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The making of prime-time TV father figures in a changing America

Wu, Zhengkang, Ph.D.

University of Hawaii, 1992
THE MAKING OF TV FATHER FIGURES IN A CHANGING AMERICA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN AMERICAN STUDIES DECEMBER 1992

By
Zhengkang Wu

Dissertation Committee:
Floyd Matson, Chairperson
Reuel Denney
David Stannard
Wimal Dissanayake
Arnold Edelstein
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Television exerts immeasurable influences on the American people, and in turn prime-time television images reveal much about American culture and society. Assuming the significant impact prime-time TV father figures have on American culture and people, and examining twenty four popular prime-time TV series from the past four decades, this dissertation explores the following questions: 1) What kind of father figures has American prime-time television portrayed in the past four decades? How have they changed over the years? 2) How is the making of father figures on television related to their social and historical contexts? 3) What kind of values do predominant father figures embody? 4) What conditions within the television industry influence the making of popular television images?

The dissertation adopts a historical and interpretive method, treating the representations of father figures for each decade from the 50s to the 80s. With each decade, it begins with a historical description of the cultural and social background of the period, identifying prevalent public sentiments and popular social stereotypes. Then each section interprets and analyzes popular TV father figures, relating their creation to specific cultural and social conditions and changes.
There have been three prototypes of popular father figures on American prime-time television in the past four decades: that of the bourgeois suburban father figure; that of the inept blue-collar bumbler; and that of the rural common sense hero. The suburban father figure embodies traditional bourgeois values of security, status, parental wisdom and education. The blue-collar bumbler represents everything the suburban father does not: bigotry, stupidity, clumsiness and bad manners. The common sense hero represents values of informality, good-neighborliness, common sense philosophy and simplicity. The making of popular television images is intricately related to historical and cultural changes in American society at large. In conservative eras, the suburban middle-class father figure is popular, whereas in progressive eras escapist father figures prevail. TV producers and network executives play an important role in the creation of television image by disseminating their own bourgeois values in the images they make. Finally, commercial interest is one of the most important yardsticks for successful TV series and images.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In only two decades of massive national experience television has transformed the political life of the nation, has changed the daily habits of our people, has molded the style of the generation, made overnight global phenomena of local happenings, redirected the flow of information and values from traditional channels into centralized networks reaching into every home.

George Gerbner, The TV-guided American

Television programs can do what very few other historical documents can: provide a focus for studying the slow process by which common images evolve within a recognizable context.

Paula S. Fass, American History/American Television

In the modern world, television has become one of the most powerful and effective means of communication. This is especially true in developed countries such as the U.S. and the Great Britain. According to International Television and Video Almanac, some 80 million American homes, comprising 93% of the population, had color television sets in 1986. The average viewing time per TV each day in the U.S. during that year was 7 hours and 48 minutes. 1 TV Facts reports that as early as the 1960s Americans spent 31% of their leisure time viewing television. 2 In 1976 American men and women respectively spent 12 and 16 hours per week

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watching dramatic materials on television. These figures compel the attention of students of American culture and society. Since television viewing is a favorite pastime for millions of Americans, the study of dramatic programs on prime-time TV may result in important insights into American culture and society.

The overwhelming popularity of television has led media critics to pay attention to its role in shaping modern society. As early as the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan posited that "the medium is the message," suggesting the creation of a "totally new environment" by electronic media. In this new environment, McLuhan believed, man thinks and behaves differently than in previous ages. George Comstock maintains that television is delivering a message of power that changes people's way of life. It has become "an unavoidable and unremitting" factor in shaping what Americans are, and what they will become. Martin Esslin

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stresses the immense amount of information communicated to viewers in dramatic TV presentations. 6

Despite such recognition of the importance of television, TV programs have not received the critical attention they deserve in the study of American culture. It is true that American social scientists have conducted a large number of content studies of television programs. However, revealing as these studies are in many cases, they have consistently adopted a quantitative approach for their investigations. They tend to reduce highly complex dramatic representations of reality to a taxonomy of quantifiable ingredients and neglect the subjective and aesthetic aspects of television viewing. Although they are often criticized for their methodological limitations, few of them have managed to transcend such limitations.

Meanwhile, studies of television programs conducted with interpretive approaches are still to come of age both in quantity and quality. Up until the 1970s, comprehensive interpretive studies of television programs were almost non-existent. Since the beginning of the 1970s, increasing numbers of such studies have been conducted and their results published. However, among these works, only a few focus on a particular genre of TV programs or TV images and subject them to historical and comprehensive analysis.

6 Martin Esslin, The Age of Television, 4-6, 17-33.
Whereas European television critics -- British scholars in particular -- have analyzed TV texts using several theoretical perspectives, similar studies in the critical world of American television are only beginning to appear.\(^7\) Obviously, there is a need to conduct more qualitative textual analysis in order to approach a better understanding of American television programs and of television as an institution in American culture.

In the view of anthropologist Gregor Goethals, American television has expressed and reinforced public values by creating popular images with which people can identify themselves.\(^8\) Popular television images have come to symbolize particular types of persons, often of a certain social class, in American society. For example, Jim Anderson is often perceived as a typical middle-class suburbanite, Sheriff Andy Taylor a cracker-barrel philosopher, and Archie Bunker a so-called "hard-hat working-class bigot." These TV images are so potent that they have become commonplace in public discourse of American life. Few Americans today do not know the connotations of phrases like an "Archie-Bunker"

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type of person, or a "Leave-it-to-Beaver" type of family. It is safe to say that popular TV images can tell us what the network executives believe should be shown on television and what the American public likes to see. Given the importance of television images, students of American culture and society should attend carefully to such images.

The way American commercial television networks operate dictates that what goes on the air must suit audience tastes on the broadest basis. Major networks and their local affiliates discover audience preferences through keen competition for a greater share of the audience, as indexed by the A.C. Nielsen rating service. To stay on top in the competition, the networks have to discover which programs attract the greatest number of viewers. Accordingly, if a network wishes to grip the imagination of audiences, it must cater to and reflect the audience's aspirations and beliefs, its fantasies and dreams, its fears and joys. In other words, in a uniquely American way, television reflects and expresses American culture.

From its inception, American television has been prone to present the trials and tribulations of family life. The Jim Andersons, the Archie Bunkers, and the Heathcliff Huxtables have historically accompanied millions of Americans in their lives. Over the years, as social mores and values change, television critics have begun to notice
parallel changes in the portrayals of family figures. At different historical moments, for example, TV producers have created different kinds of patriarchal figures on television in order to appeal to different audience. Thus an analysis of the depictions of these TV patriarchs in different historical contexts should reveal the dominant social and cultural values in American society. Such analysis will also indicate how television entertainment programs adapt to social changes, thus revealing the nature of the social function of television as an institution.

In a broader sense, the culture of prime-time television is part and parcel of the cultural and social history of the U.S. since World War II. As we look back, the creation of television programs and images in the past few decades has been interwoven with the history of American society. Hence, Horace M. Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch write: "Our hypothesis is that we might track the history of America's social discussions of the past three decades by examining the multiple rhetorics of television during that period. Given the problematic state of television archives, a careful study of that hypothesis presents an enormous

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difficulty. It is, nevertheless, an exciting prospect."\textsuperscript{10} This hypothesis points out the importance of relating the creation of various forms of television programs and different images on television to social practice and ideology. Similarly, John O’Connor believes that the historian inevitably studies "the transformation of either the television content or the changing social attitudes (or both) over time." \textsuperscript{11} Despite their different perspectives, these scholars share the conviction that we can study the social and cultural history of the U.S. by examining television programs.

This study of the father figure on television assumes that the creation of an important social character on television inevitably relates to the time, spirit, and national sentiments of a historical period. In other words, the dissertation assumes that the distinctive characterizations of the TV father can be studied as cultural indexes of American society. However, the creation of the popular television character involves many important factors such as media workers’ values and their yardsticks


for commercial success, the public's values and sentiments, and the interplay among them. It is a challenge to discover how these factors affect each other and help to create popular images on television.

In studying popular television characters, this project proceeds from the following assumptions as well: that such images affect the behavior of audiences and help shape social reality; that television texts are social products from which important social and cultural messages and values can be uncovered; that the study of TV images reveals the nature of television entertainment as a social institution in American society.

Generally, this dissertation explores how American television has portrayed an important social character, the father in the family, in some of the most popular prime-time series of the past few decades. Specifically, the dissertation proposes to see what distinctive characteristics the prime-time TV father has displayed, how they have changed over time, and what they tell us about Americans and American society. The father figure is significant because he traditionally occupies the dominant position in the patriarchal American family. To understand the father figure is to understand the basic ideology and the fundamental relations between members of the nuclear family that have been the bedrock of the American way of life.
When examining the way an image or cultural icon changes, it is important to study the social and cultural contexts in which that image takes shape. The challenge is to attempt precision about how such images relate to social and historical contexts that are themselves in transition. Do the images merely reflect social reality, or do they also define and shape it? Or on the other hand, do they attempt to avoid or provide escapes from social reality? This dissertation aims at making concrete relations between the creation of popular father figures and larger social and cultural events and trends in American society. It attempts to explain under what historical circumstances certain father figure became popular on American television. Such attempts make this dissertation a cultural and social inquiry rather than a one-dimensional study of a prevalent media image.

Over the past few decades American prime-time television's depictions of the father have varied, particularly with regard to his social or ethnic backgrounds. Beyond charting these changes, this dissertation explores several other important questions about the ways father figures are represented. For instance, what are the important cultural and social values embodied in the portrayals of father figures over time? Whose values are these anyway? Are they those of the American public in general? Or are they simply those of the image makers or TV
producers? What are the roles of media workers (network executives and television producers) in the making of popular television images and the shaping of public opinion. These questions and concerns are important because a cultural studies project should probe into what factors influence choices and into who makes those choices and why.

In addition, this dissertation considers important conditions involved within the television industry that underlie the creation of popular television images. The popularity of certain television images is a highly complicated cultural phenomenon. Under specific historical conditions, it involves the media workers' projection of the public sentiments, the public perception of and reaction to projected images, and workings within the television industry. In order to be thorough, one must attend to unique conditions within the television industry that contribute to the popularity of certain television father figures.

Finally, the dissertation explores how certain cultural and social values technically find expression in characterizations of the father or husband. In the words of contemporary television criticism, it explores what codes and conventions television resorts to in conveying cultural and social messages. Such questions are important because the codes and conventions used often dramatically increase the effectiveness of televised messages.
In researching this topic, the author has been struck by the image of the ineffectual father figure in some American TV series. Born and raised in the Chinese culture where patriarchal authority is to be respected, the author has been both intrigued and surprised by the fact that the father is mocked -- and mocked to such an extent -- on American television. This phenomenon of ridiculing the father figure intensifies the author's curiosity about the creation of certain bumbling male images on American television. Specifically, why and under what circumstances does the father figure become a victim of mockery? What does that figure tell us about the people who created such figures and about American society and culture?

In terms of method, this study is historical to the extent that it attempts to relate the creation of certain popular television images to specific historical contexts. A discussion of the historical context precedes the analysis of specific TV series and images created in a given period, and seeks to identify the salient features and prevalent social stereotypes of this period. The analysis of TV characters that follows attempts to demonstrate how the "zeitgeist" manifests itself in popular television images. John O'Connor regards such efforts as "filling out the historical background and analyzing individual television artifacts in terms of their specific historical context." He believes that this is the crucial contribution cultural
historians make to the study of television as an institution. 12

One serious challenge to the methods outlined above is that of defining and delineating a historical period usually called a decade. Although historical notions such as "the fifties" or "the sixties" seemingly differ from each other clearly enough, they are actually not so easy to characterize. While in one decade distinctive social movements may be the dominant feature, in another certain social or cultural issues can preoccupy the nation or the public. Because of such historical differences, the dissertation tries to remain flexible in describing the historical and cultural backgrounds of particular television images. It attends to social movements, important social or cultural issues, intellectual trends, unique cultural phenomena, and economic conditions.

The author recognizes that the division of history into decades must remain a somewhat arbitrary convenience for the sake of reconstructing history. If these divisions help capture the predominant national sentiment of a historical period, they also tend to create the false impression that history happens in some sort of piecemeal fashion. History does not change every ten years for the convenience of historians. Thus the division of the post-World-War-II years

12 John E. O'Connor, American History/American Television, xiii.
into four different decades in this dissertation by no means suggests that the pulse of American political, social and cultural life changes at neat intervals. Rather, the study acknowledges the important overlappings of social awareness or social movements in consecutive decades. In fact, the significant or symbolic event used to indicate the beginning of a decade may happen well before or after the calendar year of the beginning of that decade. Thus, though John F. Kennedy's election here symbolizes the beginning of the sixties, the incubation for social movements in the sixties was at work several years before that symbolic event.

In the treatment of television texts, this project is interpretive and qualitative. It is so because many judgements of the TV series are based on intuitive reactions to and personal understandings of those programs. The author makes no serious efforts to quantify any data from these observations, but trusts that extensive observation of the selected series put him in a position to tell what the program and the main characters are about, and what the basic themes signify.

This study is also interdisciplinary in the sense that it attempts to draw from the results of social science and quantitative studies of American television. In the past two decades, a large amount of quantitative studies of television programs have been accumulated. Although such studies have their limitations, they are quite useful for
sketching a general picture of prime-time television. Based on this evaluation of the quantitative studies, the author proceeds from some of their judgements of American prime-time television. For example, sociologists and social scientists have concluded that there has been an overrepresentation of the middle-class on American television. Since this judgement has been verified by quite a large number of quantative studies, the author does not question its validity. Instead, he focuses on exploring how and under what circumstances this overrepresentation came to be what it is on American television.

In order to supplement the traditional interpretive method, the dissertation draws upon various interpretive strategies, particularly those developed in semiotics. For one thing, the semiotic goal of detecting signifying codes and conventions in communication agrees with the objective of studying the ways in which cultural and social values are conveyed. For another, the strategies developed in semiotics offer sophisticated ways of reading and scrutinizing the texts. Appropriate use of such semiotic techniques promise insights that may not be obtained by the traditional method. Yet it should be made clear that this dissertation is not a semiotic study of a television image. It does not attempt to use semiotic interpretive strategies systematically and thoroughly. The goal is to enrich the understandings of
American TV texts with the help of some semiotic insights and techniques.

For clarity at the outset, a few technical terms of the study are defined as follows:

**Prime-time family situation comedy**: In the present study, this term designates a genre of television comedy centering on the depiction of a family and broadcast between 7:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. in the evening. Lawrence Mintz has given a brief definition of situation comedy: "a sitcom is a half-hour series focused on episodes involving recurring characters within the same premise." 13

**Image**: the artificial imitation or representation of a real person in a dramatic situation. The discussions of the image will be concerned with the types of roles that dramatic characters represent in the series. They also will include the artistic construction of such images. Accordingly, the artistic techniques of creating visual effects such as the distance between subject and camera, point of view, and editing may be the subject matter of such discussions.

**Family**: In the strict sense, this term names a group of people, living together and bound to each other by blood or law. The most common family type is the nuclear family, its members being the father, the mother, and the children.

Because of the significance of some shows and their popularity, legal adoption or guardianship or loose kinship will also be regarded as family relationships in a few exceptional cases. However, the notion of family in this study will not include the metaphorical type of family as in "Night Court" or "Taxi."

**Characterization:** This term names both the creation of a role in the screenplay and the performance of the actor/actress in creating the role on the screen.

**Theme:** The subject(s) of a series under study. Often a dramatic presentation of a family situation may have more than one theme in it.

Because the study covers such a long time span, it reviews a number of series to justify its historical claim. The popularity of programs as identified by the Nielsen's Rating Service is the chief criterion for selection. Other factors include the relevance of the show to the subject of the study, the show's artistic achievements, the number of seasons a show aired, and the prestige of a show as representative of one genre or type of shows. The results of other scholarly and critical works have also been helpful in the selection process. As a result of considering all these criteria, the author has decided on approximately

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twenty five series from the past four decades. Since a few hundred situation comedies have been broadcast during this historical period, the author does not claim an all-inclusive or even a representative selection of prime-time TV series. What the dissertation manages to cover is a repertoire of prime-time TV shows that many Americans regard as their favorites.

With a grant from the Institute of Culture and Communication at the East-West Center, the author has been able to view many of the primary materials of the selected series at several television archives and libraries in the country. These are the UCLA Film and Television Archive, the Museum of Broadcasting in New York, and the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division of the Library of Congress. In the same research project, the author has been able to read some scripts of the selected series at Theater and Art Library at UCLA, the Library of University of Southern California, and the Television Script Archive at the Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania.

Because each selected series was originally on the air for several TV seasons, most of them had over a hundred episodes broadcast. However, the visual records available at these archives are scarce and fragmentary. Most series have fewer than a hundred episodes on record when counting all the materials available at three archives. A few titles (*I Love Lucy, Donna Reed Show, The Danny Thomas Show, The Life of Riley*) have no more than twenty episodes available in all the places visited. But the limited amount of episodes available did not have a serious effect on the research because its design emphasizes the author's exposure to randomly selected sample episodes rather than a comprehensive viewing of all the series. In the project, the number of episodes the author viewed varied from twenty to forty. With the series that have scarce records, the author made efforts to see all the available records. The same principle applied in reading some of the scripts of the selected series at different collections.

The TV networks and syndicated cable stations are an additional precious source of primary materials. Fortunately, in selecting series for re-running, affiliated local or cable stations seem to resort to criteria similar to those used in this study. A surprising number of the selected series are being rerun on several cable TV channels (*My Three Sons, Donna Reed Show, The Danny Thomas Show, All in the Family, The Honeymooners, The Jeffersons, Family*
Ties, and others). The re-runs provide excellent opportunities for students to follow them, and to video-tape some episodes for in-depth studies. So far, the author has recorded more than one hundred episodes for this study.

By tracing the evolution of the portrayals of the patriarchal figure on prime-time television over a period of four decades, this dissertation endeavors to offer a comprehensive historical overview of an important television image and its creation in different historical contexts. Further, by focusing on the father figure on prime-time TV, this study hopes to contribute to the analysis of a pervasive and significant image on TV through careful readings of TV texts as well as the study of television culture in general. Finally, by using television programs as artifacts, the dissertation hopes to contribute to a wider understanding of American culture. About the study of television programs, one curator at a television script archive says that the study of TV texts has finally begun to come of age in America. Her remark is quite to the point. The author hopes that this study will emerge as a useful contribution to the burgeoning body of critical studies of TV programs in America.
CHAPTER II

CRITICISM OF TV PROGRAMMING: HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS

The primary concerns (in TV research) have been with audience response as influenced by television. While this results in an extensive body of research, there are very few careful descriptions of television programs. Similarly, while we have several political and economic histories of broadcasting, there are no histories of television programming. Without such descriptions and histories, there is no sense of development in television and little awareness of differences in program type, in writing, in production.

Horace Newcomb, Television: The Critical View

Since the early 1970s, studies of television programs have been drawing increasing critical and academic attention because of their contributions to the study of American culture and society. Yet in the two decades preceding the 1970s when television was becoming an important institution in American life, serious critical studies of television programs from a humanist perspective barely existed. In this chapter, the author will review various historical and institutional developments that hindered the growth of serious criticism on television programs. Further, a critique some of the most significant current approaches in television studies will be included to draw on their strengths, and to put forth the strategies to be applied in this study. Overall, the argument of this chapter will be that there has been a neglect of the study of television programs due to a number of historical factors and developments, and that the study of television programs is
now at a turning point promising an enrichment of the study of American culture.

A. "Kitsch" and "High Culture" versus "Low Culture"

To account for the lack of serious criticism on television programming in the United States, one has to look into several factors related to the development of such criticism. In the first place, from the 1930s to the 1950s, the debate over "high culture" versus "low culture" among the American intelligentsia served to relegate television programs to an inclusive category of cultural activities which the intelligentsia called "kitsch" (a German word meaning mass culture). During this debate, although certain critics maintained that popular culture may not be as worthless as its denouncers claimed it to be, elitist critics did not have any tolerance for "kitsch." The critics of "kitsch" contemptuously characterized it as unimaginative, homogenized, and vulgar. Leading intellectuals from the right and the left of the political spectrum were both critical of "kitsch."

In retrospect, the debate over "low culture" and "high culture" occurred half a century ago because certain elitist intellectuals became concerned with the loss of their prestige and authority in raising cultural standards in modern American society. The ways in which the leading
critics framed the debate and defined the issues suggest this. For instance, several leading critics of "kitsch" did not even bother to define the key notion of "kitsch" or "mass culture" in their critical tracts. 16 What they did was to lump together virtually all cultural activities other than the so-called avant-garde art and label them all as "kitsch." 17 Then they denounced "kitsch" as effortless, homogenized, vulgar, destructive, indiscriminate, and, in short, bad. In Greenberg's words: "Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times." 18 Although these critics claimed to be warning the masses of manipulation by "the lords of kitsch," their real concern was the threat posed by "kitsch" to their intellectual prestige and authority. The devastating effect of this one-sided debate was that the study of television programs and other subjects in popular culture was defined as


17 Dwight Macdonald has radio, the movies, comic books, detective stories, science fiction, television in the category, whereas Clement Greenberg lists as "kitsch" popular, commercial art and literature with their chrometypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fictions, comics, Tin Pan Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc.. Ibid, 59, 102.

18 Ibid., 102.
worthless, perhaps even sinister. As a result of such relegation and denunciation, humanist scholars tended to avoid studies of TV programs or of any other so-called "kitsch" subjects.

In addition, critics nowadays use the notion of "cultural lag" to explain the intelligentsia's unwillingness to acknowledge the aesthetic and constructive values of popular culture. Intellectuals, the critics suggest, often lag behind in accepting mass-based forms of art and entertainment. As John Fiske notes, both Elizabethan theaters and the nineteenth-century English novel received contemptuous treatment from their contemporary critics. 19 From a similar perspective, David Marc, also views the intelligentsia's relegation and denunciation of television entertainment programs as a sign of their shortsightedness and inability. 20 In the view of both critics, contemporary intellectuals' evaluation of television entertainment programs may eventually prove to be yet another such an error in judgement.


20 David Marc, *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 3-9. Marc believes that American literature received similar contemptuous treatment from its critics before the twentieth century.
What is even more difficult in the study of television entertainment programs is that in the age of print, the critical study of a visual medium will have to develop its own language and compete with the studies of traditional literary media. John Fiske and John Hartley see the tendency to evaluate all media, including television, by the prescriptions of literacy as a reflection of dominant cultural values that developed during five hundred years of print-literacy. \textsuperscript{21} In their judgement, cultural products which contemporary critics regard as insignificant or deviant, or for which no adequate critical language has been developed, are not necessarily worthless. \textsuperscript{22}

Even if we leave aside the elitist perspective on popular culture, there was a serious flaw in the attempt to differentiate "low culture" activity from so-called "high culture" activity. For instance, during the debate on popular culture, serious critics and aestheticians could not actually find the boundary between "high" from "low" culture, neither could they effectively deal with the fact that certain artistic works resist rigid categorizations. Edward Shils and Abraham Kaplan were two leading scholars  

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 15.

\textsuperscript{22} John Fiske and John Hartley raise the issue of developing a different critical language fit for television discourse in the beginning of their book. Reading Television, 14.
who attempted to devise schematic categorizations of "high" and "low" cultures. Shils, for his part, suggested a three-level paradigm of culture, composed of appropriate aesthetic, intellectual, and moral standards. He termed these levels "superior" or refined culture, "mediocre" culture, and "brutal" culture respectively. However, Shils evidently was not certain about the intermixture of different levels of cultures. Neither was Abraham Kaplan clear on this point in his meticulous differentiation of popular art and high art. Kaplan's scheme of differentiation had twenty-two items divided into three major artistic and social aspects. His theoretical construction was so minute and specific that, as Himmelstein observes, it was inevitable that art works from either of his categories would transgress the boundary one way or the other. Hence, despite the serious efforts of scholars to differentiate "high" culture from "low" culture, they could not find clear-cut boundaries along which to divide "high" art from "low" art.

That the debate over popular culture was not an adequate intellectual exchange on relevant issues can be


24 Ibid., 12.
seen from the profusion of studies of popular culture that burst forth in later decades. In an essay on "Low Life USA," Floyd Matson offers a useful account of the social and intellectual background for the popular academic movements during the 60s and the 70s. 25 He explains in detail how scholarly endeavors in sociology, history, and American Studies almost simultaneously shifted their focus onto the lives of common people during this period. Once younger scholars began to challenge the elitist judgement of popular culture, there was no need to remain silent on the "truth about the emperor." After all, Matson writes, "there may also be sense in the common, beauty in the ordinary, and culture in the popular." It was this type of new perspective and mentality that brought about a grassroots academic movement which established the study of popular culture as a formal academic discipline during the sixties, and sustained its popularity ever since. In the past three decades, research works on popular culture helped repair the damage caused by the elitist denunciations and kept informing us of the constructive and imaginative side of popular culture.

25 Floyd Matson, "Low Life USA" (unpublished manuscript, American Studies Department, University of Hawaii at Manoa).
Another important historical development that affected the existence of interpretive television studies in America was the predominance of communications research in the past few decades. The period from the 1930s to the 1960s also witnessed the growth of American communications research into an institution. The epistemological assumptions of this mode of research can be traced back to the Comtean positivism of the nineteenth century. Concerned strictly with "positive" facts and phenomena, this mode of research excludes any speculation about the object under study. Enshrouded in scientific terminology and using "content analysis" as its most important operational instrument, this mode of research prevailed in American media research up until the 1970s. Within this historical context, few studies of television adopted approaches informed by other philosophical perspectives.

Before television broadcasting, American social science scholars in communications began mass media research on the effects of radio broadcasting upon the audience. The expatriate Austrian sociologist Paul Lazasfeld and his research bureau did the pioneering work in such research. Funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, Lazasfeld first founded the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia
University in 1937. Later, in order both to draw attention from the American academic community and to secure financial support from commercial broadcasters, Lazasfeld ingeniously couched works conducted at the Bureau in terms of "administrative research," thus bestowing respectability on such research in both academic circles and radio broadcasting. On the one hand, this type of research put to use empirical methods in order to gain academic legitimacy within the flourishing discipline of empirical sociology in America. On the other, it focused primarily on the social effects of broadcasting on the radio audience in order to satisfy the broadcasters' commercial interests. As the scale and importance of radio and television broadcasting increased in later decades, both industries initiated and supported numerous sociological inquiries on audience response to broadcasting. Because of the groundwork it laid and the directions it took, the work of Lazasfeld's Bureau exerted a significant influence on these inquiries.

