*] even tho [*sic*] the hair-do is Afro you would be lovely with straightened hair but just as white women want deeper tans you are forgiven for the fuzzy wuzzy style which really only goes with African primitive styles of dress.<sup>62</sup>

The above statement indicates that for Knight, Davis’ intelligence is at odds with her politics, and her beauty is at odds with her race. It is clear that he thinks she is too smart and too pretty to be affiliated with radical ideas and expressive styles, and it is for these reasons that Knight perceived Davis to be out of place.

Whereas viewers who wrote to Kanter regarding *Julia* expressed a general frustration with a positive fictional representation of integration, Angela Davis represented to many whites a more tangible example of the dangers of growing Black Power and radicalism. Not only did many people feel unsettled by the amount of media coverage blacks began to receive by the late 1960s, but the way media created celebrities out of black radicals became exceptionally frustrating for some. A man from Hollywood, California, for example, wrote to Davis referring to her as another “instant star” who “doesn’t know the first thing about courtesy, decency, respect.” He went on to ask her why she brought her “nonsense” to California? “We Californians already have a full line-up of kooks, ‘actors,’ orators, debators [*sic*], black-tools-for-the-white-bigots and other non-doers. Now, we’ve got Angela Davis, too, lecturing, talking on TV, messing up a

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<sup>61</sup> Janet Audersou to AD, 6 November 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 25, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>62</sup> Michael L. Knight to AD, ND, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 25, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

fine university, pushing an ideology which kills far more than it enriches. Par for the course, Miss Black Genius!”<sup>63</sup> Although writing from a different perspective than the aforementioned author, A. S. Doc Young, a black writer for the African American paper, the *L.A. Sentinel*, criticized her for her communist affiliation and the media attention it drew. He asked, “Don’t you know that the bigots among white communications people welcome no one so quickly as they welcome you—a Black Communist—and that is why you are now beginning to become ‘famous?’” Young believed that Davis made other black Americans look bad, especially since she claimed that racism lay behind her firing by UCLA. Young found this assertion absurd and was frustrated that Davis’ “fame” could exacerbate racial problems in the US.<sup>64</sup>

Dennis Grant (referenced above) told Kanter that *Julia* gave viewers the wrong impression of the “American Negro.” “Miss Carroll,” he claimed, “has been glamorized by T.V publicity crews as an exotic and ‘beautiful woman.’ A hero to people of all races. She gets all the credit for the program’s success neglecting her white supporting co-stars.”<sup>65</sup> In another letter to Kanter from “THE SILENT MAJORITY,” a viewer complained about the biased representation of not only Julia, but all blacks on television. He claimed “every time you turn on the T.V. it’s one Negro who is the good guy and the smart guy and the cool guy and the poor white is mumbly, dumb, and really ‘out.’” Towards the end of the letter, his critique became more impassioned, as he directed his anger towards the liberal media, specifically in California. He exclaimed:

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<sup>63</sup> A. E. Brown to AD, 13 October 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 27, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>64</sup> A. S. Doc Young to AD, 24 September 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 26, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>65</sup> Dennis Grant to HK, 12 March 1970, Box 22, Folder 10, HK Papers, WHSA.

Why can't you tell it like it is! Tell it! You fake, phony, cheats, tell it! Living in Texas all my life I have always lived around the Negroes and they used to be really fine people until the T.V. set came out and ruined the whole world! Not only have you poor white trash taken advantage of them and ruined their chances now you have ruined the college set. You are good at getting people when they are most vulnerable and changing their entire thinking! This friend whether you like it or not is the way it is down here in poor old Texas. You arrogant, horrible, California trash. This is how millions feel and when you and all of that mess slides into the ocean out there, remember this, we didn't need you to begin with.<sup>66</sup>

For this person, universities and television shared the same disturbing capability: the power to indoctrinate the general public with liberal ideologies. A Californian who wrote to Davis expressed a similar sentiment by claiming that the younger generation thinks they are absolved of having to practice any “self-discipline” or “self-restraint.” “They appear to huddle in a psychological ghetto,” they claimed. “Unfortunately the information media, the entertainment world, and the pseudo intellectuals of the colleges seem to have fostered this.”<sup>67</sup> Writers acknowledged that television and universities had the power to influence the general public with its messages, but what that message should consist of and how it was disseminated was a contested topic.

While the letters written to Davis and *Julia* explicitly address many of the issues Americans had with both women, an underlying critique imbedded in much of the letters is a prevalent discomfort with the powerful reach of television. Correspondents expressed extreme frustration with the industry's ability to make a celebrity out of someone many Americans considered a subversive, while at the same time the small screen presented a sitcom that presented anti-integrationists as bigots, making conservative viewers feel

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<sup>66</sup> THE SILENT MAJORITY to HK, ND, Box 18, Folder 6, Hal Kanter Papers, WHSA.

<sup>67</sup> Author Unknown to AD, ND, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 28, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

underrepresented in the media and their ideals displaced. What garnered the most amount of fear, however, was that television had the ability to normalize these social changes that many were fighting to contest. Writers acknowledged that television and universities had the power to influence the general public with its messages, but the message, they argued, was flawed in that it tried to convince whites to respect blacks and be self-reflective.

### **Representation and Reverse Discrimination**

The language letter writers used to critique Davis and *Julia* also resembled “color-blind” arguments against integration, particularly those used against policies like busing, bilingual education, and housing.<sup>68</sup> Scholars have shown that rather than seeing themselves as racist, white homeowners racialized neighborhood segregation as the result of the free market—their tax paying dollars bought them the benefits of suburban boundaries and a say in education legislation.<sup>69</sup> In their fight to preserve homeowner rights and education, middle-class whites viewed civil rights advancements and integration through a lens of color-blind racism. Thus, many whites viewed the perversion of their neighborhoods and schools as a form of “reverse discrimination,” an unwanted blurring of class and race divisions between urban and suburban neighborhoods.<sup>70</sup> Understanding television as a medium over which many audiences wanted more control, Kanter quipped in an interview, “If we start picking up viewers in

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<sup>68</sup> Matthew F. Delmont, *Why Busing Failed: Race, Media, and the National Resistance to School Desegregation* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016); Kevin M. Kruse, “The Politics of Race and Public Space: Desegregation, Privatization, and the Tax Revolt in Atlanta,” *Journal of Urban History* (2005); Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crispin, ed. *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Natalia Mehlman Petrzela, *Classroom Wars: Language, Sex, and the Making of Modern Political Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>69</sup> Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), 16-18, 130-131.

<sup>70</sup> Matthew D. Lassiter, “The Suburban Origins of ‘Color-Blind’ Conservatism: Middle Class Consciousness in the Charlotte Busing Crisis,” *Journal of Urban History* (2004), 550-551.

one part of town and not the other, maybe we could bus audiences.”<sup>71</sup> In this highly-charged context, television’s portrayal of Davis and *Julia* as intelligent and beautiful put many whites on the defensive, as they considered such positive representations of blacks as disenfranchising whites.

Carroll’s appearance differed from Davis’ as the former wore more modest dresses, often a nurse’s uniform, with her hair in a short, cropped and straightened fashion. Unlike Davis, who received criticisms that focused solely on her, viewers wrote to critique Carroll’s character in relation to her white co-stars, whether that be her neighbor, Marie Waggedorn, her boss, Dr. Chegley (Lloyd Nolan), or even non-recurring characters such as Corey’s teacher or Julia’s landlord. Regardless of whether viewers wrote to Kanter identifying themselves by race or occupation, many expressed feelings of reverse discrimination by arguing that the show tried so hard to portray positive images of black characters, that the supporting non-black characters’ representations suffered as a result. For these writers, this type of representation was unrealistic and fake, a standard, Kanter argued in his responses to viewers, that they did not seem to hold TV shows with all-white casts to. One episode that Kanter received extensive responses about was “Who’s A Freud of Ginger Wolfe?” The episode’s premise featured a concerned Julia who thought Corey’s use of only black crayons in his school projects was a cry for help, only to find out in the end that his color choice was a result of his inability to reach the other colors on the tall shelf. As a part of her investigation into Corey’s dark art, Julia met with his teacher, Miss Wolfe (Cynthia Pepper), who was portrayed as a kooky

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<sup>71</sup> Gowran, B11.

woman, much to the annoyance of Julia.<sup>72</sup> In response to this episode, many teachers wrote to critique the representation of the white teacher.<sup>73</sup> Barbara Toomey, a teacher from Trenton, NJ, for example, claimed that the episode about the “half-baked nitwit” teacher was in bad taste. She went on to state, “In your striving to please Afro-Americans are you degraded to the point of such an extreme caricature as an incompetent white teacher versus a know-it-all-black mother!” Plus, she added, the show “is extremely unrealistic” with Julia living beyond her means on a nurse’s wage. She ended the letter stating, “Your idea must have originally been good but quit climbing on white teachers for a cheap laugh.”<sup>74</sup> Dan Dolan, a teacher from Modesta, CA wrote in regard to the “crude caricature of a primary school teacher.” Dolan stated that “in an age when we are trying to improve communications among racial and ethnic groups it is important not to slight professional groups as well.”<sup>75</sup> Echoing the sentiment that such contrasting representations could have serious ramifications on real social issues, a teacher from Oak Park, Michigan wrote to Kanter as a fan of the show, although she did not like the portrayal of an “unstable, immature” teacher. According to Mrs. Fealk, “a teacher is far too important an influence on a child for you to create so poor an example to be placed

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<sup>72</sup> Script, “Who’s A Freud of Ginger Wolfe?,” aired 22 October 1968, Box 19, Folder 5, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>73</sup> In Kanter’s response letter to Mrs. Marilyn Fealk, Kanter claimed that he received a lot of positive mail in regard to that episode but that she was one of “about 7 or 8” teachers who wrote him contesting the representation. He responded to her concern over the negative portrayal by arguing that the critics of this episode neglected to take away the broader message he intended to send about living in social harmony. (In the episode Miss Wolfe shows Julia the art that Corey’s classmates made while explaining each student’s ethnic background. At first Julia seems bothered by this, but Miss Wolfe explains the “purpose” of her doing so, which is “to instill in my boys and girls that America is a nation of all nations, that we may have different origins but that we can all live together as brothers, in harmony.”) Kanter, however, thanks Mrs. Fealk for her letter and closes by stating that “we are all trying—just as I’m sure you are, in your dedicated profession.” HK to Mrs. Marilyn Fealk, 7 November 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>74</sup> Barbara Toomey to HK, ND, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>75</sup> Dan Dolan to HK, 24 October 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

before the country.”<sup>76</sup> Mrs. Fealk had good intentions with her argument that television’s power to impact the way viewers perceived certain groups of people was so influential that even silly portrayals could be harmful. The irony about all of these critiques from teachers, however, is that the importance of representation becomes most apparent when white characters are presented next to a superior black foil. In a sense, *Julia* made white viewers feel the way many black viewers probably felt for decades; however, their inability to make this connection resulted in angered outrage rather than empathic understanding.

In addition to teachers, many Jewish viewers wrote to also complain about the portrayal of Julia’s Jewish landlord, Mr. Brybecheck (Benny Rubin). Audiences claimed that *Julia* stereotyped Jews because of Mr. Brybecheck’s thick accent, which seemed unfair since Kanter had gone to such lengths to portray the black characters with “dignity.” “Julia does not speak in a black dialect, nor is she a domestic servant;” wrote one viewer from Maryville, Missouri, “why, then, should she have a Jewish landlord who speaks with such a strong accent?”<sup>77</sup> In a letter from Van Nuys, California, a self-proclaimed Jewish teen and supporter of the civil rights movement wrote to Kanter: “As for those hopelessly dense, but loveable Jews—what would those people do without their guiding light, psychiatrist, and nurse, Julia? Do I detect a hint of anti-Semitism on your part? [...] Tell it like it is or shut up!”<sup>78</sup> Complaints about Julia’s superiority compared to even the most marginal characters surfaced repeatedly in the letters to Kanter. Even a short scene involving a wig shop owner prompted a Connecticut man to complain that it

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<sup>76</sup> Mrs. Marilyn Fealk to HK, 23 October 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>77</sup> Stuard Lewis to HK, March 18, 1969, Box 17, Folder 3, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>78</sup> Dean Draznin to HK, 1 April 1969, Box 17, Folder 3, HK Papers, WHSA.

was “ironic” that *Julia* “presented discrimination” in its representation of men in the hair industry as “effeminate.”<sup>79</sup> Responding to a different episode in which Julia remarks on surfers having long, messy hair, a surfer from Daytona, Florida, took umbrage. Although the man does not explicitly identify himself as white, he distinguished other law-abiding surfers from blacks, whom he implied were unruly: “But surfers are intelligent and aware persons. You won’t find them (us) at riots or hanging around main street after school. In closing, I feel that remarks such as that made on ‘Julia’ are extremely unnecessary and can only hurt a clean, healthy, and natural sport...remarks such as that do not go unnoticed and [...] surfers have feelings and rights like any other humans.”<sup>80</sup> Clearly annoyed, Kanter responded, “How refreshing to have such an articulate spokesman for yet another minority group. How comforting to know that self-appointed censors are in every segment of society!”<sup>81</sup>

Whereas the aforementioned correspondents focused more on critiquing the representation of white characters, viewers tended to criticize Carroll’s appearance specifically when they compared her to Julia’s white neighbor, Mrs. Waggedorn. One woman from Fort Worth, Texas, wrote Kanter to complain that although “Diahann is such a pretty girl,” she “recognize[s] the black-slant-advantage.” The writer explained: “Julia always looking perfectly groomed, at all times, while Mrs. Waggedorn has a stupid name and is usually at a disadvantage in some way. Please do not go overboard on this idea!”<sup>82</sup> Laura Foley from Massachusetts similarly wrote to Kanter arguing:

If Diahann Carroll were to play the roll [*sic*] of the neighboring housewife,

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<sup>79</sup> Hal Levi to HK, 1 February 1969, Box 17, Folder 3, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>80</sup> Ronnie Rannie to HK, 1 September 1968, Box 22, Folder 10, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>81</sup> HK to Ronnie Rannie, 28 September 1968, Box 22, Folder 10, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>82</sup> Mrs. Carole Lee to HK, 5 May 1969, Box 18, Folder 6, HK Papers, WHSA.

and vice verser [*sic*], the black people of this country would be screaming ‘Prejudice.’ Why must Julia be pictured so glamorously dressed, living in such a luxurious apartment, dining off the finest china while her white neighbor is made to appear sloppy, has rollers in her hair, clothespins holding up the sleeves of her robe, while she is doing the worse job of washing dishes I have ever seen. My seven year old daughter could do a better job of washing dishes.

If your show is to improve the image of the negro woman, great! But—please don’t accomplish this at the expense of the white housewife. [...] Your new show will never further the cause of uniting whites and blacks if you up grade one by downgrading the other.<sup>83</sup>

Foley’s response echoed a common sentiment in many of the letters—that Kanter intended to mitigate race relations with *Julia*. Kanter began creating *Julia*’s concept in the summer of 1967, but the timeliness of its premiere—four months after King’s assassination and the riots that followed—provided a context that altered the way viewers watched the show.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, responses such as these indicate that viewers thought *Julia* was meant to provide lighthearted entertainment for black audiences, while at the same time educating white audiences. This assumption explains why many whites defensively wrote about being “preached” to. These white viewers seemed open to the idea of a sitcom that presented a black protagonist in a favorable light but portraying a black woman as smarter and beautiful than a white woman is what made the show inaccurate and objectionable.

Many viewers also wrote to Kanter complaining that, in addition to beauty, the show’s demonstration of Julia’s intelligence also came at the expense of her white co-star. A Philadelphia woman wrote, for example, that she would no longer allow her four-

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<sup>83</sup> Mrs. Laura Foley to HK, 24 September 1969, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>84</sup> HK to Mort Werner, 31 August 1967, Box 17, Folder 1, HK Papers, WHSA.

year-old daughter to watch the show, because *Julia* kept “portraying the white mother to be some kind of stupid idiot—the colored boy and mother are as sharp as tacks which is fine but why must the other family be portrayed as being dumb, dumb, dumb.”<sup>85</sup> Another Pennsylvania “white, suburban mother” who considered herself “unprejudiced” echoed this sentiment, stating that Marie Waggedorn consistently acted like a “dumb bunny,” while *Julia* was portrayed as a “candidate for ‘Mother of the Year.’”<sup>86</sup> A New York man also wrote to *TV Guide* complaining, “As much as I like the new show *Julia* I am always irritated by the way [...] *Julia*’s white neighbor is made to look like an idiot. It might be a good idea to let her behave as if she possesses average intelligence.”<sup>87</sup> Finally, one Ohio woman stated that she, too, would no longer allow her four-year-old son to watch the sitcom, because she felt it elevated *Julia* by demeaning Mrs. Waggedorn claiming:

Why must you make the white woman in this show look so stupid. You can’t cram something like this down someone’s throat. Why couldn’t you show Miss Carroll and a white girl standing together equally—fighting for each other. Where there’s unity, there is strength. Miss Carroll is a fine example of the negro race. She could be such a help; we need people like her; she is pretty, intelligent, strong-willed, but you are turning people against her. I stand by my negro friends—I am no better; they are no better than I. But you don’t need to win me over. And you will not win the others over by cramming. You are only causing more bitterness. We don’t need that.<sup>88</sup>

*Julia* undermined how many audiences perceived black families, and also dismantled gender norms and challenged previous televisual representations of white womanhood and motherhood. Images presented of white families in sitcoms decades prior to *Julia* clashed with the appearance of the black middle-class single mother that Carroll

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<sup>85</sup> Mrs. Marie Schlattman to HK, 10 October 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>86</sup> Mrs. Joan Welsh to HK, 21 October 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>87</sup> Ronald Held, “Letters to the Editor,” *TV Guide*, 9 November 1968, A-4.

<sup>88</sup> Mrs. Loveridge to HK, 28 March 1969, Box 17, Folder 3, HK Papers, WHSA.

presented. Furthermore, *Julia* obfuscated how white Americans viewed black motherhood and families in general. These responses suggest that white viewers perceived motherhood and housewifery as sacred roles specific to white womanhood that could not be properly upheld by black women, which is why *Julia* did not “accurately” portray a black family or a white family according to these viewers. *Julia*’s portrayal of black femininity and middle-class lifestyle presented a non-traditional image of American middle-class families that unsettled white viewers.

In contrast to Carroll, news reports never portrayed Davis juxtaposed to white colleagues, or even students for that matter, despite the news’ emphasis that much of the concern the Regents had was whether Davis would push a communist ideology in her classes. Although most viewers did not deny that Julia was pretty or smart, they did, attempt to undermine Julia’s beauty and intelligence through their critiques that a black woman being portrayed as superior to her white costars was “unrealistic.” Conversely, those who wrote to Davis also expressed antipathy towards her education and her legitimacy as an intelligent black professor. For example, in a letter addressed to “Black Militant,” one writer questioned the merit of all educated blacks by stating, “You might have been employed at the university, but that does not signify high intelligence! Negroes have been accepted on a lower grade point level in our colleges and universities, so that tells much about them, doesn’t it?”<sup>89</sup>

Despite the emphasis on Davis’ education in the press, writers continued to undermine her intelligence after hearing her speak on television by calling her stupid,

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<sup>89</sup> Author unknown to AD, 12 October 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 23, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

dumb, or claiming that obtaining a degree in Philosophy is easy. For example, an anonymous author from Oakland wrote, “You are a dirty miserable wretched slob! Philosophy major? Anyone can be a PH.D [*sic*] in philosophy—it’s only slop anyway...You make me hate and despise every nigger I see.”<sup>90</sup> Kenneth Ford, physics professor from UC Irvine, wrote to Davis and the *Los Angeles Times* stating that “Racism can be found at many points in American society, but not in the hiring and firing policies of the University of California. In fact, these policies are anti-racist. As Miss Davis surely knows, in seeking an academic post, it is a distinct advantage, not disadvantage, to have a black skin.”<sup>91</sup> Although not all of the letters explicitly link their denial of Davis’ education to her race, it is implied that these presumably white writers believed that Davis could not possibly be so well educated.

In order to support their critiques of Davis’ lack of education, many writers commented on the way Davis spoke on television. One woman wrote to Davis claiming, “One can feel nothing but contempt and disgust when one looks at the likes of you or listens to the garbage that you spout to our young! Your grammar and diction also leave much to be desired!”<sup>92</sup> Someone from Los Angeles suggested Davis see a speech therapist and “either blow the snot out of your nose or swallow your spit. Your diction is lousy.”<sup>93</sup> While a man from Palm Desert, California also penned to critique Davis: “In a discussion with reporters a few days ago of a few minutes, you said ‘you know’ five or

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<sup>90</sup> Author unknown to AD, 27 October 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 25, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>91</sup> Kenneth W. Ford to AD, 25 September 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 23, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>92</sup> Janet Anderson to AD, 6 November 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 25, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>93</sup> Author unknown to AD, 22 May 1970, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 24, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

six times. This expression is used frequently on TV by dissenters with the establishment and represents exactly nothing. You had better improve or expand your vocabulary or the class will go to sleep on you.”<sup>94</sup> Such statements, many of whom from California, suggest that they did not think Davis belonged at UCLA; which is further evidenced in their references to her academic efficacy.

Audiences, for the most part, did not comment on Carroll’s speech; however, similar to the type of hate mail Davis received, many viewers directed excessive anger towards six-year-old Marc Copage who played Julia’s son, Corey. Gary Heston from Richmond Virginia asked Kanter to “please take your smart-ass nigger off the air.” He went on to continue, “It not only is an insult to an eight-year-old’s mentality but is untrue. Any nigger can get a job over a better qualified white person. And take that 6 year old ape to a speech therapist.”<sup>95</sup> Another viewer wrote complaining of Copage’s lisp and made the shocking suggestion to kill off Corey by having him run out into the street and get hit by a truck, which would eventually lead Julia to adopt a less annoying child.<sup>96</sup> Expressing similar displeasure, a Chicago family wrote asking Kanter, “Can’t you find a 6 year old black boy whose adenoids do not affect speech and annoy like those of Cory [sic] on the *Julia* show?”

Even when viewers did not comment on Corey’s speech, many wrote to vent their general dislike for the boy. One person wrote expressing their displeasure in the show, claiming that “Diahann Carroll is no Lucille Ball” and Copage is not even cute, but

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<sup>94</sup> Author unknown to AD, 17 October 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 24, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>95</sup> Gery Heston to HK, 24 September 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>96</sup> Miss Strong to HK, 12 April 1969, Box 18, Folder 6, HK Papers, WHSA.

instead he is “downright unbearable.” Not only is the show insipid, they claimed, but Kanter could have done better with Corey’s role by hiring a midget.<sup>97</sup> Cedric Kehoe from Hollywood argued that *Julia* was ruined by “casting a perfectly horrible little boy.” Kehoe stated that he and his friends refused to watch any more episodes unless Kanter recast Corey because he doesn’t want to “frow-up every Tuesday night.”<sup>98</sup> (Kehoe, however, did not follow through on his threat, as he again wrote to Kanter to complain about the show three months later.) A New York woman penned that Kanter owed her, and his audience, more than an apology because “his conception of an appealing, adorable, six year old named Corey is pathetic, he’s just too, too much.”<sup>99</sup> Kanter replied, thanking the woman for her “refreshing burst of hatred,” and added that he was glad his show “provokes people to thought, even if they do disagree with what we offer as violently as you do.”<sup>100</sup> Criticisms of Copage, Davis, and Carroll reflect a sense of denial regarding each person’s positions in relation to the middle class family, university, or even television.

On the one hand, viewers wrote to Kanter claiming that the show would “brainwash” viewers with its positive representation of integration and inaccurate representation of black families. On the other, people argued that not only could Davis indoctrinate young students with her teachings at UCLA, but many felt that television’s glamorization of this young black radical woman would influence more youth to agree with Davis’ politics rather than challenge them.

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<sup>97</sup> V. Reid to HK, 19 September 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>98</sup> Cedric Kehoe to HK, 30 September 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>99</sup> Elizabeth H. MacEvitt to HK, 1 October 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>100</sup> HK to Elizabeth H. MacEvitt, 14 October 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

Davis represented a threat to democracy because of her affiliation with communism and ability to stand behind her “bully pulpit” and influence young susceptible white minds with her youth and beauty, an impression fueled largely by print journalism. In a newspaper clipping included in a letter to Davis, for instance, the article opened with the statement: “The miniskirted black militant fired by University of California regents for being a communist said yesterday she will bring her political opinions into the classroom...” The article also indicated that 1,250 students attended her fist lecture, most of them white, and applauded twice when Davis criticized the UC Regents.<sup>101</sup> The *Chicago Tribune* reported that over 1,000 students showed up for “the miniskirted Miss Davis,”<sup>102</sup> while *The Washington Post* explained in more detail that only 169 students registered for Davis’ “Recurrent Philosophical Themes in Black Literature” class, however, the lecture had to be relocated to accommodate the 1,900 students who attended and gave her a standing ovation. *The Post* referred to Davis as “a comely young communist” who wore a “bright pink miniskirt and African natural hairdo” for her first class at UCLA.<sup>103</sup> Whereas the *New York Times* referred to Davis as the “slender 25-year-old” teacher and increased the estimated student body to over 2,000.<sup>104</sup>

The gendered reporting on Davis that emphasized her youth and beauty delegitimized her credentials. In addition, amplifying the number of white students who

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<sup>101</sup> Unknown author to AD, ND, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 26, container 39, section XI, MCLI; the newspaper clipping only included the title, “Teacher Won’t Curtail Red Views,” with the title and date cut out.