Although this empiricist mode of research prevailed in American communications study in later decades, its philosophical and methodological assumptions have met challenges from scholars informed by other philosophical viewpoints. Particularly in recent years, influenced by European film criticisms and linguistic theories, contending

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interpretive strategies on television criticism have proliferated. These perspectives raise questions about some epistemological assumptions of empiricist research. For instance, in his critique of mass communications research, Robert Allen challenges the following important positions taken by many communications researchers: that empiricism is the way to know the world; that an absolute distinction exists between the objective universe of facts and the subjective inquirer seeking explanations of the facts; and that "truths" of the world exist in regularities. These challenges, largely unanswered, explain the philosophical and methodological qualms with which some communications scholars respond to the achievements of American communications research.

In the field of communications research, since studies relying on content analysis have yielded much of what we know about TV drama, both the method itself and the results such studies yielded deserve some discussion here. Drawing upon his survey of several authoritative definitions of the content-analysis method, Ole Holsti defines the method as

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27 To discuss in detail the debate about the philosophical underpinnings of the empiricist mode of research requires much more space than this review of literature section can provide. Interested readers can refer to Chapter II of Robert Allen's book and its footnotes. *Ibid.*, 30-44.

"any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages." 29 Thomas F. Carney gives a less formal definition:

Content analysis is a technique which aims to improve the quality of the inferences we make. It is based on analyzing communications, be they verbal, written or even pictorial. And it involves demonstrating how these characteristics are related to our inferences. 30

No matter how scholars define the method, its main function is to allow the researcher to identify and analyze, invariably by quantification, salient features from communication messages. From the results of such analysis, researcher can make inferences about what occurs in a given communicative act. Since its inception, the method has been used to analyze broadcast news, political propaganda, radio and television drama, and value reflection in literature.

The use of quantification in content analysis, however, entails some limitations as to what this method can achieve in studying dramatic representations in communications. For instance, it has been pointed out that content analysis studies tend not to differentiate minor characters from main characters, or one type of drama from another. In other


30 Thomas F. Carney, Content Analysis: A Technique for Systematic Inference from Communications (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1979), xv.
words, if we content analyze *All in the Family*, Archie Bunker of that show would be counted just as one of the blue-collar workers who frequent the bar at the street corner. Evidently, this limitation of the method can prevent us from recognizing dramatic complexity in TV programs. ³¹

A more important criticism of content analysis targets at studies that quantify dramatic actions. Such studies, the criticism goes, assume that dramatic actions can be reduced to a series of quantifiable and 'objective' categories of data. It is true that a dramatic representation or action inspires certain effects in the audience. But whether such effects are quantifiable is debatable. T. W. Adorno raises an important objection to such quantitative research of a cultural phenomenon when he rejects an invitation to direct a music division research project at Columbia. He could not subscribe to the project's empiricist approach to the study of music effect. He insists upon "the difficulty of verbalizing what music subjectively arouses in the listener, the utter obscurity of what we call 'music experience'." ³²

What Adorno refers to is a kind of aesthetic experience that


resists quantitative dissection and analysis. On a similar
ground, a viewer does not fully appreciate the Mona Lisa if
he or she examines only specific color tinges in the
figure's complexion. Full appreciation is a holistic
experience. Since content analysis uses dissection to study
responses to cultural products, it cannot adequately account
for the holistic effects of such responses.

Another question about the content analysis method has
to do with whether it can be used to do qualitative analysis
of research materials. On this point, Holsti cites a
"standard source" as saying: "There is clearly no reason for
content analysis unless the question one wants answered is
quantitative." 33 However, regarding the meaning of the term
"quantitative" as equivocal, Holsti does not think that it
means only "numerical." He suggests that it has less
restrictive meanings that allow descriptive terms such as
"more," "less" and "suggesting." He objects to regarding
quality and quantity as dichotomous attributes, and suggests
that a continuum exists between them. 34 In other words, in
emphasizing the less restrictive and suggestive meanings in
content analysis, Holsti believes that a study using content
analysis method can yield qualitative, or at least not

33 Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson, eds., The Handbook
of Social Psychology, 598.

34 Ibid., 598.
totally quantitative, results. Despite the notional equivocality Holsti emphasizes, it is indisputable that content analysis operates mainly through quantification of the research materials.

In reality, content analysis studies do derive results from quantification of attributes of the object or phenomenon under study, and they tend to focus on the manifest content of communication messages. An early case in point is Dallas Smythe’s study of television programs in New York, Los Angeles and New Haven published in 1954. Aware of the importance of "latent and contextual dimensions of meaning" in communication, Smythe acknowledged in the beginning that "the produced program is .... more than the sum of the program ingredients." To transcend the formula of "manifest content" as stipulated by experts, Smythe believed, more sophisticated content categories would have to be developed. However, since psychology had not provided theories on the nature of the "interpretive process," in which "audience members re-structure the content of a given drama program to meet their own needs," he admitted that content analysts had to survive with the existing content categories. As a result, Smythe’s study had to omit


36 Ibid., 143.
measuring the latent dimensions of communication messages, while concentrating on quantifiable items. Smythe's study best illustrates how a content analyst became aware of the unquantifiable dimensions of communication messages and grappled with them, but could not transcend the limitations of content analysis.

Today the question remains: have content analysts developed sophisticated content categories to cope with latent contextual meanings? A careful look into a recent study by a well-versed content analyst will answer this question. This study, entitled "Quantity and Quality of Sex in the Soaps," examines the representations of sex in soap operas to provide evidence for impact studies. The design of this study is sophisticated because its content categories include not only highly discriminated varieties of sexual acts but also vocal expressions with sexual insinuations. Three trained coders provided the results from complicated encoding and recording. The study's quantitative analysis, as expected, accounts for character traits (ethnicity, age, and sex), and measures the occurrence of sexual acts by percentage and frequency. The "qualitative analysis" of the study is interesting because the authors still resort to numbers and frequency in order to

substantiate their arguments. Thus, after listing many oral expressions with sexual connotations, the authors resume using terms like "one fifth," "majority of references (n = 52)," "99%" and others. There is nothing wrong with the use of numbers as evidence to support an argument. The point is that the hope that content analysis can evolve into a sophisticated research method capable of dealing with latent content of communication messages has not been fulfilled.

Realizing the limitations of content analysis, Holsti himself states that "content analysis may be considered as a supplement to, not a substitute for, subjective examination of documents (emphasis added)." This evaluation of the method finds resonance in contemporary critics' research efforts. For example, in Reading Television, a semiotic study of television programs, John Fiske and John Hartley begin their discussion by presenting the prevalent television content features that communication researchers have obtained by way of content analysis. Even Robert Allen, who questions the fundamental philosophical assumptions of communications research, also acknowledges the usefulness of content analysis in documenting how television programs "represent constructions of the world." In short, content

38 Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson, eds., The Handbook of Social Psychology, 602.

39 In Speaking of Soap Opera, Robert Allen is critical of knowledge of soap opera derived by means of content analysis. In the introduction to Channels of Discourse, Allen seems also
analysis can be a good method in identifying and delineating the manifest characteristics of an object or phenomenon under study.

Being aware of the weakness and the strength of content analysis studies, the author has begun his research by reviewing what content analysts have to say about American television’s portrayals of the father and husband. A preliminary review of relevant literature indicates that content analysis studies have shown that dramatic depictions of social characters on prime-time TV are prejudiced and fictional. Overall, there has been an overrepresentation of white, middle-class professionals, and an underrepresentation of working-class figures in TV programs throughout the decades. Smythe’s 1954 study reported that the TV programs under study presented four times more professionals, managers, officials and proprietors, service workers and private household workers than exist in reality. 40 A 1961 study of two major television network stations in New York City also reported a predominance of middle/upper middle-class characters in the major dramatic programs. 41

acknowledges some merits of the content analysis research. 10.


Into the seventies and eighties, sociologists continued to identify patterns of overrepresentation of middle-class roles and underrepresentation of working-class characters. Combining data collected for a content study with their personal observations, two sociologists discerned patterns of ridiculing working-class family figures and of glamorizing middle-class figures in 1982.

In summary, content analysts have clearly delineated some persistent patterns in television's representation of social class over a long period of time. Their works, however, still leave certain questions unanswered: How do we interpret these obviously skewed patterns? Do we take them as expressions of public values? Or are they really class prejudices of the TV producers? Further, how are these imbalanced portrayals related to different social and cultural conditions in American society at different times? Most important of all, why has television's skewed representation of social class remained so consistent and by what means has it been created? Since content analysis is not very helpful in answering these questions, the


dissertation will adopt an interpretive strategy informed by contemporary film and television criticisms.

C. Contemporary Television Criticism:

The most influential critical schools in contemporary television criticism are semiotics, narrative theory, reader-oriented criticism, genre study, ideological analysis, psychoanalysis, feminist criticism and British Cultural Studies. Representing a wide range of perspectives, these interpretive strategies are making the study of television programs into a truly dynamic and engaging research enterprise. Research projects informed by these strategies have exerted a significant influence on the growing field of cultural studies. While all of these interpretive strategies are stimulating and helpful, the author has found the theoretical assumptions of the school of British Cultural Studies to be particularly similar to those of this dissertation, and, therefore, to be most useful in studying representations of social roles in a popular culture media such as television. Because of the similarity in assumptions, the following discussion of contemporary television criticism will emphasize some of the theoretical concerns of this school of interpretative strategy.
Contemporary television criticism derives some of its fundamental theoretical underpinnings from the linguistic theories of structuralism and semiotics. According to the structuralist theory, the meanings of words are generated through the words' positions within the structure of the language rather than through their direct reference to reality. Such an understanding has led critics to pay more attention to the structure of communication systems. Similarly, the theory of semiotics maintains that communication can only occur within sign systems governed by specific sets of conventions and codes. The sign, which consists of the signifier and the signified, can be a word, an image, a traffic sign, or any other object that can assume a symbolic function. The conventions of the sign system determine how we make meanings (i.e. relate signifiers to signifieds) and control the range of meanings available to us (i.e. what signifieds we produce) in communications. When critics apply these insights to cultural or literary studies, they begin to look into how the codes and conventions within representational systems or structures create meanings rather than what meanings are. In other words, they no longer think of independent objects but rather of symbolic structure and systems of relations.

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4 Here the author is indebted to Ellen Seiter's account of the semiotics in television criticism. Robert Allen, ed., Channels of Discourse, 20.
which, by endowing objects and actions meaning, make our universe. 45 After this change of focus among critics, television becomes "one of a number of complex sign systems" through which one experiences and knows the world. 46

It should be pointed out that most schools of contemporary television criticism are characterized by a deterministic view of culture. This is true of the schools of the British Cultural Studies, Marxist- informed ideological analysis, Freudian psychoanalysis, and other perspectives. All of them acknowledge the determining role of culture in the production of cultural artifacts. For instance, the first assumption of the British Cultural Studies is that meanings and their creation are inseparably connected with the social structure, and that they can only be explained in terms of that structure and its history. 47 Similarly, Marxist- informed ideological analysis assumes that cultural artifacts, i.e. literature, film and television, are products of specific historical contexts. They are made by and for specific social groups. 48 This underlying determinist assumption helps to explain why

45 Robert Allen, Channels of Discourse, 3.

46 Ibid., 2.

47 Ibid., 254.

48 Ibid., 38.
contemporary criticism is not concerned with generating "unbiased truth" but rather with how TV texts function to serve social and cultural purposes.

Like other schools of contemporary television criticism, British Cultural Studies puts to work a synthetic analysis of cultural artifacts by resorting to structuralism, semiotics and other analytical strategies. However, this school of criticism is distinguished from others by its unique notion of culture, an idea informed and shaped by modified Marxist assumptions about social dynamics. Proceeding from a generalized concept of culture as simply a mode of social living in industrial societies, this school further regards culture as a "constant site of struggle between those with and those without power." This contestation theory of culture finds its origin in Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony. 49 According to this contestation-theory, the culture-making process is not one in which the subordinate classes blindly and willingly contribute to their own subordination, but one in which the dominant and the subordinate classes constantly engage in struggles for power. Although the classes that already hold power also hold the advantage in such struggles, that advantage does not necessarily lead to the willing surrender of the powerless. The powerless, experiencing the

49 John Fiske, Ibid., 260.
disadvantages of subjugation, repeatedly engage in new rounds of the fight for power. 50 This "contestation-theory" of culture has made its impact on cultural interpretations, particularly on that of television culture. In light of this contestation view of culture, Stuart Hall contributes the theory of "negotiation of meanings" to television criticism. He suggests that, in the process of television viewing, texts allow different social groups to come up with their own readings. Viewers of various social backgrounds, according to Hall, may deploy three reading strategies in their encounter with television texts: the dominant, the negotiated, and the oppositional. 51 The dominant reading is the one that agrees with the attempted message of the text. Whereas the negotiated and oppositional readings involve partial or total rejection of the attempted message. From this theoretical perspective, the viewer or critic of a certain segment of television text cannot assume that there is the correct reading of it. What the viewer derives from the segment is inevitably influenced by his ideology and how that ideology responds to the meaning conveyed. In other words, from different ideological


perspectives, the critic may generate various readings of a segment of television text. Hall's postulations have enabled many fruitful studies of television texts at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

With regard to the relation between cultural practices and other practices in social formations, the school of Cultural Studies avoids a crude economic reductionism by drawing from the French structuralist Marxist, Louis Althusser. Althusser further develops Engels' arguments about the determinative force of production "in the last instance" and about the relative autonomy of superstructure. 52 He maintains that all social practices, be they economic, political or ideological, have their own history and independence. Together they form a closely related network of interconnections in which they "overdetermine" each other. 53 Although Althusser still acknowledges the final determining force of economic practice in the last instance, he believes that "the economic dialectic" never functions without involving


"effective determinations" of the superstructures. 54

Influenced by this Althusserian notion of overdetermination, the problematic of Cultural Studies is focused on the "relative autonomy" of cultural practices. 55

The British Cultural Studies approach contributes to this study for several reasons. First, the study of a pervasive television image and its creation in different historical contexts is part of the critical endeavors pioneered by the British Cultural Studies school. Second, since the dissertation also adopts an interdisciplinary approach, it should be able to benefit from the selective orientation of the British Cultural Studies approach. Third, Stuart Hall's theory of the "negotiation of meanings" suggests that the interpretations arrived at here represent only one type of reading -- the dominant messages from the media workers -- within a range of other possible readings. Finally, this study follows a central premise of Cultural Studies -- that culture involves power or that social relations are to be understood in terms of social power -- in its attempt to explain the unbalanced representation of different social classes on American television.

54 Louis Althusser, For Marx, 113.

Although the theoretical insights of the British Cultural Studies School are invaluable, the scope of this study prohibits a systematic adaptation of its approach. The British Cultural Studies approach is most appropriate for conducting a detailed study of the production and staging of one significant television program over a relatively short historical period. Since this dissertation attempts to conduct a wider historical analysis of a series of programs over a much longer historical period rather than to examine one program thoroughly, a general adaptation of the British Cultural Studies approach is inappropriate. In other words, while drawing upon new theoretical insights, this dissertation remains traditional in its interpretive strategy, emphasizing the direct encounter between the reader and the texts, in generating interpretations.
CHAPTER III
FATHER KNOWS BEST: REFLECTION AND REINFORCEMENT OF POPULAR MYSTIQUES IN THE FIFTIES’ PRIME-TIME TV SERIES

Manipulations by professional image-makers are effective because their audiences do not or cannot know personally all the people they want to talk about or be like, and because they have an unconscious need to believe in certain types. In their need and inexperience, such audiences snatch and hold to the glimpses of types that are frozen into the language with which they see the world. Even when they meet the people behind the types face to face, previous images, linked deeply with feeling, blind them to what stands before them. Experience is trapped by false images, even as reality itself sometimes seems to imitate the soap opera and the publicity release.

C. Wright Mills, White Collar

A. Some Salient Features of the Decade:

Historians have written extensively about the decade of the fifties. There were a few prominent features few historians fail to notice. Above all else, it was a time of moderation and conservatism. Adlai Stevenson accurately characterized this spirit of complacency in one of his speeches: "We must take care lest we confuse moderation with mediocrity, lest we settle for half answers to hard problems. .... I agree that it is time for catching our breath; I agree that moderation is the spirit of the times (1956)." During the previous two decades, economic crises and international warfare had absorbed the nation. Even at the very beginning of the fifties, the country became

involved in the nerve-racking Korean War. Yet as the decade unfolded, the truce in the Korean War in 1953 brought home American GIs and rekindled the post-War resurgent desire for a tranquil and private life. It was a time for everyone to yearn for a home in the suburb, a corporate executive position, and a large family. The best indication of the nation's preference for a trouble-free prospect was the election of the home-coming, fatherly General Eisenhower as president in 1952. Eisenhower's clement character and middle-of-the-road approach to important issues had a strong appeal to Americans just freed from War obligations and anxieties.

Yet beneath the superficial complacency and tranquility of the fifties there was a constant undercurrent of fear. At moments, the Korean War appeared to be on the verge of dragging the country into a large-scale war with China. Further, since the Soviet Union had successfully developed the atomic bomb, Americans had to make the psychological adjustment to the threat of a devastating nuclear war. "Learning to love the bomb" became one of the most curious things that mid-twentieth century Americans had to adapt to in the fifties. Most important of all, the paranoid red scares stirred up by Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin ruined many people's careers and kept the nation nervous for quite a few years. Throughout the decade, the House Committee on Un-American Activities remained a powerful
agency that could bring about the undoing of anyone critical of their cause and procedures. The McCarthyite red scare would eventually leave its indelible imprint on American culture of the post-War era.

The decade of the fifties was also one of intellectual conservatism. In the midst of post-war economic prosperity and a worldwide disillusionment with Stalinist communism, American intellectuals adopted a profoundly conservative posture in leading the nation. The 1952 Partisan Review symposium -- "Our Country and Our Culture" -- was a symbolic event in expressing and defining the intellectuals' attitude toward American culture and society. The majority of the leading intellectuals of the time who attended the symposium declared their espousal of "the intrinsic and positive values" of American democracy. 57 For most of the decade, liberal and conservative thinkers joined hands in celebrating the virtues of American capitalist system and the liberal-conservative consensus. A number of important books expounding the liberal tradition in American politics were produced during this decade. 58


The most prominent feature of the post-War era was the phenomenal expansion of suburbia in America. During the fifties, war-preparations prompted a continuous boom in manufacturing industries, which in turn led to a flourish of the consumer culture. The booming economy led to an unprecedented expansion of suburbia. Levittowns mushroomed around major cities all over the country. With the expansion of the suburbia came the drastic increase of major consumption commodities. Private cars and sophisticated freeways, two preconditions for the new suburban life style, underwent remarkable expansions during the fifties. Between 1950 and 1960, registered automobiles increased by approximately thirty percent. 59 The sale of the television set, another icon of the consumer culture, increased by leaps and bounds. In 1950, only 5 million American homes had the magic box; by 1960, the number increased to 45 million homes. 60

The migration of the middle-class to suburbia created a new life style in America, making the fifties a time of domesticity, bourgeois respectability, and conformism. It was a time when America witnessed a backlash in the feminist movement with young women abandoning career opportunities


60 Ibid., 137.
their mothers and sisters had won for them during the 20s and the 30s. Many female college graduates of the time chose to stay home and become homemakers. By the end of the decade, the average age of marriage among American women dropped to 20, and the birthrate of the United States was overtaking India’s. 61 As more women returned home, an increasing number of American men became "organization men" pursuing their careers in the expanding corporate world. Alarmed by the prevalent conformist mentality among the post-War Americans, David Riesman came up with the notion of "other-direction" to describe this generation of Americans. The suburban and consumer culture also produced compatible social stereotypes of the fifties. The ideal man of the time was the well-groomed white collar clerk filing papers in office, whereas the ideal woman was the contented homemaker scrubbing the floor in the kitchen. Jim Anderson and Margaret Anderson of the popular TV series—Father Knows Best were presented to the public as the ideal parents of the decade. All of this happened despite a widespread psychological dissatisfaction, or "unnamed disease" among suburban housewives. Betty Friedan was later to call the phenomenon "the feminine mystique" of the post-War era.

During the fifties, the mentality of "keeping up with the Jones" prevailed among Americans so much that serious intellectuals became concerned with the weakening of individualism and started to assault conformism. Among these critics, David Riesman, in collaboration with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, offered an important analysis of American character in *The Lonely Crowd*. 62 Riesman proposed that in contrast to the inner-directed individuals whose life goals were deeply implanted by their parents early in life, post-War Americans were becoming other-directed individuals who took their life directions from their contemporaries. 63 In Riesman's view, inner-directed individuals were the products and pillars of the nineteenth century Western capitalist societies, whereas the other-directed individuals were the products of the mid-twentieth century American capitalist society. Riesman and his collaborators were critical of the widespread middle class conformism in American society.

Equally concerned with the weakening of individualism in the increasingly bureaucratized American society, William H. Whyte argued in *The Organization Man* that "a Social (or Organization) Ethic" was replacing the individualistic

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Protestant Ethic among group-oriented Americans. The "organization man," according to Whyte, not only was other-directed, but also articulated the philosophy that society is benevolent and that it is necessary for the individual to sacrifice for its benefits. Whyte warned that the idea that the individual’s interests are totally compatible with those of a benevolent society robbed the individual of his defenses. In Whyte’s view, the individual-as-central ideal, which privileged the interests of the individual rather above those of society, should remain as vital and useful in corporate America as in the America of other ages. Without urging a return to the Protestant Ethic, Whyte believed that the individual could assert his individuality in the corporate culture, that the battle was not lost and the individual could still fight the organization. 64 Although Whyte claimed that his work was not an assault on conformism, his goal to revitalize individualism in a corporate culture mainly stemmed from his concern with the upsurge of conformism in the post-War America.

64 William H. Whyte, Jr., The Organization Man (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 6, 396, 370, 400, 404.
B. Popular Culture and television:

The social and structural transformations in post-War America found expressions in various forms of popular imagination of the fifties. For instance, in the best-selling novels of the time (1945-55), Elizabeth Long identifies a thematic shift from entrepreneurial adventure to corporate-suburban compromise. Long's study shows that popular novels written in the early stage of this period celebrated individual entrepreneurial success with a tone of confidence and optimism about society. These novels tended to praise and justify the individual quest for success by emphasizing the individual's contribution to social progress and to the benefits of the individual's immediate community. The typical successful man was either a self-made man or an autonomous professional. By the mid-fifties, however, a new attitude towards success, which Long calls the 'corporate-suburban' model, appeared in popular novels. In this new model of success, the protagonist excelled in integrating a set of different roles and tasks rather than in conquering the world. Work became an abstract and fragmented process, and the protagonist achieved success by

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balancing his work responsibilities and familial happiness. Long lists Tom Rath of Sloan Wilson’s *The Man in the Gray Flannel* as a typical example of this type of hero. It is not surprising that the thematic shift in popular novels in the post-War era as identified by Long corresponds to the historical change from inner-direction to other-direction as delineated by David Riesman.

As the consumer culture expanded and the television set became popular, the magic box began to capture American popular imagination on a large scale. It was in the fifties when television first exerted an important influence on every aspect of American life. As an evening pastime, television programs were becoming increasingly popular and significant. When television character Lucy Ricardo gave birth to her new baby on March 19, 1953, the event attracted a nation-wide audience of millions. In politics, the role television can play was becoming evident. On January 20, 1953, the Eisenhower inauguration was televised from coast to coast for the first time in history. The broadcast gave millions of Americans the opportunity to observe this important national political event. The effective use of television actually helped Eisenhower and Nixon win the 1952 election. It was also for the first time in the fifties when a new generation of Americans were growing up with daily

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66 Ibid., 82.
exposure to popular television images and programs. Surrounded by perfect television images such as Jim Anderson and Donna Stone, this generation lived in a world where it was not so easy to differentiate reality from television fantasy.

Prime-time television entertainment programs, the expression of popular imagination and network executives' perceptions of reality, readily embraced the conservative era of the fifties. On the evening small screen of the fifties, images of the suburban middle-class proliferated advocating the bourgeois way of life and perpetuating popular social mystiques. The creation of the most important image was inseparably connected with the conservative spirit of the decade. The popular father images reflected and reinforced prevalent social stereotypes, presenting bourgeois values as the social and cultural standards to Americans. The domination of bourgeois values in the world of television manifested itself in three major types of father figure in prime-time TV series. The three typical images were the glamorous entertainer, the bourgeois family man and the blue-collar bungler. The first two types of image directly exemplified the bourgeois life style, whereas the last type indirectly advocated the bourgeois values by ridiculing an alternative way of life.

In early days of television, the image of the ostentatious entertainer was popular because popular radio
and film stars like Danny Thomas and Desi Arnaz had already established their fame among Americans before they appeared on television. Their well-established fame worked like a halo around them, making their life style attractive, comfortable, and glamorous. Their popularity owed much to the perpetual American fascination with fame and celebrity. In contrast, the image of the benign and suburban family man was much less glamorous yet much more secured and well-grounded. Yet the suburban family man would eventually make the most important father figure of the decade. The fifties' television is today remembered by this prototype of suburban father figure. As in the case of popular novels, the life style of the middle-class suburbanite began to dominate the prime-time small screen beginning with Father Knows Best in 1954. Since then, images of doctors, engineers, and managers permeated prime-time family TV series, establishing role models for audience to emulate. The presentation of this family man image was a good example of network executives' direct effort to represent a popular social stereotype on the small screen. In addition to the entertainer and the family man, there was the bumbling father or husband in the working-class family on the fifties' prime-time TV. In his depictions, television continued the tradition of ridiculing the male protagonist in American popular culture. Yet invariably connecting the bungler image with a working-class background, television
revealed its prejudice against people of lower social classes and its implicit respect for middle-class people. Now I will examine each of these stereotypes separately.

C. Popular Father Figures on Television of the Fifties:

1. The Glamorous Entertainer:

In the early days of television situation comedies, it was not uncommon for TV star comedians or comediennes to stage parts of their own lives on the small screen and to use their own first names in the shows. Good examples of this kind of self-dependences are Danny Thomas as Danny William, Lucille Ball as Lucy Ricardo, Ozzie Nelson as himself. Such characters constituted one type of popular male image on the fifties' TV: that of the entertainer. Because these stars were well-known show business celebrities, their personal charm and achievement often endowed their shows with a quality of glamorous stardom. The characters these stars created fall between what David Marc calls representational and presentational modes of television characterization. They were representational.