<sup>102</sup> “1,000 Hear Red Prof’s Class in UCLA Hall: Communist Instructor Hits Noncredit Rule,” *Chicago Tribune*, 7 October 1969, A8.

<sup>103</sup> Donald H. Harrison, “1,900 Hear Talk by UCLA Red,” *The Washington Post*, 7 October 1969, A3.

<sup>104</sup> Steven V. Roberts, “UCLA Students Are Urged to Resist Regents: Ousted Instructor Lectures to an Overflow Crowd,” *New York Times*, 7 October 1969, 30.

attended her first lecture also contributed to the anxieties many letter writers expressed regarding her ability to influence impressionable white youth. Kathy Merrick from Columbia, Maryland, expressed such concern after talking on the phone with her sister, who took one of Davis' classes at UCLA. Kathy was infuriated that the only thing her sister wanted to talk about was ““imperialistic, capitalistic money-grabbers”” who ““exploit the working class,”” while lauding the ““beauty of a socialist form of government with its equal redistribution of wealth.”” Kathy claimed her sister spoke ““about the importance of self-sacrifices and of devoting one’s life to helping the poor and oppressed escape their chains. She has been quoting Karl Marx and Angela Davis in every other sentence. I just wanted to tell you that you have done a successful job of brainwashing my sister.””<sup>105</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s, California social conservatives fought intensely to claim the secondary public-school system as their own when fighting against liberal programs that emphasized ““multiculturalism”” and bilingual education.<sup>106</sup> The same can be said about their sense of ownership over the University of California. In letters to Davis and members of the UC Regents, white Californians declared that as tax payers, they had a say over who the universities employed. Their perceived ownership of the public institution hinged on the racist assumption that the type of people they most vehemently opposed—in this case Angela Davis—did not pay taxes. An example is a letter written by a woman, Mrs. Roberts, who states, ““You should not be allowed to teach in our tax supported schools. The taxpayers do not want you.””<sup>107</sup> An anonymous writer also

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<sup>105</sup> Kathy Merrick to AD, 13 May 1970, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 26, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>106</sup> Mehlman Petrzela, *Classroom Wars*, 11.

<sup>107</sup> Mrs. Roberts to AD, 21 October 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 27, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

emphasized that they wanted “to convey to you that we citizen taxpayers will not tolerate our money being used to pay teachers to teach the overthrow of America. Further, we shall make sure laws are passed by the legislature to make sure the administrators have full control of the teaching at our college.”<sup>108</sup> Adding salt to the wound, those who wrote to Davis believed that they were paying to have students indoctrinated. One letter, for example, by a San Diego man remarked, “Your comments re. oppressed people touches me deeply—as a taxpayer, and one forced to pay your salary. I feel considerably oppressed.”<sup>109</sup> A Florida woman berated the Left on behalf of the silent majority arguing:

Myself and other members of the silent majority are fed up to more than the chin area with people such as you. [...] Although you so called "Liberals" feel you have the upper hand now you are out-numbered and with God's help your position will topple. To say that you (Miss Davis) have the right to teach college students to over-throw our government is to say that you have a right to train traitors and revolutionaries at public expense. This means we, the tax payers, are financing the destruction of our own free institutions and government.<sup>110</sup>

Fearful that Davis could use her platform and charisma to sway vulnerable youth, these letter writers were all the more resentful that it was taxpayer dollars that allowed her to wield such influence.

Correspondents contested Davis’ position as an assistant professor and *Julia*’s depiction of a respectable family by arguing that both representations did not accurately present real African Americans. Writers often combated media portrayals of both women with sweeping generalizations about what black people “are really like,” often relying on

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<sup>108</sup> Author unknown to AD, 12 October 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 27, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>109</sup> Ken Steus to AD, 23 September 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 26, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>110</sup> Emma Nasser to AD, 2 February 1970, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 26, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

unfounded data. For example, a Pennsylvania man wrote to Davis that “Recorded statistics show that most all black minorit[ies] have been indoctrinated by the Communistic ideology...They are no consequence to themselves and certainly to any and all imbued with mediocre intelligence.”<sup>111</sup> An unknown author attempted to undermine Davis’ intelligence by telling her she belonged in kindergarten. They claimed “90% of the blacks are getting free education. 79% not married. 99% UnAmerican.” They ended the letter stating Davis and Donald Kalish were “making millions of enemies all across the country.”<sup>112</sup> A Nebraskan writer shared a similar response. Identifying themselves only as “a militant taxpayer,” they questioned why Davis should be allowed to teach at UCLA and earn money in the U.S despite her criticism of capitalism. “As soon as the high and mighty black man learns,” they stated, “he’s not above God and the law the better. Why should people have 12, 14, 16 kids if they can’t support them—and let them roam the streets and rape, steal, burn, rob, etc. Better give the brood souse the ‘pill’ and they’ll quit having so many kids for others to support.” They ended the letter stating, “I live on \$120 per month because that’s all the brains I have. I’m not burning, stealing, etc., etc.”<sup>113</sup> Comparably, a Beverly Hills woman declared Davis “stupid” for believing that black people would have more equality under communism. She proclaimed: “You don’t want an education, and you don’t want anyone else to get an education. So you picket, and you stir up trouble, cause chaos and confusion, half of you are filled with drugs, and dope, and whiskey, and your children are imbeciles. They steal, and take a man’s

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<sup>111</sup> Lloyd E. Abbey to AD, 15 October 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 27, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>112</sup> Author unknown to AD, ND, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 25, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>113</sup> Author unknown to AD, 13 December 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 25, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

automobile, because they are too lazy to work and buy one.”<sup>114</sup> Remarks such as these not only perpetuate the stereotype of African Americans as undeserving poor who take advantage of the welfare-state, but they also make assumptions that as a black woman, Davis did not truly merit her position at UCLA.

Fan mail written to Kanter paralleled some of the attitudes expressed to Davis in regard to the accuracy of black representation. As one Los Angeles man noted in his missive, Kanter wrongly portrayed Julia’s deceased husband, a character who is only referenced, never shown on screen. “First Julia is supposed to be a war widow,” the man stated before trying to correct the “error.”

Her husband died in Vietnam as a fighter pilot. The fact of the matter is that there are almost NO Negro fighter pilots in either the Air Force or Naval Air Units. This is a fact that you should check into, perhaps they can’t pass the mental tests, no it isn’t bias! Black pilots are not even 1/10 of 1 percent of the Air Force, while blacks are 11% of the population and have the same or better than opportunities than the white working man does! Somehow you’ve made Julia a real heroine!

The man went on to insist that there was nothing wrong with not wanting to have black neighbors. “Wherever they go,” he claimed, “they bring filth, fear and make neighborhoods unsafe. I want to stick up for my race is that to you being a ‘racist.’” He alleged that the same was true of public schools: “the better schools in L.A. have the lowest Negro enrollment and the worst schools have the highest. The black man will not improve himself by integrating himself into white society, all he does is frustrate white students and pulls their standards down. The Negroes are finally getting revenge against whites.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Mrs. Evelyn Shawler to AD, 11 October 1969, BANC MSS 99/281, folder 25, container 39, section XI, MCLI.

<sup>115</sup> Dennis Grant to HK, 12 March 1970, Box 22, Folder 10, HK Papers, WHSA.

Placing a black family, and woman in particular, as the lead role of a sitcom put many whites on the defensive who claimed that the show portrayed Julia and Corey as unrealistically perfect, even though the show resembled prevailing comedies that featured the perfect white housewife and family. As one writer noted in a letter to Kanter, their viewpoint of *Julia* was shared among their social circles, which included various “clubs, bridge, charity, social” groups, etc. When referring to Julia’s relationship with her white boss, they remarked: “First of all Dr. Chegley is portrayed as the most stupid M.D. in the world. He can’t think without—Julia! She’s so ‘kind’ and so ‘sensible,’ what did everybody in the community do without her? Is she some supreme being? How did everyone survive without her? Poor old dumb Dr. Chegley.” The writer continued to critique the show’s depiction of Julia’s stellar character, complaining, “Everyone on the show is stupid and hateful and biased and everything else that is wrong until Julia straightens everyone out. Boy wish I knew one person (BLACK or WHITE) that was as perfect as she is.”<sup>116</sup> Likewise, a Mississippi woman wrote in a short note, “I was truly sick after watching the premiere of Julia. I found it disgraceful to the white human race. No boy is as perfect and polite as hers is made to be.”<sup>117</sup>

Viewers’ irritation over what they regarded as a misrepresentation of black families reflects the anxieties prevalent regarding the message television was feeding audiences. As is also the case with responses to Davis, the portrayal of attractive, poised, and educated black women lay outside the norm of what black people were really like, according to those who wrote in. The racist stereotypes projected expressed a fear that

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<sup>116</sup> THE SILENT MAJORITY to HK, ND, Box 18, Folder 6, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>117</sup> Susan Moss to HK, 28 September 1968, Box18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

television could falsely convince viewers of the harmonious possibilities of integration, specifically with *Julia*. Therefore, these authors' concerns went beyond just setting the record straight, but to make a case as to what integration would really entail at the expense of white neighborhoods and overall segregated lives.

### **Sponsoring Race**

Frustration with the increase of black representation extended beyond just entertainment television and the news, but also to commercials featuring black actors, which shifted in large part due to the trend in television sitcoms and dramas that featured leading black characters. For example, on May 23, 1968, Hal Kanter wrote to the General Foods Corporation, a major sponsor for *Julia*, asking the company to integrate more black actors into their commercials in order to correlate with NBC's new sitcom. In the letter Kanter pleads,

...I ask you to consider our attitude toward the show: it's entertainment, designed to attract the largest possible audience and not slanted to any specific group. Therefore, I hope the sponsors will think of it in the same way and approach the commercials the same as they would for Andy Griffith, Gomer Pyle and other shows. We have already spoken of the integration of cast in the commercials, of course, and I'm sure your policy is to continue that—with, perhaps, a Negro as the 'star' of some of them. While I don't want to invade your area, I did want you to know my attitude in this regard...<sup>118</sup>

Not only did General Foods incorporate more African Americans into their commercials in 1968, but the company also conducted extensive research about diets in low income areas with the objective to teach about good nutrition in schools and colleges. As part of this project, General Foods discovered through their research that the character of Corey

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<sup>118</sup> HK to General Foods Corporation, care of Ridge Blackwell, 23 May 1968, Box 17, Folder 5, HK Papers, WHSA.

influenced children from low income areas, in particular what they wanted to eat for breakfast. Because of these findings, Kanter requested that Carroll cook breakfast for Copage on the set of *Julia* while being interviewed so as to educate children on nutrition and advertise General Foods products, while simultaneously explaining in the interview the goals of the show and how she thinks it can affect the lives of ordinary people.<sup>119</sup>

The changing faces of television characters, in both sitcoms and advertising, did not go unnoticed by viewers. One Ohio correspondent wrote that they would “not burn up our T.V. tube on such so-called entertainment. Even the T.V. commercials have become the same way. How monotonous can you ‘the T.V. producers’ get??<sup>120</sup> For many correspondents, the televisual world that had existed for the past fifteen years was no longer inhabited by mostly white families. Angst regarding this diminished overrepresentation of whiteness on television is reflected in the fan mail by viewers who considered blacks on television to infringe on their personal and private space. Although viewers wrote to networks to air their grievances, many felt they had limited control over the medium’s content.

In addition to letter writing, viewers attempted to express discontent with their wallets by boycotting sponsored products. A housewife from Gary, Indiana wrote to Kanter about the level of “distaste” displayed in *Julia* for “preaching” to viewers about racism and bigotry. She goes on to state, “I am very tired of this sort of thing. TV is my one form of inexpensive entertainment and you better believe programs such as this segment of ‘Julia’ go off. And, at the same time I will keep my eye out for products

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<sup>119</sup> HK to Dairy Council of California, care of Lindsay Durand, 30 October 1968, Box 17, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>120</sup> Author unknown to HK, 5 July 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

produced by Mattell, Inc., General Foods, and Menley and James the sponsors of this program. They will not come into my home when I have knowledge of it.”<sup>121</sup>

Comparably, a Virginia man stated, “I hope my hand falls off before I buy any G.F. products.”<sup>122</sup> Boycotting television sponsors became a way for viewers to feel a sense of control over television. Although they owned the physical television set itself, they could not necessarily control the messages that came out of the small screen, especially when so many networks and sponsors seemed to share the same integrationist message. As these letters reflect, many conservative whites perceived the popularity of shows such as *Julia*, and media’s spotlight on radicals such as Davis, as part of a larger liberal infringement on their personal rights and space.

The year 1968 marks a distinct turn in television. On the surface, it appears as if there could have been a positive correlation between the effects of the civil rights movement on the increase of Black representation, particularly with television’s first interracial kiss on *Star Trek*. However, an examination of mail written to Davis and *Julia* illustrates the extent to which television’s integration project faced formidable resistance. The extensive hate mail written to both women provides insight into the anxieties that were prevalent among many whites who considered Davis and Carroll to be out of “place.” The fury among whites was steeped in preconceived racist stereotypes that Davis’ and *Julia*’s class and race dismantled. That is to say, when it came to portrayals of Black Americans on television, the representation needed to be accurate—or “tell it like

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<sup>121</sup> Mrs. Robert H. Clements to HK, 18 September 1969, Box 17, Folder 3, HK Papers, WHSA.

<sup>122</sup> Gary Heston to HK, 24 September 1968, Box 18, Folder 7, HK Papers, WHSA.

is,” as many writers demanded. And for these viewers, accuracy meant portraying blacks as lower-class, uneducated, inferiors to whites.

Geographer Katherine McKittrick argues that black subjectivity “is often aligned with spatial processes and apparently fall back on seemingly predetermined stabilities, such as boundaries, color-lines, ‘proper’ places...” The social construction of boundaries normalizes spatial “difference” by creating race, sex, and economic hierarchies. Therefore the naturalization of identity and place determines where non-dominant groups “naturally” belong.<sup>123</sup> A large audience considered representations of Davis and the cast of *Julia* to be out of “place” because media portrayed both women as middle-class, beautiful, and intelligent, which was a departure from previous images of decades past that limited black women’s roles to uneducated domestics.<sup>124</sup> According to viewers, Julia was often portrayed as this “perfect” person who solved all of her white counterpart’s problems. Davis, however, was not portrayed in contrast to white colleagues, but broadcast and print news continuously referred to her extensive education before diving into their story. It became apparent that many whites felt insecure regarding each woman’s beauty and intelligence and felt it necessary to undermine Davis and Carroll in an attempt to argue that neither deserved to be in the limelight.

The rapid integration of African Americans on television in the late 1960s garnered myriad responses from viewers, however, the quality of black representation is what many white letter writers contested most. Media not only portrayed Carroll as more

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<sup>123</sup> Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xi-xv.

<sup>124</sup> Melissa V. Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011) and Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

glamorous than her white costars, but newspaper and newscasts also emphasized Davis' education and attractive appearance in reports. On the one hand, *Julia* viewers claimed they appreciated a show that could teach audiences about bigotry but expressed irritation over the message being conveyed at the expense of Carroll's white costars. Many viewers could not see that their discomfort with Julia being prettier or smarter than her white neighbor was wrapped up in their expectations of a racialized power structure that *Julia* disrupted. Instead, they argued for a more equal portrayal of black and white women. Davis, on the other hand, became the target of fierce criticism due to her affiliation with the communist party. But peppered throughout the hate mail she received, however, were numerous letters that attempted to undermine her intelligence, discredit her education, and critique her appearance. This fixation on proving that Davis was not nearly as smart or as pretty as news sources made her out to be suggests that much of the discomfort these writers felt was steeped in Davis being a black woman teaching impressionable white youth at an elite public institution. The glamorization of both women put many whites on the defensive who attempted to undermine media's portrayal of their beauty and intelligence.

At first glance, the fictitious Julia, and even Diahann Carroll herself, could not seem any more different from someone like Davis. Historian William Van Deburg has even noted that part of what made *Julia* so objectionable was that Carroll "had far more in common with Doris Day than with Angela Davis."<sup>125</sup> Despite these seemingly contrasting representations of Black women, a large audience still viewed the presence of

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<sup>125</sup> William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 251.

Davis and Carroll on the small screen as part of a larger Black invasion on their living rooms. What made matters worse, according to some viewers, was that this type of integration could no longer be controlled with a turn of the dial, because regardless of what TV station they watched, the representation of black people seemed to overshadow the representation of whites. Despite the different types of criticism each woman received, correspondents perceived Davis' and *Julia*'s fame as one of the damaging effects of integration.

## Chapter 4

### “Think Real, Think Poverty, And Think Fun”: From Problem Solving to Problem Consciousness

“As long as the country is where it’s at, the story-lines just keep coming.”  
-Allan Manings<sup>1</sup>

“...[*All in the Family*] cannot deal as forthrightly with the political and economic underpinnings of society as can ‘Good Times.’ To do so in ‘Family’ would be tantamount to questioning the economic system itself, a penetration that no sit-com script writer will touch. Perhaps another way of looking at this is to say that it’s easier in the popular mind to deal with questions of racism and the subjugation of Blacks than it is to deal with and understand what creates a class system. In short, what keeps Blacks down is more obvious tha[n] what keeps poor or white working class people down.”

-Letter to Allan Manings from Sociologist David M. Willems<sup>2</sup>

On 9 June, 1968 an Indiana pharmacist wrote a ten-page letter to NBC news anchor David Brinkley about the despair he felt following the assassination of Robert Kennedy. “I still cannot realize,” the man wrote, “that Robert Kennedy who was so much alive as late as last Tuesday (I watched him making the victory speech on TV) is now gone.” Feeling as if he lost his own brother, he decided to write a public persona about his reaction to the senator’s death and his uncertainty about the upcoming presidential election and America’s future more broadly. “I did not want to write to a politician,” he told Brinkley, “So I decided to write to you.” The pharmacist, Michael Kor, divulged his history as a Kennedy supporter beginning with John, and his recent interest in Bobby’s “philosophies regarding peace in Vietnam, the plight of the underprivileged and the injustices of our society.” He especially liked how the younger Kennedy did not succeed by attacking his opponent, but instead “took his case to the people” in places like Indiana.

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<sup>1</sup> Louie Robinson, “Bad Times on the ‘Good Times’ Set,” *Ebony*, September, 1975, 42.

<sup>2</sup> AM to David M. Willems, 22 March 1974, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

“He discussed the issues; he told it like it is and he won.” Kor’s dilemma, he told Brinkley, was that he thought Eugene McCarthy ran a “dirty” campaign and Vice President Humphrey represented the status quo, while voting for a republican was not an option. “My only choice [...] was Robert Kennedy and they killed him.” Expressing relief to have voiced his concerns, Kor thanked Brinkley for taking the time to read his lengthy missive and explained, “I felt that I just had to write to someone.”<sup>3</sup>

Coming two months after Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination and the ensuing riots, as well as the violence that erupted at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago that August—events that received extensive television coverage—the anxiety and uncertainty that Kor expressed were widely shared.<sup>4</sup> Many Americans considered the close of the 1960s a dismal time in which the social revolutions and political fervor that marked the decade began to spiral out of control. As distrust in government escalated, the public turned towards television personalities in greater numbers to air their grievances in search of solace and guidance. Whereas television audiences in the first half of the decade expected the medium to inform the public about how to address social and political issues, by the end of the 1960s viewers looked toward news and entertainment figures to mediate the tensions that penetrated American communities. Television had the ability to incite riots or mitigate them, and many viewers wrote to express how they thought the latter could be achieved.<sup>5</sup> In large part because of the television industry’s

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Kor to David Brinkley, 9 June 1968, Box 8, Folder 4, David Brinkley Papers, WHSA.

<sup>4</sup> *TV Guide* discussed television’s coverage of King’s assassination and the events that transpired in cities across the U.S in Richard K. Doan, “TV Mirrors Nation’s Upheaval,” *TV Guide*, 20 April 1968, A-1.

<sup>5</sup> Writing about the emergence of black public affairs programs during the Black Power era, Devorah Heitner states that the local WLS-Chicago television station decided to initiate a black television program, *For Blacks Only*, which debuted immediately following Dr. King’s funeral broadcast. One of the goals with airing this program during such a timely manner, however, was “to induce African Americans to stay in

extensive efforts to establish itself as a reputable medium—both in terms of its real-time news reporting and realistic entertainment programming—viewers often considered certain industry people representatives of the public. Therefore, audience members placed a great deal of responsibility on producers to present accurate information for fans to learn from, and in turn, get a better understanding of the turbulent decade during which they lived.

Many Americans felt a sense of anxiety during the 1970s, particularly within the context of stagflation, Watergate, the 1973 Oil Embargo, and the fall of Saigon in 1975 contributing to what President Carter referred to as “a crisis of confidence.” Whereas many Americans described their future in a language of limits and failure, for others the decade represented a period of opportunity and experimentation. Social movements of the previous two decades fought to break down many of the legal barriers that maintained second-class citizenship for women and people of color, ultimately contributing to the reconfiguration of American identity.<sup>6</sup> The new social landscape emphasized the importance of acknowledging the identities of African Americans, Chicano/as, Asian Americans, homosexuals, women, and the urban working class, which television reflected in numerous series such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *All in the Family*, *Sanford and Son*, *Good Times*, *Chico and the Man*, and *Welcome Back, Kotter*. Eric

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their homes, in front of their television sets, as fears of riots mounted.” Devorah Heitner, *Black Power TV* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 1-2.

<sup>6</sup> Beth Bailey and David Farber, "Introduction," in *America in the Seventies*, ed. Beth Bailey and David Farber (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 1-8; Christopher Capozzola, "It Makes You Want to Believe in the Country': Celebrating the Bicentennial in an Age of Limits," in *America in the Seventies*, ed. Beth Bailey and David Farber (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 29-49; Andreas Killen, *1973: Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the Birth of Post-Sixties America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006); M. J. Rymza-Pawlowska, *History Comes Alive: Public History and Popular Culture in the 1970s*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

Porter has argued that “during the 1970s, more than any other time before in U.S. history, people of color claimed race as a resource.” He attributes this shift to the growing role of television that dovetailed with social rebellions, which provided the tools to commodify racial identification.<sup>7</sup> Networks, however, could not capitalize on the changes identity-based movements sought to implement without altering the aesthetic of entertainment television. Dramas featuring all white casts that dealt with racial issues, and sitcoms that featured white-washed black characters would no longer capture the interest, nor win the acceptance, of a broad and diverse audience. While certain television creators still strove to create “realistic” entertainment that impacted the American public, what realism meant and how producers sought to achieve it changed in the 1970s with the growing popularity of social relevancy programming.

This chapter explores how the ways in which producers and viewers understood television’s role changed in the 1970s. Although producers heretofore considered television a vehicle that could teach citizens how to properly respond to certain dilemmas, by the 1970s they sought to raise awareness of structural inequalities that contributed to historical and contemporary social tensions. Through the lens of CBS’s hit sitcom, *Good Times* (1974-1979), I examine the shift from what I refer to as “problem solving” via entertainment television to “problem consciousness.” Analyzing correspondence between Executive Producer Allan Manings and fans of *Good Times* demonstrates how much importance viewers placed on the program, and how they expected it to impact social and political discourse in different ways. Audience members,

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<sup>7</sup> Eric Porter, “Affirming and Disaffirming Actions: Remaking Race in the 1970s,” in *America in the Seventies*, ed. Beth Bailey and David Farber (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 54-64.

however, had differing ideas concerning *Good Times*'s objectives, and what they thought black viewers should get out of watching the show compared to what white viewers should get out of watching the show. Such conflicted ideas concerning *Good Times*'s purpose lends itself to showing the difficulties of exposing the effects of structural discrimination without sending the wrong message to white audiences about poor African Americans who lived in the ghetto.

Within the context of a decade marred by political failures and economic hardships, I argue that viewers considered *Good Times*, and social relevancy programming in general, an important cultural medium that influenced public discourse in ways that politics could not. This chapter traces Manings's conception of *Good Times* as a sitcom about class inequality, how Lear's Tandem Productions tried to translate the real experiences of African Americans onto screenplays through Minority Writers Workshops, and how audiences interpreted the sitcom from various race and class positions. Viewers who lauded and criticized the sitcom agreed that television had the ability to impact their lives by bringing awareness to issues specific to their lived experience. The shift from entertainment programming that challenged *de jure* segregation to a show that discussed *de facto* segregation created a space for Manings to critique capitalism and the class structure in a way that could appeal to both black and white audiences. An unintended consequence from this approach, however, led viewers to relate racial inequality to economic injustice and in turn engage in a discourse about poverty and welfare.

### **Social Relevancy in the Seventies**

Cultural critics largely associate social relevancy programming with the 1970s even though they generally define it as a type of show that reflects social reality, and this broad definition could be applied to certain 1960s programming.<sup>8</sup> Within an educational framework, however, what sets 1970s social relevancy television apart from formats in the previous decade is the way in which producers and writers intended to teach viewers—or more specifically, arouse their consciousness—about certain issues. This particular method of consciousness-raising—a form of “collective self-education” that takes place by sharing personal experiences—is deeply rooted in feminist practices.<sup>9</sup> A method pioneered by New York Radical Women in 1967 and based on the Tell It Like It Is organizing testimonials of civil rights activists, consciousness-raising helped people understand how an oppressive culture contributed to their personal struggles.<sup>10</sup> The idea that sharing experiences in a group setting could allow a person to learn about oneself extended beyond feminist circles and became incorporated into other forms of expression such as group therapy. Television producers—most notably, Norman Lear—who adapted a form of consciousness-raising into entertainment programs tapped into the zeitgeist and generated high ratings from this new “honest” format. Because social relevancy

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<sup>8</sup> Scholars who associate social relevancy with the seventies include Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Groove Tube: Sixties Television and the Youth Rebellion*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime-Time*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Robin R. Means Coleman and Charlton D. McIlwain, “The Hidden Truths in Black Sitcoms,” in *The Sitcom Reader: America Viewed and Skewed*, ed. Mary M. Dalton and Laura R. Linder, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005). Some scholars do apply this broad definition of social relevancy programming to 1960s entertainment television, such as Phillip Brian Harper, “Extra-Special Effects: Televisual Representation and the Claims of ‘The Black Experience,’” in *Living Color: Race and Television in the United States*, ed. Sasha Torres (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), and Mary M. Dalton and Laura R. Linder, *Teacher TV: Sixty Years of Teachers on Television* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Sara Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century’s End* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 18.

<sup>10</sup> Rosalyn Baxandall, “Re-Visioning the Women’s Liberation Movement’s Narrative: Early Second Wave African American Feminists,” *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1, (2001), 233.

programming relied on affect to make sitcoms more realistic while also pushing audiences to think critically about the topics these shows engaged with, a lot was at stake for viewers who identified with the fictitious characters on TV.

*Good Times* debuted in 1974 as the first TV series featuring a black family headed by a mother and a father. The show featured Esther Rolle and John Amos as Florida and James Evans, along with their three children—the oldest, wise-cracking James Jr. or J.J. (Jimmie Walker), teenage Thelma (BernNadette Stanis), and youngest Michael (Ralph Carter), whom the family endearingly referred to as the “militant midget.” Created by black actor Mike Evans and black writer Eric Monte, the show’s premise focused on the Evans family’s strengths and struggles while living in the Cabrini Green housing project in Chicago. Norman Lear developed the sitcom at Tandem Productions, but *Good Times* maintained its authentic feel, according to *Jet* magazine, because Monte created stories based on his own experiences as a “bonified [sic] ex-hobo, cab driver, dish washer and tenant of Chicago’s Cabrini Green housing project.” *Jet*’s article came out soon after *Good Times* aired its first season, with the cast and creators expressing enthusiasm over the sitcom’s potential. When addressing some concerns about the situating humorous stories in a context of poverty, Esther Rolle defended the concept as something deeply rooted in black history: “Blacks ain’t never had anything *but* poverty, and they’ve always smiled.” She explained that finding laughter and joy in life despite not having money is something that “the haves” might not understand. “There are other values—love, sharing, caring—and if you concentrate on them, somehow you’ll ride out of the storm.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ronald E. Kisner, “New Comedy Brings Good Times to TV,” *Jet*, 23 May 1974, 53-54; CBS promotional statement for *Good Times*, ND, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

Rolle's enthusiasm for the show, however, waned just a year later, after the cast filmed their second season. In an article published in *Ebony*, the sitcom's actors spoke out against J.J. becoming *Good Times*'s focus, which they attributed to his buffoonery and antics that mimicked minstrelsy. "The show didn't start out to be that," Rolle stated. By slowly enlarging J.J.'s part—a character Rolle thought lacked education and motivation—the producers "quietly slipped" negative images into the program that she felt signaled "to black kids that you can make it by standing on the corner saying 'Dyn-o-mite!'" She did not want the producers to cut out Walker's humor entirely, "but [it] can be real," she argued.<sup>12</sup> All of the characters voiced their opinions about J.J.'s character played by Jimmie Walker. Walker, however, disagreed with their criticism and frequently discussed in interviews his belief that neither his character, nor any television representation, impacted black audiences in the way his colleagues believed. Walker's apolitical perspective on the importance of positive black images put him at odds with his cast mates.

Rolle and most of her other cast mates envisioned *Good Times* as a show that could impact viewers—a perspective shared by Allan Manings.<sup>13</sup> Manings and Rolle, however, differed in regard to their ideas about *Good Times*'s intended audience in ways that contributed to tensions that developed between black actors and white personnel. In multiple interviews, Rolle expressed her feelings of responsibility to create a show that put forth a positive image for black audiences, especially black children. In an interview with *Ebony* in the spring of 1974, for example, she discussed her selective process when

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<sup>12</sup> Robinson, "Bad Times on the 'Good Times' Set."

<sup>13</sup> See Aniko Bodroghkozy's discussion of cast perspectives and tensions in *Equal Time*, 214-219.

committing to parts. “First of all,” she stated, “I have to like me, and I couldn’t like me if I depicted crap that made a black child hang its head. I feel an obligation to do something that will make him stick his little chest out and say, ‘Did you see that!’”<sup>14</sup>

Christine Acham describes Rolle’s concern over the character that she represented as reflective of her desire to make *Good Times* an educational show that could improve the image of African Americans and instill black pride among viewers. As the sitcom became popular, cast members used their celebrity to gain agency within the industry and influence the overall direction of the show—including its scripts—in order to incorporate more “representational and pedagogical qualities” that could benefit the black community. Black cast members’ desires for *Good Times*, Acham argues, conflicted with producers’ market-driven objective to make the sitcom commercially viable. These competing agendas resulted in the series airing three types of episodes: pedagogical, political, and pure sitcom—the last of which Rolle most vehemently challenged. Acham defines pedagogical episodes as including “an overt attempt to teach the audience about a particular issue.” These storylines had a moral or a message, and characters often engaged in didactic monologues on particular subjects, such as health, education, and gang violence. Political episodes, on the other hand, explicitly presented a position on certain matters such as racism in police departments, inaccuracies in American history lessons, and busing.<sup>15</sup> I contend that Acham’s “political” episodes continued to convey an educational message and should not be consider as separate from the “pedagogical”

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<sup>14</sup> Bob Lucas, “A ‘Salt Pork and Collard Greens’ TV Show: In ‘Good Times,’ Esther Rolle and John Amos raise a family in Chicago ghetto setting.” *Ebony*, June 1974, 53.

<sup>15</sup> Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 129-135.

storylines she identifies. Instead, the two types of episodes—pedagogical and political—reflect the conflicting ideas about *Good Times*'s intended audience.

Part of Rolle's concerns were steeped in a longer history of challenging the role of television in maintaining a racial order that placed blacks as inferior to whites. However, using television to influence how the white world viewed the black world at times diverged with some of the objectives of racial uplift in media.<sup>16</sup> Although Manings and Rolle agreed that *Good Times* should have an educational meaning, Manings understood the sitcom's purpose to arouse the consciousness of white viewers regarding the effects of systemic oppression, whereas Rolle viewed the show's purpose as a televisual role model for black youth. In correspondence with Teresa Green, a woman working on a project for Minority Literature, Manings explained his perspective of *Good Times*'s purpose. Green asked if Manings expected "to help the situation of minority inequality?" and whether "the members of the ethnic groups [who] 'make fun' of themselves help or hinder their situation?" In his response to her questions, Manings implied his intended audience: "we believe that the presentation of a complete black family on TV has done a great deal to educate people about blacks." The show is "not a 'crusade,'" he explained, "[but] it is certainly hoped that [an] understanding of minority people and their problems will result."<sup>17</sup> One of the things early television supporters believed the medium could achieve was to take viewers to new places. For Manings, this meant exposing white viewers to a black family, particularly since white flight in the 1950s had established segregated

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<sup>16</sup> Acham, *Revolution Televised*, 127-128.

<sup>17</sup> Teresa Green to AM, 8 March 1975; and AM to Teresa Green, 21 March, 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

neighborhoods that became a defining element in the rise of modern conservatism.<sup>18</sup> The overdevelopment of suburbs driven by “white flight” and the underdevelopment of cities contributed to ghetto formation and urban decline. Robert O. Self notes that black communities were not merely victims of the ghetto, but instead they actively pushed for political and economic alternatives.<sup>19</sup> As the previous chapter discussed, most whites did not understand segregated urban and suburban spaces in these terms. In order to alter white sensibilities concerning African Americans and ghetto communities at large, Manings had to introduce them to a black family they could identify with. With many whites feeling hurt by the economic recession and inflation, Manings needed to reach white viewers with episodes about issues specific to class more so than race. By creating episodes that black and white viewers could both relate to, Manings could in turn foster a strong black fan base while simultaneously educating whites about structural forces that cultivated poverty and relegated people of color to second-class citizenship.

Manings’ viewpoint on what he hoped white audiences would gain from watching *Good Times* is reflective of a larger shift in 1970s story telling through media. M. J. Rymysza-Pawlowska has documented how determining a cultural production’s authenticity previously depended on whether it was informational, yet by the 1970s affect added to authenticity. Cultural productions that could elicit emotional realism also pushed Americans to have more empathy and think critically.<sup>20</sup> As Rymysza-Pawlowska points

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<sup>18</sup> Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 6-12.

<sup>19</sup> Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 1-10.

<sup>20</sup> M. J. Rymysza-Pawlowska, *History Comes Alive: Public History and Popular Culture in the 1970s*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 6-29. Rymysza-Pawlowska specifically analyzes how historical meaning making transitioned in the 1970s to include more experiential ways of

out, many factors contributed to the emergence of affective engagement, most notably expressions that involved the self, such as personal and group therapy, self-help culture at large, and the increase in feminist discourse stressing that the personal is political. Emphasis on personal discovery through interaction became part of an effort to respond to larger cultural, political, and economic changes of the decade.<sup>21</sup> The “serious undertones” that made up social relevancy programming reflected the decade’s larger move toward replacing direct problem solving in educational entertainment with raising awareness and understanding about structural inequalities that affected marginalized groups. During his discussion with *Ebony* magazine about the direction of *Good Times* in season three, for example, Manings explained how the economic recession of the seventies influenced story lines and gave audiences something to relate to, not just learn from. The sitcom was originally conceived as a show about economically depressed Americans, but as he explained, the downturn in the nation’s economy “gave the show a tremendous validity.” Revealing some of the upcoming season’s themes, Manings described episodes that could appeal to a larger, cross-racial audience, including “dying and the aged, the high cost of hospitalization, gun control, and unwanted children.” The circumstances that made up the seventies—growing distrust in politics, the economic downturn, and the continuing struggle for better treatment and opportunities among non-white male classes—cultivated a context for the success of emotionally real programs.

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engaging with history that encouraged Americans to emotionally engage and think critically about events of the past. Her arguments about the general shift in the way Americans interacted with popular culture, however, are relevant to this chapter.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997); Killen, *1973: Nervous Breakdown*; Rymysza-Pawlowska, *History Comes Alive*, 122.

Manings acknowledged this perfect storm in producing *Good Times* when he stated: “As long as the country is where it is, the story-lines just keep coming.”<sup>22</sup>

A closer examination of the show’s production also reveals the more nuanced objectives when creating *Good Times* beyond solely market-driven motives. In addition to perceived audience, Allan Manings and Esther Rolle had different understandings of the show’s overall premise. Manings considered *Good Times* a sitcom about economic disparity through the lens of a black family, whereas Rolle assumed the show intended to focus on black family values notwithstanding economic hardship. Although certain episodes did focus on issues specific to a black audience, such as the increased rate of hypertension among black men, these episodes could be considered specialized race telecasts just as much as most series devoted a few episodes to addressing gendered themes on women’s rights. They also could be the result of pushback from black cast members such as Rolle, as Acham suggests, although who influenced alterations to specific storylines and scripts is not clearly documented. What is apparent, however, is that Manings believed that spinning *Good Times* to approach issues from the angle of class instead of race allowed the program to have larger audience appeal because of the U.S.’ economic recession.

Manings’ formula for appealing to black and white viewers consisted mostly of creating episodes that focused on class issues dramatized through black humor.<sup>23</sup> The

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<sup>22</sup> Robinson, “Bad Times on the ‘Good Times’ Set,” 43.

<sup>23</sup> Glenda Carpio defines “black humor” as creating comedy out of black and white relations as a way to release anger or cope with the painful effects of racism. Dating back to slavery and Reconstruction, “black humor” typically falls into two camps: one that is considered entertaining but non-threatening to white audiences, and the other that is reserved for in-group interactions that more assertively addresses racial injustice. Glenda Carpio, *Laughing Fit To Kill: Black Humor in the Fictions of Slavery*, (New York:

episode “Getting Up the Rent,” for example, focuses on a situation in which the Evans family is short seventy-two dollars for their rent because they had to pay hospital bills after Florida’s appendectomy. Although the telecast is about how unexpected medical expenses can displace a hardworking poor family from their home, jokes about racism and white privilege are peppered throughout the telecast. In two scenes, for instance, James and Florida call their youngest son Michael “boy,” to which he retorts: “‘boy’ is a white racist word.” In another part of the episode, the three children are practicing a scheme to get money from patrons at Marshall Field’s Department Store to help their parents pay the rent. In his role as the store manager, Michael offers Thelma a dollar after she pretends to faint from hunger. Surprised he had a real dollar to give during this enactment, Thelma asked him where he got it. Michael replied: “I’m the floor manager, I’m white, I always got a dollar.”<sup>24</sup>

When discussing the show in letters with aspiring writers, Manings always described *Good Times* as a sitcom about poverty and rarely if ever mentioned how race factored into the program’s concept. In the aforementioned letter, Teresa Green asked Manings about his “particular philosophy behind the show.” He described *Good Times* as a program about “survival” that showed how families stick together and stayed on a straight path when faced with economic disadvantage, and how they strove to allow their children “to do better in life than life has allowed” them.<sup>25</sup> More to the point, Manings echoed this viewpoint again when he gave advice to an aspiring screenwriter for the

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Oxford University Press, 2008), 4-6. Acham also discusses how Redd Foxx mainstreamed black humor in her chapter on *Sanford and Son* in *Revolution Televised*.

<sup>24</sup> “Getting Up the Rent,” 22 February, 1974.

<sup>25</sup> Teresa Green to AM, 8 March 1975; and AM to Teresa Green, 21 March 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

show: “think real, think poverty, and think fun.”<sup>26</sup> Whereas this approach appealed to many viewers who felt educational entertainment could provoke empathy regarding the structural institutions that fostered poverty and inequality (which many people understood in racialized terms), other viewers pushed back on its effects on black communities.

An example of this played out prior to the series’ debut in correspondence between Manings and Charles T. Williams, a black Los Angeles writer who tried to sell scripts to various Norman Lear productions. In response to Manings’ rejection of a teleplay that indicated James Evans had a criminal record, Williams challenged Manings’ decision: “it would be very improbable that a man with James’ background would not have a record if for nothing more tha[n] a misdemeanor. I personally have been fingerprinted and served two days in jail for a traffic violation.” Williams’s experiences as a black man living among and with poor black families across the country was probably “irrelevant” for *Good Times*, he told Manings, “since it is designed to project white concepts to white audiences. (I know that Neilson has not ventured into the ghetto.) I am equally certain,” he continued, of “the fact that your program, as it is presently constructed will be excruciatingly painful for many blacks and downright insulting to others...”<sup>27</sup> Manings rejected Williams’s claim that the show projected white concepts of race, calling it a “knee-jerk reaction” based on a lack of knowledge about the show. Eric Monte and Michael Evans created *Good Times*, Manings explained, and as “ghetto born, ghetto raised and ghetto wise young men,” they oversaw production to make sure the

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<sup>26</sup> AM to Nate Monaster, 29 January 1974, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>27</sup> Charles T. Williams to AM, 13 December 1973, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

sitcom presented the “truth.” In order to successfully teach white audiences about black people, Manings needed the support of black viewers in order to authenticate *Good Times* and not undermine the show’s credibility, as in the case of *Julia*. This authentication came not only from the droves of laudatory mail from black fans, which he frequently referred to in addressing his critics, but also from the roles of Monte and Evans, who oversaw production and whom Manings referenced as evidence to the sitcom’s realistic qualities.

In response to Williams’s assertion that *Good Times* was intended for a white audience, Manings admitted that this was an accurate assumption. “That it is a TV venture that seeks to get the widest audience is true. To do otherwise would be an exercise in foolishness and futility and would eventuate itself in reaching no one.”<sup>28</sup> The nature of television in the network era meant that shows needed to attract a general audience, since the Big Three dominated the industry and competed with one another. In 1970, the majority of households owned just one set, and network programmers knew that multiple family members watched television together and that they therefore needed to appeal to the broadest range of viewers. For people like Williams, this meant sacrificing accurate content for ratings, but for Manings and others, it meant that precisely because of the limited channel options, television could provide a cultural forum, a space for negotiation of contested beliefs, among diverse audiences.<sup>29</sup>

The increased number of shows that featured non-white actors, and the efforts to portray truthful premises that reflected life in the ghetto or barrio, meant producers

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<sup>28</sup> AM to Charles T. Williams, 20 December 1973, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>29</sup> Amanda D. Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 24; 38-39.

sought out writers of color who could translate their experiences onto scripts. Norman Lear, the developer of *Good Times* along with other popular sitcoms of a similar aesthetic (such as *All in The Family*, *Sanford and Son*, and *The Jeffersons*), attempted to achieve a new level of realism by seeking out the everyday experiences of black people through Minority Writers Workshops. Altering how sitcoms presented politicized topics, and who played a part in contributing to such programs, influenced how the general public engaged with the political themes presented on screen.

### **“Workshop Forges Ghetto Talent”**

The experiences of everyday people became instrumental to the “realistic” aesthetic of 1970s social relevancy programming. In the early-1960s, television executives relied on “experts” to enrich a program’s authenticity. A person’s expertise was typically defined in relation to their profession, but by the later-half of the decade, producers determined a contributor’s expertise based on their subjectivity. When conducting research for television shows, no longer would a producer potentially ask what experiences someone faced as a teacher. But instead, the focus shifted to exploring the types of encounters someone might face as a *black* teacher, for example. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, white producers by the late-1960s acknowledged their limitations when it came to writing about race in general, and for black characters in particular. To ensure a show’s accuracy in its representation of real lived experiences, white producers therefore sought out writers of color, and by the 1970s the same consideration was extended to women writers for shows such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. What made *Good Times* and other Norman Lear productions different was how

producers solicited unrecognized minority men and women writers—not just experienced screenplay authors—to translate their lived experiences to television.<sup>30</sup>

The 1970s became one the most inclusionary decades for black people in Hollywood, both behind the scenes and on camera. Whereas scholars of television attribute the shift towards more diversity on the screen to social movements that brought attention to the importance of representation, the value placed on incorporating marginalized voices in the production of television developed out of a cultural liberalism that grew in Southern California following the 1965 Watts riots. Following decades of neglect with poor housing, lack of employment opportunities, and mounting tensions between black inhabitants and white police, South Los Angeles erupted following a traffic stop by a highway patrolman. The impact of Watts resulted in the death of thirty-four people, over one thousand injured, and 3,952 arrested. News coverage of the six-day-event juxtaposed the reality of racial tension and economic strife compared to the “improved” race relations conveyed by coverage of President Lyndon B. Johnson signing the Voting Rights Act five days earlier.<sup>31</sup> Daniel Widener has documented the origins of the Watts Writers Workshop that developed in the riot’s aftermath. A project spearheaded by Academy Award-winning screenwriter Budd Schulberg, the Watts Writers Workshop sought to give a voice to those effected by antipoverty efforts and express their feelings

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<sup>30</sup> Jennifer Keishin Armstrong discusses how James L. Brooks and Allan Burns hired women screenwriters for *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* who already had careers writing in the television industry. The writers workshops that developed in Southern California, however, intended to foster potential talent from African American, Mexican American, and Native American communities who otherwise had limited training or experience in media production. Jennifer Keishin Armstrong, *Mary and Lou and Rhoda and Ted*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> Shana Bernstein, *Building Bridges: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2011). Kindle Edition, 202; Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).

about urban reform and broader antidiscrimination efforts through artistic expression. Shulberg's notoriety and industry connections gave the workshop participants opportunities to circulate their work in mainstream venues, with participants publishing essays in *Esquire*, *Harper's*, and *Time*, and contribute to a documentary produced by NBC about the riot one year later. The effects of the Watts Writers Workshop represented a transition from older forms of Hollywood representation that externally produced images of African Americans to a newfound standard wherein black people should represent themselves.<sup>32</sup>

The Watts Writers Workshop developed within a broader context of antipoverty discourse. Proponents of the War on Poverty considered increased social spending a preventative measure toward future outbreaks. Cultural liberals invested in writing, music, and other artistic expressions as part of a larger antipoverty crusade where creative endeavors could provide opportunities for blacks who might otherwise be susceptible to militant ideals. Although cultural liberals believed that fostering a space for black art could address some of the country's social problems, writers of the workshop did not merely conform to cultural liberal standards. Instead, members of the program brought a black working-class voice to previously excluded cultural spaces, such as mainstream media. As Widener points out, "The Watts Writers Workshop reminds us that neither academics nor politicians maintained a monopoly on the terminology or use of culture during the War on Poverty."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 90-92.

<sup>33</sup> Widener, *Black Arts West*, 94-104.

Schulberg's investment in the workshop and his connections led to funding sources within the entertainment industry, such as the Rockefeller Foundation and NBC-TV, which donated cameras and editing equipment. By 1968, the workshop extended beyond composition courses and included classes on screenplay writing, acting, television and film editing, motion-picture-camera operation, and film production. Participants learned how to apply these skills to mediums intended for mass audiences so that they could find employment in the entertainment industry.<sup>34</sup>

The Watts Writers Workshop became the most visible community-based cultural institution in Southern California following the Watts riot of 1965.<sup>35</sup> The Workshop's success and the possibilities it offered underrepresented communities inspired the development of similar media-focused programs in the late-1960s and 1970s. Bill DuBois, a black cameraman for NBC, decided to create his own organization specialized in training underprivileged African Americans and Mexican Americans for technical and production positions in media. After filming Watts Writers Workshop member Harry Dolan's play *Losers Weepers* in 1966, DuBois stated that he felt "really motivated" to create his own project, especially since numerous community members asked how they could get a job like he had while working on Dolan's set. By early-1969, DuBois had established the Watts Training Center for the Television, Film, Radio and Recording Industry. With the cooperation of Dr. Edward W. Borgers of the University of Southern California's Department of Telecommunications, a class of 15 students were scheduled to take their first course in February of that year. DuBois' sole interest was to increase the

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<sup>34</sup> Widener, *Black Arts West*, 104-109.

<sup>35</sup> Widener, *Black Arts West*, 90.

number of minority technicians working in the entertainment industry, so they could hold steady permanent jobs. Faculty for this program included professionals from NBC, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and KGFJ, the first 24-hour radio station; and celebrities who supported it included Gregory Peck, Sammy Davis, Jr., and Diahann Carroll<sup>36</sup>

That same year, New Communicators, Inc. developed to help poor African Americans and Mexican Americans learn filmmaking, with the intention “to allow communications to flow out of minority communities to the outside world.”<sup>37</sup> In addition, the Writers Guild Open Door Workshop was established to teach film writing to racial minorities. The Writers Guild of American West ran the latter program with professional writers and actors leading each week’s class. Courses included a close “man-to-man relationship between the TV pro and the would-be writer.” While compared to the Watts Writers Workshop, the Open Door Workshop distinguished itself as a permanent fixture in the industry, a possible solution to the lack of integration in media production. Successful participants sold teleplays and story ideas to shows such as *Room 222* (1969-1974) and *The Name of the Game* (1968-1971).<sup>38</sup>

The Watts Writers Workshop developed out of antipoverty efforts, and similar reasons motivated the development of programs established as a byproduct of Watts. But networks also used these workshops to diversify its personnel per the demands of the FCC. In July of 1968, the FCC announced a new policy that required television and radio

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<sup>36</sup> Jack Jones, “TV-Radio School for Blacks to Open at USC,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 January, 1969, B1, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Jones, “TV-Radio School for Blacks to Open at USC,” B1.