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David Marc, *Demographic Vistas: Television in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 99. Marc maintains that there are three modes of TV characterization: the representational mode, in which the actor functions as a fictional character; the presentational mode, in which the actor directly addresses the audience; and the documentary, in which the actor's life style and his
in the sense that the characters they created were supposed to be fictional as in the case of Danny William. Yet they were also presentational because their show business personae spoke directly to the audience. The life style of the Nelsons was a good example in this case. For more sixteen years, the Nelsons played the life they lived and lived a life they played on television. This fusion of reality into representation was one unique feature of the early television series. This star mania in early television entertainment harmonized with the emphasis on biographic depictions of the entertainer in popular magazines in the post-World-War-II era. 68

One of the most distinctive features of the show business star was the flamboyance of his life. The series that best exemplified the flamboyant life style of show business stars was *I Love Lucy*. Critics claim that Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball had intended to dramatize the life of an ordinary couple rather than that of a movie star and a

opinions become the subject of other television programs.

68 Leo Lowenthal, "Biographies in Popular Magazines," in Paul Lazarsfeld and Stanton, eds., *Radio Research, 1942-43*, (New York, Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1944), 509-520. In this study, Leo Lowenthal identifies a historical shift from idolizing entrepreneurs to worshipping entertainers in biographies in American popular magazines in the second half of the century. He links this shift to social changes in American life. The fascination with show business stars in TV programs on prime-time television in the fifties certainly reflected a similar tendency in this historical period.
band leader. 69 This proves to be true only to some extent. The show was about the mundane affairs of a middle American couple: Lucy's aspirations to be involved in show business, her troubles managing money, Ricky's show business at the Tropicana and so on. However, despite their deliberate efforts to be ordinary people, the glamour of the show business star frequently manifested itself in the life of the Ricardos. When working in a Hollywood studio, Ricky can invite William Holden home to surprise his star-maniac wife. The Grand Opening of Ricky's Club Babalu gives Ricky and Lucy a chance to stage a show with Bob Hope. Episodes such as "L. A. At Last," "Harpo Marx," "Lucy Does A TV Commercial," "Lucy's Italian Movie," either featured Lucy's star worship or her unyielding efforts to be involved in show business.

Another distinctive feature of the entertainer image was his deep-seated male-chauvinism. Most of the popular family shows of the fifties revolved around the male protagonist's career with the man as the indisputable patriarch of the family. Ricky Ricardo of I Love Lucy was typical of such a paternalistic male figure. Although Lucy

69 Rick Mitz quotes the advertising agent of Philip Morris as urging the Arnaz: "If you can create characters for yourselves with whom the average person can associate -- everyday people, not Lucille Ball, the movie star, and Desi Arnaz, the $150,000-a-year bandleader--I'll make a commitment here and now." Rick Mitz, The Great TV Sitcom Book (A Perigee Book, 1988), 43.
Ricardo is the real star of the show, Ricky Ricardo is there to preside over the male-centered family. Ricky earns the money, Lucy spends it. Ricky solves the problems that Lucy creates. Ricky treats Lucy as if she were a child, scolding her, forgiving her, and pandering to her. A tone of exuberant male chauvinism is frequently identifiable in the character of Ricky Ricardo. The same was true with the long-time popular daddy, Danny William of The Danny Thomas Shows. A male chauvinist, Danny would make jokes out of his wife’s being at home: "My wife doesn’t work--she just has babies. I haven’t seen’em for so long--my kids call me Uncle Daddy (laugh)!" On the topic of family roles, Danny advises his young friend: "In a marriage, it’s the woman’s job to take care of the home and children. It’s the man’s job to provide the home. In other words, he earns the bread and she slices it." These remarks, commonplace in the popular shows of the fifties, were typical of the male chauvinist view that dominated American society in the post-War era.

The sexist overtone was often implied in the characterization of the male protagonist in the early popular TV shows. A convention these shows used to popularize the male-centered view on family life was to portray the man as totally incapable of doing housework. The implicit message was, of course, that the woman was born to do the housework. One of the classic episodes from I Love Lucy, "Job Switching," is a good example. Convinced of their
own abilities, Lucy and Ethel decide to switch "jobs" with their husbands. They want to go to work and let their husbands take care of their homes. As a result, while the ladies have to go through many difficulties finding appropriate jobs, the men are having all kinds of trouble at home. The cake Fred bakes turns out to be as thin as the plate. The blouse Ricky irons burns with a smoke, the chicken he cooks is blown up onto the ceiling, and the rice he makes keeps oozing out from the over-filled pot. It is simply a disaster for the men to do the housework! At the end of the day, both husbands and wives are disillusioned and want to change back to their own roles. The message the episode conveys to the audience? How ridiculous that they dare to exchange social roles when such roles seem to be so "natural" or "normal."

A similar episode appeared in *Make Room for Daddy.* While Kathy is on her jury duty, Danny also has a "disaster" at home. In the morning rush, he slaps on and smashes the eggs that he puts in his pajamas pockets. When all things are late, he has to call a cab to send the kids school. For a descent weekend dinner, he has to hire three people to do what Kathy does by herself. When Kathy returns, Danny, battered by domestic troubles, has to confess to his home-coming wife that not only is she indispensable, but she is "the biggest bargain" in town! In the pathetic ending, when Danny mentions the "help-wanted" sign he wanted to put
up that requires a wife's dedication as qualification, Kathy volunteers to take the "job". Danny sings a tribute to his dedicated wife, and the episode ends with the couple embracing each other and accepting their own regular roles in the family. Episodes such as these were quite popular in the TV shows of the fifties. In fact, the convention of portraying the man as inadequate in the kitchen persists until recently. In *All in the Family*, Archie Bunker is still presented to the audience as helpless with cooking anything at all. The use of this convention has made hilarious jokes on men's inadequacy in the kitchen. Yet the message these jokes conveyed is quite clear and sexist: the kitchen is the woman's territory and man is not supposed to be there. Nothing can be more effective than a popular television program to convince the public of the fifties' ethic that the woman should stay at home than venture into the world of works.

The characterization of the male protagonist in the popular TV series of the fifties emphasized his domestic rather than his social roles. It is ironical that while the popular mystique portrayed the man as the sole bread-earner, television seldom bothered to present how the man was earning the bread in a new and expanding corporate world. Instead, most important characterizations in the prime-time series of the fifties were domestic, apolitical and entertainment-oriented. This apathetic feature of prime-time
series was a reflection of the public desire for detachment so popular during the fifties. We find that the popular series often featured the most routine and trivial affairs of the character. Ozzie Nelson makes an embarrassing mistake reporting for a woman's club newspaper, and then mobilizes his sons to correct it. Ricky Ricardo makes a fool of himself getting Lucy to the hospital when her baby is due. Dr. Alex Stone wants to wear a moustache but his wife persuades him to shave it off. All the jokes or funny situations were centered around humdrum routine affairs. During the fifties, what the public wanted was a self-centered private life and television was trying to present just that. Nothing comparable to the social commentaries of the 70s' television was imaginable in the mania for private life in post-War America.

In addition to the apathetic public attitude of the fifties, the paranoia of McCarthyism certainly contributed to the obsessive treatment of private, trivial and apolitical subject matters on prime-time television. A dramatic event in the real life of the Arnazes was quite instructive. In 1953, when it became known that Lucille Ball was confronted with a charge of her previous Communist party membership, the Arnazes panicked. They had to seriously face possible withdrawal of major sponsors such as Philip Morris. That could have been an economical and professional disaster
for Desilu Enterprises. To clear Lucy, Desi Arnaz had to plead with the studio audience:

Lucille Ball is no Communist! Lucy has never been a Communist, not now and never will be. I was kicked out of Cuba because of Communism. We both despise the Communists for everything they stand for, Lucille is one hundred percent American. She's as American as Barney Baruch and Ike Eisenhower. ....

A nerve-wracking event such as this could explain why TV programs of the fifties steered clear of anything that could be seen as left-wing persuasion. The combination of McCarthyism and Cold War atmosphere actually made certain television programs the official machine of propaganda. In 1959, the U.S. Treasury Department commissioned the producers of Father Knows Best to make one episode featuring the Anderson children living under a dictatorship. It was made to show the public the importance of preserving democracy and purchasing U.S. government bond. The episode was actually shown within certain religious and "patriotic" circles. 71

Another notable feature of the popular TV shows of the fifties was the prominence of the leisure theme and the emphasis of the American post-War affluence. The leading character Ozzie Nelson of The Adventures of Ozzie and

70 Ibid., 46.

Harriet is a good example. Probably no other TV character can better represent the "care-free and affluent" life-style of the post-War America. For the sixteen years when the series was on the air, Mr. Ozzie Nelson had no serious occupation. He just hung around in the neighborhood, enjoying a seemingly parasitic life. Episodes of long-lasting series would feature story lines such as the Nelsons craving and searching for Tutti Frutti ice-cream, Ozzie reporting and writing for a women’s club newspaper, Ozzie missing his golf tournament while taking a group of children on a Boy Scout trip, and so on. The life of the Nelson family seemed to consist only of shopping, partying, raising children, dating, having small talks, and resolving insignificant family complications. Despite such a life style could only be possible for a family of Hollywood television stars, the popularity and longevity (16 years) of the show indicated that it was how the producers and the public perceived American society of that era. Such semi-realistic depictions of American life helped create a blind optimism in "an ever-expanding post-war prosperity."

We all remember too well that it was only in the beginning of the sixties when Michael Harrington’s passionate study of "the other America" awaked the middle America from their Ozzie-and-Harriet smugness. If the middle America had suffered from a social myopia in the previous decade,
television and its blind glorification of the suburbia had much to do with it.

2. The Respectable Family Man:

In the popular prime-time TV shows of the fifties, the image of the respectable suburban father figure was the most conspicuous and memorable. Sociologists refer to this image as the superdaddy on television of the time. \(^{72}\) Ready examples of such an image include: Jim Anderson of *Father Knows Best*, Alex Stone of *The Donna Reed Show*, and Ward Cleaver of *Leave it to Beaver*. Unlike the flamboyant show business man, the respectable father figure was meant to be a down-to-earth middle class suburbanite. He did not bear the ostentatious air of the show business star, neither did he frequent night-club stages or Hollywood resorts. There usually was no direct connection between the life of the character and that of the star. He was normally engaged in a profession or at least a managerial occupation—medicine, accounting, or insurance—with which the middle American TV audience could identify. He had an intact nuclear family with a contented homemaker and two or three well-behaved

teenage children. His family’s material well-being symbolized the middle America’s status and achievement, comfort and security. In short, he represented many of the bourgeois aspirations.

In a typical family series of the fifties, the credits are set in a suburban community with a two story house situated at the center of scene. The conventional technique in presenting this suburban landscape is to use a long shot to cover the house in the distance. Then gradually the camera leads the audience into the house, where domestic complications begin to unfold. Consisting of several scenes that introduce the characters, the credits are usually accompanied by a lively melody that creates an atmosphere of cheerfulness and domestic harmony. Briefly, the credits try to convey the theme of the show and present the important characters: the harmonious family life, the responsible and respectable parents, and the well-behaved children. Although this image of the picket-fenced house first originated in films about suburban life during the thirties, it was the suburbanization of America and the advent of television during the fifties that boosted its popularity. The popular use of this image in TV show credits tended to create the fantasy that every American family was living in such a beautiful house.

The popular show *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963) provides a good example of using such credits. They are set
in front of the Cleavers' home. In the first scene, Mrs. Cleaver, dressed in an apron, comes out of the house holding a tray of beverages. She serves drinks to the family working in their garden on a holiday. (The melody starts. The name Barbara Billingsley appears on the scene.) Mrs. Cleaver calls her husband gently. The scene cuts to Mr. Cleaver (Hugh Beaumont) trimming the hedges and wearing a light woolen shirt. He responds to Mrs. Cleaver with a grin. Then Wally (Tony Dow) and Beaver (Jerry Mathers) appear separately, each pushing a mower and responding to Mrs. Cleaver's call with a smile. Simple as these scenes are, they convey important messages about the show. First of all, the home and its vicinity indicate that the Cleavers are a suburban family with a comfortable living standard. Then the scenes of the family working together suggest that this is a harmonious and caring family. On a holiday, the father and the sons work in their own yard and the mother takes care of them. Furthermore, throughout the credits the men assume men's roles (trimming the hedges and mowing the lawn) and the woman takes a woman's position (serving the men). The whole picture fits the stereotypical notion of a "normal" family of the fifties: the exemplary father, the caring mother, and two decent teenage boys. Thus, the credits imply that the Cleaver family is caring, loving, cooperative and harmonious. These were the themes the show tried to establish through numerous episodes for years on end.
The unique historical conditions of the fifties can help explain the widespread use of the suburban home as a symbol of American family life. Historians identify a trend of urban migration to the suburbs caused by the industrial revolution in conjunction with 19th-century romanticism. 73 American urban migration to the suburb was part of this trend. Yet the Great Depression and World War II curbed the trend in the U.S. during the 1930s and 40s. After World War II, economic prosperity in the United States led to a resurgent movement towards the suburb. Miller and Nowak documented the massive migration of urban middle class to the suburbs and the tremendous boom of suburban housing industry during the 1950s. 74 With the rapid growth of suburbia, it was only natural for commercial television to use a symbol that would appeal to the taste and the aspiration of its suburban audience. To average Americans, the suburban home could be a symbol of domestic serenity and security, of social status and material success. It is an important part of the American dream.

Contrasted by the low social status of the blue-collar bungler American TV offered to its audience in the fifties, the respectable suburban family man has his secure social


74 Ibid., 127-146.
status. He enjoys the advantages and prestige of his profession. The initial superdaddy image was Jim Anderson (Robert Young) of *Father Knows Best* (1954–1963). Hailed as an effort to restore parental respectability, *Father Knows Best* started the tradition of the suburban situation comedy mainly concerned with domestic complications and adolescent growing-up. Jim Anderson of the show is an embodiment of bourgeois achievement and values. He lives in his own home in Springfield, a typical town whose name suggests many other American towns and cities. At work, Mr. Anderson is an agent of the General Insurance Company and conducts his business in an ethical manner. At times, he is named "the father of the year" by his company. At home, Mr. Anderson has an angel-like wife and three well-behaved teenagers. Both Mr. Anderson and his wife are college graduates, although for Mrs. Anderson (Jane Wyatt) the college education only makes her a more attractive housewife. Mr. Anderson's wisdom in counseling his children makes him an omniscient figure in the show. In short, in Jim Anderson television created an image that reinforced the stereotype of successful and responsible father figure in popular culture. By the late fifties, American television witnessed a proliferation of the Anderson-like father figure (Dr. Alex Stone of *The Donna Reed Show* and Ward Cleaver of *Leave it to Beaver*) and the representation of suburban middle-class families became predominant on prime-time TV. All of these
figures had similar qualities of Jim Anderson: a professional job, a white picked-fenced house, and a harmonious family.

In the tradition of American prime-time TV family situation comedies, we can hardly imagine any better show title than *Father Knows Best* to suggest the self-righteousness of the father figure. The moral authority or self-righteousness constitutes an important feature of the Anderson-like father figure in those shows. Earlier shows featuring the entertainer were not so intent upon establishing the moral authority of the patriarch in the family. They entertained more than they moralized. Shows featuring the blue-collar bungler actually undermined his authority in the family. The suburban family shows made a difference by establishing and glorifying the moral authority of the father figure in the middle-class family. It was his mission to moralize in these shows. Many episodes featured moral lessons that the parents, particularly the father, taught to the children. They provided good examples of how an entertainment medium could create a popular family figure and disseminate acceptable social and moral values to the public.

A typical episode (1960) of *Father Knows Best*, for instance, shows how the father’s values are finally accepted by everyone in the family. When Mr. Anderson is elected "the Best Father of the Year" in his company, he allows the
family to guess what surprise he will bring home. The children’s speculations include a convertible, a trip to Hawaii, and a swimming pool. Even Mrs. Anderson thinks along the line of domestic luxuries. She dreams of hiring a maid. When told of the honor Jim Anderson has won, no one appears to be excited and impressed. But Mr. Anderson makes it clear that he disapproves of everyone else’s wishes for luxuries. Contrary to material enjoyment, he wants a college education for every child in the family. He strains to convince the children that a college education is much more valuable than the luxuries they desire. Further, he objects to following the "dollar-down-dollar per week installment plan" to get those luxuries as many other people do. Finally, when the children see the wisdom of their father’s philosophy, they treat him with a well-prepared dinner and show him all their outstanding achievements at school. It was a touching and sentimental episode. In Mr. Anderson’s philosophy, we see his belief in education, security, and restraint in the use of credit. In the suburban family shows of the fifties, moralistic episodes like this are not uncommon. They invariably advocate bourgeois values through the moral authority of the father.

In addition to his moral authority, the suburban father figure was often idealized in the family shows of the fifties. When the notion of "togetherness" became a vogue in the fifties, television created a wise, loving,
understanding, responsible and family-oriented father figure. Mr. Ward Cleaver of *Leave it to Beaver* is a good example. Although the series focused on Beaver’s adolescent problems, the wise and responsible father was indispensable to the children’s coming of age. One thematic formula the series resorted to was that the children, by their naivete or wrong judgements, get themselves into trouble, wrestle with it until the wise father comes to their help. The following dialogue between Wally and his mother is a typical example of how the child comes to realize his father’s wisdom. It is about Wally’s admiration of his daddy’s experience with and knowledge of people. Wally says this after Daddy helped him disentangle himself from a "triangular" relationship with an older girl on the tennis court.

Wally: Hey, mum.
Mum: Yes, Wally?
Wally: When you married dad, he was a pretty old guy, wasn’t he?
Mum: Oh, no, I wouldn’t say he was pretty old.
Wally: What I mean is, he sure must have gotten around a lot.
Mum: Gotten around?
Wally: What I’m trying to say is, you know, he sure knows a lot about stuff.
Mum: Oh, yes, that he does.
Wally: Yes. Like last night, he was trying to tell me something for my own good. I couldn’t understand what he was getting at.
Mum: But you do now?
Wally: Boy, I sure do. Some girl was using me for a real goof. I didn’t even know it.

Mum: Well, Wally I think as you grow older, you’re going to find out that your father knows quite a bit about a lot of things.

Through this conversation, the image of a wise and helpful daddy is well established. Television texts such as this prove that this idealized father image reflected and
reinforced the "father-knows-best" mystique that was prevalent in the popular culture of the fifties.

As far as the understanding and helpful daddy image is concerned, Jim Anderson of *Father Knows Best* is again a good example. When his teenage son, Bud, has difficulties with his first date because he can't dance, Mr. Anderson carefully arranges social occasions for him to learn and practice. He even personally teaches Bud how to dance. With daddy's help, Bud avoids all the awkwardness a clumsy dancer could have encountered and ends up with a happy and successful first date. Similarly, when his younger daughter, Cathy, has problems being accepted by her boy peers because of her own boyish mannerism, Daddy tells her that most boys need to be macho and that all she needs to do is to let them feel that way. So with the meticulous help of her daddy, Cathy learns how to behave among her macho boy friends. An idealized father figure like Jim Anderson makes a sharp contrast with the father image in *Catcher in the Rye*. In Salinger's novel the father is negligent to the extent of being hateful. And a popular film of the fifties, *Rebel with a Cause*, tells a story of juvenile delinquency because of parental negligence in the fifties. Despite these contrary images, television still presented to the American public an idealized father figure.

As mentioned earlier, early TV shows featuring the life of the entertainer propagated the mystique that man and
woman have fixed roles in the household. The suburban family show worked to intensify that mystique by further emphasizing the contented homemaker image. Whereas in the earlier shows a character like Lucy Ricardo could still dare to pursue an actress' career, in the suburban shows we only had the "professional" and happy homemaker. In the earlier shows, Lucy's successes in involving herself in show business sometimes even worked to undercut Ricky's patriarchal authority. In the suburban shows, however, the line between a housewife's and a breadwinner's role is clear-cut. The man is the breadwinner, the boss and the woman is the contented homemaker, and nothing else. The man always appears important in his business suit, whereas the woman constantly looks domestic in her apron. Together with their polite children, these so-called "perfect" family images brainwashed the American TV audience. The happy homemaker image such as that of Donna Reed or Margaret Anderson might have presented some truth of the life of the suburban woman the fifties. Yet it tells us nothing about what Betty Friedan later called the "unnamed disease" that suburban housewives had to go through at that time.

Despite the benignity of the suburban family man, he always acts with a sense of superiority over his wife. The way Dr. Alex Stone treats Donna often suggests his craftiness, condescension, and superiority. They manifest themselves in his cocky air as the master of the house, his
manipulation of Donna's feelings, and his treating her as a child. Jim Anderson of Father Knows Best also demonstrates an obvious air condescension (and superiority) towards his wife. When someone suggests that Margaret Anderson serve as a chairperson of a committee for building a clinic in the community, Mr. Anderson comments:

She (the person recommending Margaret) thinks no better than throwing all the responsibility to a small woman with no experience. It's unfair (condescendingly). In fact, it's pretty stupid. .... It's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard of. .... That woman should realize that washing dishes and making beds and cooking beans hardly qualifies a person as a building contractor.

When Margaret's involvement in the project is over, Mr. Anderson is proved to be right in his judgement that she has no capacity for anything like that. Now it is Mr. Anderson's turn to tell his pretty wife condescendingly: "Even though you're the prettiest clinic builder in the world, don't build any more. We need you too much right here."

The social and cultural environment of the fifties was a hotbed for the popularization of "the feminine mystique" and the so-called "typical version" of the American family. Farnham and Lundberg's widely-circulated Modern Woman: the Lost Sex viciously attacked the childless woman as sick and perverted and condescendingly advised that a woman could only be happy by accepting a homemaker's role. 75 Along the

75 Douglas T. Miller and Mario Nowak, The Fifties, 154-155.
same line of argument, Lynn White, Jr., the president of Mills College, openly declared that higher learning was frustrating and harmful for women, and that homemaking was the woman’s destined profession. 76 During the decade, doctors writing on female roles exerted great influences on women’s lives. Dr Benjamin Spock’s Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care, a best-seller throughout the decade, insisted on the mother’s full time devotion to child care. 77 Another best-seller of the time, Child Care and the Growth of Love by Dr John Bowlby, popularized the theory of maternal deprivation. It served to persuade the woman to stay at home with the child in early years for fear of raising an emotionally deprived child. 78 With these theories circulating in the popular literature of the fifties, we should not be surprised to see some stereotypical images on prime-time TV series.

3. The Ineffectual Male:

In comparison with the suburban supperdaddy image, the blue-collar bungler also enjoyed some popularity on early

76 Ibid., 160.

77 Ibid., 155.

American television. The typical bumbling father or husband was Chester Riley of *The Life of Riley* (1949-58) and Ralph Kramden of *The Honeymooners* (1955-1956). Unlike the suburban family man image that had a sudden assent during the fifties, the bumbler had had a longer tradition in American popular culture. He had already established himself in radio comedies (*Fibber McGee and Molly Show*) or comic strips (*Dagwood and Blondie*) since the 1930s. As a type of American folk hero, the ineffectual male figure was quite different from the ostentatious entertainer or the bourgeois family man in the suburban shows. He was the butt of jokes and the symbol of stupidity. Lacking the patriarchal authority, the bumbling male was looked down upon by his wife and children. Although he may also want to assert the male authority, he was seldom taken seriously. The early male bumbler image on American television was an embodiment of all of values that television producers rejected and liked to ridicule.

*The Life of Riley*, an original radio comedy created in 1943, dramatized an ineffectual blue-collar bungler raising a family in suburb of Los Angeles. The series was twice transplanted onto television. Jackie Gleason starred in the first television version in 1949, but after two seasons the show could not maintain high enough ratings to stay on the air. When the radio show’s original star, William Bendix, re-created the show on television in 1953, the series’ ratings took off and remained high for five years on end.
The Honeymooners was originally part of the CBS Saturday night comedy hour, featuring the tribulations of a Brooklyn bus driver and his wife. In 1955, the show became a series in its own right after its sketches had been played first in DuMont's Calvacade Stars and then in CBS' The Jackie Gleason Show in 1951. Although its thirty-nine episodes filmed for the 1955-1956 season became classical highlights of television comedy of the fifties, the series itself did not maintain high enough ratings to continue as an independent series. Gleason later returned to a regular variety format.

Recently sociologists have noted that the ineffectual male figure tends to have a working-class background. He sweats to make ends meet while aspiring to move into a more prestigious social stratum. Chester Riley, for example, is a riveter at Stevenson Aircraft Associates located in West Los Angeles. He represents blue-collar workers who squeezed themselves into middle America in the post-War boom of manufacturing industries. Ralph Kramden is a Brooklyn bus driver, perpetually aspiring to escape from his deplorable living conditions and to move onto an upper rung of the social ladder. He reminds us of many American working people.

79 Lynda Glennon and Richard Bustch, "The Family as Portrayed on Television 1949--1978," 267. Despite the negative depictions of Riley and Kramden, television of the early fifties still had blue-collar worker images. Soon the middle-class family comedies would become predominant on prime-time TV. American TV audiences had to wait for about two decades before they could see All in the Family, a TV show that had a blue-collar worker as the protagonist.
captivated by the Alger Horatio success story, constantly trying and perpetually failing. Both Riley and Kramden are uneducated, behaving with coarse manners and using vulgar language. Their living conditions are apparently not as good as those for the middle-class family. The Rileys have their own ordinary one-story house, whereas the conditions of the Kramdens' apartment remind us of an immigrant tenement or some kind housing arrangement at the time of the Depression.

Invariably, the ineffectual male is looked down upon by the woman and children in the show. Despite Ralph Kramden's growls and bullies, he is childish and incompetent in many things he does. In one episode, Ralph simulates a contest condition at a furniture store by buying the same glass jar used in the contest and filling it with jelly beans. With this tactic, he actually finds out the exact number of the jelly beans in the store's jar. But it turns out that the $100 prize Ralph wins is a gift certificate that has to be accompanied by a purchase of $1,000 worth of merchandise. Clever as he is, Ralph can't defeat the crafty salesmen. In another episode, having found a suitcase of counterfeit money, Ralph throws the money around like a prince and almost ends up in jail for spending them. Every time Ralph gets into trouble with some of his new money-making scheme, his wife Alice consoles him and forgives him. In contrast, Alice Kramden of the show is a person of intelligence,
common sense, understanding and compassion. She refers to Ralph as her "262-pound baby." She often reminds Ralph many of his previous failures. She acts somewhat like a mother to Ralph perpetuating the myth that the blue-collar man is childish. This image of an able, intelligent, and even satirical woman makes a striking contrast with that of the suburban homemaker.

A similar pattern of the bumbler making himself a laughing stock for the family reveals itself in The Life of Riley. In one episode, Riley misinterprets an event in the workshop as a sign of his promotion. When Riley is too proud to admit that it is an honest mistake, his wife Peg gives him a chance to correct it and shows her respect for him no matter what he is. In another episode, Riley is confronted with a tonsil operation, but he becomes so frightened that his wife and children can't help laughing at his stupidity. If we compare the portrayal of the ineffectual male in the working-class family with that of the domineering male in the middle-class family, we find that while the former is often forgiven by his wife, the latter tends to forgive his wife. 80 In other words, the patriarchal authority of the

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80 The author is indebted to sociologists, Lynda Glennon and Richard Bustch, for the connection they made between social class and television portrayals. Lynda Glennon and Richard Bustch, "The Family as Portrayed on Television 1949--1978," 267-269.
man is maintained in the middle-class family, but it is seriously undermined in the working-class family.

The inept male, as portrayed in TV series of the 50s, usually harbors a deep desire for upward mobility. Incompetent as he may be, he constantly dreams of making it overnight. Ralph Kramden of The Honeymooners exemplifies the predicament of the American working man captivated by the success story of Horatio Alger. As critics point out, a dominant subject of The Honeymooners is Ralph’s attempts to become rich. In changing his destiny, Ralph is full of money-making ideas: diet pizza, Day-glo wallpaper, and Kranmar Mystery Appetizer. Although a comic figure, Ralph Kramden certainly resembles Willy Loman. Both pursue their dreams relentlessly, although Ralph does not come to such a tragic end as Willy Loman. Both, through their pathetic failures, arouse sympathy from the audience. A major difference between the two characters is that Ralph Kramden is not so much a tragic hero as he is a laughing-stock. The same is true with the character of Chester Riley. Whether in Riley’s ardent hope for his son to become somebody, or in his happy celebration of a mistaken promotion, there is a deep-seated dissatisfaction with his own social status. As much as Kramden, Riley wants to escape from his own

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conditions and move up on the social ladder. Although the shows tended to ridicule the little man's dream of becoming rich, the pitiable failures of the little man more often than not make the audience sympathize with him.

Despite his relentless efforts to make it, the little man and the bumbler is destined not to succeed because of his flawed character. Either society or his personal inability thwarts his schemes. In one episode, covetous of promotion to the position of the assistant traffic dispatcher, Ralph tries to befriend the company president by trying to become his golf companion. Ralph's scheme is that by the end of the month, when he is to play golf with the president, he may already have been given the job of the assistant dispatcher. But an invitation from the president for Ralph to replace an absent golf companion puts Ralph on the spot. He has to learn to play golf in two days! When the company's vice-president gives him an opportunity to avoid the embarrassment, Ralph again begins to brag about how well he can play golf and how he will fix the game in favor of the president. Irritated by Ralph's vain personality, the vice-president lets the appointment stand and puts Ralph on the spot again. In the end, Ralph furiously admits to his wife that he does this because he has a "b-i-i-i-g mouth." The message from an episode like this is clear: the little man can't make it because his character is flawed.

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Compared with the glamorous entertainer and the polite suburban patriarch featured in other shows, the bumbling male comes off as coarse and crude. To his wife Alice Kramden, Ralph often acts like a bully. Stung by Alice's cool sarcasm on his schemes, Ralph often clenches his fists and threatens: "One of these days, Alice. One of these days--POW--right to the moon." When angry, Ralph is not hesitant to "throw out" his mother-in-law or his best friend Norton. One of Ralph's favorite devices in resolving an argument is to throw the door open, and, with his bull-like eyeballs bulging, to roar at his guest: "Out! Out!" Riley also sounds and looks uncouth. Disapproving of the boy his daughter dates, Riley demands that he leave, yelling "Out!" Suspecting that his wife's French tutor has become too intimate with her, Riley separates them by sitting down on the tutor. Riley speaks an uneducated dialect characterized by sub-standard expressions such as "I ain't...." and "He don't...." Within the middle-class families of I Love Lucy or Father Knows Best, by contrast, the male figure always behaves politely and resolves any potential dispute through reason or persuasion. In comparison, the Ralph Kramden type does everything that is the opposite of the middle-class standards.

In the tradition of American popular culture, the image of the ineffectual and bumbling male could date back to many similar depictions in other popular media. Examples
include the pathetic and inept Dagwood of *Dagwood and Blondie* in comic strips, the flawed and self-deflating Fibber McGee of *Fibber McGee and Molly Show* on the radio, and the weak father images in many popular movies of the thirties and the forties. How to explain the ineptness of the male figure in American popular culture has intrigued American as well as foreign scholars. One interpretation maintains that the incompetent father figure is a symbol of a decadent European culture rejected by a new generation of Americans.

American historians, however, offer another interpretation. In his study of radio comedy of the thirties, J. Fred Mcdonald stresses the self-deflating quality in a flawed comic character such as Fibber McGee, a quality with which, he thinks, Americans identified in their efforts to cope with the hardship of the Depression. To Mcdonald, the depiction of a flawed male and the audience’s

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83 Martha Wolfenstein, under the influence of cultural anthropology, takes this position.

identification with him are not a sign of cultural inferiority but rather a sign of confidence. Interpreting the Dagwood strips, Arthur Asa Berger also brings the social background of the Depression into the picture. Berger argues that either the foundering businessman or the Horatio-Alger-myth aspiring working man could use Dagwood's ineptness as an excuse of his own predicament in the time of the Depression.  

Recently from a sociological perspective, two scholars interpret the phenomenon of buffoonery on television by connecting the demeaning depictions of the bumbling male with their social status. They point out that television tends to portray the working-class male figure as a fool, whereas it is apt to depict the middle-class male figure as an impeccable superdaddy.

As we can see from different interpretations of the inept male image in American popular culture, the scholar's perspective has much to do with what kind of interpretation the scholar generates. However, most scholars agree that self-deflation during the Depression time was an element


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that contributed to the popularity of the male bungler in American popular culture. The fact that the radio comedy *The Life of Riley* first became popular during the Depression should also support this argument. Yet this argument does not make the sociologists' argument invalid. The bungler is almost always a blue-collar worker. In the case of television representation, other social science scholars have also identified patterns of devaluing and underrepresenting working-class people on American television over time. 88 On the prime-time television, audience either sees male figure in the working class family as a fool, a big mouth, a bigot, or they don't see him at all. Television offers its audience hardly any working-class figures as role models, though its positive portrayals of the middle-class figures provide many qualities for the audience to emulate. This dichotomization in television's representation of reality reveals the value preference of the TV networks and of the audience. While bourgeois social values are reinforced or instilled through the positive

portrayals, working-class values are either rejected or ridiculed and distorted through negative portrayals.
CHAPTER IV

THE SUBURBANITE AND THE RURAL PATRIARCH: IRRELEVANCE AND ESCAPISM IN THE PORTRAYALS OF FATHER FIGURES IN PRIME-TIME TV SERIES OF THE SIXTIES

Let the old men ask sourly, "Out of Apathy--into what?" The Age of Complacency is ending. Let the old women complain wisely about the "end of ideology." We are beginning to move again.

C. Wright Mills, Coming Apart – An Informal History of America in the 1960s

We followed a whole bunch of shows like Father Knows Best, Leave it to Beaver, Green Acres, and other shows of the '60s. They were all fine shows, but you would think by watching them that America had no blacks, no racial tension, that there was no Vietnam. As people asked me about the points of view, I thought, "My God, by omission, look at the points of view of the earlier shows: wall-to-wall television comedy that would let you think there were no problems in the 1960s."

Norman Lear, Archie & Edith, Mike & Gloria

In the fifties, a period of social conservatism and complacency, prime-time television series reflected and reinforced dominant social stereotypes that embodied bourgeois values. The predominant male image on prime-time TV during the fifties was that of the bourgeois family man, much as Jim Anderson was portrayed in Father Knows Best. In the sixties, a period of social movements and transformations, television entertainment programs lagged behind the times, remaining insulated from social reality. While blacks, students, and women took to the streets to fight for their rights, prime-time television was still permeated with images of bourgeois suburbanites. In fact, TV's evasion of political turmoil during the 60s produced a
new and interesting phenomenon in television's portrayal of the father figure in prime-time. While still preoccupied with the suburban bourgeois family life, American prime-time television now also presented prototypical images of pre-industrial small town life, thereby offering momentary refuge and escaping from the reality of dramatic, often violent social upheaval. In doing this, television appealed to the mainstream American family's nostalgia for preindustrial cultural values and folklore versions of the heroes. Prime-time television programs developed as they did because the fifties' moderate-conservative mind-set still held sway among television producers and network executives.

A. Social and Cultural Climate of the Sixties

Historians often refer to the sixties as "the age of protest" or "the era of dissent." Although such labels tend to be reductive, they convey the generally progressive and self-questioning spirit of the time, and reveal the most salient features of the sixties.

The conservative moderation of the Eisenhower years had led the country to self-satisfaction and a blind pursuit of materialism. By the end of the fifties, the country seemed to have lost its direction and purpose. 89 The election of

the forty-one-year-old John F. Kennedy as the President of the United States in 1960 symbolized the beginning of a new era. The idealist appeal of the Kennedy administration struck a chord in the hearts of many Americans, particularly of the young. His famous Inauguration remark: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country," highlighted the surging idealism of the sixties.

The American response to Kennedy’s appeal for self-sacrificing commitment to achieving a deferred American vision did not occur all of a sudden out of nothing. Dissent and dissatisfaction with materialism and conformity were already forming in the fifties, particularly among the young. Paul Goodman’s Growing Up Absurd gave voice to young Americans’ disillusionment with the "organized system" and "canned popular culture." Goodman’s argument that regressive, stultifying social conditions and codes that stymied personal growth struck at young Americans searching for ways to express their frustrations. Allen Ginsberg’s Howl proclaimed the "beatniks’" disgust with the "rat-race" and their yearning for individual freedom. Thoroughly disillusioned with social norms, the beatniks experimented with new lifestyles. Norman Mailer’s famous article, "The White Negro," saw the insurgent potentialities in the hipsters, and likened them to those of the Negro. Like the Negro, who had never enjoyed security in American society and who might rise up against social oppression, the
hipsters, Mailer predicted, might rebel against the suppression of freedom that became so pervasive. Thus germinative ideas and expressions for the counterculture movement of the sixties were already existent in the late fifties, foreshadowing the "youthquake" that was to transform American society.

Beginning in 1960, sit-ins and freedom rides challenged the national conscience by publicizing the gross inequalities black Americans had to endure. The grim reality facing black Americans demolished many Americans' sense of self-righteousness about their society. More importantly, civil rights activism awakened aspirations in black Americans for racial and social equality and mobilized them to strive for these goals. As the Movement developed, it helped bring about other major social movements. For example, the cardinal philosophy of preserving and respecting individual freedom as advocated by SNCC not only promoted the Civil Rights Movement, but also influenced the emergence of the New Left Movement. Throughout the decade, the Civil Rights Movement served to change the moral sensitivity of the nation, inspiring many Americans to engage in progressive social action.

Anti-War movements developed alongside the Civil Rights Movement, playing a similar transformative role in American society. At first, to eliminate "cold war" legacies from the fifties, Americans concerned with social change strove
for two objectives: civil liberties at home and peace in the world. 90 Students' efforts to achieve the second objective laid the foundation for the anti-War movements. In 1959 SPU (the Student Peace Union) had been formed in Chicago to promote the cause for international peace and to oppose nuclear warfare, and students at the University of California, Berkeley marched against obligatory military training. 91 By 1962, SPU had over 3,500 members and was effectively organizing protests, vigils, and demonstrations against nuclear testing and nuclear arms production. By 1965, as the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War escalated and led many Americans to question the credibility of American democracy both at home and abroad, civil rights and student organizations such as SNCC, SDS, and SANE, became active in organizing sit-ins, teach-ins and massive anti-war demonstrations. 92 Never had the U.S. government encountered such massive and organized resistance. Consistent anti-war

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91 Ibid., 477.

92 Many of these demonstrations were of a massive scale. For example, in 1967, the Spring Mobilization Against the War organized antiwar demonstrations that led to marches of 200,000 people in New York and of 65,000 people in San Francisco. Ibid., 479-480.
demonstrations profoundly divided the nation and altered American foreign policies and domestic politics.

Another catalyst for social and cultural change was "the New Left," a coalition of radicals that grew out of other major social movements, including the Civil Rights Movement, the Free Speech Movement, and the anti-War movement. Unlike the flower children who rebelled vaguely against an authoritarian system, the New Leftists had a clear-cut political agenda: they wanted to transform America into a more democratic and humanist society, or to construct "participatory democracy." Unlike the Old Left of the thirties, the New Leftists did not espouse a systematic theory. They chose not to rely only on the proletarian as the main agent for social changes, as prescribed by Marxist theory. Rather, they recruited young people, women, ethnic minorities, hipsters and others. Later the New Left coalition was to become radicalized -- targeting capitalism, racism, imperialism and other fundamental social problems in America.

Reflecting on such sixties movements at the end of the decade, Philip Slater suggested that the countercultural rebellion manifested communal values inherent in American culture. He used the notions of the "old culture" and the "new culture" to represent opposing value orientations in the American society. Where the "old culture" emphasizes property rights, competition, and social forms, the "new
"culture" stresses personal rights, cooperation, and personal freedom. The two cultures differ fundamentally in their basic assumptions about natural resources. Whereas the "old culture" maintains that natural resources are barely sufficient for human needs, the "new culture" believes that resources are plentiful for human needs. The "new culture" values are embodied in what Slater calls "the desires for community, engagement and dependence." 93 These desires were inherent but suppressed in American society during the fifties, and in his opinion, the re-assertions of the "new culture" values during the sixties were mainly responsible for the transformations in American society. Slater's comparisons help us understand the counterculture movement and the transformations of the sixties both as a reaction to the materialism of the complacent fifties and as an inevitable cultural development in American society.

B. Popular Culture and Television

The popular culture of the sixties, evolving against the background of social upheavals, represents a complex phenomenon. Some products of popular culture remained conservative and escapist; others changed dramatically.

Popular paintings of the sixties, for example, rebelled conspicuously against fifties' conservatism. Avant-garde art of the fifties had been abstract; these paintings participated in contemporary social life, using mundane objects and scenes. "Happenings" invited direct audience participation. Artists like Andy Warhol blatantly appealed to popular tastes and blurred the boundary between art works and manufactured merchandise. On the whole, however, these works advocated a new tenet in the appreciation of art: anybody can see the truth and anything can be art. Implicit in this tenet was a challenge to the exclusive bourgeois standards of the fifties. That innovative pop arts came into vogue during the sixties suggests a questioning of traditional bourgeois taste and values, and indicates that rebellious sentiments of the young and the counterculture were finding new vehicles for expression.

The most serious artistic innovations occurred in the experimentation of the new theaters during the sixties. In these theaters, the youth cult values of romanticism, idealism, spontaneity, and sexual liberation prevailed. They ran directly counter to the post-war bourgeois values of status, security, and greed. The living theater artists

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95 Ibid., 205.
and performers staged experiments that either engaged the audience's participation or repudiated the conventional theatrical format. Often the artists had to make great personal sacrifices for what they were advocating and creating. The Living Theater, the leading troupe in the movement, went into exile in Europe once and its leaders were arrested many times for staging offensive scenes. 96 The artistic experiments in the new theaters represented the innovative and radical direction some popular cultural activities took at the time of major social changes.

In comparison with the new theaters, popular novels of the sixties were less a vehicle of contemporary social sentiments than a record of larger cultural changes in post-War American society. According to Elizabeth Long, best selling novels published between 1956 and 1968 could no longer sustain the image of the successful entrepreneur as a contributor to social progress. 97 They rejected the old conviction that morality and success go hand in hand. Without a grand social objective for the hero to achieve, these novels focused on the hero's private life. Presenting a simplified and idealized version of family life, such narratives were preoccupied with the depictions of the

96 Ibid., 207.

hero's fulfillment of personal dreams realized through satisfaction with providing material comfort for others or through exhibition and enjoyment of fabulous wealth. The rejection of the "success-equals-morality" theme from the novels of the fifties indicated that the broad cultural changes taking place in post-War America were beginning to raise new cultural standards that questioned the credibility of the traditional American dream. They reflected the broad transformation of America from a production-oriented society to a consumption-oriented society.

The most conservative aspect of American popular culture of the sixties was the world of prime-time television entertainment. While most of the popular arts absorbed the revolutionary energies of social movements, network TV was astonishingly reinscribing, reinventing, and reproducing the conservatism and "consensus ideology" of the fifties. Against a background of progressivism, most prime-time series attempted to recapitulate "the good old days" by creating anachronistic or escapist figures such as Jed

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98 Ibid., 94.

Clampet or Gomer Pyle. The rise of bucolic and escapist TV series made a chasm between social reality and its representation on television.

In 1962, when John Kennedy was galvanizing the nation with his idealistic appeal, a bucolic TV series, *The Andy Griffith Show*, captured the imagination of the TV audience. When Newton N. Minow likened television to a "vast wasteland," CBS offered *The Beverly Hillbillies*, catering to the populist taste of its audience. In 1963, a hundred thousand Americans marched to Washington to listen to Martin Luther King give his famous speech "I Have a Dream"; and then with grief and horror the entire country watched the assassination of its young and idealistic President. Yet on prime-time television, simultaneously, rustic and pietistic sitcoms (*The Beverly Hillbillies*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*) scored their highest Nielsen ratings. In 1968, scenes of the tumultuous Chicago Democratic Convention were juxtaposed on prime-time TV with representations of tranquil urban middle-class family (*Family Affairs*). In short, prime-time TV entertainments of the sixties constructed a world totally different from social reality, one that purveyed a counter force to the revolutionary counterculture.

Overall, prime-time television in the sixties presented three main types of family shows with distinctive father and husband figures: the suburban shows, the bucolic and
populist shows, and the parodical fantasy shows. All of these met the policy of "least-objectionability" imposed by the networks. They seemed to be proclaiming to a changing America that nothing really serious was happening in the society and that the audience should rest content with amusing themselves through these TV fantasies. In the jaded middle-class landscape, the respectable and reassuring suburban father figure held over from the fifties continued to be popular. Suburban shows like *Father Knows Best* and *Leave it to Beaver* still held audiences by presenting similar personae and repeating old formulae. As the decade proceeded, similar prime-time family TV series were produced: *My Three Sons* (1960), *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (1961) and *Family Affairs* (1966). These "family" shows differed slightly from those of the previous decade in their depiction of single fatherhood, a new feature hinting that both TV producers and the public had become somewhat disillusioned with the so-called "typical nuclear family" version. On the whole, however, these programs continued to present the life of suburban middle America.

Keeping step with the jaded middle-class landscape, a new genre of rural comedies began to appear in the sixties. The forerunner of this new comic genre, *The Real McCoys* (1957) had first introduced a clan of country bumpkins to urban American prime-time television. The most successful series of this genre, *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962–1971),
topped the Nielsen rating in its first two years and maintained a leading position throughout the decade. The second best-rated comedy of this genre, *The Andy Griffith Show*, also gripped the imagination of American TV audiences through most of the decade. Predominantly featuring the life of rural town people from a pre-industrial society, such pastoral visions made up the core of the nostalgic and escapist television shows of the sixties. They all portrayed the leading patriarch as a lovable common-sense hero. In popularizing the legendary heroes of folklore, these shows at once glorified the values of rural people and satirized the values of the urban middle class.

In addition to these two dominant types of shows, the major TV networks also produced a batch of family sitcoms—*Bewitched* (1964-1972), *The Addams Family* (1964-1966), *The Munsters* (1964-1966) and *I Dream of Jeannie* (1965-1970) that featured either a beautiful witch or a monstrous woman as the housewife. Empowering the woman in domestic affairs at home, these shows weakened the male figure by making him appear passive, incompetent or dim-witted. Very often he became the beneficiary or the victim of his wife’s witchcraft. In retrospect, these shows had two functions. On the one hand, their fantasies catered to the escapist audience with their unprecedented wizardry on television. On the other hand, the depictions of the emasculated male foreshadowed the belittlement and mockery of the male image.
that would characterize American prime-time sitcoms of the next decade.

In retrospect, during the sixties, a decade of political polarizations and social transformations, prime-time television series managed to avoid offending audiences by presenting the traditional suburbia, folklore legends, crackerbarrel heroes, and romantic fantasies. In the midst of dramatic social movements, the image of a benign father figure counseling his fledgling children was both comforting and cathartic for an anxiety-ridden public. In comparison with scenes of violent demonstrations on the daily news, the scenarios of small town life in Mayberry or the bizarre adventures of the Beverly hillbillies were both appealing and escapist. The fantasy of getting what you want through the swing of a magic wand or a twist of the lips clearly appealed to a broad audience. Eager to withdraw from the social turmoil of the time, these shows catered to American nostalgia for a simpler past and to their yearning for social tranquility.
C. The Father Figure in Popular Prime-time TV Series of the Sixties

1. Father Still Knows Best: the Continuation of Patriarchal Authority and Middle-class Respectability

The prominent presentation of the middle-class family life on prime-time TV during the sixties perpetuated the suburban family series of the fifties. Up until the fall season of 1965, the proportion of fifties' shows in the prime-time television schedule was still significant. The typical sitcoms of the previous decade, such as Leave it to Beaver and Father Knows Best, continued to attract American audiences until 1962. The Danny Thomas Show remained on the Monday night schedule through the fall season of 1963; other resilient and popular shows like The Donna Reed Show and The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet remained on prime time until 1965. The continued popularity of the "suburban situation" comedies indicates that TV audiences in the sixties were still under the

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influence of the complacent syndrome of the fifties. It also indicates that TV producers were still relying on the old formulae to get them through quite a different historical time.

A new vision of the classic middle-class family show of the sixties was *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (CBS, 1961-1966). While still carrying on the suburban tradition of the fifties, this series incorporated some elements of social change. Unlike the typical fifties TV show that centered on domestic life, the new program featured actions both at home and in the workplace. This change marked an enlargement of the social circle in the life of a "typical" American family. Furthermore, the standard concern with adolescent problems gave way to adult problems both in the workplace and at home. The protagonist's problems with his colleagues and boss provided materials for a fuller depiction of the life of a white-collar worker. Finally, reflecting social changes of the time, the show featured members of ethnic minorities (Jewish). Despite all these changes, the basic tone and the center of interest of the show perpetuated conservative ideology. It was still about the life of a member of the urban middle class, and it made limited references to topical issues of the time.

In Rob Petrie (Dick Van Dyke), the hero of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, we find an interesting combination of the respectable family man and the ostentatious show business
type of the fifties. Rob owns a well-furnished apartment and writes scripts for a popular TV comedy series. His wife, Laura (Mary Tyler Moore), has given up a dancing career to become a good homemaker. In Laura's willing abandonment of her career for a "wholesome" domestic role, we still see signs of the fifties' family show tradition. The Petries have one child and make up a typical nuclear family, although the child is no longer an important character in the show. As the head writer of The Allen Brady Show, Rob has aspirations and headaches resembling those of Ricky Ricardo. His show enjoys great popularity, but Rob has to deal with a very difficult boss. As "head of the family" (the original title of the show), Rob's role in the family is as important, authoritative, and prestigious as that of his predecessor Jim Anderson. Since Rob is the breadwinner of the family, his good fortune in his career means a great deal for the well-being of the family. Any setback of Rob's career troubles his wife, too. Fortunately, because of Rob's outstanding talents in writing and performance, the Petries are popular, upwardly mobile, and comfortable.

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102 Carl Reiner himself tried Rob Petrie's role in the beginning of the show, but failed. Following Sheldon Leonard's suggestion, Reiner let Dick Van Dyke, a Missourian of mid-West, replace him. David Marc suggests that Reiner being a New York Jew, this change of major actor with a WASP identity may have contributed to the success of the show. Ibid., 98.
Unlike its predecessors, The Dick Van Dyke Show intertwines the main character's family life with his work experience. We find this new feature first in the credits of the show. Differing from the typical mum-greeting-dad sitcom credits of the fifties, the signature of The Dick Van Dyke Show depicts Rob’s two colleagues paying a visit to the Petrie’s family. This inclusion of colleagues in the credits suggests that the show features not only the private life of the Petries, but also their social life. It also signals that the show is no longer just about the Petries at home, but also about Rob’s work and colleagues. We also find the new feature of work experience in the series' frequent use of Rob’s home and workplace as locales for dramatic action.

103 Carl Reiner claims that he was creating "the first situation comedy where you saw where the man worked before he walked in and said, 'Hi, honey, I'm home!'" 104 Reiner's claim suggests a growing awareness among producers of the limitations of the premise of earlier suburban family shows. The representation of Rob’s work experience gives us a glimpse into difficult aspects of the white collar lifestyle, in this case, that of a comedy writer. Allen Brady,

103 Ella Taylor also notes that The Dick Van Dyke Show was among the first series that created a work-family and pushed the domestic comedy into public sphere. Ella Taylor, Prime Time Families (Berkley: University of California Press, 1989), 32.

104 David Marc, Demographic Vistas, 93.
the boss of the show for which Rob writes, often humiliates Rob both as an individual and as an employee. Rob often has to bring his work back home and have it intrude upon his private life. In one episode, when Laura unintentionally tells the host of a television show that her husband’s boss, Mr. Allen Brady, is bald, the remark almost costs Rob’s job on *The Allen Brady Show*. In another typical episode, Allen insists on staging a television event at Rob’s home on the date when the Petries have scheduled a birthday party for a neighborhood friend. Poor Rob thus has to persuade his reluctant wife to use the party for two purposes. When Allen wants to cut the number of people for the party, Rob has to cater to Allen’s desire lest he lose his job. At the party, all the guests have to re-take certain scenes according to Allen’s dictatorial wishes. Rob as an individual is so emasculated at times that a whole episode is devoted to an imaginary fight between him as a sheriff and Allen as an arch-villain. This humiliation of Rob Petrie by his superior at work represents one aspect of the middle American’s life that was not emphasized or dramatized in previous shows.

Although the producers of *The Dick Van Dyke Show* did not feature social events of the day as directly as TV producers were to do in the seventies, some episodes did suggest a clash between emerging and existing cultural values. Invariably in such episodes, the main characters were made to conform to bourgeois values. For instance, in
one episode, when visiting a gallery, Laura is greatly embarrassed to see a nude painting of herself exhibited there. Laura had had her clothes on when she sat for the painter a long time ago. It was a counterculture painter who imagined her nudity. Even so, Laura is greatly concerned about Rob seeing the painting, feeling that her nudity might humiliate her white-collar husband. In fact, Rob is very upset by the painting's "inappropriateness." How can the wife of a well-known TV show writer serve as a nude model for a counterculture artist? The rest of the show dramatizes how serio-comically the Petries, claiming to own the painting, manage to persuade the artist to agree to sell the painting only to a wealthy man for his remote mountainous villa. The solution to this "embarrassing" problem for the Petries suggests that their moral standards are strictly those of the bourgeois. The counterculture artist threatens those values but his values have to be suppressed or avoided. There is no place for nude art in the world of the Petries.