<sup>38</sup> “TV, Film Writing Classes Set for Minority Groups,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 July 1969, A8; Ray Loynd, “Workshop Forges Ghetto Talent,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 June 1969. O28, 29, 34.

stations who applied for license renewal to show that they did not discriminate in their hiring practices on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin, and that the station was committed to “racial understanding.”<sup>39</sup> The opening of a previously segregated industry created new opportunities for young people of color to write, act, or produce in media, influencing the medium’s content. By the 1970s, training workshops extended from Southern California grassroots organizations to state-wide college campuses from San Diego to San Francisco and offered media workshops often sponsored by faculty in telecommunication, journalism, and drama departments.<sup>40</sup> It is no surprise, then, that Norman Lear—an executive producer known for sitcoms that featured non-white casts that addressed race, class, and gender themes—decided to create his own minority writers workshop that could train underprivileged people to write screenplays specifically for his aesthetic.

Norman Lear’s Tandem Productions, Inc. and TAT Communications Co. created the experimental program in the spring of 1975, just after *Good Times*’ second season aired. The story consultant for *Good Times*, Bob Peete, ran the organization which aimed to provide “access and opportunity for minorities trying to enter the comedy writing field.” Termed the Minority Writers Workshop, and advertised in *Jet* magazine and the *Los Angeles Times*, the program was meant to find writers who already had skill and knowledge of writing comedy but who did not have connections to break into the industry. Participants received guidance for writing telecasts to fit Lear’s aesthetic, and

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<sup>39</sup> “FCC to Deny Licenses in Cases of Bias,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 July 1968, A12.

<sup>40</sup> “Black History Week Celebrated,” *The Guardsman*, City College of San Francisco, Vol. 74 No. 2, 3 March 1973, 1,4; “Esther Rolle at ‘Good Times’ to Speak at Media Conference,” *Daily Aztec*, San Diego State University, 25 April 1975.

were put in contact with producers affiliated with *All in the Family*, *Sanford and Son*, *Maude*, *Good Times*, and *The Jeffersons*.<sup>41</sup> As an extension of the Minority Writers Workshop, Peete and *Good Times* producer Gloria Vincent also participated in San Diego State University's first annual Southern California Black Media Conference hosted by the Black Mass Communications Major (BMCM). In line with the conference's theme of "Positive Images through Black Communications," workshops on topics related to recruitment and employment opportunities, educational television, and television writing were offered for attendees. Esther Rolle also appeared at the conference as the keynote speaker. She spoke about the importance of playing roles that presented positive representations of African Americans, and at one point she even hinted at her dislike for Jimmie Walker's character on *Good Times*. She warned participants to "find out what you're laughing at because you might be laughing at yourself." Her talk concluded with a request for students: "help me to keep this show which I feel is important in its true perspective, by really listening and watching and making sure it is giving something worthwhile to Black people."<sup>42</sup> Rolle's participation in the conference and her plea to students reflects the challenge she felt as a black actress trying to have a voice in an industry dominated by mostly white men. With Bob Peete and Gloria Vincent present to scout potential talent for *Good Times*, she delivered her address to future writers who could help maintain the show's success in her vision. Skeptical of the show's popularity that focused on the character of J.J., however, Rolle felt the need to caution writers from engaging in a certain type of humor at the expense of the greater black community. Her

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<sup>41</sup> "Tandem, TAT Look for Black Comedy Writers," *Jet*, 10 July 1975, 56; "Program Offers Opportunity for Minority Comedy Writers," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 July 1975, E9.

<sup>42</sup> Victoria Butler, "Black Media Conference a Success," *Daily Aztec*, 6 May 1975, 5.

plea was not only for future screenwriters to bring black voices to the television industry, but she also asked them to be conscious of the content they create and not sell-out for a cheap laugh.

Lear likely wanted to create his own writers program for multiple reasons. The first coming from pressures placed by black actors who starred in Lear's sitcoms, and took issue with white writers creating material about black people. In the case of *Good Times*, John Amos and Esther Rolle believed white writers were disconnected from black experiences and objected to them working for the show.<sup>43</sup> Manings, however, believed that writing a good script was indicative of someone's talent, not their subjectivity. In response to Sociologist David Willems who lauded the program for its portrayal of race and class, for example, Manings corrected his assumption that the show avoided stereotypes because of its black writers. He wrote, "Some of our writers are Black; others are Caucasian. But because they are dealing with real situations and because they are gifted writers, the stereotyping is avoided. I believe it is more a question of talent than color."<sup>44</sup>

A second reason for Tandem to develop their own Minority Writers Workshop could have been because the 1960s programs trained its students to water-down teleplays intended for a mass audience. At the aforementioned Open Door Writers Workshop, for example, faculty taught students how to write treatments for preexisting shows, when Lear wanted to do something markedly different. In one particular course, writer-producer Sidney Sheldon advised students not to write for themselves. In the television

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<sup>43</sup> Acham, *Revolution Televised*, 211, n. 35.

<sup>44</sup> AM to David Willems, 22 March 1974, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

climate of 1969, Sheldon suggested students “be realistic and write for the market as it exists.” In a separate class, comedy writer Howard Ostroff had “*Mod Squad* night,” where students wrote treatments for the acclaimed drama.<sup>45</sup> Encouraging students to pull from their own experiences in order to create portrayals of race that could appeal to mass audiences explains how one of the original Watts Writers Workshop members, Harry Dolan, found great success as a writer for *Julia*. But by the mid-1970s this type of training directly contradicted the objective of Norman Lear’s programs, which pulled from the gritty reality of social hierarchies that cultivated much of the country’s problems to date. The tension between screenwriters who relied on a traditional sitcom formula and producers who tried to break that mold with social relevancy programming is demonstrated in the correspondence between Manings and aspiring writers.

Writers who submitted scripts to *Good Times* frequently fell back on some of television’s old comedy formats and Manings always gave the same constructive criticism: something had to be “at stake” in order for the idea to get picked up by Tandem. In response to one storyline, for example, Manings rejected the idea stating, “if there is one thing that we all detest, and try to stay away from is that situation where someone has brought the boss home to dinner, and unfortunately that is what [this] is about.”<sup>46</sup> Aspiring screenwriter from Oakland, CA, Don Haney, wrote Manings multiple times trying to get a script picked up by one of Lear’s many sitcoms. Haney introduced himself as young, black, ambitious and in need of a literary agent. He had no television or screenplay credits, but claimed to have talent and a desire to write. “I have completed a

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<sup>45</sup> Lloyd, “Workshop Forges Ghetto Talent.”

<sup>46</sup> Althea Scott to AM, 14 August 1974, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

Writer's Workshop course at San Diego State," he explained, and "I have also just recently completed a San Francisco City College Writer's Workshop course to prepare minority Writers for Screenplays and on-going Television Shows [...] I have paid my dues by carefully and professionally preparing myself for the great challenge ahead. All I need now is the opportunity to be read." Manings rejected the three scripts Haney submitted, stating they were not right for *Good Times*.<sup>47</sup> Desperate to succeed, however, Haney wrote back asking for more detailed feedback so that he could improve his writing and sell a script. Using the type of humor reflected in *Good Times*, Haney pleaded with Manings: "If my typing appears a little cruddy I'm sorry about that, Sir, the depression hit the ghetto real hard, and a typewriter cost almost as much as a Cadillac. (PERSONAL NOTE: If I could just sell one script, or part of a script, Mr. Manings, I would be on my way and forever be grateful and that's no jiving. I have a ghetto room full of unread screenplays to substantiate my claim."<sup>48</sup>

Manings responded to Haney's plea with detailed feedback on each teleplay. The essential problem with all three ideas, he explained, was that none of them were "important enough," and "if the basic topics are important, you don't deal with them strongly enough." For example, Haney's episode titled "The Weightwatchers," describes a premise about the growing concern over black obesity in the Evans' neighborhood. In the abstract Haney writes: "Florida attempts to deal with some of the problems by having a Weightwatcher's meeting in her home. Then it happens. The Doctor conducting the Weightwatcher's meeting is unable to attend. Florida and James are uneasy as the Four

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<sup>47</sup> Don Haney to AM, 7 March, 1976; and AM to Don Haney, 9 April 1976, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>48</sup> Don Haney to AM, 19 May 1976, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

(4) Female Weightwatchers look on famished. Thelma save[s] the night. Yep. You guessed it. J.J. substitutes for the Doctor and all laughter breaks-out.” In response to this idea, Manings pointed out that the foundation of the episode captured a real issue worth discussing—limited healthy food sources in the ghetto—yet the execution of the idea portrayed an unrealistic comedic turn that diminished the issue at hand. “Mr. Haney,” Manings concluded, “I can only suggest that if you want to think of *Good Times*, think of hard real subjects, perhaps out of your own experiences, and you will find that more likely you will come closer to our interest.”<sup>49</sup>

Manings consistently emphasized that scripts needed to address structural issues and encouraged writers to reflect on their own experiences in order to accomplish the show’s goals. *Good Times*’ objective and J.J.’s character, however, sent mixed messages to those interested in writing for the show—a point Esther Rolle addressed in her presentation at SDSU. Although Manings encouraged black writers to pull from their own experiences, he also defended white writers’ talent when it came to creating storylines about black people. Lear developed the reputation for including African Americans in the production of his shows. Therefore, agents frequently wrote to Manings on behalf of their clients, noting their race as a credential in addition to their experience. On behalf of Helen Autry, for example, her agent’s letter attached to her resume stated, “She is a young black woman who writes comedy, monologs and drama. There is an authenticity that you know she knows what it’s all about.”<sup>50</sup> Writers themselves also cited their race as a credential. William Murray wrote to pitch a story idea and stated in his

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<sup>49</sup> Summary of “The Weightwatchers” is found in the Evaluation Agreement sent to Tandem Productions, ND; AM to Don Haney, 16 June 1976, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>50</sup> Gary Cosay to AM, 18 December 1973, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

letter, “I read somewhere that you were looking for young black writers for your new show starring Maude’s maid, Florida. I’m 22 and I’m black.”<sup>51</sup> Whether Tandem wanted black writers to demonstrate diversity efforts or black experiences to include in their storylines became muddled, and this became even more unclear as tensions between Manings and black cast members intensified.

The Minority Writers Workshop provided more than just opportunity for black voices to be heard, it also provided jobs during a moment marked by high inflation, high unemployment, and declining job security for blacks and whites. Therefore, a show about a poor black family within this context influenced the way audiences viewed *Good Times*. At the same time, social movements of the era continued to emphasize the U.S.’s long history with race oppression and the damaging affects it had on social relations. Television shows played up on this moment and tried to address structural factors that continued to impact marginalized groups. Despite their best efforts to portray people of color in non-stereotypical ways, however, television shows could not escape the long racist historical assumption that African Americans were inherently impoverished because they preferred to receive government handouts rather than work.

### ***Good Times in Moynihan’s Shadow***

The 1965 Moynihan Report altered public sensibilities regarding the cultural image of black families in the 1970s. Funded by the federal government and officially titled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, Daniel Patrick Moynihan claimed that households headed by a black matriarch contributed to the low economic

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<sup>51</sup> William A. Murray to AM, 24 January 1974, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

status and crumbling of black families. Controversy ensued from Moynihan's conclusions, particularly in regard to his assumption that black women's overly independent and aggressive nature alienated black men and led to a "tangle of pathology," which contributed to juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, and poor education, thus perpetuating a cycle of poverty.<sup>52</sup> Scholars have attributed Moynihan's Report to the imagery of matriarchal black families used to undermine the welfare state during the 1980s and 1990s, specifically Reagan's attacks on welfare recipients, whom media portrayed as African American single mothers.<sup>53</sup> The economic recession of the 1970s, however, did cause the number of black families living in poverty to increase and led more families overall to receive welfare benefits. But African Americans made up a minority of welfare recipients even though welfare became increasingly racialized and gendered as a program that benefited black women most.<sup>54</sup>

The production team for *Good Times* had to face the legacy of Moynihan's Report and the stereotypes it helped foster when creating a fictional black family who lived in one of America's real ghettos. Even during the show's infancy, black actors had to push back against the trope of fatherless households when Norman Lear suggested making the Evanses a matriarchal single-parent family. Esther Rolle protested the idea and refused to do the show if Lear changed Eric Monte's original concept, arguing that a strong father

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<sup>52</sup> Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case of National Action*, (Washington D.C.: Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor, 1965).

<sup>53</sup> For more on the reactions from conservatives and liberals to Moynihan's report see Daniel Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights: The Moynihan Report and its Legacy*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

<sup>54</sup> Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), xvi-xvii

figure authentically represented black families.<sup>55</sup> Even with James and Florida Evans in place, producers faced the struggle of portraying a poor black family amidst developing stereotypes that associated blackness to poverty and welfare. For example, in a letter following the episode “Operation Florida,” in which the Evans family’s financial belt tightens when trying to pay a hospital bill following a gall bladder operation, a self-identified “honkie” wrote to Allan Manings enraged about how hard she and her family worked to pay a hospital bill of five years, yet they never had to go on welfare. In his response, Manings corrects the woman’s assumption: “The family on *Good Times* is not on welfare, never has been on welfare and it is our intention to portray them as people who do not wish to be on welfare.” The woman stated that her white family worked hard to pay their bills, implying that James Evans did not, to which Manings affirmed that “the father in our family also works his rear off.”<sup>56</sup>

Conversely, a different viewer took issue with the episode “Getting up the Rent” a separate but similar telecast also about the Evanses struggling financially due to medical bills. In this episode, Florida and her friend and neighbor Willona (Ja’net DuBois) go to the welfare office out of desperation to consider their options for government assistance. After learning that James made one thousand dollars more than what qualified a family of five to receive welfare benefits, Willona jokes that Florida only had to have another child for them to receive government aid.<sup>57</sup> The scene intended to address the stereotype that black women had multiple children in order to receive welfare, however, viewer Roy

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<sup>55</sup> Acham, *Revolution Televised*, 129-130; Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time*, 209; Sean Campbell, *The Sitcoms of Norman Lear* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007), 96-97.

<sup>56</sup> Mrs. M. Anderson to AM, ND, and AM’s reply, 7 October 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>57</sup> “Getting Up the Rent,” 22 February 1974.

Freeman felt that by just portraying Florida and Willona in a welfare office had the potential to send the wrong message about poor African Americans receiving government assistance. What made the portrayal particularly damaging, Freeman noted, was that it inaccurately presented welfare recipients as black and failed to challenge preexisting stereotypes. “We are as aware as you are,” Manings responded, “of the fact that the majority of people on welfare are white, and if you had looked at the scene at the welfare office more carefully you would have seen that out of the eight applicants on welfare only two were black.” Manings intended to make a point about the accuracy of welfare recipients, but instead neglected to consider the historical implications of race and dependency. Challenging deeply entrenched stereotypes about African Americans on welfare required more than subtle placement of non-speaking background characters. Manings’ correspondence with Freeman demonstrates how difficult it was to create realistic episodes about class inequality that also sufficiently challenged racist stereotypes. He explained to Freeman that *Good Times* tried to show “a family that will stick together and come through in spite of unemployment, low income and other aspects of life that beset many ghetto families.”<sup>58</sup> His objective to present the reality of life in the ghetto for “many families,” was fraught with contradictions that played out in the fan mail the show received. Viewers considered social relevancy programming persuasive in its format and wrote commending or critiquing the show, expressing how they thought *Good Times* could alter the way people understood structural forms of oppression.

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<sup>58</sup> AM to Roy L. Freeman, 15 March 1974, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC. The original letter from Roy Freeman to AM was not archived, however, Manings summarizes portions of Freeman’s letter prior to addressing each point, which indicates that Freeman challenged the representation in “Getting Up the Rent.”

Given television's history of excluding African Americans from entertainment television and the extent to which racism influenced black peoples' experiences and opportunities, many black viewers felt a lot was at stake in the way the medium represented them. Particularly during a moment when an increased number of sitcoms claimed to present "realistic" scenarios under the aegis of social relevancy programming. One *New Yorker* even claimed *Good Times* had more influence over viewers than the news. In response to the premier in which J.J. is shown shoplifting, Wesley Sineath wrote that the scene was "in very bad taste" for making such a crime look cute. "One may see your 10,000 murders per day but this, generally speaking, is taken with a grain of salt and kids cannot actually go out and imitate these situations. However, they are capable of going down to the Supermarket and imitating what you present as a completely tolerated family situation. For God's sake," he argued, "try and have some responsibility toward the public rather than concern yourself with the next can of deodorant that you may sell."<sup>59</sup> Manings' attempt to shed light on the reality of economic hardship through the lens of a black family frustrated some viewers who felt that he failed to consider the ramifications that *Good Times*' race representation would have on black and white viewers. Following the pilot, for example, a black woman from Los Angeles, Adella Stone, expressed her frustration and anger about "another negative picture of black folks." She claimed that with "the negative self-image [...] Black people must naturally hold," Manings needed to consider the frustrations of young Black people, especially young men, and feed them "positive ideas instead of constantly playing up the negatives.

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<sup>59</sup> Wesley Sineath to AM, 11 February 1974, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

Continuing to foster these images will be, and is, disastrous.” The kind of black family Stone would like to see on television “would not...be simply a carbon copy of white, i.e. ‘Julia,’” which she described as “shallow, empty, and ‘middle-class.’” Instead, black families on television needed to “contain all the humor, warmth, and yeastiness of Black life, with a little honesty and love thrown in.” Expressing notes of concern that *Good Times* would reinforce the stereotypes presented in Moynihan’s report, Stone addressed one more trope: “I’m so tired of downtrodden Black males...or posturing ones. And of Black women always ‘saving the day’ as if the male cannot function on his own.”<sup>60</sup> Although Stone disliked how *Good Times* portrayed African Americans in their respective gender roles, Manings responded to her critique with a defense for what the sitcom did for African Americans in their respective class position. He took exception to Stone’s statement that the show is “another negative picture of black folks” and claimed: “for the first time a television program is presenting an entire family, led by a hard-working father who is the head of his family. You will see people sticking together, struggling to make a better life for themselves under the adverse conditions that face most under-privileged people.”<sup>61</sup>

Christine A. Story, A Philadelphia woman, shared similar concerns about the representation of a poor black family. Whereas initially she claimed to find *Good Times* “enlightening,” and her three children liked that the show had an all-black cast, in the sitcom’s second season she began to question the direction of the program.

This type of housing is supposed to be temporary for lower income families until they are able to improve their life styles, after which the

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<sup>60</sup> Adella Stone to AM, 9 February, 1974, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>61</sup> AM to Adella Stone, 15 February, 1974, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

family is expected to move out into better housing. At the rate your series is going, this Black family will never move. The father has never been able to keep a steady job. Why? The eldest son is mixed up and very frustrated. His high school education is threatened because of his lack of interest and grades. Most Black women with children past the ages of 8 or 9 years are working somewhere. Is this series supposed to represent all families in housing projects? These types of images projected on television do not need children as viewers. Everything about *Good Times* is actually bad. I have considered discontinuing my children from watching this program. The image of your show is very depressing.<sup>62</sup>

Like Stone, this writer suggested what Manings could do to improve the quality of *Good Times*. James should be able to get a better job and later buy a home, Florida should either work or attend classes to help improve their situation, J.J. should graduate high school and attend art classes, Thelma should focus on her education, and Michael was the only character who did not need to change at all. In his response, Manings explained that “One of the aims of the show, as with most artistic endeavors, is to reflect the world and the times in which we live. Economic depression and unemployment are very much prevalent in our society. The family on ‘GOOD TIMES,’ like most of us, are victims of this.” In response to Story’s suggestion that *Good Times* portray economic mobility, Manings reassured her that “the desire to move up and out and to hang together as a family with love and respect for each other is not diminished. This, I think, is the thrust of our show.”<sup>63</sup> Critics who considered *Good Times* a negative representation of black people were often met with a response from Manings who defended the show’s intentions to bring awareness to the type of poverty that exists in the U.S. even among hardworking people. By associating himself with the writer and fictitious Evans family as victims of

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<sup>62</sup> Christine A. Story to AM, 7 January, 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>63</sup> AM to Christine A. Story, 27 January 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

the decade's economic recession suggests his inability to understand *Good Times* in intersectional terms. For Manings, framing the show around class meant that he thought different viewers would have a shared experience when watching *Good Times*, instead of thinking about how audiences would interpret the show's messages differently based on one's subjectivity.

Manings received a fair share of letters from people who objected to the representation of African Americans in *Good Times*, yet he received favorable fan mail in much higher numbers. Although the data on *Good Times*' comprehensive fan mail is unclear, the sample collected in Manings' archival papers suggests three times as many viewers liked the show than did not. Out of 69 letters, 40 approved of *Good Times* while only 9 disapproved, and the remaining 20 people stated they enjoyed the show but had an issue with a specific episode that they wrote to complain about. Manings also boasted about the high praise he received in correspondence, always referencing the same statistic—95% favorable letters—which he pointed out in one missive “is a rare percentage in a business where most people who write choose to express negative views.”<sup>64</sup> Contrary to the letters from black folks who found *Good Times* a negative influence on viewers, many black fans conversely wrote in to express their enthusiasm for the show. In response to the two-part episode “The Gang,” in which J.J. is forced to join a gang and is later shot, a Chicago woman wrote to Manings and claimed: “It is about time producers allowed writers to write scripts with some meaningful messages concerned with black life. Your two-part show dealing with J.J. and the gang brought

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<sup>64</sup> AM to Fred Hunter, 7 August 1974 and AM to Teresa Green, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

tears of joy to my heart. This show dealt with reality! It had a theme black audiences could relate to.”<sup>65</sup> In response to the same episode, an elementary school teacher for the Los Angeles Watts area wrote in thanking Manings for not glamorizing gang leaders. “We are having some problems with ‘gangs,’” he stated, and after an estimated 75% of the students watched the episode “the talk of the school was of nothing but the shooting.” He commended Manings for depicting the “‘gang hero’ as nothing but a ‘sad lonely child,’” and hoped that this portrayal would make younger fans reconsider gang-life altogether.<sup>66</sup> Black viewers who lauded the sitcom wrote to approve the show’s realism in its depiction of black life in America, and commend it for presenting alternate solutions to some of the problems that plagued youth growing up in the ghetto.

Furthermore, audiences who responded positively often cited the sitcom’s ability to shed light on the systemic racism that affected African Americans’ social standing in the U.S. For example, a Sociologist at NYU wrote after she was mistaken multiple times for Esther Rolle while on vacation in Austin, Texas. Having never watched the show, she assumed all of the white people who asked for her autograph “didn’t know one Black woman from another.” Flattered nonetheless, she began to watch *Good Times* and to her surprise, she liked it. “As a teacher of a course called Black Life Styles in the Sociology Department,” she explained, “the program does capture an authentic strand of Black Life. For one thing, it is the first program on that recognizes the Black ‘family’—with a mother and a father. It also carries the spirit of Black life style; the desire for education; the take-off on the White power structure; the dignity; the love, of Black people.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Dorothy Hazzard to AM, 20 November 1974, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>66</sup> Michael McLinn, 19 November 1974, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>67</sup> Aldena B. Runnels to AM, 7 October 1974, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

Debates about whether *Good Times* implicated African Americans for the adversity they experienced or if the show critically presented structural racism as the cause of segregation and urban decline reflected the long shadow Moynihan's report cast on race discourse. Viewers who disagreed if the sitcom presented positive or negative representations of African Americans, however, shared a common belief that *Good Times* could impact audiences and influence social politics. This perspective reflects an educational turning point wherein the rise of social history in museums and the academy encouraged an active interrogation of people's lived experiences to create new ways of learning about structural racism in the past and present. The civil rights movement's struggle for equality and representation, and Black Power organizations that challenged capitalism and institutional discrimination in housing, employment, education, and the legal system, played a part in altering perspectives about the need to understand the accomplishments of everyday African Americans undeterred by systematic oppression. New Black Studies departments founded throughout the U.S and an increase in African American history museums developed in tandem with cultural shifts that emphasized self-empowerment and black pride.<sup>68</sup> Emphases on social history created alternate ways to learn about people of color, women, and other marginalized groups in more accessible ways. Television, therefore, became another medium through which Americans could become educated about the structural factors that established certain groups as second-class citizens. As one white middle-class couple wrote: "We think GOOD TIMES should be given some sort of special award for the tremendous service it is rendering the

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<sup>68</sup> Kathleen Neal Cleaver, "Women, Power, Revolution" in *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and Their Legacy*, edited by Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas (New York: Routledge, 2001), 123-127; and Rymysza-Pawlowska, *History Comes Alive*, 157-158.

American public. It should be required viewing for everyone! [...] The need for reform in some areas of our system can't be stressed too strongly."<sup>69</sup> Audience members who wrote to Manings illuminates how certain people interpreted the ways in which *Good Times* could influence social politics.

### **A Ghetto Enlightenment**

Producers of television shows that tackled politicized topics became agents of change in the eyes of viewers. That is to say, audiences looked toward television figures as representatives of the public during a period when American government officials proved themselves untrustworthy. Allan Manings referenced this general political distrust in *Good Times* with frequent jokes about President Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and government policies in general. Specific references to real political events in the show distinguished the sitcom's morality and trustworthiness from the corrupt government that the show mocked. Viewers, therefore, considered the sitcom a cultural medium that had the power to persuade social discourse and influence people's perspectives and decision-making.