2. Troubled Television: Single Fatherhood and the Fission of the Nuclear Family

Despite the use of old formulae and the continuous focus on the middle-class family, there was an obvious change in the depiction of father figures in prime-time TV
series of the sixties. The single father appeared for the first time, indicating a move toward more realistic and troubled representations of family life where the single father strains to maintain domestic harmony, e. g. Bachelor Father (CBS, NBC, ABC, 1957-1962), My Three Sons (ABC, CBS, 1960-1972) and Family Affairs (CBS, 1966-1971). All of these shows spotlighted the tribulations of the family without the caring and motherly woman. Although the father figure in such shows is still as benign, prestigious, and sagacious as in the shows of the fifties, now he has to face problems that his predecessors did not have to cope with. He has to rely on someone, usually and interestingly another male figure, to take care of the children and the family. He dates various women while taking care of his own children and coping with difficulties the dating incurs for his family. This prominent representation of single fatherhood suggests a shattering of the "perfect nuclear family" myth in America. That myth could no longer grip the imagination of the public as single parenthood increased during this decade.

In many respects, the TV image of the single father in the sixties resembles the suburban family man of the fifties. Like his predecessors, the single father holds a

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105 Although Mr. William Davis is not the parent of the two children, he has become their guardian now that their parents died in an accident.
secure, high paying job. Bentley Gregg (John Forsythe) of Bachelor Father is a well-to-do Hollywood attorney. Steve Douglas (Fred MacMurray) of My Three Sons is an aeronautic engineer, and Bill Davis (Brian Keith) of Family Affairs is a civil engineer. Their incomes and occupations determine the settings of each series to be strictly that of the middle class. The actions of My Three Sons take place mostly in a suburban home, and the stories of Family Affairs unfold in an elegant and spacious apartment on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. Also like his predecessors, the single father or guardian is wise, understanding, knowledgeable, and tolerant. He knows best; he is the children’s hero. As in previous shows, solving adolescent problems remains his preoccupation. As life goes on, the father fulfills his parental duty faithfully. As Mr. Douglas of My Three Sons tells his elder son: "I’ve been with you (Robbie) and Mike through your first dates. Now I have to go through this with Chip." So there was an obvious continuity in the depiction of the middle-class father figure even though he has become single.

As in the shows of the fifties, the man does not handle housework well in the single father shows. Only now the father’s "shortcomings" become particularly conspicuous and problematic for the life of the family. In I Love Lucy, when Ricky and Fred find out that they are not the right type for housekeeping, they have the option to switch back to their
men’s roles. But Mr. Douglas of My Three Sons is stuck with three growing children. He has to manage no matter what happens. Because of the peculiar "weakness" of the father, life is often strained in the single parent family. In one episode entitled "Woman’s Work" of My Three Sons, the family suffers from Steve’s bad house-keeping when Bub (William Frawley), the grandfather and the family’s long time helper, leaves for Ireland. The breakfast turns out to be as hard as rock, and the bed sheet falls apart because of over-bleaching. An important message such episodes convey is that the family goes through many tribulations without the woman.

The most prominent new feature of the single father figure is the mother’s role he is now supposed to play, sometimes with the help of a housekeeper. In the shows of the fifties, the father had the homemaker who assumed much of the responsibility of taking care of the children and the home. In the single parent shows of the sixties, the father has no such help. So the chauvinistic stereotype of the helpless man in the kitchen is now compounded by strains of single fatherhood. For example, Steve Douglas (Fred MacMurray) of My Three Sons has to play the motherly role at home, taking care of the children, mediating in their quarrels, and surviving the hardships of housekeeping. His clumsiness with cooking or various housework only works to worsen the situation. Compared with his predecessors such as
Jim Anderson or Alex Stone, Mr. Douglas can no longer enjoy the psychological and emotional comfort of the traditional marriage. The bliss that permeated the fifties' family shows is now replaced by a sense of strain. One day a child runs away from home, another day the other child has problems with his schoolwork. In all of these incidents, the father alone has to deal with the problems. As the father figure is battered by domestic burdens, images of family life became less rosy than before.

3. The Rural Patriarch as Common Sense Hero in the Bucolic Television Shows of the Sixties

The unique contribution of American television to the popular culture of the sixties was the so-called bucolic show that utilized folklore legends to appeal to the audience in a time of social turmoil. With the bucolic TV shows came the rural patriarch who differed drastically from the suburban father figure. The rural patriarch embodied values of a way of life that Americans cherished and longed for. As much as the suburban father figure was impeccable and incredible, the rural patriarch was legendary and impossible. Yet, due to unique historical conditions, the bucolic father figure became prominent and remained popular on the prime-time small screen throughout the sixties. The popularity of the bucolic shows and the rural patriarch
constituted one major pastoral and escapist trend in the history of American prime-time television.

Among other things, the increasing suburbanization of America, an important historical development in the post-World-War-II era, had much to do with the popularity of the bucolic shows of the sixties. These shows can be seen as a serious way of questioning the suburban and modern way of life in America by TV producers and the public. The rural patriarch and the lifestyle of small town good neighborliness in the bucolic shows appealed to Americans' nostalgia for a legendary past when life was more relaxed and people more friendly. In post-War America, this legendary way of life was fast disappearing; modern suburban life was fraught with both social and psychological problems. The fictionalization of the old way of life on television served as a psychological buffer for Americans undergoing drastic changes in lifestyle.

With the development of new suburbs and the construction of sophisticated highway systems all over the country, the trend of suburbanization in America reached a peak during the fifties. Middle-class Americans, having migrated to Levittowns in suburbs, found that they had to make unexpected social and psychological adjustments. 106

106 Betty Friedan addresses the social and psychological problems educated middle-class house wives had to cope with in their suburban life. Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1963). Other historians also discuss various problems that occurred in the suburbanization
They had to deal with problems in community service, isolation, child care, transportation, and, above all, the housewife's psychological adjustment to a new way of life. Under these new social conditions, it was not surprising that a genre of TV shows fantasizing the life of "good-old-days" small town people became popular. While the reality of suburban life was hard to adapt to, the fantasy of TV-land was easy to enjoy. The rural town of Mayberry in The Andy Griffith Show represented a pre-industrial society, a social environment that did not have any of the problems modern and suburban Americans were facing in the fifties and the sixties.

The prototypical bucolic show of the sixties was The Andy Griffith Show (1960-1968). Its credits best convey the show's theme of rural tranquility, innocence and freedom. Walking on a small path alongside a stream are the care-free town sheriff, Andy Tyler (Andy Griffith), and his first grade son, Opie (Ronny Howard). Each carrying a fishing rod, they are on their fishing trip to a nearby pond. Andy, wearing his police uniform casually, whistles a lively tune. (A chorus of instruments imitates and reinforces Andy's melody making it the theme music.) Opie, bare-foot and running ahead, picks up a piece of pebble and throws it into


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the stream. (A voice announces the show's title as the title and the names of the characters appear on the screen.) As Opie enjoys gazing at the ripples, Andy beckons to him. Catching up with his dad and unable to resist the temptation, Opie throws another pebble. As Andy whistles, they both look at the ripples, delighted. (Black out.) In contrast to the popular credits that featured the suburban home or the urban department scenes, these rustic scenes of the country brought a refreshing air. The show provided an opportunity for Americans to be temporarily released from the reality of the competitive corporate culture or the boredom of the mass production line.

In *The Andy Griffith Show*, Sheriff Andy Tyler functions more as the clan patriarch of a small rural town than as the head of a single rural family. For his patriarchal purposes, Andy is conveniently widowed. His widowed life with a lovable boy and mother-like aunt leaves him with more time and opportunities to take care of the folks of Mayberry. Andy is unlike the lonesome cowboy of the Westerns, who just comes, helps, and leaves. He is an integral mainstay of the Mayberry community. He first functions within his immediate and loving family. Andy helps when Opie has problems with his math or when he thinks the elderly Aunt Bee needs a date to cope with her loneliness. Andy also uses his homespun wisdom to advise almost everyone in town about their conduct. He particularly helps Barney Five, his own deputy.
and harmless stooge. Much of the dramatic action in the series features Andy’s protection of the naive, boastful, good-hearted and incompetent Barney Five. Their relationship is, in nature, one between a father and son rather than one between colleagues. Andy’s near omnipotent ability and omniscient wisdom make him a typical legendary common sense hero in American folklore. He is also typical of the patriarchal figure from a pre-industrial society, where the male enjoyed respect not only at home but also in the community. The popularity of such a character in late twentieth century American society suggests that American TV audience was still nostalgic for such a society.

In the show, Andy Tyler is portrayed as a common sense hero, a cracker-barrel philosopher. His rustic common sense often proves itself superior to the thinking of pompous urban authority. A typical episode entitled "Man-hunt" illustrates how Andy functions better than a city police captain. When an escaped criminal enters the Mayberry county, a city police captain leads a troop of policemen in pursuit of him. When discussing strategies to catch the criminal, the captain ignores Andy’s suggestion of setting up roadblocks on small paths. Irritated by Andy’s casual and countrified working style, the captain refuses to have Andy and his deputy involved in the operation. But as the story develops, not only is Andy right about the sideway roadblocks, but he also catches the criminal with a trap he
ingeniously sets up. In the end, the captain has to show respect for Andy because of his superior strategy. In episodes such as this, Andy's common sense outperforms "sophisticated" opinion and the rural hero proves more effective than the urban official.

Good neighborliness and informality characterize the Mayberry lifestyle. Theirs is a way of life in which people resolve disputes by handshake rather than by lawsuit. Andy understands this, while his deputy does not. A typical episode features how Barney Five goes against the mores of the Mayberry life, and ends up creating more problems than he solves. The episode begins with Barney discovering an unsettled case from sixteen years ago. It was undecided whether, after a small quarrel, Floyd, the town barber, punched Foley, the town grocer, in the nose or vice versa. Determined to settle the case on paper once and for all, Barney begins to investigate the parties involved. But Barney's efforts to re-open the case lead Floyd to swing at Foley's nose, and later, Foley to swing at Goober's nose, and Goober at another person's nose. Before long, the whole town seems embroiled in feuds. Finally, Andy has to intervene to solve the problems Barney has created. Without resorting to any formal and legal procedure, Andy reconciles the two sides by asking them to shake hands.

Andy's approach to the problem and his humane philosophy represent the attractiveness of the Mayberry
lifestyle, a style that emphasizes good neighborliness rather than competition, informality rather than formality. Mayberreans can still relax and enjoy life rather than constantly pushing for material gains; they still take pride in what they do rather than focusing the monetary reward or prestige their occupations can bring to them. However, the Mayberry way of life was fast disappearing from the American scene with increasing suburbanization and modernization in post-World War-II America. In contrast, Barney’s approach, ridiculous as the show makes it seem, symbolizes a new way of life that was becoming the "norm" in America. It is one that emphasizes bureaucratic procedures and formality, competition and prestige, and de-emphasizes human relations and good neighborliness. Since World War II, the latter way of life was fast replacing the former way of life. But Barney’s approach to the problem was ridiculed to the producer’s heart’s content.

In addition to feeding Americans’ nostalgia for a legendary way of life in the past, the rural patriarch’s popularity can be explained by his populism. The rural patriarch is a hero of the common man and a homespun philosopher. He is both wiser than and bemusedly contemptuous of pompous urban dwellers. His appeal to Americans is deeply rooted in the history of American popular culture. The common man and his rags-to-riches story are part of American folklore. To an average American, the
patrician is not necessarily superior to the plebeian, urban folk may not be wiser than rural folk. And the modern way of life may not be preferable to the traditional way of life. All of these popular beliefs were epitomized in a very popular prime-time TV series, *The Beverly Hillbillies* (CBS, 1962-1971). For the TV producers who were trying to avoid being offensive to audiences of various political perspectives, the presentation of the bizarre adventures of Beverly hillbillies was both safe and tactful. The show proved to be winning a large share of audiences without offending many.

In contrast to the rural setting of *The Andy Griffith Show*, *The Beverly Hillbillies* transplants a backwoods clan in the center of urban extravagance, Beverly Hills of Los Angeles. The bizarre combination of the Clampetts' hillbilly background and the fabulous wealth of Beverly Hills is an ingenious idea to attract American TV audience. Further, as if trying to debunk the convention of portraying the suburban nuclear family on television, this show presents a group of hillbillies who are actually a group of close relatives. Despite this, Jed Clampett (Buddy Ebsen), also widowed, still functions as the patriarch of this clan. His patriarchal function is to strengthen the forces that hold the "family" together. Also different from the suburban family shows of the time, *The Beverly Hillbillies* mainly focuses on the conflicts of values between the Clampett
hillbilly clan and their urban neighbors. The show pits the simple rural values of the Clampetts against the sophisticated urban values of the Drysedales, glorifying the former and satirizing the latter.

Among other things, The Beverly Hillbillies first presents an incredible change of fortune with the Clampetts by emphasizing their humble origins. Each episode begins by retelling how the Clampetts got their fortune and began their adventures in Beverly Hills. It is a revised rags-to-riches American dream: having a lot of money without working hard for it. As a montage tells the story, a ballad sings along:

Come and listen to my story 'bout a man named Jed,
A poor mountaineer, barely kept his family fed,
Then one day he was shootin' at some food,
When up through the ground come 'a bub-a-lin's crude,
--oil that is; black gold, Texas tea.
Well first thing you know old Jed's a millionaire,
The kinfolk said, "Jed, move away from there!"
They said, "Californie is the place you ought to be!"
So they loaded up the truck and they moved to Beverly,
--Hills that is; swimming pools, movie stars. 107

The montage consists of just a few scenes with much meaning assumed in between. In the first scene, Jed follows an animal and shoots at it. He misses the target, hits the ground, and up flows the black crude oil. In the second

scene, Jed rushes back to his cabin to break the news. In
the next scene, the Clampetts have already packed their
cart-like truck, ready to leave for California. In the last
scene, the Clampett clan are driving and looking around on a
Los Angeles street with cars and palm trees in the
background. In the most succinct manner, the credits tell a
legendary story, leaving the audience to make their own
interpretations. Here we can assume a sub-text: oil is big
money; it can buy one a mansion in Beverly Hills, the symbol
of fabulous wealth in America; and it can bring other
luxuries of modern comfort. Most importantly, the credits
tell the audience that the Clampetts are of humble origin;
they are a bunch of mountaineers from a backward Texan farm.
They are rich only because they have accidentally struck oil
in their fields. The humble origin and background of the
Clampetts prepare the audience for all the up-coming and
humorous conflicts of social and cultural values.

Jed Clampett of The Beverly Hillbillies is another
version of the rural patriarch image. Unlike Andy Tyler,
Jed Clampett functions in a bizarre and extravagant
environment, one in which he and his clan have to make
drastic adaptations. We see Jed’s wisdom in his moderate and
flexible ways of coping with a completely new environment.
This is particularly true when we compare Jed with Granny
(Irene Ryan), the staunch adherer of their rural ways, or
with Jethro (Max Baer, Jr.), the easy admirer of urban
values. For example, to resolve a conflict with Mrs. Drysdale, Granny, with her hot and rugged rural temper, generally resorts to her shotgun. But Jed always stops her. On the other hand, every time Jethro eagerly and easily picks up a new urban way, Jed sneers at it with the comment: "Some day I’ll have to have a long talk with that boy!" Between the extreme behaviors of Granny and Jethro, Jed demonstrates the most level-headed in adapting to and coping with the new urban environment.

The idea of transplanting a backwoods clan to Beverly Hills, the symbol of urban wealth and sophistication underscores the American plebeian notion that the common man is just as good if not better than the rich man. The suggestion is that there is nothing mysterious or difficult about being wealthy and privileged. Although the show derives many of its jokes from ridiculing the backwoods men in modern culture, it leaves little question as to who is more contemptible when Jed Clampett is compared to Milbourn Drysdale, the Clampett’s banker and a figure symbolic of urban corruption. Whereas the former is consistently portrayed as simple, honest, and generous, the latter is always pretentious, dishonest, and greedy. Through such partial delineations, the show appeals to Americans’ love and trust of the plebeian and their distrust of the influential and wealthy.
Although a hillbilly from a Texan farm, Jed Clampett has his own dignity and way of doing things. He is unlike Cousin Pearl, a would-be social climber who is eager to become one of the "high class folks." When the president of American Historical Genealogical Society informs them that Jed Clampett may be the descendant of one of the Mayflower settlers, Cousin Pearl is overwhelmed. But Jed questions why the earlier one’s ancestor arrived in America, the higher social class one belongs to. He is quite indifferent to Pearl’s efforts to become "high class folks." In the same episode, when the final moment comes for Jed to confirm his great grandfather’s name, he can’t tell a lie. Giving up the chance to become a national celebrity, he chooses to tell the truth that his great grandfather’s name was something else. In his choice, we find Jed’s suspicion of a man-made aristocracy, his self-respect, and, most importantly, his honesty.

The Beverly Hillbillies both lauds the rural way of life and satirizes the urban way of life. Mr. Milburn Drysdale, who represents the corrupted urban values, operates his bank on the huge funds deposited by customers like Jed Clampett, he is a parasite of the Clampetts’ money. Drysdale is everything Jed Clampett is not. He personifies greed, hypocrisy, flattery, money-ruled thinking, and male chauvinism. Drysdale’s eyes shine and his body trembles when he sees the possibility of marrying Jed with a new
millionairess, Mrs. Clarington in the neighborhood. In his words, "a twenty-five million marries a twenty million." In the whole series the greedy Drysdale acts as a good foil to the innocent Jed Clampett.

Similarly, people like Drysdale approach everything in terms of money and the show does not spare any chance to mock and punish them. For example, two of Drysdale's colleagues are so greedy and money-minded that they end up making a big mistake in their investment decision. It all starts from a remark they overheard from Jed, their idol for overnight riches. When Jed Clampett tells an attendant about purchasing certain merchandise in a nearby grocer's store, they take it as a hint to buy certain stock on the stock market. They rush to call their brokers to buy a large quantity of stocks of this strange product, thus making a ridiculous havoc on the financial market. In episodes such as this, the rich are portrayed as ludicrously greedy in contrast to simple generosity of the common man.

If the representation of Andy Tyler and Mayberry was an appeal to Americans' nostalgia for a legendary way of life in the past, the dramatization of the adventures of the Clampett clan in Beverly Hills went beyond that. The Beverly Hillbillies not only glorified the folklore hero, but also satirized the corrupted urban way of life. As a lampoon against the urban extravagance, corruption and greed, the series allowed the plebeian to take revenge on and ridicule
the rich and pretentious. Further, by utilizing the appeal of plebeian hillbillies to Americans, the show reached a vast number of American TV audiences without touching on sensitive social issues of the time. Leaving aside racial equality, youth cultural rebellion, women’s liberation and many other important contemporary issues of the time, the series entertained Americans with highly imaginative and improbable folklore stories.

4. The Middle-class Male as the Laughingstock or the Victim of Witchcraft:

In the mid-sixties, a new and different portrayal of the middle-class male appeared on American prime-time television. The prominent feature of this new image was that he was either ridiculous in a rural context or emasculated in a domestic context. Green Acres (1965-1970, CBS) was such a comedy that portrayed a middle-class fool in the country. Developed and produced by the author of The Beverly Hillbillies, Green Acres reversed the formula of The Beverly Hillbillies, making it a burlesque of city people in a rural context. To do this, the show relocated a couple of well-to-do New Yorkers to a dilapidated Mid-Western village farm, Hooterville. Like The Beverly Hillbillies, the show featured the conflicts between urban and rural cultures. But now it was the turn of Mr. Oliver Douglas, the Manhattan attorney,
to adjust to the rural culture of Hooterville. In the adventures of the Douglas, the city dwellers are the butt of the joke. They even call themselves "middle-class dummies."

Unlike The Andy Griffith Show, Green Acres made no attempt to idealize life in a small rural town. The farmers of Hooterville are coarse, gullible, ignorant, and intrusive. The exemplar of the Hooterville culture is its wily wheeler-dealer, Mr. Haney. Although Hooterville does not have the pastoral quality of Mayberry, it is still an attraction for Mr. Douglas' fantasy of rural romanticism. Mr. Douglas' stupidity lies in the incongruity between his fantasy and reality.

The credits of Green Acres suggest the themes of the show. After several overviews of the mid-Western countryside, the camera focuses on the Green Acres' farm, where Mr. Oliver Douglas sings as he makes hay:

Oliver: Green Acres is the place to be, farm livin' is the life for me (view of the Green Acre farm), Land stretching out so far and wide (Oliver happily drives a tractor across the farm and past his dilapidated house), Keep Manhattan, just give me that countryside.
Lisa: New York is where I'd rather stay (cut to their lavishly furnished Manhattan penthouse apartment), I get allergic smelling hay (Lisa, holding her poodle and looking outside their glass door, makes a sneeze), I just adore a penthouse view (cut to birds-eye-view of the skyscrapers), Darling I love you, but give me Park Avenue (sentimentally),
Oliver: The chores (cut to Oliver throwing hay and his fork, too!)
Lisa: The stores (cut to Lisa merrily opening boxes upon coming home from shopping)!
Oliver: Fresh air (Oliver patting on his breast)!
Lisa: Times Square (Night view of Times Square)!
Oliver: You are my wife (Forcing her with a pull)....
Lisa: Good-bye, city life (in a rush and helplessly)....
Ensemble: Green Acres, we are there (Both standing in front of their farm house as if enlisted.)
In these dramatic scenes, the house looks old and rickety, the farm is not very well tended, the tractor out-of-date, and Mr. Douglas fumbles ineptly with farming tools. Meanwhile, they leave no doubt that Mrs. Douglas has no taste for the country life, yet she has to yield to her husband’s whimsy. Mr. Douglas is arbitrary and chauvinistic because he forces his wife to go with him. The credits encapsulate the show’s main message, that is to mock Mr. Douglas’ ridiculous craving for a "pastoral" country life.

Like The Beverly Hillbillies, Green Acres tried to make a populist appeal to American TV audiences. The strategy was to mock the "middle-class dummy" by making him look stupid. The Douglases are portrayed as romantic and gullible city dwellers, who either make fools of themselves or are taken in by the wheeler-dealers of Hooterville. In one typical episode, when the sheriff leaves the village for a while, no one wants to assume his duty. Mr. Douglas seizes the opportunity to lecture the villagers on their apathy for public service. In response to his lofty speech, the villagers simply ask Mr. to perform that duty. Mr. Douglas find it difficult to betray the spirit of his own lecture and reluctantly agrees. While on duty, Mr. Douglas handcuffs himself to his own car by accident. The episode ends with hilarious scenes of Mrs. Douglas handcuffing herself with Mr. Douglas and of the couple desperately reaching for the key to unlock the handcuff. In a similarly absurd manner,
another episode features Mrs. Douglas' stupidity. When she bakes a cake, somehow she manages to have the spoon, the fork, and all kinds of other stuff included in her cake. Although the portrayals of the "middle-class dummy's" clumsiness often seem absurd, they convey some raw truth about their life style when compared with that of the down-to-earth rural people.

In the eyes of Mr. Douglas, the life style of inaction and sluggishness in Hooterville is the result of the villagers' laziness and incompetence. Yet his judgement is often made out of his ignorance of what life is really like in Hooterville. In one episode, without any knowledge of how the market works for the sale of apples, Mr. Douglas simply can't understand why the farmers would rather sell apples at $3.00 a bushel to traders when the market price in town is $4.00 a bushel. He believes that these farmers simply do not have the capitalistic drive that they should. Instead, they indulge themselves in smug laziness. Mr. Douglas is so convinced of himself that he decides to buy the farmers' apples for $3.00 a bushel, transport them to town, and make a dollar a bushel. Smart as he appears, Mr. Douglas ends up facing all kinds of difficulties in transporting the apples. When he finally manages to get them on the road, he has a flat tire before he reaches town. In his desperate effort to the replace the tire, poor Mr. Douglas overhears from the radio that the price of apple in town has already
fallen to $3.00 a bushel. Repeatedly real life proves that Mr. Douglas is not as smart as he thinks after all.

Accompanying the shows that portrayed the "middle-class dummy" in the country were escapist series that presented an innocent or impotent male figure whose authority was overshadowed by his wife's wisdom or supernatural power. Typical of these shows were Bewitched (1964-1972, ABC) and The Munsters (1964-1966, CBS). 108 Bewitched was a traditional suburban show with a new feature of the wife's witchcraft made possible by technological gimmicks on television. In this unique suburban show, Darrin Stephens, an advertising agent in New York, is married to a beautiful young witch who attempts to abandon her witchcraft to be united with her mortal husband. Yet once thus married, Samantha (Elizabeth Montgomery), the witch, cannot help resorting to her supernatural power to achieve domestic miracles or to cope with difficult social situations. So episodes of this magic show features Samantha producing a sumptuous dinner, icing cakes, washing floors, improving the lawn with a twist of her nose, or Samantha embarrassing a hostess who flirts with Darrin right on the dinner table.

Compared with the traditional suburban family shows of the fifties, Bewitched accomplishes a subtle transition of

power from the male to the female at home. The father figure of the fifties' family shows was so powerful that the series always revolved around his values, philosophy, and actions. *Bewitched* revolves around the themes of how Darrin Stevens adapts to the fact that he as a "red-blooded American boy" has fallen in love with and later married a "house-haunting, broom-riding" witch. By empowering the woman supernaturally, the show made the homemaker witch a powerful figure in humorous ways. For instance, with her supernatural power, Samantha makes magic appearances in Darrin's office and convinces Darrin's boss of her existence. The scenes of the Fifth Avenue advertising agents being puzzled and enchanted by magic appearances of a pretty witch are both amusing and demystifying. They are amusing because these scenes are absurd. They are demystifying in the sense that they reveal the weaknesses of those powerful business executives. When the boss suggests an ingenious plan that includes Darrin's promotion and Samantha's cooperation in the agency's advertising campaigns, Samantha flatly rejects it. The episode shows that the Fifth Avenue executive has to kowtow to a witch embodied in an insignificant housewife.

The salient feature of the male figure in *Bewitched* is that Mr. Stevens' authority is rendered hollow and his masculinity emasculated. Compared with domineering and respectful male figures like Mr. Jim Anderson, Mr. Darrin Stevens is subject to the whimsies of witches and wizards.
He has to go through a series of magic tests Samantha's mother puts on to prove that he is really in love with Samantha. As the head of the family, he does not have any control over his wife's witchcraft. At times, this young outstanding advertising agent has to beg his wife not to use witchcraft to achieve her purposes. In fact, Mr. Stevens is often portrayed as a clown or simply as a victim of witchcraft. In one typical episode, when a witch maid decides not to leave Darrin's house despite his request for her to do so, a wizard comments: "You sir have no control over your household. You're are a mere reflection of a man."