Entertainment television in the 1960s wove contemporary politics into the fabric of sitcoms and dramas, whereas social relevancy programming in the 1970s included more explicit political commentary, often directly critiquing the U.S presidential administration. In *Good Times*' second season premier, for instance, reference to Nixon paying minimal taxes considering his substantial income was made in contrast to people like James Sr. who made very little money yet still had to face a tax audit. In a letter to a

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<sup>69</sup> Mr. and Mrs. James D. Yale to AM, 13 February 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

viewer who wrote in about this scene, Manings described his intentions to make a point about the hypocrisy regarding Nixon's maneuver to pay fewer taxes while holding hard working, underpaid citizens accountable.<sup>70</sup> Critiquing the president on a prime-time sitcom became acceptable amidst the Watergate scandal, which generated an overall distrust in politics and Nixon's presidency in particular.<sup>71</sup> Controversy surrounding the president's involvement in Watergate unfolded while the cast filmed the second season of *Good Times*, and one month before the first episode aired Nixon resigned. Not only did Manings play off of the general feelings of cynicism among Americans toward politicians, many of the episode's themes about the types of obstacles working-class folks had to overcome directly related to failed policies and bureaucratic organizations. The corruption and greed that came out of the White House fostered an overall skepticism over whether government officials truly had the people's best interest in mind.

Manings openly expressed his objectives with *Good Times*, which was to present a show that mirrored the economic hardship many Americans faced, and in the process educate white people about black families. In some cases, Manings achieved his goal. A white, twenty-two-year-old Pentecostal Christian, for example, believed that *Good Times* told "the truth about life in the projects, human nature, the social problems of our day, [and] religion in the home, etc." Finding the show "thought provoking," they found themselves "understand[ing] black people better than I did before," and claimed that by

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<sup>70</sup> AM to C. Rollin Albert, 4 March, 1974 1974, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>71</sup> Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past* (New York: Basic Books, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1992). Aniko Bodroghkozy discusses *Laugh-In*'s veiled criticism of President Johnson's Vietnam War policy through skits about hippies and musical guests such as Peete Seeger, but at that time CBS would not have tolerated a direct critique aimed specifically at a US President. Bodroghkozy, *Groove Tube*.

presenting “real lives” Manings could in turn “reach lives” of those watching.<sup>72</sup> An English teacher working in a suburb of San Francisco also wrote to commend Manings for portraying a family that has “values” and demonstrates a “balance between parents and children and the outside world.” After declaring that *Good Times* is “absolutely educational,” she stated: “I recommend it to all my students and their parents (mind you, I’m in an upper class white area). I think we all have a lot to learn from the Evans family.”<sup>73</sup>

Whereas some white viewers claimed to learn about race from watching the show, the majority of documented letters touched on how *Good Times* brought awareness to a variety of social issues and could potentially influence some of the decisions viewers made in regard to their personal lives. Charles E. Sanders of Carson, California wrote in response to “The Family Gun,” an episode about James Sr. buying a gun in response to increased neighborhood crime, only to find the gun missing after Thelma is attacked. “I watched your program ‘Good Times’ and I was really educated, surprised, deeply moved, and I changed my mind on what I was going to do,” Sanders stated. He continued to explain:

[The] ‘Good Times’ program expressed the fact that it is better not to own a gun especially around the family. I know people (the viewers) just as I learned and felt that if a gun that we bought was stolen and someone else got shot with it the owner (we) would feel at fault. Since I am Black I could really relate to this because my family went through the same situation. Recently I’ve been debating on whether I should buy a gun since I just turned 21. Now since I seen your ‘Good Times’ presentation, you know what I say now? The hell with guns! I don’t want that type of problem or any other related to guns on my mind. The high cost of living is enough.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Charles E. Holster III to AM, 23 August 1974, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>73</sup> Louise D. Kleinsorge to AM, 8 October 1974, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>74</sup> Charles E. Sanders to AM, ND, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

Manings expressed to Sanders how thrilled the cast was to read his note. “When you get someone to react as you did,” he stated, “you know you are doing right.”<sup>75</sup>

One of the qualities most frequently noted in letters to Manings was the show’s ability to bring awareness to certain issues that most viewers may not have otherwise known about. For example, in response to “The Houseguest,” an episode which depicted James’ childhood friend’s gambling addiction as a sickness that could be helped with Gamblers Anonymous (GA), Arnie W. of the New York GA chapter wrote to the show. He thanked Manings for plugging GA and stated that he received phone calls from people who heard about the organization on *Good Times*.<sup>76</sup> The most notable response to a particular episode, however, came after “The Checkup,” wherein James learns he has high blood pressure; audiences learned about the warning signs of hypertension and its high rate among African American men. The day after the episode first aired, thousands of black men phoned a doctor or medical center to receive more information. The American Heart Association, the Department of Health Education and Welfare, and the National Medical Association honored *Good Times* for increasing public knowledge about heart disease. In fact, “The Checkup” received so many accolades from health associations that when the network aired the rerun months later, it included a public service announcement in which physicians lauded the episode.<sup>77</sup>

In the 1960s, producers came up with educational topics and solicited help from experts. But by the 1970s, experts were requesting the help of TV producers to spread

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<sup>75</sup> AM to Charles E. Sanders, 23 September 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>76</sup> Arnie W. to AM, 19 February 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>77</sup> Norman Lear, *Even This I Get To Experience*. (New York: Penguin Press, 2014); and AM to Fred Hunter, 7 August 1974, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

awareness about particular issues facing millions of Americans. For example, Public Information Officer for the State of Illinois Dangerous Drug Commission, Patricia Larson, asked Manings to consider producing an episode about drug use. “If there is a key to solving the problem of drug abuse,” Larson stated, “the beginning must lie in responsible, realistic, preventative education.” She asked for Manings’ help because *Good Times* had the reputation of successfully dealing with “problems of urban life in a manner that is both factual and entertaining.” After making a few suggestions for how episodes might accomplish her mission, Larson explained that the “Commission is committed to disseminating accurate drug information to the widest possible population. We continually seek new ways to accomplish our goal, and since ‘Good Times’ is set here in Chicago and you have a large, particularly urban viewing audience across the country, it seemed natural to contact you.” In his reply, Manings explained that they were actually in the early stages of writing a two-part script about the very subject matter she proposed.<sup>78</sup> It is unclear whether Manings collaborated with Larson, but the episode, “J.J.’s Fiancé,” did turn J.J.’s girlfriend’s heroin addiction into a teachable moment about how someone could become addicted to drugs and the types of resources commonly available in most inner-city neighborhoods to help with drug addiction.

*Good Times*’s reputation for accuracy in its portrayals of social issues and structural factors affecting economically disadvantaged citizens made the show an appealing pedagogical tool for academics, who often used the program to teach about issues specific to the low-income, elderly community in the United States. The Associate

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<sup>78</sup> Patricia Larson to AM, 29 September 1975; and AM to Patricia Larson, 6 October 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

Director for Duke University's Clinical Program for Older Americans requested script copies of "The Dinner Party," an episode about the Evans's elderly neighbor, Gertrude Vinson (Frances Foster), who can barely survive on her social security benefits and occasionally resorts to eating pet food because of it. Professor James A. Lewis intended to use the scripts in the School of Law, in conjunction with the Duke Center for the Study of Ageing and Human Development, to teach about legal problems related to impoverished senior citizens. In requesting materials, Lewis claimed that *Good Times* "spelled out the significance of the problem, in legal, practical and—above all—human terms, and we would like to include excerpts from the script in our readings on Social Security."<sup>79</sup> Norman Lear's assistant sent two copies to Professor Lewis and noted that the production team had taken "special pleasure" in learning that he believed the show to be valuable in this manner.<sup>80</sup>

The episode framed its discussion on the failures of Social Security around an exploitative and corrupt government intervention into people's lives. In a scene with James Sr. and his youngest son Michael, James explains what "diplomacy" means: "That's a word that's used mostly by people in government. See, when they want you to vote for something but they know that if they was to tell you directly what it is they wanted, you wouldn't vote for it. So they tell you something else and then you end up voting for it. That's diplomacy." Unsatisfied with this explanation, Michael retorts, "but that's lying," to which James replies, "That's the same thing."<sup>81</sup> Professor Lewis' interest in supplementing academic readings on welfare policies and old-age assistance with this

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<sup>79</sup> James A. Lewis to AM, 25 February 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>80</sup> Virginia A. Carter to James A. Lewis, 5 March 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>81</sup> "The Dinner Party," *Good Times*, 11 February 1975.

script suggests his shared critique of how Social Security failed many Americans. Although Congress passed legislation in 1972 that adjusted Social Security benefits to account for inflation, and by-and-large Americans considered social insurance programs as earned entitlements and separate from “welfare,” which had the stigma of unearned charity, white women and people of color did not benefit from such programs the same way white men did. As historian Marissa Chappell points out, American social protections depended upon participation in the labor market, not on citizenship or residence. White women and people of color typically did not have access to the kind of jobs reserved for white men that afforded the most security with minimum wage and unionized protections. Even when federal policymakers “enhanced” benefits in the Social Security Amendments of 1939 by offering pensions to widows and children of deceased beneficiaries, they widened race and class divisions by privileging white breadwinners, excluding unwed mothers, and limiting the benefits black fathers received since they could rarely act as sole breadwinners while working.<sup>82</sup>

Although Ms. Vinson’s race and gender adds context to the position she is in, the episode downplays these factors and instead connects her struggle on Social Security to a crooked federal government—sans racism—and the recession. The episode is meant to engender empathy among a cross-racial audience for elderly people whose standard of living is diminished by inadequate Social Security funds and regulations. But neglecting to depict how race and gender factored into Ms. Vinson’s plight suggests *all* people are equally affected by government oversight of social protections. Whereas most viewers

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<sup>82</sup> Marissa Chappell, *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty, and Politics in Modern America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 8-12; Karen M. Tani, *States of Dependency: Welfare, Rights, and American Governance, 1935-1972*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 27-56.

did not find the episode as educational as Professor Lewis, they contested the episode on the grounds of false information and engaged in a dialogue about poverty and the aged outside of race and gender influences.

Manings received extensive complaints from general viewers who felt the episode presented inaccurate information about Social Security. They referred to a specific scene during which Willona explains the real reason Ms. Vinson is retiring from giving singing lessons: “She gets two-hundred dollars a month social security, which is not enough to live on. That’s why she’s been giving the singing lessons to get a little extra money. But do you know that every extra two dollars she makes giving a singing lesson, they take a dollar from her social security check.” “What kind of deal is that?” James asks. “It’s a new dance they invented,” Willona jokes, “called the Washington D.C. Boogie. Every time you take two steps ahead, they draaag you back one.”<sup>83</sup> In reference to this scene, a woman from Burbank, California, claimed that *Good Times* “misled the viewers.” She explained that “people on Social Security are allowed to earn \$2,520 yearly without a penalty. Your show gave the wrong impression. Either you give true facts, or no facts at all!” Manings responded that the viewer had misunderstood the scene; “[t]he character of Wilona,” [sic] he wrote, “stated that the elderly woman was allowed to make a further sum over and above her Social Security but, after that level is reached, for every two dollars she made she had to give back one dollar of Social Security. This checks out with the Social Security office and, if you are a recipient of Social Security, that information is included in an insert with your monthly check.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> “The Dinner Party,” *Good Times*, 11 February 1975.

<sup>84</sup> Mrs. Edward Gold to AM, 11 February 1975; and AM to Mrs. Edward Gold, 21 February 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

Judith Curran, an employee at a Social Security office in Virginia, expressed similar frustration with the episode. As someone who normally enjoyed *Good Times*, Curran believed that viewers trusted the sitcom to present accurate material, and therefore the episode's misguided information could impact their future during an already precarious economic moment. She claimed:

My main concern with the false information given out by the program is the effect it will have on individuals contemplating retirement. (Those in receipt of benefits already know that the information is incorrect.) This is certainly a cruel thing to do! Especially considering that they are generally uninformed regarding the Social Security Act. [...] But, I strongly feel that because of the dangerous and frightening misconception you have built up, that the producer, Norman Lear, or the network, should be forced to give the story truthfully—for the sake of those who don't know any better and who are now, thanks to the program more upset and insecure about their future in these trying times.<sup>85</sup>

Defensive in his response, Manings replied to Curran with the same explanation he gave every viewer who wrote to complain about “The Dinner Party”—they misinterpreted the scene. He supported the episode by citing those who lauded the program, such as senior citizens' organizations, Social Security recipients, and Duke University Law School, which Manings boasted “requested the script to be used in teaching graduate law students about problems of the elderly. Professor Lewis of that University referred to the program as being one of the most important ever done about old people in this country.”<sup>86</sup>

Manings relied on the positive responses from viewers to justify how *Good Times* critiqued Social Security benefits, indicating that the production team “did the right thing.” As Curran pointed out, however, the people who praised the episode were those who already understood how Social Security operated. Rather than laying the issue to rest

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<sup>85</sup> Judith Curran to AM, 11 February 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>86</sup> AM to Mrs. William H. Robinson, 26 February 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

after Manings' letter, Curran wrote back again to respond: "You state that Wilona [sic] pointed out that only income over a certain amount is subject to the \$1 for \$2 reduction. I didn't hear that and neither, apparently, did the hundreds of upset claimants who flooded the local social security office with phone calls the next day over the misunderstanding."<sup>87</sup> An NBC affiliate station in Minnesota, WHEC, also received phone calls immediately succeeding the episode. Program manager Bill Carroll stated that most callers "were annoyed by what they felt was a misrepresentation of the facts," and he requested an outline of the research conducted on Social Security regulation to help him respond to outraged viewers.<sup>88</sup> Despite Manings' defense of the scene to viewers, he acknowledged in one letter that after reading the script over again, it was "not quite as clear" as he would have liked, but continued to claim that the script was nevertheless accurate in its representation.<sup>89</sup>

Rather than engage in discourse about race and class through episodes about the contentious topic of welfare per se, *Good Times* couched informative programming about economic injustice in episodes about the elderly. Lear's sitcoms were less than subtle in their nod to many contemporary social movements—a direct reference is made to the Gray Panthers when Gertrude Vinson raises her fist and shouts "Medicare Power" at the end of "The Dinner Guest"—but academics seemed most interested in shows that portrayed problems faced by America's ageing population. Assistant Professor of Social Work, Jim Kelly, wrote to Tandem Productions in the spring of 1976 requesting to

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<sup>87</sup> AM to Judith Curran, 26 February 1975; and Judith Curran to AM, 1 March 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>88</sup> Bill Carroll to AM, 12 February 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>89</sup> AM to Catherine Danner, 12 February 1975, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

borrow films of *All in the Family* and *Good Times* episodes that addressed the aged. As the Director of the Gerontology Summer Institute at the University of Hawaii, Kelly explained the films would be used during the three-week convention for educational sessions on “media portrayal[s] of the elderly.” Kelly also extended an invitation to anyone affiliated with Tandem Productions to help conduct discussion sessions following each viewing. Manings responded that he happened to have a trip scheduled for Kona Village during the Gerontology meeting and would be happy to fly over to Honolulu to address the group. Manings brought copies of *AITF* episodes “Edith Finds an Old Man” and “Archie’s Weight Problem,” in addition to *Good Times*’s “The Dinner Guest” and “A Place to Die.” The latter telecast about an elderly man who requests to die in the Evanses home instead of at a nursing home. The Institute did not have the funds to pay Manings, but he was encouraged by Lear’s assistant to get feedback on how the audience reacted “to Tandem images of older people.”<sup>90</sup> Following Maning’s presentation of Tandem’s sitcoms, Kelly expressed his appreciation for taking the time to attend the conference, and show films on “the poignant facets of human behavior” that were so “realistically portrayed” in the featured episodes.<sup>91</sup> Educators who used sitcoms as a teaching tool represented a shift in pedagogical intentions that pushed Americans to have more empathy when learning about poverty, race, and class, and to think critically about the role structural discrimination played in establishing social hierarchies. Beliefs that *Good Times*, and social relevancy programing in general, could impact people’s lives extended

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<sup>90</sup> Correspondence between Jim Kelly, Virginia Carter, and Allan Manings, 6-24 May 1976, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>91</sup> Jim Kelly to AM, 25 June 1976, Box 1, Folder, Correspondence, AM Papers, AHC.

beyond academe as everyday people demonstrated in their missives to Manings about the show's capabilities.

As viewers pointed out, the public's understanding of poverty and welfare was clouded by stereotypes and misunderstandings. Manings relied on the economic recession of the 1970s to elicit empathic understanding among white audiences about the difficulties African Americans faced in a capitalist society that stacked the deck against people of color. His expectation to educate white viewers based on a shared experience with economic hardship proved successful in some instances, but for the most part white viewers either failed to let go of their preconceived racist ideas or they used the show to engage in a dialogue about poverty in the U.S. that neglected to consider any factors related to race or gender. Black viewers conversely viewed the show as one that focused on race and understood the grave implications that representations of a poor black family could have on race relations in general. At the same time, the growing lack of confidence in American politics, and *Good Times*'s explicit criticism of government distinguished social relevancy programming as a moral right fighting against an immoral wrong. Audiences therefore viewed certain television shows as trustworthy educational sources to learn from in ways that influenced social behavior.

As entertainment television became more realistic, the more influential it became in shaping viewers' worldview and behavior. Stakes were high, therefore, during the 1970s due to the social responsibility placed on the shoulders of media figures during a moment of political distrust and economic failure. For many actors of color, the opportunities afforded them in the television industry meant participating in a lot of "firsts"—in the case of *Good Times*, the first two-parent black family. Tensions between

black actors who sought to respectfully represent their race and white producers who intended to reach a broader audience via cross-racial storylines played out in the show and sent mixed messages to budding screenwriters regarding the show's intentions. Although many black people felt that media misrepresented the fight for civil rights and black power, they continued to look toward industry figures to improve television's portrayal of the black experience, and influence the public's consciousness about matters relating to race and class. Similar to the letter written to David Brinkley, many viewers considered television producers—in this case Allan Manings—mediators who could alter the tone of the country via the powerful medium of television.

## Chapter 5

### Flipping The Script: Learning about Sexism Through Introspection

“We are simply taking a look at our life and times through another kind of prism. Of course, the prism may appear to have been fashioned by a drunken lens maker in a darkly wooded German forest.”

-Norman Lear’s description of *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*.<sup>1</sup>

“Many women in America make the effort to grow out with women’s lib and all, but [Mary Hartman’s] is a growing in. I either want her to say fuck off or I can’t anymore...A lot of people have been saying fuck off lately, and not enough people are saying I can’t anymore.”

-Louise Lasser<sup>2</sup>

In Cleveland, Ohio, *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* aired at 7:30 p.m., which upset many Midwest residents. They prompted the city council to condemn the station for airing the show during a time when it could harm “innocent minds.” The station manager, Bill Flynn, bought an hour of prime-time television to allow the show’s creator, Norman Lear, to defend the program against its fierce critics. While addressing a panel consisting of the head of the PTA, a journalist from the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, a councilman, and an Episcopalian minister, Lear asked why Clevelanders were not concerned about the real-life incidents of homicide, rape, arson, and violence that dominated nightly news reports that aired at 5:00 and 6:00 p.m. Couldn’t the news also harm “the innocent minds” of children? “Yes,” the woman representing the PTA answered, “but that’s not as real as *Mary Hartman*.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* press kit, no date, box 16, folder “Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman,” Ann Marcus Papers (hereafter, AM), American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming (hereafter, AHC).

<sup>2</sup> Louise Lasser’s essay on Mary Hartman’s nervous breakdown, 29 January 1976, box 16, folder “Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman,” AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>3</sup> Norman Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 291-297.

*Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman (MH<sup>2</sup>)* debuted at the beginning of 1976 as the first nighttime soap opera to run five days per week. Starring Louise Lasser as Mary, the show lasted two seasons before Lasser quit, ultimately leading to *MH<sup>2</sup>*'s end. During the program's two-year run, 325 episodes aired between 1976-1977 featuring plotlines that centered around such edgy topics as the impotence and infidelity of Mary's husband and the exhibitionism of her grandfather Larkin, the "Fernwood Flasher." But the central, ongoing plotline concerned Mary Hartman's nervous breakdown, which Lear considered a metaphor for "America's nervous breakdown."<sup>4</sup> Lear had two main objectives with the show: to satirize daytime soaps and to "comment on the impact on an American family of commercial-driven all-day-and-all-night television, especially on the housewife who was more inclined [...] to be at home with the TV on."<sup>5</sup>

Lear contested television's prevailing negative influence over social behavior and relationships through the very medium he criticized. He came up with the general idea to do a night-time soap opera in 1968, but his ongoing productions kept him from developing the concept. Lear developed the critique of consumer culture that informed *MH<sup>2</sup>*'s over many years in which he gave speeches, sat for interviews, testified before congressional committees, and wrote articles about the state of television in American society. Moreover, the shifting political climate and conservative influence over media policy directed his vision for making and airing *MH<sup>2</sup>*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Writers meeting minutes, ND, box 16, folder "Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman," Ann Marcus Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming (hereafter, AHC).

<sup>5</sup> Writers meeting minutes, no date, box 16, folder "Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman," Ann Marcus Papers, AHC.

<sup>6</sup> Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience*, 291.

Neoconservative politics, which originated in the late-1960s with Richard Nixon's call to the "silent majority" and extended to Catholics and evangelical Christians in the 1970s, opposed the liberal left's idea of expanded citizenship. Conservative anti-feminism and pro-family ideology challenged social welfare policies and claimed that sex and gender social and legal advancements threatened "family values."<sup>7</sup> Disputes about how Americans conceived of the nation and how society could be improved extended to cultural politics, as well. Lear's critics shared his concern over the possible negative consequences of television playing such a prominent role in American households, yet their political motives for interrogating the medium's effects differed. By the mid-1970s, political perspectives on television's purpose in American lives shifted. Liberal ideals in the 1960s advocated for more diverse programming to reach wider audiences, but by the following decade conservatives were claiming that television needed to reach a "monolithic public" represented by a universal "American family" with shared values and interests.<sup>8</sup> Advocates for television reform who emphasized a need to protect "family values," therefore, couched their appeals in concerns over children viewers.

Political interest in television's impact on children developed out of the 1969 Surgeon General Scientific Committee on Television and Social Behavior report. In response to the study, Congress required the FCC to investigate how images of violence and obscenity affected children. Threats to cut the FCC's budget put pressure on television executives to address emerging concerns, and thus resulted in a form of self-

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 5-6; Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1969-1980* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Perlman, *Public Interests*, 132.

regulation adopted by broadcast networks and the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB).<sup>9</sup> Early efforts to make prime-time television more “family friendly” came from CBS Entertainment president Arthur Taylor who unilaterally determined that a “family viewing hour” from eight to nine p.m. (seven to eight in the central time zone) would allow American families to “watch television in that time period without ever being embarrassed.” Shortly thereafter, NBC and ABC joined Taylor’s mission to make TV safe for parents and children.<sup>10</sup>

By the time Lear found Ann Marcus—a writer willing to take on *MH<sup>2</sup>*, a five-episode per week serial—Family Viewing Time regulations were already in place. Executives from ABC and CBS initially expressed interest in the series, but all three networks ended up rejecting the pilot. Certain that American audiences would respond well to *MH<sup>2</sup>*, Lear sought an alternative plan to broadcast the show. He went directly to independent and multi-owned stations to sell *MH<sup>2</sup>* with the expectation that it would “open up a new marketplace for ideas and programs.” When the show premiered, 70-80 stations carried *MH<sup>2</sup>*, but its ratings success led another 30 stations to pick up the program seven weeks into the run. In its second season, 125 stations nationwide carried *MH<sup>2</sup>*, reaching an estimated 55 million households.<sup>11</sup> In what was perhaps a dig toward network executives who rejected the series, Lear stated in *MH<sup>2</sup>*’s press kit that the show’s

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<sup>9</sup> Perlman, *Public Interests*, 126-127.

<sup>10</sup> Lear, *Even This I Get To Experience*, 282-285. Lear discussed what this policy did for social relevancy in his memoir. *All in the Family*, for example, had its time slot moved from 8:00 p.m., where it reigned as TV’s number one show for four seasons, to a later hour, since Lear would not conform to Family Viewing standards. The Family Viewing Time was so restrictive that 20 out of 24 episodes of *All in the Family*’s 1974 season would not have been accepted by CBS under their new regulations.

<sup>11</sup> Elana Levine, *Wallowing in Sex: The New Culture of 1970s American Television*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 202-203; Ted Morgan, “*MH<sup>2</sup>* Recycles Our Garbage,” *New York Times*, 3 October 1976, 195.

future would “be in the hands of the people [who] should make all such decisions—the public.”<sup>12</sup> Lear’s freedom from network oversight allowed him to experiment with a new aesthetic and storylines that pushed television boundaries.

Norman Lear conceived of *MH<sup>2</sup>*’s concept, but co-creator and head writer Ann Marcus developed the show’s storylines and main characters. Her success with *MH<sup>2</sup>* led Lear to invite her to create a second series, *All That Glitters* (1977), with a similar format about a world where gender roles were reversed. Although less successful than *MH<sup>2</sup>*—*All That Glitters* (*ATG*) lasted just 13 weeks and aired 65 episodes—both programs represent a shift in the way entertainment television tried to reach viewers with impactful lessons about social relations. Whereas social relevancy television attempted to elicit affect from the viewer in order to arouse his or her consciousness about structural issues such as race and class hierarchies, Lear’s soap-opera satires intended to prod viewers to think about themselves and the ways in which capitalism and patriarchy went hand-in-hand, contributing to the general malaise that loomed over the latter half of the decade. More to the point, writers for these two shows intended for audiences to see themselves, specifically their gendered roles within their families and personal relationships, through the desperate and sad characters featured in both programs. Soap-opera satires were intended to serve as mirror for viewers, who could see how their complacency contributed to their own unhappiness, which represented a departure from social relevancy shows that intended to become a window through which viewers could perceive social issues. Unlike social relevancy programming, these shows seemed to

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<sup>12</sup> *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* press kit, no date, box 16, folder “Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman,” AM Papers, AHC.

assume a mostly white audience in its representation of an unhappy housewife. The show's soap-opera quality and feminist critiques did not discourage male viewers however, who frequently wrote in as fans of the show.

This chapter examines how Lear, Marcus and other writers for *MH<sup>2</sup>* and *ATG* challenged male and female viewers to reflect on their own interpersonal relationships through entertainment television. One of the ways they did this was by engaging with cultural psychology that had entered mainstream discourse in the 1970s to help shape characters and storylines. Through an analysis of production files for both shows, such as the weekly tape recorded and transcribed meeting minutes between the writers and Norman Lear, I argue that *MH<sup>2</sup>* and *ATG* represent an experimental moment in television history which presented feminist critiques of patriarchy in a less didactic manner in order to encourage introspection among viewers.<sup>13</sup> As the US politically moved in a more conservative direction and cultural mediums faced increased regulation under the aegis of “family values,” Lear found a way to circumvent network control that allowed writers to critique conventional gender roles and consumer culture from a feminist perspective.

### **Narcissism, Self-Help, and Cultural Psychology in the “Me Decade”**

Tom Wolfe famously defined the 1970s as the “me decade” in a 1976 *New York Magazine* article. In the essay, he attributed contemporary obsessions with authenticity and finding one's true self with post-war white, middle-class affluence. According to Wolfe, as the pursuit of individualism became mass-marketed and entangled with

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<sup>13</sup> As I have discussed in previous chapters, television premises that encouraged self-reflection among viewers as opposed to more direct lesson teaching fared better among white audiences with plotlines that avoided race topics. Therefore, although Lear developed a reputation for creating sitcoms with black casts, both soap-opera satires featured only white characters and focused on gender-specific issues devoid of any race analysis.

consumer culture, Americans became more interested in “me” and achieving self-fulfillment. Citing New Left communes, various religious revivals, women’s liberation, the sexual revolution, and the prevalence of therapy and counseling, Wolfe branded the entire white, American middle-class as narcissistic.<sup>14</sup> Wolfe first dubbed the 1970s as the “me” decade, but readers would have already been familiar with his general critique, and his particular usage of the “narcissism” to explain their existence.<sup>15</sup> Natasha Zaretsky has documented the transformation of narcissism from a psychiatric into a cultural condition in the second half of the 1970s. As Wolfe noted, psychoanalysts traced the origins of narcissism to the white, middle-class family after WWII, specifically how smothering yet cold mothers and absent fathers contributed to narcissistic personality disorders. Narcissistic features included delusions of grandeur and self-importance. The narcissist was excessively pretentious, yet at the same time required praise from others and could not handle criticism. They exploited interpersonal relationships, lacked empathy, and failed to recognize the emotional needs of others. As journalists, scholars, and social critics tried to make sense of the political and economic decline of the 1970s, however, narcissism transitioned from a clinical to a cultural condition. More than a personality disorder, narcissism came to represent generations, decades, and trends.<sup>16</sup>

But as much as social critics relied on psychological analysis to interpret the decade’s failures, psychological influences on popular literature and therapy practices did lead to a cultural phenomenon wherein people attempted to create a sense of self outside

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<sup>14</sup> Tom Wolfe, “The ‘Me’ Decade and the Third Great Awakening,” *New York Magazine*, 23 August 1976.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978); Elizabeth Lunbeck, *The Americanization of Narcissism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*, 183-222.

the constraints of traditional norms. In what sociologist Sam Binkley refers to as “getting loose,” characteristics previously associated with a hippie lifestyle—natural foods, less-restrictive clothing, longer natural hair, open communication, spirituality, and sexual openness—became regular habits of the middle-class in search of their most authentic self by the 1970s.<sup>17</sup> The transition from uptight to loose and from counter-culture fringe to mainstream middle-class created a certain degree of uncertainty and anxiety among people who tried to adjust to a new way of living that directly contradicted the norms they were raised to uphold. As more people attempted to understand their self in between new and old ideologies—such as housewives who thought differently about their gendered role yet wanted to maintain the basic structure of their marriage—psychology penetrated popular culture in the form of self-help to assist Americans in understanding themselves amidst a society in flux.

“Getting loose” involved new forms of self-expression and breaking free from the confines of traditional gender roles. Sexual liberation and feminist movements altered men’s and women’s expectations of what they wanted to put into and get out of intimate relationships. Part of the changing discourse concerning men’s and women’s “healthy” relationships involved the notion of intimacy. Intimacy differed from romance, which was the previous marker of a strong connection, in that intimacy involved acknowledging and addressing the problems, in addition to the joys, of a particular union. Expressing

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<sup>17</sup> Sam Binkley, *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Andreas Killen also discusses how critics identified the “me” decade by an increased concern with personal over political transformation, but the focus on the “self” also indicated a sense of paranoia. Increased cult followings and religious revivals reflected a rejection of the cultural and familial changes of the decade. Andreas Killen, *1973: Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the Birth of Post-Sixties America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006), 112-113.

what made each person in a relationship happy—or stimulated, in the case of the bedroom—is what could make a couple more intimate.<sup>18</sup> Complications arose, however, from this “individualization of intimate relations,” and portrayals of couples who lacked intimacy from failing to communicate dominated literature, film, and television. Increased divorce rates and popular culture’s depictions of unhappy couples fostered a consumer market for psychologists to enter providing advice on ways to communicate better with one’s partner. In self-help books, magazine articles, and even television talk shows, psychologists provided different models for communicating as a prescription for “sexual incompatibility, anger, money disputes, an unequal distribution of domestic chores, personality incompatibility, secret emotions, and childhood events.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, self-help advice offered through popular culture provided many Americans with a general understanding of psychological terminology and therapeutic practices.

Sociologist Eva Illouz has documented the “transition of the textual and institutional structure of therapy into a cultural performance,” which most notably manifested itself through support groups. Characterized by publicly communicating private stories, support groups such as assertiveness training, Alcoholics Anonymous, and trauma support encourage people to translate their private experiences to the public as a form of therapy. Support groups borrowed therapeutic methods but were most commonly organized by nonprofessional psychologists who ran workshops as a form of grassroots healthcare based off of their own success with self-improvement.<sup>20</sup> An

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<sup>18</sup> Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and The Culture of Self-Help*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 125-131.

<sup>19</sup> Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 131-135.

<sup>20</sup> Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 188-189; Micki McGee, *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2005), 18.

example is with Werner Erhard, a former car retailer who in 1971 introduced the notion of transforming one's life. Through "empowerment workshops," more commonly referred to as Erhard Seminars Training (EST), Erhard could teach attendees how to communicate and relate to others because therapeutic language and narrative was so deeply entrenched in American culture.<sup>21</sup>

Americans also became familiar with various components of psychology through social activists who publicly used methods that resembled self-help and support groups to foster a sense of community and stimulate empathy. Feminists most notably drew on therapeutic discourse with consciousness-raising groups that critically evaluated the family and women's experiences with men in more general terms.<sup>22</sup> Feminist writer Vivian Gornick explained consciousness-raising in a 1971 article in *The New York Times*, as a technique for feminist conversations where women can "examin[e] one's personal experience in the light of sexism; i.e., that theory which explains women's subordinate position in society as a result of a cultural decision to confer direct power on men and only indirect power on women." To explain consciousness-raising more thoroughly, Gornick included stories from three different women who she explained were not feminists or members of the women's liberation movement. In one example, a Toledo, Ohio woman realizes that after ten years of working in the same factory as her husband,

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<sup>21</sup> Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 186-196.

<sup>22</sup> Illouz discusses how feminists incorporated elements of psychology to bring awareness to women's struggles, yet at the same time disavowed psychoanalysis and psychology, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 120-125; Ellen Herman also discusses how post-war psychological culture impacted the women's liberation movement. She argues that psychology "offered resources with which to support the ideas and actions of the women's movement: to resist the separation of private and public, to bridge the yawning chasms between the physic and the social, and the self and the other." Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 277-280.

she has always cleaned and cooked despite both her and her husband working the same hours at the same job. Once this Ohioan realized the skewed division of labor in her marriage, she insisted that her husband help out with chores around the house. After a large fight in which her husband got so mad the woman thought, “he was gettin’ ready to belt me one,” he caved and did the dishes for the first time in his life. Gornick claimed that none of the women who shared their stories had ever heard of consciousness-raising. “And yet,” she explained, “each of them exhibits the symptomatic influence of this, the movement’s most esoteric practice. Each of them, without specific awareness, is beginning to feel the effects of the consideration of woman’s personal experience in a new light—a political light.”<sup>23</sup> The remaining eight-page editorial does not explain how these women could have gained consciousness if they were unfamiliar with consciousness-raising, feminism, and the women’s movement. But it does demonstrate how much feminist critique became woven into the fabric of changing expectations regarding gender roles in both public and private spheres.

Sociologists have studied how popular culture has been used to teach Americans about psychology, but this chapter examines the relationship between culture and psychology from a different angle—it considers how creators of television programming used psychological knowledge to explain women’s discontent with traditional gender roles. More to the point, describing the decade’s problems in psychological terms influenced the way television writers developed characters and storylines meant to reflect the current social and cultural moment. As Illouz points out, psychological texts become

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<sup>23</sup> Vivian Gornick, “Consciousness,” *The New York Times*, 10 January 1971, 20.

actionable experiences when people practice introspection to make sense of their own and others' feelings.<sup>24</sup> The remainder of this chapter examines how writers for *MH<sup>2</sup>* and *ATG* intended to educate viewers about the ways in which a patriarchal culture contributed to women's unhappiness and the decade's social problems as a whole, and how the narrative structure of these two shows encouraged self-reflection among viewers to think differently about their own participation in maintaining a gendered status quo.

***Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman: Between Feminist and Total Woman***

Psychological culture of the 1970s impacted the way Americans discussed and understood contemporary events and trends. Cults, radical political groups, drug use, and sexual experimentation—among other changes in the decade's culture—all led to analyses of the psyche in search of explaining what caused people to distance themselves from societal norms. Doctors and social critics looked toward changing family structures from the 1960s to understand mental illness and fanaticism in the following decade. Hollywood also provided their own version of this prevailing story through films such as *The Exorcist* (1973) and *Sybil* (1976).<sup>25</sup> Although fewer attempts to understand human behavior took place on television, *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* became one of the most notable shows to dramatize psychopathology and the demise of a typical nuclear family. *MH<sup>2</sup>*'s press kit described the show as having “a wry sense of humor that is satirical, humanistic and realistic,” and explained how the series presented the personal relationships between characters and how these average Americans reacted and interacted

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<sup>24</sup> Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, 18-19.

<sup>25</sup> Andreas Killen, *1973: Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the Birth of Post-Sixties America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006), 111-133.

“to the realities of contemporary America.”<sup>26</sup> *MH*’s realism, therefore, stemmed from depicting the characters’ feelings and trying to explain their behavior within the context of a decade divided by feminism and family values.

Set in the fictitious working-class city of Fernwood, Ohio, *MH*<sup>2</sup> begins with the murder of a neighborhood family of five, along with their two goats and eight chickens. Although her kitchen television set shows reports of the horrific violence, it is not enough to distract Mary from questioning whether the new cleaner she purchased truly lives up to its promise of removing the “waxy yellow buildup” that has developed on her kitchen floor. Echoing arguments put forth by psychologists and social critics of the decade like Tom Wolfe, Lear instructed the writing team to address the “lunacy of our escalating consumer culture” in the opening act of *MH*<sup>2</sup>. Ann Marcus captured Lear’s vision in the famous opening scene between Mary and the “waxy yellow buildup” on her kitchen floor. “My, who would want to kill two goats and eight chickens,” she asked without taking her eye off the can of cleaner. “And the people. Of course, the people.”<sup>27</sup>

*Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*’s writing team used psychological discourse that had penetrated American culture to explain the pressure capitalism placed on families in general, but women in particular. Although increased representations of psychological theories and practice in popular culture occurred in the 1970s, the use of cultural sources to address the psychological effects of women’s unhappiness with domesticity has a longer history.<sup>28</sup> Eva Moskowitz has documented how women’s magazines in the 1950s

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<sup>26</sup> *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* press kit, ND, box 16, folder “Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman,” AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>27</sup> “Episode 1.1,” 6 January 1976.

<sup>28</sup> *MH*<sup>2</sup>’s representation of an unhappy housewife was really a new version of an old trope. Television scholars have studied how “ethnic” sitcoms during television’s “golden age,” such as the early seasons of

frequently covered the “discourse of discontent” felt by married women across the US. Marriage counselors suggested techniques, exercises, and provided advice on how women could find self-fulfillment while still conforming to domesticity. The objective was to educate readers about the value of domesticity, and to help women find a sense of purpose in housewifery to overcome their dissatisfaction. Moskowitz points out the divide between anti-feminist women who believed housewives’ attitudes contributed to their own displeasure in the home, and feminists who later argued that women’s magazines provided solutions that depoliticized discontent.<sup>29</sup> Marcus created the character of Mary Hartman as someone conflicted by this tension between feminists and anti-feminists who disagreed about how women could feel fulfilled and happy.

Leading actor Louise Lasser developed Mary’s character, while head-writer Ann Marcus and the writing team created storylines about Mary’s search for her sense-of-self, her husband Tom’s (Greg Mullavey) “performance anxiety” in the bedroom, and Mary’s eventual nervous breakdown. In the show, Mary takes on the responsibility to fix her marriage and looks for advice through television shows, *Reader’s Digest*, and self-help books from the library titled: *You and Your Climax*; *343 Ways to Improve Your Marriage*; *Orgasm and You*. The writers emphasized the prevailing psychological culture

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*The Danny Thomas Show* (1953-1965), *The Honeymooners* (1955-1956) and *I Love Lucy* (1951-1957) featured disgruntled housewives. What set *MH<sup>2</sup>* apart from earlier sitcoms, however, was its format. The show did not have a laugh track, nor was it filmed in front of a live audience, the actors took long pauses as a way to mock soap operas, and eerie organ music played between scenes. This style of presentation of Mary’s discontent was not funny, per se, even though some of her lines were intended to be comical. Therefore, although television’s unhappy housewife was not new, how the show presented her unhappiness was unprecedented.

<sup>29</sup> Eva Moskowitz, “‘It’s Good to Blow Your Top’: Women’s Magazines and a Discourse of Discontent,” *Journal of Women’s History*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1996); For more on popular culture’s presentation of the “discourse of discontent” see Jessica Weiss, *To Have and To Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change*, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

of the decade through plotlines that included Mary hiring a sex therapist (who later turns out to be a sex surrogate) and her experimentation with personal growth therapy referred to as STET (a spoof on the decade's EST trend).<sup>30</sup> The American public was already skeptical about the effects of people watching too much TV and seeing so many advertisements, but the writers of *MH<sup>2</sup>* wanted their viewers to think about how the medium played a part in establishing gender roles that made women and housewives feel trapped in their home. Whereas Lear's intention with the show was to question how consumer culture impacted American housewives, Marcus and Lasser helped to answer that question with the characterization of Mary.

Ann Marcus strongly influenced the direction of the soap opera satire, presenting a feminist portrayal of an American family to the masses through the powerful medium of television. In writing her scripts, Marcus would later explain, she drew inspiration from everything she ever read or saw (from real life occurrences to films and television), as well as her own life experiences and those of people she knew.<sup>31</sup> It was precisely Marcus's experiences as a woman in the television industry that contributed to the "realism" that so many viewers either appreciated or, like the PTA woman from Cleveland, protested. Her role as co-creator and head writer played a part in presenting a feminist portrayal of housewifery and the suburbs—one that showed Mary's unhappiness in particular as stemming from an oppressive consumer culture.

Ann Marcus began her career writing for magazines such as *Life* and *Vogue* in the 1940s. During this formative period, Marcus developed a feminist sense of self after

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<sup>30</sup> Levine, *Wallowing in Sex*, 204.

<sup>31</sup> Marcus, *Whistling Girl: A Memoir*, (Los Angeles: Mulholland Pacific Publishing, 1998), 154.

reading Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1940), a book that Marcus felt spoke "directly to and for" her. Inspired by *The Second Sex*, and drawing on her own experiences as a writer for women's magazines, Marcus wrote in 1953 an article for *Vogue Magazine* entitled "Are Women the Second Sex in Hollywood?" After interviewing several actors, including Ann Baxter and Ronald Reagan, Marcus concluded that women had to fight so hard in this highly competitive male-dominated industry that it often undermined their self-confidence. Being "forced to maintain a delicate balance between fulfilling their inalienable artistic rights, and integrating themselves with their male colleagues" led Marcus to conclude that women indeed were the "second sex" in Hollywood.

Marcus took great pride in her report, but ultimately *Vogue* rejected the article. In the years following, Marcus tired of writing unpublished essays yet felt unfulfilled and bored when she tried to devote her time to just being a wife and mother. She dabbled in acting and writing screenplays (*A Woman's Place*) and short stories that reflected her own life experiences as a mother in the workplace. For example, one short story she penned entitled "Should Mothers Have Brains?" featured a woman who lamented having raised her sons so well that even as young boys they thought they were superior and more knowledgeable than their mother.<sup>32</sup> By the early-sixties, Marcus participated in workshops with actors, writers, and directors at Desilu Productions, where she eventually found an agent who offered to represent her as a television writer. Ezra Stone was the first producer to hire Marcus in 1961 for the television show *The Hathaways*, which

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<sup>32</sup> Full short story in Marcus, *Whistling Girl*, 135-138.

starred a childless couple raising chimpanzees as their kids. Even though Stone liked the ideas she pitched for the series, he had one stipulation: Marcus could only have the assignment if her husband (an established television writer) wrote the show with her. Infuriated by the blatant chauvinism that accompanied her first employment offer, Marcus swallowed her pride and took the job. In the coming years, she eventually became recognized as a credible writer independently from her husband.<sup>33</sup>

By 1975, Marcus had an established career as a writer for many soaps and dramas, including *Peyton Place* (1964-1969), *Days of Our Lives* (1965—), and *Love Is a Many Splendored Thing* (1967-1973). After Lear hired Marcus, she recruited Daniel Gregory Browne and Jerry Adelman to make up the *MH<sup>2</sup>* writing team. Due to Lear's distraction with his other five sitcoms—(*All in the Family* (1971-1979), *Maude* (1972-1978), *Good Times* (1974-1979), *The Jeffersons* (1975-1985), and *One Day At a Time* (1975-1984)—the three writers worked under the direction of Marcus to flesh out the characters in Mary's family and to create 10 new characters. For example, during one of the writers' meetings that took place just one month before the show first aired, Marcus expressed frustration with Lear for coming in, after the writers had brainstormed and written scripts, only to make suggestions for major changes—changes that contradicted ideas he had initially suggested. Lear's response to her frustration shows how much autonomy he gave his writers: "it's not my intention to talk so fast and have you take what I've said literally, because I am more aware than you how often I'll say either too little or something that's so wrong. You've got to use what I say with a fine sieve, and

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<sup>33</sup> Marcus, *Whistling Girl*, 140-142.

take from it what you like.”<sup>34</sup> The following day, he again admitted: “In these meetings, you can see that sometimes I am not reading as carefully as I should. And you see I just also let my head go, and it isn’t always right. So you use what feels right, and you discard what doesn’t. I have no feeling of great propriety about any of this. Whatever feels right to you.”<sup>35</sup> In addition to creating extra characters, Marcus, Adelman, and Browne independently wrote the long-term storylines for the entire first season, including the first ten half-hour scripts.<sup>36</sup>

When writing for *MH<sup>2</sup>*, Marcus incorporated many of the elements from her written work from the 1940s and 1950s. Most notably, she was able to write Mary as a woman who felt guilty for longing to be something more than a housewife because Marcus felt the same way earlier in her own life. The writing team as a whole, moreover, pulled from contemporary books, theories, and discussions regarding feminism and women’s sexuality when brainstorming. The main point writers wanted to deliver through Mary’s character was the difficulty real women faced when trying to navigate the mixed messages presented in media about how to find their true self and happiness. In multiple writers’ meetings that took place the same month the show aired, Lear re-hashed Marcus’s characterization of Mary, specifically her sexual frustration with her husband, Tom, since they had not had sex in almost two months. Lear connects Mary’s and Tom’s intimacy troubles “to what people are terming the impotency problem,” but the Hartman’s issues are bigger than impotency. “I viewed it as a husband and wife problem

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<sup>34</sup> Writers meeting minutes, December 22 1975, box 16, folder “Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman,” Ann Marcus Papers, AHC

<sup>35</sup> Writers meeting minutes, December 23 1975, box 16, folder “Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman,” Ann Marcus Papers, AHC

<sup>36</sup> Lear, 292-293; Marcus, *Whistling Girl*, 163-165

and one which I think is rampant throughout the nation, for various reasons,” Lear explained. Tom’s lack of desire to have sex with Mary is not because Tom is impotent, according to Lear; instead, Tom is psychologically responding to the decade’s changing gender norms. Mary, too, feels caught between myriad ideologies presented in media on how women should behave. With feminists declaring women should break free from the chains of domesticity, anti-feminists challenged the notion that patriarchal gender roles fostered women’s unhappiness and instead placed the onus of a happy home and healthy sex-life on the wife. Both perspectives required women to take charge, but the more Mary attempted to initiate sex the more Tom recoiled. “He didn’t want to be pressed,” Lear explained, “as if he were (in old-fashioned terms) the female, and she were (in old-fashioned terms) the male.”<sup>37</sup>

The writers continued to engage in a dialogue about Mary and how to realistically portray a housewife in the seventies. From Marcus’s reports, it seems clear that Lear understood Mary as a woman who unconsciously longed to be something more than a mother and a housewife, but who did not identify as feminist. Unhappy in her assigned role, she was nonetheless influenced by books such as *Fascinated Womanhood* (1963) and *The Total Woman* (1970) that instruct women to “sit on the television set with your legs crossed with a touch of crotch showing” in order to titillate one’s husband when he comes home from work. Both books served as a self-help guide to teach women how to restore their marriage through submissive behavior toward their husbands. Marabel Morgan’s *The Total Woman* in particular responded to the sexual revolution and feminist

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<sup>37</sup> Writers meeting minutes, 20 January 1976 and 26 January, 1976, box 16, folder “Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman,” AM Papers, AHC.

movements by presenting a conservative, evangelical approach to “claiming female sexual power while maintaining sex-defined roles in the household.” Sex between heterosexual married couples, Morgan argued, was not sinful but necessary to maintain a happy household. Through costumes, role-playing, and props, Morgan encouraged evangelical readers and attendees of Total Woman workshops to initiate sex and how to properly respond to their husband’s sexual overtures. Sex, Morgan claimed, was “as clean and pure as eating cottage cheese.”<sup>38</sup> Although conservatives directly opposed feminists in their beliefs regarding how women could achieve happiness and fulfilment, Lear saw the two ideological camps as rooted in the same struggle. Neoconservative women, therefore, did not develop an ideology in response to feminism; instead, they responded to the same discourse of discontent that supposedly fueled feminist movements. Rather than blaming men, however, anti-feminists condemned women for feeling unfulfilled with domesticity. He explained the shared sentiment he thought liberal and conservative women felt: “I’m sure what’s happening with women, on an unconscious level, all across the country, at every level of economic life, is a nameless need to do something more than be a mother and a housewife and do all the little things that we have captured (you have captured) so brilliantly.” He explained to the writers that on the one hand, you have feminists fighting patriarchal structures and trying to pass the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), and on the other hand, there are women who “are whipped up by the Phyllis Schlaflys” to hate feminists and fight to maintain traditional

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<sup>38</sup> Amy DeRogatis, *Saving Sex: Sexuality and Salvation in American Evangelicalism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 62-64.

gender norms. The character of Mary, as Lear understood it, represented everyday women who felt unsatisfied with their lives yet conflicted by these polarizing positions.<sup>39</sup>

All the while, Mary was confined to the home by constant domestic labor since she and her husband could not afford to hire domestic help. Lear considered Mary part of “the bulk of America” constantly bombarded with commercials that interrupt TV shows to advertise oven cleaners: “we forget about all those products if we can afford to have somebody do this for us, we forget how much time is spent cleaning ovens.” Marcus added that it is precisely Mary’s socio-economic class that presented a different perspective of feminism, or from previously televised depictions of women’s unhappiness more generally. Marcus concluded the writers’ meeting by stating that for a number of reasons, both metaphorically and literally, “Mary can’t get out of that kitchen.”<sup>40</sup>

Mary’s tension with her husband, Tom, was a storyline that continuously developed over the course of the show and therefore became a topic that the writers frequently discussed in their meetings. Mary’s character was thought to have shared many of the problems that feminists discussed, but she was adamant in her anti-feminism,

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<sup>39</sup> Elana Levine argues that *MH2*’s engagement with sexual material is reflective of the show’s “radical take on the sexual revolution.” She argues that Tom’s and Mary’s unhappiness is rooted in their growing distaste for conventional marriage values and their interest in the new sexual culture. The transcripts of the writers’ meetings, however, indicate that Tom and Mary were written as conservative characters in their marriage ideals. The way the writers’ discussed developing both characters suggests that the show actually satirizes conservative beliefs that marriage, children, a house, and consumer goods is what makes a person happy. Mary’s appearance—her braided pigtails and pinafore with exaggerated puffy shoulders—mimics the child-like persona books like *Fascinated Womanhood* claimed women should maintain in order to make their husbands happy, and in turn, themselves happy. Examining *MH2* within a conservative context provides a different understanding of the show’s intended purpose. Rather than reflect the sexual revolution, the show’s pathos tried to explain how women tried to make sense of their gendered role amidst conflicting neoconservative ideologies, and more generally, what caused a decade of angst. Levine, *Wallowing in Sex*, 200-207.