To further demonstrate the power of his witchcraft, the wizard sends Darrin right into a closet in the wall with an instant magic spell. Poor Mr. Stevens, freezing in there, has to wait for Samantha to undo the magic spell to free him. In another episode, when Darrin's boss needs him to look macho on a social occasion, the wizard magically stuffs a rose in his mouth so that he appears exactly the opposite.

Thus in the comic portrayal of Darrin Stevens, we see a subtle sign of distaste for the impeccable father figure television produced in the fifties. It was an effort to emasculate him and mock him. In the fifties, the producers of the respectable family man image were confident of what they created and offered to the public. In the mid-sixties, it was obvious that some of the image makers were rightfully fed up with a stereotype that had been on the small screen.
for more than a decade. They were looking for ways to change. The victim of their search for alternative image was that of the respectable suburban man image, a change obvious in another popular show of the time, The Munsters.

The Munsters was perhaps the foremost show that demystified and satirized the impeccable bourgeois father image from the fifties.Situated in a quiet suburban neighborhood, the Munster family are simply presented as a family of monsters and the show is thus endowed with a touch of surrealism. Although almost every character in the show has some monstrous trait, it is Herman Munster (Fred Gwynne), the father, who is the most bizarre of all. He is about two feet taller than a normal adult, somewhat dim-witted, has a Frankensteinian face, and talks with a cartoon voice. The Munsters have one child and live together with Grandpa Munster. Mr. Herman Munster has a menial job at a graveyard, the Gateman, Goodbury & Graves, which fits him well into the old stereotype of a working-class bungler. However, the surrealistic setting of Mr. Munster's home and his absurd actions make the show more of a satire of the impeccable suburban father image than of a traditional buffoonery of a blue-collar bungler.

In The Munsters, Herman Munster is not presented as a hideous and frightening monster, once you get used to his Frankensteinian appearance. He is actually a naive, good-natured and lovable monster. Despite his good nature, the
show focuses on Herman's incompetence as a father figure. Though he often reminds his brood that he is "head of the family," seldom does anyone in the family heed that seriously. His very need to assert this undermines that claim and sets him up for ridicule. Episode after episode derides Herman while he is asserting his patriarchal authority or imitating TV fathers of an earlier time. In one episode, Herman tries a good father-to-son talk with Eddie (Butch Patrick) about his school problem. Herman is told by his wife that this is what a decent father is supposed to be doing, as in show like *Father Knows Best*. During the conversation, however, Herman finds that Eddie's problem turns out to be a swollen tonsil. The funny thing is that upon seeing Eddie's swollen tonsil, Herman is so scared that he faints away right on the spot. The use of tonsil as something fearful is not unfamiliar with the TV audience. We still remember that the bumbling father Chester Riley used to make a big fuss out of it.

In contrast, Lily Munster, the vampire-looking housewife, presides over family affairs and treats Herman

109 The attempt to relate to previous TV father figures in the show is so obvious that the characters often refer to them in their dialogues. For example, when Lily, in one episode, urges Herman to counsel Eddie (their son), she suggests that Herman should imitate Jim Anderson of *Father Knows Best*. In response, Herman retorts that the mother has also a responsibility as in *Donna Reed Show*. This kind of cross-referencing to previous television characters indicated that prime-time television really became a culture of its own.
like a child. Thus the show portrays a strong female
protecting a weak male, making Herman Munster a child of a
father figure with the use of the Honeymooners formula. In
this female dominated satire of the suburban show, Herman
repeatedly gets into messy problems that he can't deal with
or reacts to childishly. In one episode, Herman, dreaming of
becoming a popular rock song star, books himself for a
television appearance. Herman’s whimsy is fancy enough to
cause some trouble at home. Fearing that she might loose a
"celebrity" husband, Lily beseeches grandpa to stop Herman
from appearing on television with his magical tricks. Sure
enough, while Herman is rehearsing his songs, grandpa and
Eddie manage to shoot a cannon ball right into Herman’s
mouth. Herman swallows the ball and immediately loses his
golden voice. Realizing what he has lost, Herman goes into a
childish tantrum. In a fit of anger, he destroys his guitar
by striking it against the table. Finally, with Lily’s
consolation, Herman promises not to appear on television so
long as Lily buys him a new guitar. Thus the angry giant
bursts into laughter exactly like a child. Throughout the
episode, Herman behaves just like a child, where Lily is
like a mother.

Thus the analysis of depictions of father figures on
sixties’ prime-time television cautions us not to hasten to
the conclusion that prime-time television always simply
reflects the time spirit and prevalent cultural sentiments. It did that in the conservative fifties. But in the tumultuous and progressive sixties, American prime-time series managed to do the opposite, i.e. insulated itself from ongoing social events with complacency and escapism. The co-existence of social progressivism and an escapist prime-time television reminds us of the intermediary, and, to a large extent, determining role of television network executives and TV producers in the process of image creation. Since these industry elites still maintained their moderate-conservative mentality during the sixties, the images they provided for the American public were by no means in synch with the revolutionary time spirit. For sitcoms that did attempt to capture the changing national audiences, we need to turn to the seventies series that claimed to have "changed the face of television."
CHAPTER V
THE FATHER AS BIGOT: THE MOCKERY OF WORKING-CLASS MALES IN THE PRIME-TIME SERIES OF THE SEVENTIES

Almost everyone agreed that the family had entered a period of painful "transition." "The old religious-proprietary form of patriarchal authority is doomed, .... and until new spiritual restraints are formed to take the place of those that are passing away a condition which, in the sight of some, will border on chaos is bound to result." Even those who described themselves as optimists did not deny that "the present instability of monogamous wedlock results from imperfect adaptation to modern society and industrial conditions." They argued merely that the community would gradually learn to do things the family could no longer do for itself: enforce housing standards, provide better education, regulate conditions of employment, and exercise proper supervision over public places of amusement.

Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World*

If sociology creates the official stereotypes, Hollywood and the networks create the ones we know best. No sooner had the news media discovered the working class and found it to be reactionary, bigoted, and male, than the scriptwriters set to work to exploit the entertainment possibilities of this interesting new social grouping. Roughly speaking, television was drawn to its humorous possibilities; Hollywood, to its supposed potential for violence. The result was two overlapping images: on television, the blue-collar male as buffoon; and in the movies, the blue-collar buffoon as mass murderer.

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*

Television programs of the 50s and their producers embraced a conservative ideology by creating images that reflected and reinforced popular mystiques of the fifties; mainstream sixties TV programs remained conservative, insulating themselves from dramatic social changes. In both cases, prime-time television programs reflected dominant bourgeois values, and the images that TV producers created were perceptions of white upper-middle Americans like themselves. However, in the 1970s, American television took a different turn venturing into the realms of race, gender,
and life in other social classes. The suburban father figure was debunked and a new image of the working-class bigot flourished. At first glance, this deviation from tradition may seem revolutionary in the sense that the programs and their producers were freed from the self-absorption of bourgeois culture looking at itself. But a careful examination of the most popular programs of the seventies indicates that more often than not they are based on TV stereotypical notions of people in other social classes.

The move toward presenting alternative images on the American prime-time small screen came about for several reasons. The massive social and cultural transformations of the sixties and seventies had nurtured a more sophisticated TV viewing public, and the viewpoint of TV producers changed significantly. Consequently changes in the creation of prime-time television images were inevitable. In keeping with these trends, seventies TV rejected the bourgeois suburban father figure and projected the blue-collar bumbler. An important motive for this change was a desire to win over the more diversified TV audience of the seventies — though, in the end, those audiences were seen to be not that different. The alternative images were invariably characterized by bigotry and vulgarity. The rejection of the traditional bourgeois father figure on the one hand reflected middle-class TV producers’ qualms concerning bourgeois values and traditional patriarchal authority in
American society. On the other hand, the mockery and belittlement of the working-class father figure on television revealed TV producers’ and network executives’ long standing prejudices against working-class people in America.

A. The Somewhat Tumultuous Decade of the Seventies

Although the 1970s were less tumultuous than the sixties, people still remember both decades as traumatic. The Chicago Democratic Convention of 1968 and the Trial of the Chicago Eight symbolized profound differences of opinion existent in American society at the end of the 1960s, while the election of Richard Nixon as President in 1968 indicated that the nation was moving away from the liberalism that helped bring about pervasive social transformations during the sixties. Upon Nixon’s election, the new administration’s unscrupulous suppressions of dissent -- suppressions that would lead to Watergate -- temporarily stymied attempts at social action. However, despite governmental suppressions, new social forces such as the antinuclear movement and women’s liberation continued to take shape and have impact on American society. The Vietnam War also continued to haunt and divide the nation; events such as the publication of the Pentagon Papers triggered widespread anti-war feelings and demonstrations. At times, troops had to be used to quell
student demonstrations and blood was shed on university campuses, most tragically of all at Kent State. When the War finally ended in 1973, the failure of the U.S. to prevail in a small Third World country made many Americans realize their limitations. The moral ambiguity and military failure in Vietnam, coupled with Americans' recognition of their limited resources, led to the decline of post-World-War-II optimism and the rise of environmental protection movements. In sum, the seventies were a decade of "square" control, of doubt and chaos, and of waning American optimism and confidence.

1. "Crises" in American Society and Family:

With major social problems unsolved and significant social events unfolding, a sense of cultural and social crisis characterized American society of the 1970s. Social critics like Lasch and Bell examined the inner life of the American people and society, highlighting this sense of crisis. In *The Culture of Narcissism*, Lasch argues that competitive individualism had resulted in a "war of all against all," and that the pursuit of individual happiness had given rise to a narcissistic preoccupation with the self. 110 He believed that "the economic man has given way

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to the psychological man," and that the narcissist
personality pervades American society. In The Cultural
Contradictions of Capitalism, Daniel Bell examined late
twentieth century social problems from a historical
perspective. He argued that modern capitalism in America
has created a "disjunction between the kind of organization
and the norms demanded in the economic realm, and the norms
of self-realization that are now central in the culture."
Bell traced the social history of America into the
present time and explained how the liberal ideology of
bourgeois society had given rise to a "modernist" culture
which ironically criticizes and challenges bourgeois
society. According to Bell, in contemporary American
society, the bourgeois world-view -- one of rationalism,
matter-of-fact attitudes, and pragmatism -- has been
replaced by a modernist and hedonistic outlook, which is
primarily "concerned with play, fun, display, and pleasure."
For Bell, this change from asceticism to hedonism signals a
decline of American civilization. 113

111 Daniel Bell, The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism
112 Ibid., 53., 70.
113 On this point, Daniel Bell cites the theory of an
Arabic thinker Ibn Khaldun that maintains "societies pass
through specific phases whose transformations signal decline."
Ibid., 82.
Although writing from different perspectives, Lasch and Bell demonstrated a similar concern about the prevalence of a culture of narcissistic hedonism. Facing a more dismal reality than their predecessors like David Riesman and William Whyte, Lasch and Bell wrote with a more somber tone and probed deeper into the psychology of contemporary Americans. Like social critics of the fifties, they both commented on current cultural values with reference to the Protestant Ethic and deplored its disappearance. Whereas the fifties' social critics were mainly concerned about the prevalence of "other-direction" and the weakening of individualism, Lasch and Bell were concerned that hedonistic narcissism had led to the loss of a moral imperative and sense of purpose for the individual and the nation alike. Critics in the fifties had regarded "other-direction" as a cultural aberration of capitalism; Lasch and Bell took the prevalence of hedonism to be a sign of cultural crisis and decline. Ironically, however, their critiques reflected and fueled the very process they described: their diagnostic delineations of an ailing American society and character undoubtedly helped generate the sense of social and cultural crisis during the seventies.

Through that decade, a serious concern about the precarious status of the American family also contributed to the general sense of cultural and social crisis. With the counterculture movement of the sixties still in the
background and the women's liberation movement gaining momentum, Americans in the seventies witnessed a drastic increase in the number of divorces, single-parent families, and children affected by divorce. These alarming demographic and social shifts led to numerous intensive studies of family. By the middle of the decade, social critics, government policy makers, and various professionals had produced a significant amount of literature analyzing what had gone wrong with the American family. Abundant as it was, this literature by no means generated a consensus about what caused the break-up of American families, or about how to cope with the resultant problems. An exemplary case in point was the publication of two influential books, *All Our Children* and *Haven in a Heartless World*, that made contrary arguments in 1977.  

Based on different diagnoses of the problems with the American family, these books made different recommendations as to how cure the maladies.  


115 In *All Our Children*, the authors maintain that technological advances and complicated social problems dictate that further institutional aids should be given to American parents. In contrast, in *Haven in a Heartless World*, Christopher Lasch argues that modern problems with American families originated from the decline of patriarchal authority and the invasion of private life by "the helping professions." Therefore, Lasch recommends that the patriarchal authority be restored and the power and authority of social institutions be reduced.
The central issue of this discussion - that the American family was besieged or in trouble - was also to find its resonance on prime-time television.

2. Manifestations of Cultural Crises in Popular Culture and the Changing Perspectives of Media Workers

The sense of cultural and social crisis also manifested itself in popular novels of the decade. In her study of the best-selling novels between 1969-1975, Elizabeth Long characterizes the novels of this period as showing "a world-view in crisis." In these novels, the central metaphor of individual success lost its appeal because widespread affluence had failed to provide the better world that the American Dream promised. The novels no longer had moral sanctions and ideals, nor did they have models of "the good." They even questioned the morality of success and rejected traditionally cherished values. Furthermore, popular novels conveyed a sense of crisis for individuals and their social environment. In particular, historical novels resonated with cultural anxiety in their frequent use of "end of empire" settings. 116 This sense of crisis, loss

and confusion was also found in the reaction of television to the historical environment of the seventies, particularly in its rejection of traditional bourgeois images. Interestingly, however, under the influence of a prevalent pessimism of the seventies, popular novels still continued to explore the inner life of the American middle class, whereas television merely switched from one stereotype to another: that is from the suburban stereotype to the blue-collar bigot. This suggests that television may have an inherent shallowness limiting what it can and cannot do by way of social awareness.

Despite thematic changes toward the depiction of grimmer realities, Long discerns in popular novels a characteristic of "cultural open-endedness" that still promises hope. This characteristic suggests that novelists at least realized that "traditional verities are too simple to handle the complexities of modern times." ¹¹⁷ Once the traditional metaphor of material success was no longer felt to be valid, novelists began to explore other themes, "other values, other times, and other rewards." This attitude of "open-endedness" aptly expressed the liberal-pluralist point of view that became widely held among Americans, particularly the middle-class media craftsmen of the seventies.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 147.
By the beginning of that decade, TV producers who had grown up with television, and also were deeply influenced by the social movements of the sixties, came of age. With this new generation, the liberal-conservative viewpoint of the fifties gave way to the liberal-pluralistic point-of-view of the new producers. When this change was reflected on the small screen, there appeared several new situation comedies that "changed the face of television." In the new shows, such as *All in the Family* (CBS, 1971-1983) or *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970-1977), the producers directly or indirectly touched upon current social issues in order to reach a younger, more sophisticated and diversified urban audience. Unlike the suburban shows on prime-time TV in previous decades, many of these top-rated series featured the lives of ethnic minorities, most notably of black Americans, and of other social classes. The suburbanite father figure was replaced by patriarchal figures of different working-class backgrounds: Archie Bunker as a working-class bigot, George Jefferson as a Black parvenu, and James Evans as an ordinary Black ghetto worker tenuously employed. Unquestionably, the new generation of TV producers were more open-minded and ready to explore different values. But in the final analysis, their views of people from other social class were inevitably prejudiced.
3. The Market Imperative

In addition to the cultural environment of the seventies, the market imperative remarkably contributed to new trends in television’s representation of reality during this period. Market imperative had been working in different ways in previous decades. Thus in the fifties, the massive middle-American TV audience was complacent and confident about the American dream; all television needed to do was to provide this self-satisfied populace with popular suburban and bourgeois stereotypes. In the sixties, with social movements radicalizing American society, the TV watching public became somewhat uneasy with the obsolescent version of the middle-American landscape; television had to resort to escapism to capture the widest audience. But in the seventies TV was catering to a different public. Through various and successive changes, the TV viewing public of the seventies became more diversified, open-minded, and sensitive to racial and social issues.

At the beginning of the decade, the major television networks needed to change strategies to face the new reality. Network executives began to look at the "demographics" of the audience. The new goal in the network race for audience was to attract the young, urban and sophisticated audience with its stronger consuming power. The logic behind Robert Wood’s promotion of a controversial
series at the very beginning of the decade is most illustrative of change. 

Up until the late sixties, CBS had succeeded in staying on top of the ratings by hiring superstars and fostering a bond between these stars and their audiences. At the beginning of the seventies, however, after examining the "demographics" of the CBS audience, Wood realized that this strategy was undermining CBS' own position in the competition for the younger audiences. Though still winning the ratings war, CBS had a mostly rural and aging audience. Foreseeing the prospect of losing the battle for the younger and more urban audiences, Wood resolved to discontinue a number of successful rural and star-centered shows. In their place, Wood installed new and controversial sitcoms such as All in the Family. Wood sensed that Americans were ready for such a show and that it would attract audiences from different social strata. Despite a slow beginning, All in the Family eventually became the most popular show in the history of American prime-time television. Thereupon, sensing the shift in popular taste, the other networks followed suit with similar topical shows.

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Robert Wood was chosen to be the president of the CBS network at this time to meet new challenges. The controversial series he staged on prime-time television was All in the Family. Anticipating a dramatic public response to its controversial issues, Wood even increased the number of telephone operators at the CBS switchboard to handle criticisms.
B. Father Figures in Prime-time Television Series of the Seventies:

1. The Absence of Leading Male Characters

During the seventies, one obvious change in the representation of American life on prime-time television was the proliferation of shows featuring independent and self-assertive women. Beginning in 1970, a number of TV shows became popular by dramatizing a female character as a career woman or as an independent head of the family. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970-1977), *Maude* (CBS, 1972-1978), and *One Day at a Time* (CBS, 1975-1984) typified this unprecedented type of show. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* was the first major prime-time series since the inception of television to feature a woman who was neither a scatterbrained buffoon nor a contented homemaker. Mary Richards (Mary Tyler Moore), the show's protagonist, was an independent, intelligent, and career-oriented television journalist. And she was a single woman. 119 Similarly, *Maude*, a spin-off of *All in the Family*, depicted an

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119 Old morality persisted during the seventies. The plot line of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* was originally rejected by CBS because it presented Mary Richards as a divorced woman. Even as late as 1976, one of the show's producer, James Brooks, said that it would be "pretty spectacular" if they could find humor in a realistic treatment of divorce on prime-time TV. Horace Newcomb and Robert S. Alley, *The Producer's Medium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 203-204.
intelligent, assertive and opinionated woman, featuring significant incidents of her personal life such as divorce, abortion, menopause, and political involvement. All of these topics would have been taboo on prime-time television in the previous decades. With a slightly different focus, One Day at a Time featured a single woman leading a family and trying to make it in the real world without the domineering and supporting male. In retrospect, these shows were, to a great extent, the result of producers' attempts to cater to a more sophisticated and career-oriented female audience influenced by the Women's Liberation Movement of the decade. Reflecting the liberal-pluralist point-of-view of TV producers, these shows demonstrably helped break the tradition of male dominance in the world of prime-time television entertainment.

2. The Bigot Working-class Father and His Weakening Authority

By the late 1960s there were shows that either emasculated or ridiculed the hackneyed middle-class suburban male. In the beginning of the seventies, as television began to feature the life of women and minorities, it further debunked the middle-class suburban father figure. In fact, for the first time American television literally rejected the model of the white male middle-class father. This
rejection indicated how drastically the public needs as perceived by TV producers had changed, and it was bound to lead to the creation of new images on television. With the "decent" family role model debunked, TV producers moved to explore the world of working-class people, offering shows that ridiculed and belittled the blue-collar father figure.

The whole process of regenerating a stereotypical blue-collar image on American prime-time television during the seventies was part of the so-called "discovery of the working class" by media workers. In 1968, when the mayor of Chicago, Mr. Daley, sent out policemen to crush student demonstrators and press workers, a national poll found that a slight majority (56%) of Americans sympathized with the police rather than the victimized student demonstrators and press. In the following year, Richard Nixon issued his well-known appeal to "the silent majority," maintaining that their interests had been trampled upon by the protestors and neglected by the media. Suddenly, the American media awoke to the reality that it had alienated itself from a large portion of the American public. Fearful of losing their sympathy, the media immediately made efforts to shift attention to "the silent majority." Thus a series of remarks about "discovering a forgotten working class" found their

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places in the media. 121 Several new images were created that tried to compensate for the negligence. Although the media's efforts were intended to attract "silent majority," the images they created were invariably colored by the image makers' prejudices against American working people. The image of the blue-collar man was often biased, reactionary and stupid. 122 All in the Family (CBS, 1971-1975) provided a prime example of this kind of image.

In addition to being the most popular sit-com in the history of American television, All in the Family may also have been the most influential. The series became the undisputed number-one show by the summer of 1971, and maintained that position for five consecutive years. The original model for All in the Family was a popular British television show Till Death Us Do Part, which also featured incessant quarrels between a stereotyped working-class father figure and his adult son. When Norman Lear discovered the show, he immediately recognized its market potentials. In re-making the British model for American television, Lear utilized the social stereotypes of "a conservative hard-hat" and "a liberal intellectual" to make the comedy into a forum for social debate. The most unique feature of

121 Barbara Ehrenreich gives a good account of these developments and makes pertinent comments on them. Ibid., 99-100.

122 Barbara Ehrenreich makes similar comments on the characteristics of such images. Ibid., 101.
All in the Family, however, was its characterization of Archie Bunker, a biased, laughable yet lovable father figure who symbolized the diminishing power of the patriarch in a troubled American family of the seventies.

Archie Bunker (Carroll O'Connor) of All in the Family certainly belongs to the tradition of the blue-collar buffoon on American television. There are many similarities between Archie Bunker and his predecessors, such as Chester Riley or Ralph Kramden. Like Ralph, Archie is a laughingstock, repeatedly satirized but never quite getting the point or losing his preconceptions. Both perform manual labor. In addition, Archie is uneducated, vulgar, biased, and uncouth. As much as Kramden, Archie vigorously asserts his patriarchal authority only to see it wither away. His own daughter, Gloria, marries someone with totally different values from his. His wife, Edith, even begins to assert her own identity by demanding the right to work outside the home. The similarities between Ralph Kramden and Archie Bunker suggest that American television producers have always looked at blue-collar workers with certain prejudices -- prejudices shared by TV audiences. Seventies viewers undoubtedly "liked" Archie Bunker for different reasons -- some because he was an easy target as a comically unbelievable bigot, other because to their minds he was telling the "truth." But Archie Bunker's astonishing popularity indicates that the American public was ready and
eager to embrace the slanted image of the working-class person.

The unique cultural environment of the seventies and Norman Lear’s liberalism had much to do with the mockery of Archie Bunker’s hard-hat conservative bigotry. Archie Bunker is a man who, at the prompting of his son-in-law, would go on television to suggest that an airline company lend guns to its passengers to counter terrorist assaults. He is also the God-fearing grandfather, who sneaks out to have his grandson baptized against the will of his parents. To Archie Bunker, every ethnic minority falls into a stereotype and assumes a distasteful nickname: the Jews are Hebes, the Japanese are Japs, the Chinese are Chinks (or Chinamen), Black Americans are coons or black beauties, the Poles are Polacks, and so on. In spellbound disbelief, the American public watched their favorable suburbanite being replaced by this unscrupulous champion of bigotry who is nothing less than a Pandora’s box for racial slurs and prejudices. We all know that most Americans harbor some of Archie’s prejudices. But not many of us would imagine that prime-time television could become the stage for such prejudices to be released and mocked in this dramatic manner. It was the loss of confidence among TV producers toward the bourgeois values, along with the sense of confusion of the seventies, that
made this miracle possible. In addition, the question was asked whether it was a good idea to dramatize bigotry on prime-time television. Even prominent media workers could not agree on that. Finally, although the racial slurs and jokes were all put in Archie Bunker's mouth, we should remember that it was really the scriptwriter and the producers who put them together and created the racist protagonist.

In a political and social sense, Archie Bunker differs importantly from Ralph Kramden or Chester Riley. Whereas the problems of Ralph Kramden and Chester Riley were mostly personal, the character of Archie Bunker gave voice to many social problems of his time. Through the debates between Archie Bunker and his liberal son-in-law, All in the Family touched upon significant events and issues such as the

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123 Some critics assumed that the show was staged at a trying time for America. A critic of All in the Family is quoted as saying: "It is irresponsible to air a show like this at a time when our nation is polarized and torn by racism." Richard Adler, ed., All in the Family (New York, Praeger, 1979), 99. Commenting on the comic ambiguity of All in the Family, another critic says that it "reflects our own uncertainty about what courses of action to take in real life," Ibid., 113.

124 An interesting debate occurred in The New York Times between Laura Z. Hobson and Norman Lear as to what words bigots really use in real life and whether bigotry is lovable. This is a good example of the difference of sensibility among media workers and commentators of different generations. In his rebuttal of Hobson's criticism, Lear particularly stresses the age difference between him and his critic, and what that difference means as to their sensibility and standards of tolerance. Ibid., 97-111.
Watergate incident, gun control, racial tension, the Vietnam War, and unemployment. By the seventies, America’s honeymoon had become all (the bickering) in the family. Clearly, Archie’s personal problems were related to the broad cultural and social malaise that afflicted American society during the seventies. By comparison, the background of *The Honeymooners* was an America enjoying the boom of a post-War consume culture. Economic prosperity was assumed and social problems were rarely suggested in that show. Most of the Kramdens’ concerns related to matching their neighbors’ spending patterns. With the Kramdens, the audience learned about what they could win on television and how they could live with television. With the Bunkers of *All in the Family*, Americans of the seventies found themselves debating and thinking about social issues in their living rooms. Only in a time of profound social and cultural confusion could this happen on such a frequent and regular basis. The social relevance of *All in the Family* suggests that some of the TV producers of the seventies were willing to confront and even market rather to evade current social issues.

In contrast to the suburban sitcom culture, *All in the Family* offers a glimpse into the urban world of working people. Like Ralph Kramden, Archie Bunker is a blue-collar worker, working on a dock and moonlighting as a cab driver. Later, his laid off from the dock and becomes a bartender. When an opportunity knocks, he mortgages his house to buy
the bar and becomes a small businessman. He is unreasonably venturesome when he "traces" his wife's signature on the mortgage application. Yet no matter how hard he tries, Archie is essentially stuck at the bottom of the social ladder. As a rich relative tells him: "Archie, you are poor, and you know it!" With a wry smile, Archie reluctantly admits: "Some people make it, some people don't." Although Archie despises his son-in-law for his "free ride" on him, he envies Michael for the opportunities open to him, like a graduate education. So as far as social position is concerned, Archie Bunker represents those Americans who strive on the lower rungs of the social ladder to make ends meet and who do not see a chance for improvement. To these American, Archie's problems and worries are real.

Unlike Ralph Kramden, who still aspires to make his dreams come true, Archie has few fantasies of success. As a critic insightfully comments: "Archie Bunker's purpose in life is to do his job and be left alone." 125 Archie wants to be left alone because every available options for success has proved a dead-end. So he simply protects what he already has, cutting corners whenever possible, as with the tax due on his moonlighted income. As he tells his wife, "Money made on the sabbath is between me and Him." To Archie Bunker, the minorities are getting too much cutting edge from the

government, whereas he gets nothing. It is painful for Archie to see families like the Jeffersons, newly rich blacks, move into his neighborhood. Any ascent in social status of his black neighbors seems to mean a relative descent of Archie’s status. As the Jeffersons fare better, it is even more upsetting for Archie to see them move out of the Queens and onto the East Side of New York. Somehow, Archie vaguely believes that the more blacks can get ”a piece of the pie,” the less his share of ”the pie” will be. The tense relationship between Archie Bunker and George Jefferson helps bring out, symbolically, the tension between different social classes and races in American society.

Unlike Ralph Kramden or Chester Riley, Archie Bunker has his real, though weakening, authority in the family. Archie is not a henpecked husband as other male bumblers were. We can see Archie’s patriarchal power in several respects: he will not allow anyone to sit in his chair, which comes to symbolize his paternal authority. Home from work, Archie likes to sit down in his chair and demand his wife’s service as if that were the natural order of things. "Bring me a beer, Edith," Archie shouts to his wife. In the Bunker family, no one, except for Michael Stivic, is able to challenge Archie’s arguments, prejudiced and convoluted as they may be. Although Archie is imperfectly intelligent, he makes decisions which have important consequences for the family. He is partly licensed in this because, though not
engaged in any lucrative business or occupation, Archie manages to support the family, including his college graduate son-in-law. So in Archie Bunker, we still see several vestiges of the patriarchal family at work, challenged as it is, this authority still appealed to certain audience of the seventies.

In the later episodes of the show, however, it becomes clear that Archie's patriarchal authority is withering away under increasing assault. Gloria's choice of a liberal graduate student as husband itself denies Archie's values. It pains Archie to see his "little gore" marry a "Meathead Polack" who opposes him on almost every issue. Later, Archie can't stop his daughter from going West with Michael, or even from going through a divorce with him. To worsen the situation, Edith Bunker, who has always respected Archie's patriarchal authority, begins to assert her own identity and to challenge Archie's authority. An episode that features a rare argument between Archie and Edith about her voluntary work at an old home exemplifies this. Having offered her help to the aged, Edith feels a sense of usefulness. But this is no good news for Archie. Accustomed to Edith's role as his servant-like housewife, Archie denounces Edith's work as worthless. However, Edith's self esteem has grown enough to give her the courage to make her case, and to refuse to speak to Archie without an apology from him. In the end, Archie has to admit that he is wrong. In this incident,
Archie Bunker has to wrestle with the fact that life is simply not what it used to be. Through these aspects of the Bunkers’ life, we see a microcosm of a functioning patriarchal family, one in which the patriarchal authority still exists, yet begins to falter under the influences of sweeping social changes.

3. The Bigot of A Black Man: Reverse Bigotry among the Black Working-class People

During the decade of the seventies, sitcoms that featured the lives of black Americans also flourished. Among the top ten popular shows in the Nielsen’s ratings during this decade, there were at least three such shows: Sanford and Son (NBC, 1972-1977), Good Times (CBS, 1974-1979) and The Jeffersons (CBS, 1975-1985). While bearing some resemblance to series like All in the Family, these ethnic minority shows had several distinctive features of their own. First, they all had black Americans as protagonists. These characterizations profiled black Americans of lower-middle class or underclass. However, considering that black Americans had hitherto been portrayed only as maids or porters on television, representations of working-class black Americans as protagonists on prime-time television still meant social progress in America. Second, in term of social class, the male protagonists represented people of
various working-class backgrounds. They ranged from a ghetto
resident doing odd jobs in Chicago to a small junk-dealer in
Los Angeles to an owner of a chain cleaners in New York.
Finally, as with the satirical characterization of Archie
Bunker, these shows tended to ridicule the male protagonists
and portrayed them as bigots or bumblers. The mockery of
these Black males was part and parcel of the tradition of
ridiculing the working-class male and it continued the trend
of belittling patriarchal authority.

Sanford and Son, also based on a successful British
television show, depicts the life of two black junk dealers,
father and son, in Los Angeles. Using lower middle-class
black people as its main characters, this show most sharply
departs from the suburban sitcom tradition of the fifties
and the sixties. The settings of the show create the
atmosphere of an urban lower-middle class neighborhood.
Instead of a well-mown lawn and a picket-fenced two story
house, we see an old house with a small yard jammed with
junk. Instead of a well-tended orderly home, we see a
living-room that is used for business, entertainment,
dwelling and other purposes. Instead of doctors or lawyers
caring for their children or tending their clients, we see a
father and son together involved in the junk-dealing
business. If Archie Bunker’s home is plain and dull, Fred
Sanford’s home looks messy and ratty. By dramatizing the
life of two small junk-dealers and using these unpleasant
home scenes, the producers of the show presented an America that had ceased to exist on prime-time television since the Kramden's days. However, despite these unprosperous scenes, the producers' concern for high numbers in the rating should not be questioned. Their rationale was that this kind of show could reach a wider audience, particularly those in the world of the black working class and underclass. The immediate and continuous popularity of Sanford and Son proved that their strategy was quite successful.

As in the case of All in the Family, the producers' strategy in staging Sanford and Son was also to break taboos, in many cases, racial taboos, and to portray a bigot or a fool for people to laugh at. Fred Sanford (Redd Foxx) is out-spoken and funny, yet his ethnic jokes are often prejudiced. He is often portrayed as a malicious and ignorant bigot. Fred Sanford's bigotry contrasts sharply with his son's common sense and racial tolerance. Whereas Fred likes to make frivolous use of the issue of racial equality, his son shows better judgement on such matters. The difference between the father and the son is best shown in the following example. Lemont Sanford (Demond Wilson) is arrested for passing a red traffic light. He breaks the law in order to avoid being hit by an vehicle from behind. In the courtroom, Lemont defends himself well, but Fred, pretending to be Lemont's counsel, makes the inquiry a hilarious ethnic joke.
Fred (to the white police officer): "What have you got against Black drivers?" (Laughter and a commotion breaks out among the audience in court, many of whom are Fred's buddies.)
Judge (a Black man): "I will not tolerate the outburst. And you will restrict your inquiry to the matter before the court."
Fred: "Well, that's what's wrong with the court, judge. A black man ain't got no chance down here."
Judge (disputing): "I'm black."
Fred: "You're the judge. That don't count (wild laughter). Listen (walking towards the police officer), why don't you arrest some white drivers?"
Officer: "I do."
Fred: "You do? Well, where are they (looking around)? Look at all these niggers here."

In the end, Fred is fined $25 for contempt of court and Lemont has to drag him out of the court to prevent him from further antagonizing the judge. In the whole episode, Fred Sanford is presented as a clown and a fool. His buffoonish performance trivializes the issue of racial equality. Even if Sanford's argument is relevant to the case, the presence of the black judge, the most respectable character in the courtroom, directly undercuts Sanford's charges. This episode emphasizes the uselessness of Fred's frivolous use of the issue of racial equality, and ridicules him as an ignorant bigot.

In the character of Fred Sanford, we also see a reverse of the middle-class father figure. In this father-and-son show, Fred often behaves like a grown-up child, whereas his son, Lemont, often demonstrates reason, common sense and racial tolerance. In one episode, when Fred and his buddies are preparing to have a "wild party" with their girl
friends, Lemont, knowing what this will do to his father's poor health, manages to get the men drunk before the girls arrive. In another episode, Fred is upset that his neighbor's things occupy some space in his yard. Lemont advises his father not to force his neighbor to move his things out. When in doubt about the property line of their yard, Lemont counsels leniency. But Fred secretly hires an inspector to find out where it should be, hoping this will force his neighbor to move his things out. To Sanford's surprise, the surveyor finds that he has been mistakenly using his neighbor's property. To deal with the error, Lemont wants to tell the truth, whereas Fred sneaks out to move the stakes. In doing so, he is caught in the narrow passage between their house and his truck. In the end, Fred has to call his neighbor "tio" ("uncle" in Spanish) before Lemont and the neighbor come to his rescue. So the father is a stereotypically working-class mean, sneaky bumbler, whereas the son is generous and aboveboard. The father does everything wrong, the son everything right.

When *Sanford and Son* became a hit, some critics charged that it was an up-dated version of *Amos' n' Andy*. Redd Foxx and the producers flatly rejected such charges. Yet when we look at the show carefully, we can see that such charges were not groundless. First of all, the format of the show does resemble that of *Amos' n' Andy*, featuring two grown-up men exchanging jokes and making fun of each other. Only in
Sanford and Son, Sanford’s vulgar jokes are somewhat balanced by Lemont’s moderate viewpoint. Second, the show resorts to negative social stereotypes as Amos’ n ‘Andy did. Fred Sanford is portrayed as a witty, listless, rowdy, and belligerent fellow. He is also crafty, dishonest, ignorant, and mean. We can see that the producers made such an image for audience to laugh at rather than emulate. Third, Fred Sanford is a merry-go-lucky underachiever. He is a small junk-dealer and feels content about it. For selfish reasons, he stops his son from changing to a new occupation. Every time Lemont mentions the pursuit of a new career, Sanford feigns a heart-attack. On the whole, though Lemont presents a contrary viewpoint, Fred Sanford dominates the show and, therefore, determines the important messages the show conveys.

Another popular show featuring a black father figure during the seventies was The Jeffersons, a spin-off of All in the Family. Before the series became popular by itself, its main characters had already established themselves among audiences. Compared with Sanford and Son, The Jeffersons is characterized by its theme of upward-mobility achieved by a small black newly-rich businessman, Mr. George Jefferson. The upbeat tone of success is well conveyed in the credits of the show: the Jeffersons are moving out of Queens to a high-rise apartment in the East side of New York. The theme song that accompanies the scenes of the Jeffersons moving
into the new apartment is particularly appropriate for the credit scenes. It goes: "We are moving up to the East Side, .... We are finally getting a piece of the pie." However, as it is often the case with the newly-rich, the Jeffertons have many social and cultural problems while trying to adapt themselves to the new social circle. The credits adumbrate these adjustment problems. In the ascent to his new bourgeois status, George Jefferson is portrayed as a shrewd businessman and a good-hearted bigot.

Though he is a self-made man, George cannot escape the fate of being ridiculed by middle-class TV producers. Any one coming from Jefferson’s background is bound to be presented as rude and prejudiced. In many ways George Jefferson is an Archie Bunker in black face. He is as prejudiced against white people as Archie Bunker is against black people. For example, when George Jefferson is hiring a new manager for one of his stores, he only wants to choose from among black candidates. "I ought hire black people to manage my black stores," he tells his family. When accused of being unfair to white candidates, George claims: "That’s right. I already got my token white." We know that in reality black people cynically charge discriminatory individuals or institutions for their use of "token blacks." In this case, the producers put George in the hiring position, only to have him reverse the practice of discriminatory hiring. This suggests that prejudice works
both ways. Furthermore, George Jefferson is equally presented as biased against woman. In the same episode, George denies a black woman’s application because she is a woman. "A woman’s job is working for man," he tells his son and his girl friend. "Because a woman ain’t happy just being a boss. She’s got to be a ‘bossee’." By depicting a successful black businessman as a bigot and a chauvinist, the show conveys the message that bigotry is equally despicable no matter who harbors it.

If we are to characterize George Jefferson in one word, the word has to be "upstart." In the credits, the way George Jefferson stalks into the high-rise apartment reveals much of his arrogance and his sense of achievement. The most vivid scenes of George’s pride are in the episode when the Jeffertons first move into their new apartment. Remembering that he and his family used to share one bathroom with other families, George runs into all four bathrooms and flushes each toilet to demonstrate their newly achieved convenience. "How about that?" George says to the dumbfound family proudly, "Four jars, no waiting." These vivid scenes and remarks well convey George’s jubilant sense of achievement. But they also imply a derision of George’s shallowness and vulgarness. In another episode, dwelling on the nightly beauty of the New York City from their balcony, George exclaims:
"It’s better than beautiful. It’s one of a kind. ... I mean who else could’ve done what I’ve done. ... (Asking Louis.) Did you ever think a couple of years ago that we would be living up here in style, looking down on the greatest city in the world?"

Then his ego swells with ecstasy as he exclaims:

"New York and me (shouts and laughs)! Here this city is a big-leap just like me. That’s why it’s called a big apple. You take one bite and you get class. You think big, you live big, and you throwww big parties. (in a rhapsody and yelling) I love it!"

This is George Jefferson -- the Jefferson who struggles out of a tenement where a few families shared a bathroom; the Jefferson who sees unlimited opportunities in New York City (and in America) that await him to make "big" fortunes out of them. Whatever style Jefferson may think he lives in, to the producers of the show, it is the style of an upstart.

In the eyes of the producers, George Jefferson’s moral standards are quite different from those of Jim Anderson or Ward Cleaver. His judgements and conducts are often morally dubious according to middle-class standards. For example, he tries to bribe the inspector who examines his out-of-date ventilation equipment. He reasons that since big business corporations can give millions of dollars to foreign dictators for business advantages, he is entitled to do the same in his small business. He approves of his son’s lying in order to have things done and tells his wife: "You’ve got to be that way to get by in that jungle out there." When Lionel is having difficulty with his English professor and
can't finish his research paper, George simply pays someone to write it for him. But in all these incidents, George ends up being the loser. Although the format of the sitcom eventually allows George to change his mind, particularly under the righteous influence of his wife, the show projects the image of an unscrupulous businessman.

*The Jeffersons* makes subtle use of racial issues to appeal to a wider audience. To do this, the show portrays George Jefferson as a bigot and a fool so that no one takes him quite seriously. Yet George Jefferson is also portrayed as streetwise and sharp. He often outsmarts the dim-witted white supporting characters, Harry Bently and Tom Willis. In almost every encounter with George Jefferson, Harry or Tom winds up as a victim of George's harsh jokes. This makes George Jefferson a likable figure among the black audience. Furthermore, the show resorts to unusual, racially sensitive scenes. For example, Harry Bently has a strange illness in his back. He often invites George Jefferson to tread on his back to kill the pain for him. This view of a black man walking on a white man's back is both symbolic and provocative. The first time Tom Willis meets George Jefferson, Mr. Willis demonstrates his unbiased welcome by embracing a dubious and hesitant George. While Tom is overly enthusiastic, George appears to be very uncomfortable about being embraced by a white person. Here the producers mean to deride both Tom's overly enthusiastic liberal attitude
towards racial integration and George Jefferson’s distrust and resistance to it.

4. Positive Father Figures from the "Hard Times"

During the seventies, efforts to censor television resulted directly from the outcries about the restoration of "traditional morality" in the face of "crisis in the family." These efforts began with members of the House of Representatives denouncing detrimental television programs and ended with the FCC and the networks allocating Family Viewing Time (before 9:00 p.m. in the East and varying times elsewhere) on prime-time television. This measure imposed certain standards on the programs shown during that time. The criteria adopted for acceptable programs were so strict that programs had to be adjusted, causing serious frictions between networks and independent producers. 126 In reaction to this censorship, TV producers founded the Producers Caucus, which protested the measure and protected the interests of producers. 127 The allocation of Family Viewing Time and the protest against it suggested that the media and the public held different views on television’s role.


127 Norman Lear and others even filed a lawsuit against Family Viewing Concept. Ibid., 177.
Even within the television industry, not all TV producers and network executives believed that their tasks were just to laugh at bigotry or to expose the evils of the patriarchal family. Some responded to dismal social and cultural conditions with TV series imbued with positive family images. Although such series did not dominate prime-time TV, they made an identifiable impact. Among other things, they best eulogized family values of the past, perhaps as an expression of their producers' lamentation of the loss of traditional American family values.

Representative of such shows were *The Waltons* (CBS, 1972-1981) and *Little House on the Prairie* (NBC, 1974-1983). Interestingly, both series were about American families from distant pasts, *The Waltons* from the Great Depression and *Little House on the Prairie* (NBC, 1974-1983) from the frontier days. The use of traditional family images from past hard times in both shows indicates that even these nostalgic producers had abandoned the post-War suburban family model as a resource of family values in their moralizing efforts. In the new "trying time" for the American family, the producers, sharing public concern about the predicament of the American family, romanticized the past.

The production of *The Waltons* in 1972 epitomizes such a conscious effort to shore up American family values. In an
interview, Earl Hamner, the producer of *The Waltons*, acknowledges such intention:

> For reasons I've never been able to figure out, in today's society, the family does seem to be in danger. And I hope that television can remedy that or be an antidote to the disintegration of the family because the family has always been the unit through which society has survived. I would hope that through television shows, like *Family*, like *The Waltons*, we can show that families are valuable, can be a uniting influence, can provide stability and some solid base in a society that seems to be trembling on the brink of disaster most of the time. 128

Hamner's statements caught the tone and themes of public discourse in the seventies: the family was in "danger" and going through a "disintegration"; American society was "trembling on the brink of disaster." All of this reminds us of what the contemporary social critics contemplated on. Evidently, Hamner was concerned about the predicament of the American family and he had his own agenda to shore up the "historic values" by televising positive images. In reality, Hamner's moralizing show really appealed to a broad audience and remained popular throughout the later part of the decade.

What values did *The Waltons* advocate? Earl Hamner had quite a different mentality and set of beliefs than Norman Lear and others. In a time of restless doubt, Hamner remained confident of the values he had been brought up with

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and he wanted to strengthen them in his TV shows. On the source of the characters' values in the show, Hamner said:

> I draw material from my own family: from the character of my mother and father; from the characters of my brothers and sisters and myself and the people who lived around us. They tended to be God-fearing, country people from Nelson County. Their values were the historic values that the country is founded on: thrift and independence and self-reliance, going to church and trying to make something of yourself.129

Hamner celebrates exactly the values that social critics felt were disappearing from American society. His message was that these values are precious and should be retained because they will help Americans survive crises. The characters of the series embody what Hamner believes in. 130 His traditionalist vision stood out against prevailing pessimism of the seventies.

Unlike most other prime-time series that portrayed the working-class father figure as a bumbling fool, *The Waltons* depicts a positive working-class father, John Walton. He supports a large extended family by running a lumber mill together with Grandpa Zeb. Although the show emphasizes John


130 Earl Hamner strongly believes that television shows reflect producers' viewpoints and conscience. At the end of the interview, he says: "I'm beginning to sound like a Baptist preacher, but I think that what you see on any television show reflects the morals and the conscience of the people on those shows who have influence. I have an affirmative, upright, cheerful view of humanity, and I think that that's reflected in the show." *Ibid.*, 172.
Boy's coming of age during the Depression, the image of his father as an honest, hard-working and righteous man is made through the influence he exerts on his son. The values John Boy learns from his parents manifest themselves in his understanding of the world. When a rough, run-away boy from New York can't understand why the Waltons care about him, John Boy comes up with a defense of his family that best demonstrates his appreciation of those values:

Look, Gino, we may be 'a bunch of dirt poor hicks,' but we've got something a lot of other people miss. My mother and father happen to really love each other. They happen to love their children. I've done an awful lot of thinking about what makes this family work, and I think because there's love enough to go around and some to spare. I guess we just care about life, whether it's a wounded racoon or run-away boy.

Episode after episode, the show sold this type of wholesome image of a family of earthy and honest people sticking to each other with enduring values of love, care, honesty. The show implied that the public should look up to and emulate the Waltons in times of difficulty.

Similarly, Little House on the Prairie attempted to restore the family values of the past. Fittingly, the show was slotted in the "family viewing time" (8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.) on NBC. Its pilot, written, produced, and starred by ex-movie star, Michael Landon, was originally presented as a made-for-TV movie; later, the show developed into a serial of its own right once it proved to have an appeal to a
fairly large audience. 131 Set in the pioneering West of the 1870s, the show was an imitation of The Waltons portraying a loving family surviving harsh times by banding together. 132

Reacting against the cultural pessimism of the seventies, Little House on the Prairie glorified a loving homesteader's family as a bulwark against hard times and crises. Repeatedly, the principals were subject to crises of survival in their new frontier ventures. Invariably they overcame adversarial, even dangerous circumstances with nobility, bravery and splendor. In a typical episode, the bankruptcy of the business where Mr. Ingalls works leaves the Ingalls deep in debt to the general store. In the time of crisis, rather than blame others or each other, everyone in the family chooses to do whatever is possible to make ends meet. Ignoring the taunting of their neighbors, the Ingalls family maintains its dignity and honor their debt faster than expected. In the end, Mr. Ingalls can pride

131 In the season of its debut, the show was rated as the thirteenth most popular show by the Nielsen's Company trailing behind a number of well-established series of the decade such as All in the Family, The Mary Tyler Moore Show, Sanford and Son and The Jeffersons. By 1977, with these popular shows gone, this show was number seven on the Nielsen's top twenty-five popular series. Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, The Complete Directory, 971-972.

132 Similar to The Waltons, this adventure drama drew much of its materials from the life of Laura Ingalls Wilder, author of the "Little House" books. Like Hamner in the production of The Waltons, Michael Landon had a great leverage for the show's production. Never being able to achieve the laureate status on the Nielsen's rating, the show nevertheless gained a fairly good foothold in the rating during its prime years. Time Brooks and Earle Marsh, The Complete Directory, 971-972.
himself on being the richest man in town. In all crises of the show, Mr. Ingalls is portrayed as a brave man with love and tolerance for those who make troubles for him. The show boosted Landon's popularity making him a popular hero.

Despite its popularity, *Little House on the Prairie* made little mark on the list of respected programs of American television. \(^{133}\) Compared with the Lear shows that took a daringly realistic approach in their dramatization of American life of the seventies, *Little House on the Prairie* took an escapist and sentimental approach in its depiction of reality. Unlike Lear's prejudiced bumbler, Landon's characters are from the reserve of the American folkloric imagination. They are so perfect and idealistic that audiences see fantasies of their pasts and of themselves. In addition, the show does not transcend the conventional good-guy-and-bad-guy format in its depictions of social conflicts. In its usual episodes, the tranquil town life is disturbed by a bunch of menacing bad-guys. Yet the good folks eventually band up within their church or neighborhood to prevail over the trouble makers.

Despite the subcultural phenomenon of traditionalist programs with their wholesome father figures, the mainstream

\(^{133}\) At its debut, a commentator from *Variety* acutely points out the sentimental appeal of the show, and predicts that it will not win respect for TV as a medium of serious expression. *Variety Television Reviews* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1989), Vol. 11, April 3, 1974.
prime-time TV made dramatic changes by presenting alternative images to suit the needs of diversified audiences. However, since the network executives and TV producers were themselves uncertain of what values to assert and reinforce, they rejected the traditional bourgeois father figure and concentrated on ridiculing bigotry and prejudices, which they believed were an inherent part of the blue-collar life. It is true that in doing so television both catered to and reflected the contemporary skeptical feelings. And it is indisputable that leading seventies series strenuously advocated liberal-pluralistic ideology and stretched the standards of acceptable TV to the greatest extent. But it is also true that the network executives and TV producers were subtly manipulating the audience taste to achieve their commercial objectives. In doing so, the industry gurus never lost their control of what they were doing for the American public.
CHAPTER VI

FATHER KNOWS BEST AGAIN: THE RENEWED CELEBRATION OF BOURGEOIS "FAMILY VALUES" IN THE EIGHTIES

Capitalism depends not on greed but on giving, investment without a contracted return. The workers under capitalism are motivated not by crude economic rewards but by love of family. The entrepreneurs succeed to the extent that they are sensitive to the needs of others, and to the extent that others succeed. Altruism is the essence of the positive-sum game of capitalism.

George Gilder, The New Right

I'm the image of American happiness. Look at my home, my carpets, my leather couches, the view of the river, my yard, my cars, my photograph with my husband and my children. This is happiness because I believe in the virtues of the American credo: religion, family, country, work, morality, money. Look at the feminists: not a single one has a successful life. Not a single one can offer American women a mirror in which they can recognize themselves.

Phyllis Schlafly, The Conservative Revolution in America

The sitcom breakthroughs pioneered by Norman Lear aren't apparent here; overall, it's still a throwback. But if most Americans want to spend thirty minutes a week tuned to a show that emphasizes love, family, and responsible parents—and showcases a great comedian like Cosby—so what? Maybe the traditional values of Father Knows Best really need to be updated every once in a while, just to keep us from losing touch with them.

John Javna, The Best of TV Sitcoms

Despite the election of a Republican president in 1968, the prevalent public discourse of the 1970s was one of liberalism and uncertainty. Such a historical climate provided opportunities for deviation and experimentation, and coincided with the coming of age of a new generation of TV producers. Their social vision and profit motivated efforts to cater to changing TV audiences in part led to new trends of "social relevance." Against a widespread sense of "cultural crisis," these TV producers began to express qualms about perpetuating traditional bourgeois values and
later debunked the traditional suburban father figure, replacing him with a blue-collar buffoon. The mockery of the blue-collar father figure was part of the so-called media "discovery of the working-class majority" and its efforts to court audiences of this "majority." But it was based on the middle-class producers' residual bias against American working-class people that dated back to the beginning of American television. Although some producers managed to project nostalgic father figures from the past, the most prominent TV producers of the seventies focused on ridiculing working-class bigots. This rejection of the traditional bourgeois father figure and the failure to project and endorse an alternative contemporary father figure effectively revealed the cultural confusion of the seventies.

However, in the 1980s America entered into a new conservative era. Public reiteration of "traditional family values" and changes of national sentiment gradually led to the decline of the "social relevance shows" and a comeback of the benign bourgeois father figure. By 1984 America began to witness a resurgence of the fifties style sitcoms, spearheaded by the unprecedented popularity of *The Cosby Show* and a rekindled popularity of fifties' family TV shows such as *Leave it to Beaver*. While the suburban father figure was being reincarnated, the burlesque of the working-class males continued with prime-time TV turning out new blue-
collar bumblers like Al Bundy and Homer Simpson, and reproducing the cultural pattern of the fifties' prime-time television. However, the reappearance of the benign middle-class father figure on prime-time TV was not a simple repetition of the programs from the past. In the making of the new middle-class father figure, TV producers incorporated changes that both catered to altered TV audiences, and reflected cultural changes that had taken place since the fifties. The concurrence of social conservatism and the popularity of the bourgeois father figure on prime-time TV in the 1980s implies an intricate connection between the two. It also suggests that TV image makers do cater to broad national audiences and popular sentiments. The renewed dichotomy of prime-time television images in a new but familiar historical environment suggests that American media workers have hardly freed themselves from longstanding prejudices against American working-class people.