<sup>40</sup> Writers meeting minutes, 20 January 1976, box 16, folder “Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman,” AM Papers, AHC.

because she did not fully understand feminism as a movement or an ideology. Echoing a point Marcus had made in a previous meeting, Lear stated that it was “marvelous” that they could draw out the storyline of how Mary figured out her unhappiness since she was unable to articulate what was bothering her the way “other women of more education” could. Lear then provided an example of the type of dialogue he envisioned, with Tom accusing Mary of watching too much TV and “getting into all that femini[st] bullshit about not being fulfilled,” to which Mary insists that she is “not one of them” and is happy being a wife and mother. Although Mary has a difficult time articulating what makes her unhappy, the writers all agreed that in order for her to communicate to Tom, Mary had to insist her sentiments were anti-feminist. Rather than present Mary as a self-avowed women’s liberationist, the writers tried to portray how an ordinary woman might have to maneuver within her marriage to express her discontent with traditional gender roles. Lear claimed that what he saw in Marcus’ Mary Hartman was exactly what he saw in actual women who were trying to break out of a “patriarchal shell.”<sup>41</sup>

Marcus concurred, noting that Lear’s understanding of Mary was exactly how she came to define the other female characters whom Mary envied. because she saw them as having life goals, something Mary wanted, even though she didn’t know exactly what she was longing for. That, Lear replied, was “something very real” that “every woman in America can plug into [...] because women are restless, sex morals have changed.” Although Lear claimed he wanted to see Mary’s character as representative of the tidal wave of women pushing for what they wanted in life—“just like most women in America

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<sup>41</sup> Writers meeting minutes, 20 January 1976, box 16, folder “Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman,” AM Papers, AHC.

are”—he was adamant that Mary should not be associated with feminism. As he put it, she has certainly “needs,” but “doesn’t want to fall into any traps of expressing herself in any feminist way. You don’t even need the word feminist.”<sup>42</sup>

By never using the word “feminist” on the show, *MH*<sup>2</sup> presented an invisible feminist commentary on capitalism and housewifery. It had the potential to attract viewers who supported women’s liberationist ideals, while not necessarily discouraging audiences who opposed it. For example, on the one hand, the show received praise from viewers like a thirty-three-year-old Oakland woman who claimed that, as a women’s activist, she considered the show “right on.”<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, another person wrote to Lear claiming that “the silent majority LOVES you” for creating *MH*<sup>2</sup>.<sup>44</sup> Even though the show presented a sexually frustrated woman who longed for an identity outside of being a wife and mother, by circumventing any explicitly feminist language, it managed to speak to a wider audience across the political spectrum that found common ground in their praise for the show.

### **Consumer Consciousness and America’s Nervous Breakdown**

Louise Lasser also contributed to the correlation between Mary’s characterization and real women, and American society as a whole. After writing scripts for the first half of the first season, one of the writers called Lasser to ask her opinion on the direction she

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<sup>42</sup> Writers meeting minutes, 20 January 1976, box 16, folder “Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman,” AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>43</sup> Shelly Fields to Channel 44: 22 January 1976, Box 16, Folder “Correspondence, 1976; Fan Mail for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*,” AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>44</sup> The letters written to Norman Lear are located in his personal collection at his media and production company, Act iii Communications, in Beverly Hills, CA. Per Lear’s request, the names of all letter writers are omitted from citations. Letter to Norman Lear, 12 April 1976, Box 803, Folder “Fan Mail/Related,” Norman Lear Papers (hereafter NL), Act iii.

saw Mary going in. Without hesitation, Lasser explained that Mary should have a nervous breakdown. Lasser was told to tell Lear about her suggestion, but the idea of approaching the producer intimidated her, leading her to pitch the idea in an unconventional way. She wrote a twelve-page paper, “like a school paper,” she later recalled, “on how Mary’s nervous breakdown was really America’s nervous breakdown, and Mary personified America.”<sup>45</sup> In the essay, Lasser describes the conditions contributing to Mary’s emotional state, which include the lack of intimacy in her marriage and her strained relationship with her pre-teen daughter. On a broader scale, however, these personal incidents represented feelings of failure during a moment when Americans had access to endless resources to guide them toward self-fulfillment. Lasser identifies how insidious self-help culture could be since it provided contradictory guidelines to achieving happiness, all of which related to what she identified as America’s angst. She fleshes this idea out in the essay by describing a potential scene between Mary and another character, Sargent Foley (Bruce Soloman). “I just want to live properly and do the right thing,” Mary explains, “but all these emotions and relationships that experts write about confuse me.” Foley asks, “You mean the emotions and the relationships?” To which Mary replies, “No, the experts.” Mary metaphorically represents the country through her realization that white middle-class values and aesthetics represent a fantasy, or what Lasser refers to as a “J.C. Penny” world. The real world, in fact, is falling down around Mary, and despite having done everything “right,”

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<sup>45</sup> Lasser recalls this event in multiple interviews, but she does not remember which writer called her on the phone. “Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman (1976) Louise Lasser Interview,” nd, accessed 1 November 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15nlfO0-Kys>; Louis Lasser Interview with The Television Academy Foundation, 16 May, 2017, accessed 1 November, 2018, <https://interviews.televisionacademy.com/interviews/louise-lasser#about>.

her husband and child still do not want anything to do with her. Lasser elaborates on this later in the essay: “She’s trying to live properly in a world that’s turned upside down, she’s trying to make order in a world that there is no order. Everybody does that, it’s America.”

Although Mary’s breakdown is specific to white women and housewives, Lasser related consumer culture to the cause of anyone’s emotional distress. “How long can you be a housewife in America?” she asked, “With what is going on, with what you’re exposed to without it affecting you in some way, if you can’t express it, and [Mary] can’t express it.” Mary’s inability to articulate how she feels stems from the media’s failure to live up to its potential and its tendency to obfuscate information and current events. Lasser argues that popular culture contributes to this anxiety by explaining that Mary used to avoid her problems, but now she reads more to try to solve them. And “she doesn’t know what’s happening because she’s reading more,” Lasser writes, “the media is feeding her more—she’s not only getting overwhelmed and bombarded by the people around her, but bombarded in general. She is getting emotionally bombarded and what happens????—she has a nervous breakdown.”<sup>46</sup>

Lasser’s idea made it into the show, with Mary falling apart on television from the pressure she faced while being interviewed on *The David Susskind Show* as “America’s Typical Consumer Housewife.” During a meeting between Lear and Lasser, they discussed how these events would play out. Maybe a television executive would recognize Mary was “near-hysterical” and want to put her on TV because of it for ratings;

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<sup>46</sup> Louise Lasser’s essay on Mary Hartman’s nervous breakdown, 29 January 1976, box 16, folder “Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman,” AM Papers, AHC.

or Mary could be on television with two other “perfectly well” housewives who make her unhappiness more noticeable; or finally, they considered whether Mary should appear on the show with two “very strong women’s liberationists,” like Margaret Mead and Bella Abzug figures. They ultimately decided to have Mary on *The Susskind Show* with a combination of some of the ideas presented. They portrayed a film crew documenting a week in Mary’s life before sending her to New York to face a panel consisting of a feminist, a consumer advocate, and a media expert. Unable to handle having her personal life magnified under television’s spotlight, Mary cracks under the pressure of knowing all of the answers she *should* give in response to questions about her “typical housewife” activities. But instead, feeling the need to lie about her familial relationships and present a false image of herself pushes Mary to break down on national television.<sup>47</sup> The way Mary’s breakdown plays out suggests that everyone knows the “typical” housewife is an unhappy woman—TV executives, Susskind, feminists, and even Mary—and it’s the energy put into trying to maintain a façade that wears on Mary’s emotional health. Mary’s anxiety on *Susskind* developed out her slow realization that consumer products did not deliver on their promise to provide happiness. She begins to see herself as a person whose identity and aspirations are tied to material objects. A *New York Times* article aptly identified the treatment of Mary’s breakdown as “the price she pays for awareness.”<sup>48</sup> During the writers’ meetings, Lear made sure to distinguish Mary’s character from feminists, but the portrayal of her discontent mirrored feminist criticisms

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<sup>47</sup> Meeting with Lear and Lasser, 9 April 1976, box 16, folder “Production Files, 1975-1976; Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman,” AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>48</sup> Morgan, “*MH2* Recycles Our Garbage.”

of domesticity. America's nervous breakdown, therefore, was in response to women breaking out of their "patriarchal shell."

Unlike cultural critics like Tom Wolfe, Lear viewed the anxiety-filled decade that led to America's nervous breakdown in a positive light. He disagreed with academics who analyzed *MH<sup>2</sup>* as a representation of the country's "sick society," because he believed the "program is affirmative." He considered Mary a "survivor" who learns over time how strong she really is. Lear argued against critics who called him a subversive for portraying real hardships. He considered the cheery sitcoms of television's "golden age" subversive for peddling false narratives of happy housewives with perfect families and "telling people who had lost their jobs and were delinquent in their mortgage payments and had runaway children that it didn't matter because look at how lovely life is."<sup>49</sup> The realism that Lear wanted to portray in *MH<sup>2</sup>* is what led to the show's large cult following as well as fierce critics. Supporters created *MH<sup>2</sup>* fan clubs, cars donned bumper stickers that read "Honk Honk If You Love Mary Mary," a page broke up a tense moment on the Senate floor by shouting "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman" in the same manner as the show's opening sequence, and Sumner County inmates in Tennessee were up in arms after guards tried to deprive inmates of *MH<sup>2</sup>*. Novelist and award-winning playwright, Donald Freed, even taught a University of California Extension course titled: "Mary Hartman and the Rest of Us—a Nervous Journey into Television Land."<sup>50</sup>

As much as fans of the show conveyed their enthusiasm, however, so critics expressed their deep dislike of the program. Stations in Richmond, Virginia, and Salt

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<sup>49</sup> Morgan, "MH<sup>2</sup> Recycles Our Garbage."

<sup>50</sup> Morgan, "MH<sup>2</sup> Recycles Our Garbage."

Lake City faced such a backlash that they cancelled the show. In Little Rock, 1,200 people signed a protest petition against the show, and in Seattle, hostile critics of the show organized a boycott of *MH<sup>2</sup>*'s sponsors. Arguments over whether *MH<sup>2</sup>* should be cancelled or allowed to air reflected the decade's political divisiveness and turned into debates about individual rights. Local station WBNS in Columbus, Ohio, for example, received letters from residents who threatened to boycott *MH<sup>2</sup>*'s promoters, with one person claiming, "the show must be sponsored by the Communists who have vowed to destroy us from within." In response to those critics, fans also threatened to boycott advertisers if WBNS pulled the show. "Until I receive satisfaction," wrote a woman in defense of *MH<sup>2</sup>*, "may your 'yellow waxy build-up' reach epidemic proportions and may the Fernwood Flasher visit your wife's next Tupperware party."<sup>51</sup> Opponents of *MH<sup>2</sup>* framed their objections ethical arguments made in support of television's "family hour," claiming the show was vulgar, indecent, sacrilegious, and as one writer put it, indicative of "the whole moral fibre [*sic*] of our country [...] going down the drain."<sup>52</sup> Proponents of the show viewed their support of *MH<sup>2</sup>* as a political position in contrast to neoconservatives who attempted to assert their political control via media regulations. A Florida viewer who liked the show, for example, expressed concern that the conservative crusade over *MH<sup>2</sup>* would result in their station withdrawing the program. Having read that the show was "quite controversial," they hoped "those that don't like it, will turn their sets off (if it's going to destroy their children) and let us have some tongue-in-cheek

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<sup>51</sup> David Drake, "Mary Hartman a Communist?: Viewers Force Advertiser Off Serial," 7 September 1976, *Columbus Citizen Journal*.

<sup>52</sup> Based off of two Audience Response Mail Reports for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* from Bina Bernard, 9 July 1976 and 23 July, 1976, Box 803, Folder "Fan Mail/Related," NL Papers, Act iii.

laughs.”<sup>53</sup> Another writer begged their local station to stand their ground against “citizen groups, P.T.A., whatever...Let the parents police their children.”<sup>54</sup> One person, who believed *MH<sup>2</sup>* would not last despite its fan base, associated the rise of neoconservatism with an overall social and cultural decline: “There are too many rednecks being offended. It takes some intelligence to have a sense of humor. If we can’t laugh at ourselves (and obviously we no longer can), we’re in trouble...The All American kids can’t cope with this or any deviation from the norm.”<sup>55</sup>

Audiences liked and disliked *MH<sup>2</sup>* for the same reason: it was “real.” As one *New York Times* article pointed out, “‘Mary Hartman’ is the news. It’s the news about how Americans live, complete with airing of issues like impotence, alienation, homosexuality, and adultery, and with references to Vietnam, Nixon, Watergate, Howard Hughes, Presidential Elections...and whatever else happens to be going on.” But it was the inability of the news to fully inform Americans about their contemporary lives that attracted viewers to the soap-opera satire. To make a point, the article quoted a line from Mary’s mother Martha Shumway (Dody Goodman): “You can always find something on the evening news to take your mind off life.” Martha Shumway’s line indicates that there was a disconnect between political topics covered on the news and the everyday lives of its viewers. *MH<sup>2</sup>*, therefore, transcended the parameters of a television show to become a

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<sup>53</sup> Helen Rongitsch to local station, 30 January 1976, Box 16, Folder “Correspondence, 1976; Fan Mail for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*,” AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>54</sup> Louise Burton to local station, 20 January 1976, Box 16, Folder “Correspondence, 1976; Fan Mail for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*,” AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>55</sup> Dorothy Oenbrink to local station, 5 February 1976, Box 16, Folder “Correspondence, 1976; Fan Mail for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*,” AM Papers, AHC.

cultural event. Americans in the 1970s did not need sociologists or culture-watchers to help explain themselves—all they had to do was watch *MH<sup>2</sup>*.<sup>56</sup>

The extensive work that went into developing each character and making the show as realistic as possible engendered a different type of response from viewers compared to fan mail written to sitcoms. Fans of the program frequently referenced how they could relate to *MH<sup>2</sup>* because of its “real” and “truthful” quality. Members from the Mary Hartman Fan Club in San Francisco, for instance, wrote that Mary Hartman is “the American woman; her triumphs and tragedies are ours, as are the lessons she painfully learns.”<sup>57</sup> According to the Audience Reports conducted by Bina Bernard at Tandem Productions, one person claimed that “Mary Hartman gives the viewers the feeling that all the sickness surrounds us and is closing in,” while another lauded the program for showing all “the irony, joys and sorrows of life. Keep up the good work in keeping America in touch with itself.”<sup>58</sup>

What made *MH<sup>2</sup>* particularly salient was the moment during which the show aired. The rise of neoconservatism and the push for old-fashioned family values increasingly supplanted the liberal political zeal of the previous decade. Fans of *MH<sup>2</sup>* therefore considered the series a breath of fresh air, particularly since trends in popular culture began to lean toward nostalgic representations of the past. Hollywood’s resurgence of Westerns, as well as films and television shows set in the 1950s like *American Graffiti*, *Happy Days*, *Laverne and Shirley*, or even further back, like *The*

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<sup>56</sup> Morgan, “*MH<sup>2</sup>* Recycles Our Garbage.”

<sup>57</sup> Audience Response Mail Report for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* from Bina Bernard, 20 February 1976, Box 803, Folder “Fan Mail/Related,” NL Papers, Act iii.

<sup>58</sup> Audience Response Mail Report for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* from Bina Bernard, 9 April 1976 and 30 August, 1976, Box 803, Folder “Fan Mail/Related,” NL Papers, Act iii.

*Waltons* and *Little House on the Prairie*, became strove to create what Andreas Killen refers to as “an imagined past of total harmony.”<sup>59</sup> Television, it seemed, was moving back in the direction that Newton Minow lambasted, a trend not lost on fans of *MH*<sup>2</sup>. In a letter to Norman Lear, a man from Los Angeles praised *MH*<sup>2</sup> and explained: “Whenever I see something different on TV I think about Newton Minow and his description of it as a ‘vast wasteland.’ It would be, too, if it weren’t for men like you.”<sup>60</sup> *MH*<sup>2</sup>, exclaimed another viewer from California, was a “treat on the ‘vast wasteland’ of television. So, keep it up. It’s a ‘giant step for mankind.’ Strangely, but I think ‘Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman’ will probably have more of an impact on civilizations than a man waltzing on the moon.”<sup>61</sup>

Fans of *MH*<sup>2</sup>, therefore, often wrote about the show’s importance and its impact in regard to helping viewers understand themselves. “Politically, socially, and otherwise Mary Hartman is very necessary right now,” wrote a woman from rural Minnesota. The mother of four praised the show’s timeliness but feared that because it was “too truthful” it would not last. “I feel there is a general, overall unhealthy insidiousness that does claim the soul,” she wrote, “and of course it just atrophies a person’s ability to create images of one’s own making. That’s why your thing is ironically calling out to us that there’s something really, really outside/empty in all the shit we have to endure in the name of ‘being good.’”<sup>62</sup> *New York Times* journalist, Ted Morgan, explained why he thought the

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<sup>59</sup> Killen, *1973*, 176-177.

<sup>60</sup> Letter to Norman Lear, 18 January 1976, Box #S-247, Folder “Norman Lear Correspondence MH (first season) 1976,” NL Papers, Act iii.

<sup>61</sup> Charles Shields to local station, 13 January 1976, Box 16, Folder “Correspondence, 1976; Fan Mail for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman*,” AM Papers, AHC.

<sup>62</sup> Letter to Norman Lear, 12 March 1976, Box #S-247, Folder “Norman Lear Correspondence MH (first season) 1976,” NL Papers, Act iii.

show impacted viewers on a personal level. It “provides a cathartic experience,” he explained, since “Mary and her fellow players recycle our society’s garbage. As we watch her failing marriage, her dismal love affair, her disjointed attempts to break out of her kitchen, as she sinks and cries for help in the swamp of consumerland, we find relief from our own emotional stresses.”<sup>63</sup> Fans believed, however, that what made certain audiences connect to *MH*’s characters and find “relief” in the show, was exactly why others disliked the program. One woman wrote to her local station and stated: “I think a lot of people are afraid to watch ‘Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman.’ They may just see some of themselves or some of their friends somewhere in the show.” She brought up Mary’s father as an example: “I know a number of fathers (and husbands) who like ‘George’ think that ‘a breakfast without a nagging wife is like a headache that doesn’t hurt,’ as well as demanding the food be on the table the minute he enters the eating area.” She discussed in greater length how she saw herself in Mary,

I must admit I do see some of my own temptations and also some of my friends in her. I wonder how many of us, talk-show-observing housewives, watch the shows, ‘Today’ or ‘Donahue,’ only to later expound (in Mary Hartmanesque manner) some of the ideas of their guests (such as Dr. Joyce Brothers—Mary’s favorite—, Gloria Steinem, Dr. Reuben, some politician, etc.) as our own at the next party or meeting we attend. Right now, the character, Mary Hartman, is trying to find herself, her goal in life, as are many other women in this world. As in other soaps, perhaps, those TV viewers are trying to find themselves through her gropings too.<sup>64</sup>

The way in which Marcus, Lear, and Lasser envisioned Mary’s character and her dilemmas is exactly what this viewer saw in herself through the show—a woman who tries to make sense of the cacophony of messages television hawked. As this letter and

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<sup>63</sup> Morgan, “MH<sup>2</sup> Recycles our Garbage.”

<sup>64</sup> Letter to local station, no date, miscellaneous box, Folder “Fan mail to *MH*,” NL Papers, Act iii.

Lear suggested in the writers' meetings, "everyday" women were more confused than convinced by media's representation of arguments for and against feminism. One of the struggles women's liberationists faced when trying to get their message across was media's misrepresentation of the movement, and feminist typecasting that portrayed a singular perspective of feminism and its ideology. Feminists, therefore, used daytime and nighttime talk shows as a way to take control of their media portrayal. On panels with other guests such as popular psychologist Dr. Joyce Brothers, and sometimes even anti-feminists like Phyllis Schlafly, television continued to sensationalize women's liberation, positioning it as another version of self-help culture that came to dominate the 1970s. Although supporters of the medium argued that television could be used to share information to the widest possible audience, this had negative repercussions, as the writers for *MH<sup>2</sup>* tried to convey. Therefore, *MH<sup>2</sup>*'s portrayal of an unhappy housewife who comes to realize the role capitalism and media play in maintaining the very gender roles that contribute to men's and women's discontent is what made the show so impactful for audiences. Rather than telling viewers what to think about their interpersonal relationships, like the experts featured on talk shows, *MH<sup>2</sup>* became a mirror for viewers to see what contributed to their need to watch these experts at all.

By the end of the first season, Lear received 1,147 letters from viewers, with 75% of the responses in favor for the show, and 25% opposed to the series.<sup>65</sup> *MH<sup>2</sup>* aired when social relevancy programming dominated prime-time airwaves, yet the soap opera satire deviated from other contemporary feminist sitcoms. TV shows such as *Maude* (1972-

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<sup>65</sup> Audience Response Mail Report for *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* from Bina Bernard, 23 July 1976, Box 803, Folder "Fan Mail/Related," NL Papers, Act iii.

1978), starring Bea Arthur as a middle-aged, ardent feminist, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977) presented main characters and storylines that reflected some of the ideologies that real feminists on the ground were fighting for. *MH<sup>2</sup>* however, did not have any explicitly “feminist” characters. Instead, the show presented a feminist critique of a traditional white suburban neighborhood and housewife, which is what appealed to so many viewers. As one woman from Lynbrook, NY wrote, *MH<sup>2</sup>*’s “humor doesn’t hit you over the head as in *Maude* or *All in the Family*. It’s subtle and outrageously funny.”<sup>66</sup> Considering that one of the largest complaints among viewers by the late-seventies was that entertainment television “preached” to audiences about moral lessons, *MH<sup>2</sup>*’s “subtlety” explains the show’s wide viewership.

Ann Marcus’ contributions to *MH<sup>2</sup>* helped to make feminist critiques of an oppressive consumer culture visible to a large viewer audience. By pulling from her personal experiences and her research as a writer before her career in the television industry began, she developed a feminist sense of self and translated it onto the small screen. It was these very topics that made it into the scripts of *MH<sup>2</sup>*. But Marcus’ success came at a cost, or at least that is how she saw it. After production of *MH<sup>2</sup>*’s first season ended, and Marcus, Daniel Gregory Brown, and Jerry Adelman won an Emmy for writing the series, Lear fired Marcus. Dumbstruck and simultaneously furious, Marcus called Lear to yell at him for removing her from a successful show that she attributed to her contributions. Lear, however, felt it was a misunderstanding. He did not intend to “fire” Marcus; he wanted her to write for a second comedy soap-opera that he had

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<sup>66</sup> Letter to Norman Lear, 21 January 1976, Box #S-247, Folder “Norman Lear Correspondence MH (first season) 1976,” NL Papers, Act iii.

recently envisioned while shaving. He wanted to create a program about a world where gender roles were reversed, and men were the second sex. Beyond this basic premise, Lear had not put any more thought into the show that would later become *All That Glitters*. He put his faith in Marcus to develop the setting, the characters, and the storylines. She resisted the urge to decline his offer and instead accepted the challenge to write another pilot, and because of it, spent countless hours in Transcendental Meditation to help her cope with her rage over Lear treating her so cavalierly. Although Marcus—with very little assistance from Lear—created the characters and storylines, and wrote the pilot for *All That Glitters*, she ultimately turned down the offer to be head writer for the new series. Despite all her efforts in meditation, Marcus was still too angry to continue working for Lear.<sup>67</sup> In the retelling of this story twenty years later in her memoir, Marcus states that over the years Lear “has been sensitive to the Women’s Movement,” particularly because of his work for People for the American Way, The Equal Rights Amendment, and other causes. She attributes his feminist consciousness to his late ex-wife, Frances, and their daughters, but specifically notes: “[b]ut it took time.” Marcus did not claim that Lear was not a feminist at the time that she wrote her memoir, but she made sure to note that the creator of *Maude* and *MH<sup>2</sup>* was not as feminist in the 1970s as maybe he considered himself to be. This is undoubtedly due to the irony Marcus felt of trying to write a show that demonstrated the need for feminism while she also felt oppressed when working for Lear.

### **Chairwomen and Househusbands in *All That Glitters***

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<sup>67</sup> Marcus, *Whistling Girl*, 176-183.

*ATG* and *MH<sup>2</sup>* debuted in the late-1970s when media's focus on feminism as a movement had begun to wane.<sup>68</sup> Patricia Bradley discusses second-wave feminism's rapid rise and quick disappearance from mass media and argues that once feminism became attached to the defining issue of job equity, and discriminatory practices became recast as bad behavior, mass media lost interest in feminism. Once media turned its attention to stories about women in new jobs, Bradley claims, feminism's philosophical discussion of male and female power relationships "found limited expression."<sup>69</sup> This is true for network news, but in the realm of entertainment television, soap-opera satires like *MH<sup>2</sup>* and *ATG* presented storylines in such a way that challenged viewers to think critically about gender roles. Both shows portrayed feminist critiques of sexism and power structures in a way that did not "preach" to viewers (something audiences had complained heavily about over the past decade), which made viewers of both programs receptive to considering how gender hierarchies served to benefit men and disadvantage women. In the case of *ATG*, producers described the show as putting a microscope on "all the infinite complexities of the male-female relationship." As Lear explained the logic behind the show: "By reversing roles, you're not only able to see what 'might' happen, but get a better look at what 'is' happening."<sup>70</sup> In some ways, *ATG*'s analysis of gender roles and its overall objective with the show was similar to *MH<sup>2</sup>*, but viewers did not

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<sup>68</sup> Bonnie Dow has examined feminist representations in network news and concludes that media coverage of the women's liberation movement reached its peak in 1970. Bonnie J. Dow, *Watching Women's Liberation, 1970: Feminism's Pivotal Year on the Network News*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

<sup>69</sup> Bradley notes that the exception to her argument is of course the topic of abortion rights, but other topics related to feminism were considered nonthreatening and therefore were related to "soft news" coverage, if any coverage at all. Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, 1963-1975* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), xii.

<sup>70</sup> *All That Glitters* press kit, ND, box #S-232, folder "All That Glitters, production material," NL Papers, Act iii.

identify mostly with one central character. Instead, audiences of *ATG*'s short thirteen-week run expressed in large numbers how the portrayal of reversed gender roles of the entire cast in general provoked them to reflect on their own interpersonal relationships.

*All That Glitters* debuted on 18 April 1977. Similar in format to *MH*<sup>2</sup>, the serial aired five days a week and mimicked a soap-opera aesthetic. The basic premise revolved around the executives, employees, and families of a fictional multi-billion-dollar business conglomerate called Globatron Corporation. In every aspect of *ATG*, men and women are biologically the same, but gender roles are turned 180 degrees. The press kit for the show gave a brief explanation of what this upside-down world looked like: "The women executives of 'ALL THAT GLITTERS' work long hours, drink hard, worship the bottom line and employ extremely attractive male secretaries. Women dominate life, love and business. After their day's labor, the executives return home to the waiting arms of their various househusbands."<sup>71</sup> *ATG* critiqued patriarchy in a more direct way than *MH*<sup>2</sup>, giving the show an undeniable feminist edge. Like a soap-opera, episodes focused on the daily lives of its characters and did not present moral lessons intended to teach audiences, as did social relevancy programming, and it did not incorporate political commentary the way *MH*<sup>2</sup> did. By presenting a typical soap-opera but with reversed gender roles, however, the show prompted many viewers to write to producers, claiming they had learned much from it about feminism, sexism, and most importantly, themselves.

Viewers commented most on how *ATG* exposed what sexism was in a way that had previously been unclear to them. Feminists used consciousness-raising as a tactic to

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<sup>71</sup> *All That Glitters* press kit, ND, box #S-232, folder "All That Glitters, production material," NL Papers, Act iii.

illuminate how behavior that men and women considered “natural” was in fact sexist and contributed to establishing a power structure that benefitted white men. For those who did not fully understand how sexism operated on professional and private levels, however, *ATG* explained it to viewers by depicting common interactions men and women might have. The show did not portray violent misogynists or feminist ideology; instead, it explained sexism to viewers by showing what everyday, seemingly normal, situations looked like from a woman’s perspective. In a scene from the fourth episode, for example, one of Globatron’s secretaries, Michael (David Haskell), is out to dinner with his girlfriend, Andrea (Louisse Shaffer), at a themed restaurant where all of the waiters wear revealing togas to show off their biceps and pectoral muscles for the mostly female clientele. While ogling the server Andrea orders drinks for the two, a martini on the rocks for her and a white wine spritzer for Michael. “Do you have to stare at waiters,” Michael asks, “your eyes are going to fall right out of your head.” Not thinking how her ogling makes Michael feel, Andrea nonchalantly explains that she’s just enjoying the scenery and that even though she’s with Michael, “that doesn’t mean I can’t look.”<sup>72</sup>

Among the many themes addressed by *ATG*, the show narrowed in on the psychological effects of sexualizing women and the insecurities and fear that this culture fostered. This aspect of sexism is best portrayed through the relationship between Bert and Christina Stockton. Christina (Lois Nettleton) is a top Globatron executive, and her spouse Bert (Chuck McCann) is a househusband who struggles to find happiness in his marriage, and sense of purpose in his own personal life now that their son is in high

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<sup>72</sup> “Episode #4,” 21 April 1977.

school. In addition to feeling like his son no longer needs his dad, Bert's thinning hair and thicker waist that comes with age is negatively affecting his self-esteem. His loneliness is compounded by the fact that Christina, a "manizer," and avoids her declining marriage by spending long hours at work and after hours with the secretaries. In a separate act from the abovementioned episode, the scene opens with Bert talking to his dad on the phone one afternoon. The audience can only hear Bert's side of the conversation, but it is clear his father is concerned that Bert is depressed. He insists that he is "fine," and that his marriage is "fine," explaining that Christina is "just tied up at work" again. Bert gets upset when his dad asks about his weight and tries to explain that he sounds distressed because the washing machine is broken again, he's waiting for the repair company to send someone to fix it. "What do you mean what am I doing in the house alone with a washing machine repairwoman? What could she do to me?" Bert determines how safe he is based on how he feels about himself, assuming that a repairwoman would not be interested in him since he is middle-aged, overweight, and balding. Bert ends his phone conversation when Maxine (Paula Shaw), the repairwoman, arrives to assess the machine's damage, which she estimates will cost \$92.50 to fix. Unsure about committing to such an expensive purchase, Bert says he has to call his wife but, in the meantime, Maxine should help herself to coffee. "I make some good coffee," Bert says, and while slowly looking Bert up and down Maxine replies, "I can tell just by looking at ya." Christina is frustrated that Bert's call interrupted a meeting. She angrily instructs him to "take the damn laundry to a river and beat it with a flat rock" before hanging up. The repairwoman senses that the phone call was tense: "If my husband knew how to make coffee as good as this, I'd sure know how to treat him." Maxine blows on

her coffee in a sexual manner making Bert uncomfortable. She moves in closer, but Bert nervously giggles and moves away explaining that he doesn't want to cheat on Christina. "It's okay," the repairwoman states, "I got a bank president's husband not very far from here. Averages about 4 service calls a month." Before leaving Maxine suggests that Bert buy a book called *The Manly Man* to help him with his marriage. "A terrific woman wrote it, she's on all the talk shows," Maxine stated, "*The Manly Man* really teaches you how to light a fire."<sup>73</sup>

*The Manly Man* is a fictional reference to *Total Woman*, particularly the way the scene places the onus of fixing Bert's marriage on Bert, and his need to become more submissive, sexually adventurous and available to ensure his wife is happy and faithful. One fan found the satirical reference to Marabel Morgan's *Total Woman* delightful and thought the treatment of gender roles in this way had tremendous potential to "sensitize[e] a culture."<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, the characters of Bert and Christina clearly depict how men and women are socialized to measure their value differently—through assertiveness, decision-making, and careers compared to qualities that emphasize physical appeal, being sexy, and subservient. Based on recorded writers' meetings, the show's creators discussed how Bert depends on Christina for establishing his self-worth, and the possible ways he could discover his sense-of-self through therapeutic means, not from any sort of "men's liberation." Through couple's therapy, assertiveness training, or EST groups, the writers pulled from the decade's psychology culture to explore how

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<sup>73</sup> "Episode #4," 21 April 1977; character descriptions are provided in the *All That Glitters* press kit, no date, box #S-232, folder "*All That Glitters*, production material," NL Papers, Act iii.

<sup>74</sup> Letter to Norman Lear, 22 July 1977, box #S-232, folder "Cancellation letters, 'All That Glitters,'" NL Papers, Act iii.

people outside of social movements might learn to speak to their spouses and articulate their feelings through different forms of therapy.<sup>75</sup>

The study of psychology and its methods influenced the way in which writers created characters and storylines, often challenging them to confront their own assumptions and stereotypes in the process. In the early stages of writing for the show for example, when discussing the character of Glen Bankston (Wes Parker), a former actor and very good looking, well-dressed, self-possessed husband to Globatron executive Nancy Bankston (Louisse Shaffer), Creative Supervisor Virginia Carter wanted to discuss the character's narcissism and what she described as "fagishness." Contributor Eve Merriam objected to this statement, claiming that it demonstrated just how "deeply imbedded, even people in this room are in old sexual stereotypes." When discussing Glen's character, she added that, "if he were a woman [his behavior] would not be disturbing to the status quo. I think this is going to be another area for us to try and open people's minds to. A great deal depends on the actor who is playing him who will not look effeminate and men, particularly actors, are narcissistic, it goes along with the territory."<sup>76</sup> *ATG*'s writers pushed themselves to create a series that reversed gender roles in a way that did not exaggerate stereotypes. Having serious actors play reversed gender roles in a way that did not deride either sex made the series impactful, even though it was short-lived.

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<sup>75</sup> Writers meeting minutes, 1 January 1977, box #S-232, folder "Writers Meeting-ATG-NL," NL Papers, Act iii.

<sup>76</sup> Writers meeting minutes, 11 January 1977, box #S-232, folder "Writers Meeting-ATG-NL," NL Papers, Act iii.

Following the final episode of *ATG*, viewers wrote to Norman Lear expressing how much they learned from the program, and the effects it had—or could have—on social norms. One woman from Titusville, Florida wrote in to express her interest in the show. “The narrow dimensions of sex-related roles are shatteringly visible in ‘All that Glitters.’ The diminution of people’s options becomes much more apparent when, all of a sudden, the world turns upside down.” She continued to add her thoughts on what audiences could take away from the series: “The nonsensical present real-world situation of all people being lessened in their potential because of a socially-conditioned hierarchy is non-threateningly held up for examination, and the audience learns.”<sup>77</sup> A Wisconsin woman also wrote to Lear explaining that it was the program’s ability to have viewers see themselves in characters played by the opposite sex that elicited empathy among audiences. “Besides its obvious entertainment value,” she wrote, “‘All that Glitters’ is a show which men and women can identify with as well as learn from. [...] In addition, ‘All that Glitters’ is a fresh and new idea. This program has much to say to its viewers, in as much as it allows men and women a chance to reverse their roles and “walk in the other’s shoes [...].”<sup>78</sup> One woman wrote to Ann Marcus (who was listed as the co-creator in the credits) expressing the despair she felt that nothing could be done to keep *ATG* on the air. She discussed how the basic premise successfully educated audiences, including herself: “All I can say is that it was a fabulous show, the idea of role reversal showed a lot of men and women how trapped we are in this rigid, traditional society of the US of

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<sup>77</sup> Letter to Norman Lear, 22 July 1977, box #S-232, folder “Cancellation letters, ‘All That Glitters,’” NL Papers, Act iii.

<sup>78</sup> Letter to Norman Lear, 24 September 1977, box #S-232, folder “Cancellation letters, ‘All That Glitters,’” NL Papers, Act iii.

A. And that I certainly won't forget it. It has opened my eyes a little wider than before 'ATG' came on the air."<sup>79</sup> Most notably, however, was the California woman who used the program to screen her dates. "If a boyfriend comes over," she explained, "I excuse myself to turn on the TV at 8:00. If the friend seems uncomfortable watching 'All that Glitters' I take that as a clue that this man is lacking maturity in his relationships with women." She concluded the letter asking Lear, "Do not want to be responsible for setting back the clock 20 years in regard to the roles [...] men and women find themselves caught up in?"<sup>80</sup>

In addition to viewers who wrote in about what *ATG* did for women, many fans also expressed how men could, or sometimes did, benefit from the program. A self-identified feminist wrote that *ATG* brought visibility to women's problems and that after watching the show, a man she knew asked her, "Is that the way we really act?"<sup>81</sup> A man from Berkeley, California, claimed he "enjoyed and learned from 'All That Glitters,'" and expressed his frustration that it was taken off the air: "Perhaps the American public cannot stand to see its sexism exposed on national television. I'm certain that the show disturbed many (male) viewers. For that reason alone it was an enormously important show."<sup>82</sup> *ATG*'s cult following had such an impact on viewers that men's consciousness-raising groups across the country tuned in to learn about sexism and their own behavior.

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<sup>79</sup> Letter to Norman Lear, 25 July 1977, box #S-232, folder "Cancellation letters, 'All That Glitters,'" NL Papers, Act iii.

<sup>80</sup> Letter to Norman Lear, 6 July 1977, box #S-232, folder "Cancellation letters, 'All That Glitters,'" NL Papers, Act iii.

<sup>81</sup> Letter to Norman Lear, 5 July 1977, box #S-232, folder "Cancellation letters, 'All That Glitters,'" NL Papers, Act iii.

<sup>82</sup> Letter to Norman Lear, 20 July 1977, box #S-232, folder "Cancellation letters, 'All That Glitters,'" NL Papers, Act iii.

A viewer wrote in explaining the process: “The programs are watched all week and at a weekend session the men discuss what happened by themselves, then with the women. Most men have been amazed at what their behavior toward women seems like, and they can see, sometimes in an exaggerated way, what it looks like. ‘Do I really talk that way?’ ...etc. The show is terrific instruction.”<sup>83</sup>

Fans learned to think critically about gender roles and sexism through *ATG*'s unique narrative structure. Of course, some viewers were drawn to the program because they already identified with feminist ideals, but many viewers wrote in claiming they had no association with women's liberation and found the show informative. As one woman wrote in response to a scathing *ATG* review in the *Los Angeles Times*, “I am not and never have been a feminist until now, with your degrading comments about the program and my personal experiences which the show portrays in its role reversal, I have just become one.”<sup>84</sup> Lear and writers like Ann Marcus used *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* and *All That Glitters* to promote a feminist message in a way women's liberationists tried tirelessly to do in media without much success. Influenced by the popularity of cultural psychology in the 1970s, writers incorporated psychological theories and practices to explore human behavior when developing characters meant to represent everyday real people. Without “preaching” to audiences, creators of *MH*<sup>2</sup> and *ATG* educated viewers by encouraging them to self-reflect on their own behavior and interpersonal relationships.

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<sup>83</sup> Letter to Norman Lear, 5 July 1977, box #S-232, folder “Cancellation letters, ‘All That Glitters,’” NL Papers, Act iii.

<sup>84</sup> Letter to Cecil Smith, “TV Editor,” 24 June 1977, *Los Angeles Times*, box 803, folder “Fan Mail/Related,” NL Papers, Act iii.

Conservatives pushed back against the type of content television could air in the 1970s, but in the case of *MHP* and *ATG*, it worked in Lear's favor. He could explore edgy topics related to sexual intimacy, mental health, and capitalist critiques because he did not have to adhere to network regulations. Lear's general success with alternative television shows suggests that Americans in large numbers wanted to view programming that could socially impact the general public despite the conservative direction the country was heading politically. Lear used television to critique how ubiquitous the medium had become in influencing viewers' lives, their personal sense of self, and general understanding of the world around them. Through satire he criticized the increased sensationalism of the news, talk shows, and soap operas, but he never lampooned sitcoms, or anything resembling the type of shows he produced. Through discussions captured by the tape-recorded writers' meeting minutes, and the content that made it onto Lear's shows, it is clear that he was critical of television's consumer-driven interests but still thought the medium had the ability to improve society by educating audiences about contemporary social issues in certain circumstances.

Conservatives, however, continued to couch their appeals against the type of programming Lear privileged as threatening to children. Debates about how television should be regulated, therefore, acknowledged entertainment programming's educational capabilities and the effects it could have on society as a whole. With liberals at the reins of popular culture, conservatives argued for a television landscape that resembled the mindless 1950s programs that television advocates condemned in the early-1960s. As the 1970s came to a close, the diverse and socially relevant series that had come to symbolize a turbulent era slowly ended. Only a few socially relevant programs lingered into the first

half of the 1980s, such as *One Day At a Time* (1975-1984), *The Jeffersons* (1975-1985) and *The White Shadow* (1978-1981). Overall television reflected the neoconservative turn as the medium's content by and large appeared and whiter than it had in decade's past.

## Epilogue

The Supreme Court affirmed in its 1978 *FCC v. Pacifica* decision that the federal government could regulate indecent speech in broadcast media. The incident that initiated the case occurred in 1973, when a father heard George Carlin’s monologue on “Filthy Words” one could not say on the airwaves while driving in the car with his young son. Following complaints about the Pacifica Foundation FM radio program that aired the monologue, the FCC censured Pacifica for violating indecency regulations. At the heart of the case lay broadcasting’s pervasive quality as a fixture of the home (or, in this case, the family car—a space that functioned as an extension of the home). Children’s access to broadcasting, according to the Court, and the nature of how people listened or viewed media, continuously tuning in and out, meant that content warnings could not fully protect the viewer from indecent programming. The Court determined that “broadcast media are subject to different First Amendment protections than are other forms of speech.” In Justice William Brennan, Jr.’s dissent, he claimed that the decision would endorse the “dominant culture’s efforts to force those groups who do not share its mores to conform to its way of thinking, acting, and speaking.” He also argued that the decision took the power away from parents to decide what was appropriate for their children, and additionally limited what adults could hear, as well.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the Court ruling in support of regulations that prohibited indecent material, the FCC did little to enforce these strictures in the 1980s. Social conservatives

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<sup>1</sup> Allison Perlman, *Public Interests: Media Advocacy and the Struggles Over U.S. Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 123-133.

responded by creating organizations to combat what they considered indecent programming, such as the Parents Television Council (PTC), Morality in Media, and the National Federation for Decency. They used appeals similar to those advanced by the Kennedy Administration two decades before, couching their pleas in moral arguments about media's role in shaping future citizens. Yet the social vision they advocated was radically different. Beginning in the 1970s, social conservatives discomfited by television's greater diversity developed their own ideological response—one that emphasized a need to maintain “family values.” Allison Perlman notes that organizations like the PTC believed that television should operate as a “moral instruction for protocitizens—children—whose future contributions to civil society hinged on their respect for traditional sites of authority, their embrace of the virtue of the heterosexual family, their understanding of the marital bed as the only site of sexual relations, and their belief that homosexuality is an immoral lifestyle choice.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, liberals and conservatives alike believed that television should provide “moral instruction,” since it had the ability to impact the development of future citizens, but their understanding of morality and what lessons children should imbibe differed along political lines.

*Tell It Like It Is* has argued that content creators and the general public considered television a tool that could alter social and political discourse. When television transitioned to a medium that presented educational entertainment to the masses under the direction of President Kennedy, debates about the types of messages sitcoms and dramas should send became a contested topic. Television executives experimented with different

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<sup>2</sup> Perlman, *Public Interests*, 125.

ways to present informative content—through problem solving, arousing viewers’ consciousness, and encouraging introspection—and learned the different ways viewers understood this information based on viewer mail. Oftentimes audience members responded positively, claiming they learned about social issues and thought differently about a specific political topic after watching a given show. Many Americans, however, felt threatened by liberal portrayals of topical issues and reacted hostilely. This dissertation demonstrates that examining periods of resistance through the lens of popular culture reveals how everyday people interpret and responded to social and political change. This is especially true for examining anxieties that contribute to conservative backlash, since viewer responses illuminate how people feel about broader issues, such as integration, welfare, and feminism.

Such an approach is particularly salient during our current political moment. Within the context of the divisive and racist rhetoric espoused under Trump, the US is as divided culturally as it is politically. On the one hand, journalists have raved about recent trends in television which include more diverse casts, representations of non-binary and queer characters. They have also lauded the quality of content that challenges audiences to think critically about race, gender, immigration, sexuality, and class, among other relevant topics. On the other hand, conservatives complain bitterly about being underrepresented in entertainment programs. The issue for them is not a lack of white representation per se; rather, they feel that the current television landscape fails to reflect and express conservative social and political ideologies.

Following the cancellation of the *Roseanne* reboot, for example, conservative fans took to Twitter claiming ABC was “communist” and that the network’s decision to

terminate the sitcom because of Roseanne Barr's racist Tweet about President Barack Obama's former advisor, Valerie Jarrett, was a violation of conservative free speech.<sup>3</sup> As TV critic Emily Nussbaum points out, the central message of *Roseanne* that appeals to conservative viewers is conveyed in one joke from the third episode. After falling asleep on the couch, Roseanne and her husband Dan wake up at 11:00 p.m. "We slept from 'Wheel' to 'Kimmel,'" Roseanne claims. In response, Dan states, "We missed all the shows about black and Asian families," to which Roseanne sardonically responds, "They're just like us! There, now you're all caught up." The joke references two of ABC's other sitcoms, *Black-ish* and *Fresh Off the Boat*. On the surface, the joke seems to suggest that the Conners are living in a separate America from "black and Asian" families on TV, but Nussbaum's deeper analysis shows that it functions as a conservative dog whistle by echoing a sentiment Trump tweeted in 2014 after *Black-ish* debuted, stating, "black-ish? Can you imagine the furor of a show, 'Whiteish!' Racism at highest level?" Notably, ABC capitalized on this white hostility when they used the slogan "A Family That Looks Like Us" in promoting *Roseanne* to advertisers.<sup>4</sup> The "us" ABC referred to—and that Roseanne referenced in the joke—distinguishes the white working-class Conner family from other families of color, but also, "us" refers to a political ideology intended to appeal to conservative viewers who feel disenfranchised by liberal media.

The uproar surrounding *Roseanne* is not an isolated incident. Fans of the conservative sitcom *Last Man Standing*, starring Tim Allen, launched a petition to save the show when ABC cancelled the series, claiming that the sitcom "appeals to a broad

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<sup>3</sup> Lisa Gutierrez, "A Teaching Moment: Valerie Jarrett and Others Respond to 'Roseanne' Controversy," 29 May 2018, *The Kansas City Star*.

<sup>4</sup> Emily Nussbaum, "How One Joke On 'Roseanne' Explains The Show," 23 April 2018, *The New Yorker*.

swath of Americans who find very few shows that extol the virtues with which they can identify; namely conservative values.”<sup>5</sup> And in an interview with *The New York Times*, a neo-Nazi associated his “political awakening” to what he felt was the injustice of affirmative action and the “malice directed toward white people” in popular media; the latter, he believed, was exemplified by the fact that “the cartoon comedy ‘King of the Hill’ was the last TV show to portray ‘a straight white male patriarch’ in a positive light.”<sup>6</sup> But as Nussbaum points out, there are of course more sitcoms on television that resemble the cast of *Roseanne* than *Black-ish*, and the assumption that shows like *Fresh Off the Boat* or *Black-ish* do not portray “family values” rests on a very narrow understanding of the phrase. For conservative viewers, it is not enough to have white representation on television; that representation must come packaged in shows that convey appropriate political messaging.

This dissertation has investigated how people in the television industry sought to provide educational entertainment that could have a positive and socially progressive impact on the American citizenry. It is true that networks determine what makes it on the air, and it is also true that they are primarily profit-driven. But writers and producers typically use the platform they have to express their creativity and send a particular message—often with an objective in mind. Their motives are not the same as those of the networks. As evidenced by the thousands of Americans who wrote letters describing their responses to sitcoms and dramas, these educational or political messages do not just reinforce preexisting ideologies. Examining the production process of popular culture and

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Berr, “Will ABC’s ‘The Conners’ Appeal to Conservative ‘Roseanne’ Fans?,” 25 June 2018, *Forbes*.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Fausset, “A Voice of Hate in America’s Heartland,” 25 November 2017, *The New York Times*.

how people respond to it illuminates not only how popular culture represents a current political moment, but also gives insight into the complicated ways in which culture informs politics, to the point that it can be difficult to draw a line between the two.

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