A. The 1980s: A Decade of New Social and Cultural Conservatism

The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 marked the beginning of a new conservative era in America. Since the time of FDR and the New Deal, conservatism as a political philosophy had been rendered peripheral in American
politics. Even the two important post-War Republican presidents (Eisenhower and Nixon) who did manage to capture the White House governed with moderate conservative philosophies, which did not substantially differentiate them from their democratic predecessors.  

Ronald Reagan's victory in 1980 fundamentally changed American political reality. It revitalized the ideas of laissez faire capitalism, tradition, family and religion. Thus reaction against all the liberal gains achieved in the post-War decades characterized the social, economic, and political agenda of the Reagan Administration: anti-abortion, pro-school prayer, anti-school busing, anti-pornography, anti-government regulation of private and religious schools, anti-employment quotas, and anti-ERA.  

In response to Reagan's policies, America witnessed the emergence of several major conservative movements: the Moral Majority, Eagle Forum, the Religious Round-table, the Neo-right and the New Right. All of these movements eventually influenced

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135 Charles W. Dunn and J. David Woodard, American Conservatism, 12.
The conservative spirit of the Reagan era was manifested in Reaganomics, a theory based on "supply-side" economics, which fundamentally differed from the Keynesian economic philosophy. Rejecting consumer demand or government facilitation as the key agent of economic growth, the supply-side economists maintained that the capitalist elites or "the economic activists" were the real agents of economic growth. Therefore, Reaganite economists wished to minimize government intervention and taxation, and to maximize economic freedom for American entrepreneurs. Only under such circumstances, the supply-side economists argued, could American "economic elites" find the incentive to fully participate in economic activity and bring about growth. Furthermore, Reaganite economists argued that the economic prosperity brought about by the supply-side economy would eventually "trickle down" to all members of the society, --a theory which had flourished during the 1920s.

During the Reagan era, some prominent liberal intellectuals converted to conservatism. After a decade or so of exploring the leftist political territories, Norman Podhoretz openly advocated being rich and famous in his biography -- Making it (1980). His Breaking Ranks (1979) typically represented the shift from radical liberal politics to conservatism (anticommunism and fewer government
roles). Other formerly influential leftist intellectuals (notably Michael Novak) went through similar conversions. Meanwhile, conservative advocates firmly asserted traditional American values in American education. Allen Bloom offered the most influential critique of liberalism in American education in *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987); William Bennett, Secretary of Education, openly and frequently criticized the tendency of debunking traditional Western cultural values as the cornerstone of American education. 136

The resurgence of conservatism during the 1980s also manifested itself in a backlash against feminism. From the late 1970s to the early 1980s, American feminist movements encountered fierce resistance from conservative groups advocating the virtues of the traditional family. Prominent among these opposition groups was one led by a mid-Western Republican politician, Phyllis Schlafly. Ingeniously exploiting the changed political environment, Schlafly and her followers dealt a major blow to the American feminist movement by successfully blocking ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment Act in 38 states. These anti-ERA efforts were accompanied by well-organized pro-life campaigns which

also had a negative impact on the gains the feminists had achieved since the early 1970s. By the early 1990s, many prominent feminists had re-assumed subsidiary roles in their new relationships with men and the feminist movement was believed dead. 137

The alleged goal for the Reaganite "supply-side" fiscal policies was to increase incentives for capital to be reinvested. Whether such policies achieved their goals is questionable, but the immediate visible effect of the "supply-side" policies was that the wealthy, benefiting from tax cuts, became wealthier. 138 Hence by the early 1980s it again became respectable to pursue wealth with zeal and to flaunt it. The American heroes of the time were Ted Turner, Donald Trump and Lee Iacocca, and consumer binging became a prominent feature of American life. The Reagans set the pace for the new trend of conspicuous wealth by spending thousands of dollars on china and on renovations of their


138 Post-Reagan-Era studies suggest that such policies had only a minor positive effect on investment, and a modest positive impact on the labor supply. Anandi P. Sahu and Ronald L. Tracy, eds., The Economic Legacy of the Reagan Years: Euphoria or Chaos? (New York: Praeger, 1991), 16.
White House living quarters. 139 The sale of luxuries was strong even during recession years of the 80s. 140

According to a leading U.S. news magazine, much of what was in vogue in the eighties was reminiscent of the fifties: e.g., investment and property ownership, marriage and traditional weddings, patriotism and music of the 50s, plastic surgery and Chanel suits, among other things. 141 On university campuses, interest in educational courses waned, while enthusiasm in business courses rocketed. As if saying farewell to the relatively idealistic and liberal years of the sixties and seventies, university students again became "serious" about day-to-day tasks, leaving "profound issues" for others. 142

With the resurgence of conservatism during the 1980s, a different bourgeois life style flourished as a new generation of educated Americans came of age. Known as

139 It is reported that the Reagans spent $800,000 redecorating the White House family quarters and $209,508 purchasing the White House china. Newsweek, January 4 1988, 44.


142 Ibid., 62-63. Barbara Ehrenreich also sees the trend for university students to abandon pursuing less well-paid careers (education and social work) for lucrative ones in the early eighties (banking and corporate law). Barbara Ehrenreich, "Premature Pragmatism" in The Worst Years of Our Life (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), 30-34.
"yuppies" (young urban professionals) or "yumpies" (young upwardly mobile professionals), this new breed of middle-class Americans were stars in the consumer binge of "the decade of greed." Compared with their bourgeois precursors, the yuppies pursued material success harder, consumed more ostentatiously and, most importantly, had less patience with the thrifty and frugal life. An upwardly mobile social class, the yuppies had highly flexible political attitudes, opting for liberal social policies and conservative economic policies. They were libertarian on issues of gender and sex, and conservative on environmental issues. When Daniel Bell had addressed the cultural contradictions of capitalism during the seventies, he was seriously concerned about the vanishing of Protestant values in the face of an invading consumer culture. The prominence of the yuppie life style during the eighties seemed a confirmation of Bell's concerns and a proof of his prophecies.

Throughout the 1970s, politicians, scholars, government officials, and the public generally had lamented the disintegration of the American family and its traditional values. These concerns continued to haunt eighties America. Symposiums and public speeches addressed the issue of "the American family in times of trouble." The most symbolic of

these public debates was the White House Conference on Family held in three sessions (at Baltimore, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles) during the summer of 1980. But despite the three million dollars government spent on the project, the participants of the conference could not even agree on the definition of family. Opinions differed on this crucial notion among the "pro-life activists," "the coalition of organizations" and "the middle-of-the-roaders." 144 The "pro-life activists" held a strong conservative view, opposing abortion, the equal rights amendment and government encroachment on family rights; the liberal "coalition of organizations" maintained that changes in family life were both desirable and inevitable. In retrospect, the White House Conference on the Family mirrored the nation's division on the issue. America was still grappling with the reality of successive social changes in this oldest of social institutions, the family.

As the decade proceeded, the conservative view of family gained an upper hand in the national media. Although the print media continued to carry articles about "the American family in the time of troubles," television, radio, cinema defended traditional conceptions of the traditional family. Some even argued that the reputed decline of the American family was "the biggest hoax ever perpetrated on

Americans" by government agencies that used the myth to boost their prestige and increase their project funding.  

The Reagan Administration's reiterated emphasis on "family values" spearheaded a "family retrenchment" movement that aimed at reconstructing the patriarchal family.  

The Family Protection Act that aimed at reducing federal assistance to the family members was hailed as an act of "saving the family." Under increasing public pressures to shore up "family values," and facing a new conservative national mood, American television network executives and producers returned to traditional family images like the respectable bourgeois father figure. After all, domestic complications in a suburban family has been a favorite topic on prime-time television.

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148 Ibid., 64.
B. The Renewed Celebration of Bourgeois Respectability on the Prime-time Small Screen of the 1980s

1. Father Knows Best Again: the Resurgent Popularity of Suburban Family Shows

As Reaganite conservatism became fully entrenched, the decline of the Learesque TV series was accompanied by the resurgence of the fifties' style family sitcoms. Three such series -- *The Cosby Show* (NBC, 1984-present), *Growing Pains* (ABC, 1985-present), and *Wonder Years* (ABC, 1988-present) -- did well in the Nielsen's ratings. As sitcoms of the suburban domestic complications, they either expressed a nostalgia for the suburban life of previous decades or featured contemporary suburban middle-class life. Particularly noticeable in these reincarnated family series was the reappearance of the respectable middle-class father figure, making the bourgeois life style once again the model of decency. This conspicuous return of the bourgeois father figure reflected subtle changes in TV producers' perspectives and dramatic changes in national sentiment.

Among the newly created suburban TV series, *The Cosby Show* (NBC, 1984 - 1992) achieved phenomenal success. Benefiting from the unusual comic skills of Bill Cosby and the image of an upscale black professional family, the show
captivated American TV audiences. Compared with All in the Family, The Cosby Show emphasized the old themes of familial love, parental responsibility, and domestic harmony. In addition, the show portrayed upper middle-class professional family life. Both of these features represented backward steps towards complacency in television's representation of American life. In fact, the striking similarities between The Cosby Show and the shows of the fifties led critics to argue that The Cosby Show was a reincarnation of Father Know's Best.

With the success of The Cosby Show, American television has come full circle in its presentation of American life -- from Jim Anderson to Andy Griffith, on to Archie Bunker, and finally back to Heathcliff Huxtable. The reappearance of the suburban father figure at the end of this cyclical journey suggests that the resources from which American TV producers draw their raw materials for television drama are quite limited. It also suggests that a connection can be established between a complacent and conservative era and the popularity of the bourgeois father figure.

149 After 1985, it continued to top the Nielsen's rating service as the most popular TV show on American prime-time TV.

150 John Javna points out that the debut of the Cosby Show in 1984 marked that American TV sitcom have come full circle. He argues that the theme of family harmony and the portrayal of responsible parents all date back to the fifties' series. John Javna, The Best of TV Sitcoms (New York: Harmony Books, 1988), 78.
In contrast to the "socially relevant" shows of the previous decade, *The Cosby Show* focuses on suburban domestic complications rather than wider social issues. Story lines such as children's mischiefs or teenage dating again become main concerns. For example, in one episode, little Ruby (Keshia K. Pulliam) learns at home to play what she gets (a fiddle) rather than what she wants (a cymbal) in her music class assignment. In another episode, the whole family joins Ruby in mourning the death of her goldfish. Still another episode features a fight between Denise and Vanessa over the use of Denise's sweater. With a focus on such trivial matters in the Huxtables' private life the series dodges grave social issues -- for instance, racial tension -- that teenagers, particularly black teenagers, face when growing up in America. The change of focus in *The Cosby Show* definitely places the show in the tradition of *Leave it to Beaver* and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*. American TV producers have learned how to effectively appeal to a complacent national audience.

Except for the change of subject to a black family, *The Cosby Show* has many characteristics reminiscent of the middle-class family shows of the fifties. One of the most important characteristics of the show has to do with the middle-class status of the Huxtable family. Dr. Heathcliff Huxtable (Bill Cosby) of *The Cosby Show* is a counterpart of
Dr. Alex Stone of *The Donna Reed Show* in the 1980s. The two protagonists' profession, home, residence office, and preoccupation with their growing children are very similar. The Huxtable house of today may be taken as the Stone house about thirty years ago: a staircase leading up to upstairs bedrooms, a well-furnished and spacious living room, and a nice-looking facade. Of course, there are differences between the families and their establishments. *The Cosby Show* caters to the taste of the eighties' audiences; unlike the tasteless interior of the Stone house, Dr. Huxtable's house is embellished by many fine paintings and decorations, indicating that the Huxtables are more refined and more bourgeois. Taking advantages of today's color TV production, *The Cosby Show* presents the Huxtable family members in more attractive and more stylistic clothes. But these are superficial differences next to the important similarities between the two doctors' families in terms of social class, occupation, and prestige.

*The Cosby Show* also reminds us of the series of the fifties with its emphasis on the father's wisdom and responsibility. In this respect, the contemporary Dr. 

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151 When Bill Cosby initially proposed the show to NBC and ABC, he suggested that the show take place in a black blue-collar worker's home. Both NBC and ABC rejected the proposal. After Bill Cosby changed the setting into a black professional family, only the NBC network accepted the project. Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows: 1948 -- Present*, 4th ed., (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988,) 168.
Huxtable is a reincarnation of Jim Anderson of *Father Knows Best*. Like Jim Anderson, Dr. Huxtable takes meticulous care of his children and demonstrates his understanding of their needs. He helps Denise (Lisa Bonet) decide which college to attend, advises Vanessa to take a proper attitude towards her low achievement in a scientific contest, and teaches Theo (Malcolm J. Warner) to work hard on his school work and forget about becoming a "regular person." In most situations, Dr. Huxtable handles his children's problems with understanding, love, and often a sense of humor. Through his wisdom and model behaviors, Dr. Huxtable again establishes himself as an ideal father. But for Dr. Huxtable's complexion, the fathers in these two shows are so similar that an exchange of these characters would not make much difference in respective shows. This recreation of a responsible and authoritative middle-class father figure is part of TV producers' efforts to rebut the widespread belief that the patriarchal authority of the American family is besieged and diminishing.

In all this, *The Cosby Show* ignores social reality as squarely as *Father Knows Best* did in the fifties. Although set in New York City in mid-1980s, a time and place where the gap between the poor black Americans and middle-class black Americans was widening drastically, the producers of *The Cosby Show* choose to present a haven from social problems. Within this peaceful sanctuary, the Huxtable
children live under the loving care of their responsible parents. Outside this haven, the setting of the show can be in an art gallery, a restaurant, a jazz music club or a gymnasium. Yet invariably these settings and the actions taking place in them add to the already detached and bourgeois atmosphere of the show. When Norman Lear developed his "socially relevant" series in the seventies, he criticized the earlier shows for their neglect of social issues and their assumption of bourgeois values as the predominant values of the time. 152 The narrow focus of The Cosby Show marks a return to such negligence and bourgeois complacency.

Similarly, Growing Pains (1985-present), constitutes another updated version of Father Knows Best. Mr. Jason Seaver of the show is a psychiatrist, has his own home and home-office in a suburb of New York, drives a Ford-Taurus, and raises three precocious teenagers. Like Jim Anderson, Jason Seaver is mainly preoccupied with helping his children cope with their adolescent problems. The remarkable similarity between Anderson of the fifties and Seaver of the eighties suggests that the bourgeois suburban father figure is a ready stereotype that network television may employ to

152 Norman Lear, Speech on The 100 Episode Celebration of All in the Family, video available at UCLA Film and Television Archives.
attract American TV audiences in times of social conservatism.

This similarity between Growing Pains and the popular family shows of the fifties begins with the credits, which borrow heavily from the American family sitcom tradition. After featuring successive photos of each cast member at different ages (a new technique used to suggest the "growing" process), the series presents the whole family standing in front of their two-story suburban house for a family "album" photo. The use of a suburban house as backdrop, a symbol of middle-class comfort and security, recalls family series like Leave it to Beaver and My Three Sons. In addition, the collective family photo opportunity is clearly reminiscent of the credit of The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet. The benevolent father, the caring mother, and the fledgling youngsters, are all well posed in front of their suburban home for a big nice smile. After about a decade of family bickering with the Bunkers or vulgar jokes with the Sanfords, a "wholesome suburban family" again takes its "shot" on the American prime-time small screen. And Americans clearly welcome their return.

A comparison of two episodes from Growing Pains and Father Knows Best further illustrates the similarities between Growing Pains and its predecessors from the fifties. In one episode of Father Knows Best, despite her parents' eager encouragement, Betty makes her own decision
to go to a smaller college rather than the state university where her parents graduated. Although Mr. Anderson has a strong preference for the state university, he eventually respects Betty's independence. In a similar episode of *Growing Pains*, Carol (Tracey Gold) is faced with the choice between going to Columbia University on a scholarship and continuing to work in her company where she is newly promoted as a manager. For Mr. Seaver and his wife, Carol should abandon her current job no matter how prestigious it is and go to Columbia. But Carol, imbued with the professional pride she gets from the promotion, insists on continuing at her new position for at least a few months. An actual visit to his daughter's workplace persuades Mr. Seaver to respect Carol's decision. In both episodes, the father is portrayed as a wise and benevolent human being, who understands and supports his child.

In the late eighties, another new suburban show, *Wonder Years* (ABC, 1988--present), captured the imaginations of American TV viewers. The historical background of *Wonder Years* is the turbulent sixties. Yet the show carefully manages to focus on the adolescent world of Kevin Arnold (Fred Savage) while keeping larger social events as a distant backdrop. In terms of content, the show is a *Leave it to Beaver* for the eighties.¹⁵³ Like *Leave it to Beaver*,

¹⁵³ One critic is quoted as calling this show "a *Leave it to Beaver* with bite." Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, *The Complete Directory*, 870.
*Wonder Years* deals with three suburban teenagers coping with their adolescent problems with the help of their parents. As in *Leave it to Beaver*, *Wonder Years* features a comfortable suburban family with a busy father and a homemaker mother. Even the appearance of the small good-looking actor reminds us of Beaver from three decades ago. His brother, Wayne Arnold (Jason Hervey), recalls Wally Anderson. Although the show distinguishes itself by its touches of sentimentality and nostalgia, it again appeals to the public’s renewed desire for images of tranquil and loving suburban families.

However, *Wonder Years* is not a mere imitation of *Leave it to Beaver*. After all the vicissitudes of the past three decades, *Leave it to Beaver* now appears to be too innocent a picture of the American family. To appeal to audiences of the eighties, *Wonder Years* revises the sitcom format by adding an adult narration to the dramatic actions of the adolescent protagonist. In this addition, the narrator assumes the adult perspective of the boy protagonist. So Kevin Arnold always seems to be looking at important past events from two different perspectives: that of a child of the sixties and that of an adult of the eighties. As audience, we have to regard Kevin Arnold as two different persons. As we are amused by his childhood mischief, we are also enlightened by his mature interpretations of his childhood events. Although the matching between the narration and the action is sometimes awkward, the narration
does bring out deeper layers of meanings of the dramatic actions. In addition, the protagonist's adult perspective creates the illusion that the audience is actually re-viewing an innocent era from a sophisticated perspective.

*Wonder Years* further differs from *Leave it to Beaver* in its choice of the youthful actor and his performance. Whereas Beaver Cleaver was nice, innocent, and sincere, Kevin Arnold of *Wonder Years* is good-looking, precocious, and sophisticated. Whereas Beaver appeared to be a real twelve-year-old, Kevin Arnold often speaks and acts in an adult manner. These striking contrasts between the adolescent performers suggest a significant change in television's representation of American suburban life in two different decades. Whereas *Leave it to Beaver* still attempted a realistic portrayal of American suburban life, *Wonder Years* tries to achieve a more sophisticated version of that lifestyle today.

2. The New TV Father of the Eighties

Television network executives and producers had courted diversified audiences in the 1970s. Although the general political climate changed during the 1980s, some enduring factors in American culture and society continued to have impact on TV audiences. By then, the fact that a large percentage of the American labor force were women was
generally accepted by the public. Women’s increasing participation and economic independence inevitably redefined public opinion about women’s role in the family. The women’s liberation movement in the previous decade had made significant strides in preparing for such altered public images, as the Civil Rights Movement had prepared for a new perception and treatment of American ethnic minorities. In many ways, American society now seemed more receptive to ethnic minorities who were willing to conform to the American social norm and to compete with others on an equal footing. These changes affected what images TV producers in turn projected. In fact, the producers of the eighties were very careful to add fine tuning to their new images so that they might appeal to contemporary audiences.

One of the most prominent new features of the suburban father figure in the eighties has to do with the change of the protagonist’s ethnic background. The most popular show of the eighties, The Cosby Show, portrays the life of a successful black doctor, his attorney wife, and their family. Dr. Huxtable has fulfilled the middle-class "American dream" in every sense: he is a doctor, lives in a well-furnished town house with a home office, has married a successful black attorney, and has sent his children to Ivy

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154 The decade’s most popular prime-time family sitcom, The Cosby Show, featured the life of a black professional family. Jessy Jackson could make a bid for presidential election and did fairly well in the primaries in 1987.
League colleges. Representing a black man on TV like this had not been possible in previous decades. In the fifties, there were only Amos and Andy and other stereotyped roles that were generally demeaning or insignificant. After the sixties, there were working-class bumbler like George Jefferson, who were moving up, yet coping with problems that accompanied their upward mobility. In the eighties, the Huxtables have finally arrived at the upper rung of the social ladder, providing positive role models for the public. The improved record of the black American’s image on American prime-time TV suggests that real changes were taking place in the public’s perceptions, which in turn indicates progress in racial tolerance within American society.

In the eighties the sitcom that created the father figure most conspicuously different from his suburban predecessors was *Family Ties* (NBC, 1982 - present).

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155 People do notice that this is the first American prime-time TV series that features a truly positive image of a black American family, and acknowledge its function as an inspiration for black Americans. Donna McCrohan, *Prime Time, Our Time -- America’s Life and Times Through the Prism of Television* (Rocklin: Prima Publishing & Communications, 1990), 331.

156 In the culture of American prime-time television, it seems natural that the first popular series that offer positive black role models for the audience has to feature a middle-class professional family. It is also ironical that this fictional black family has to accept almost all the white middle-class standards before it could become a truly success on American prime-time television. For the change of social class backgrounds for *The Cosby Show*, see footnote No. 151.
Mirroring the cultural changes taking place in American society during the 1980s, the series had these three distinctive features: a subtle thematic change towards family harmony, the depiction of a liberal and open-minded father figure, and finally a distinctive and representative figure from the so-called "me-generation." Although Family Ties continued to dramatize ideological polemics in the home, it no longer conveyed the essential message of family disintegration. Instead, the series advocated domestic unity and harmony. We can see the subtle thematic change as a response to the public advocacy of family values in the previous decade.

Family Ties conveys the theme of domestic harmony in ways different from other family series of the decade. It was more ideological than The Cosby Show. It was less about how the father helps his children with their adolescent problems, than about how he treats them, particularly in later episodes, as adults with their own respectable viewpoints. The show inherits from All in the Family the format of father-and-son confrontation. Yet it reverses the ideological stereotypes of All in the Family by making the father a sentimental liberal and the son an ultra-conservative. In contrast to All in the Family, Family Ties attempts to convince the audience that love can link the family together despite ideological differences between generations. The word "ties" in the show's title conveys an
important message of "togetherness." In the series' credits, run as a prologue each week, the actors or actresses first appear individually in their own personal photos and then together in a family photo. Compared with the cliche-ridden sitcom signature (one with the family doing something together or standing in front of the house), this family photo more powerfully and evocatively symbolizes their emotional unity. Furthermore, the show's theme -- that love can transcend ideological differences -- manifests itself in each member's tolerance for the others' outlooks. This is particularly true in the lovingly adversarial relationship between Steven Keaton (Michael Gross), the liberal father, and Alex Keaton (Michael J. Fox), the adolescent yuppie son.

In the suburban shows of the fifties as we have seen, there had been a strong sense of self-righteousness behind the idealized father figure, as suggested by titles like *Father Knows Best*. In those series, the fathers and their children seldom confronted ideologically, and even when young characters asserted themselves, the father figure always proved to be wiser or morally correct. Unlike these fifties' predecessors, Steven Keaton of *Family Ties* did not assume the moral authority of the family, nor did his children regard him as infallible. Mr. Keaton was an ex-student activist -- a somewhat cynical liberal -- who has had great difficulties adjusting to the new conservative
environment of the eighties. In one show, when his son goes to a restrictive club, Mr. Keaton wants to stop him, but finally becomes unsure of his moral authority. In a telling moment, he admits: "We are both growing older. One of us is bound to grow up sooner or later." When Mr. Keaton advises his son that "you should be thinking about hopping on a tramp steamer and going around the world," he gets a laugh from Alex, who reminds him: "The 60s are over, dad." In numerous instances like this, Mr. Keaton's liberalism clashes with his son's conservatism. But Mr. Keaton has no moral authority over his son. This lack of moral strength in the father figure of a popular TV show of the eighties reflects a more permissive attitude toward the father's authority in a changed cultural environment.

Parental authority has also become more negotiable in Growing Pains. In a typical confrontation between the parents and their elder son, Michael, Mr. and Mrs. Seaver cannot agree to Michael's engagement to the family's nanny. But after some debates the parents finally change their mind because Mrs. Seaver suddenly realizes that she does not want to be an obstacle to her son's marriage as her parents were to hers. Whimsical as the result of the confrontation may seem, it nevertheless suggests that the parents' opinion, if they have one at all, is now flexible or even discountable. By contrast, a typical episode of Father Knows Best in the 1950s reaffirms parental wisdom; Betty and her fiance embark
on a romantic fancy and wish to get married before the boy really settles down with a permanent job. Yet Mr. and Mrs. Anderson finally manage to persuade the youngsters that early marriage is impractical and that a matter of such magnitude needs to be considered more seriously. The episode ends with the adolescents awakening from their romantic fantasies. The different outcomes from these two episodes indicate that in today's popular prime-time series the parents are less authoritative and less righteous than their fifties' counterparts.

In today's father figures we also see quite a different attitude towards women. The portrayals of men in the suburban TV shows of the fifties typically had strong, if unconscious, sexist overtones. In those shows, men were generally depicted as superior to women, who were dependent on males. In the characterization of Steven Keaton, however, respect for women replaces male-chauvinism. A comparison of two episodes from *The Danny Thomas Show* and *Family Ties* illustrates the change. In both episodes, the wife has a sudden yearning to sing publicly. In the *Danny Thomas Show* episode, Mr. Williams jeers at his wife, predicting that she will be too nervous to sing on stage, and sure enough, she freezes. So Mr. Williams turns out to be right. In the *Family Ties* episode, despite the children's disapproval of their mother's whimsy, Mr. Keaton encourages his wife to sing. She fails as Mrs. Williams did, but Mr. Keaton remains
as supportive as he was before her failure. So in Mr. Keaton, we see a much more supportive, sensitive and respectful husband -- the embodiment of today's liberal-pluralistic perspective.

The same respect for women is written into different male characters in other popular series of the eighties. None of the important female characters in today's popular family sitcoms is a housewife; they all have careers or occupations. Because of this change, their husbands tend to respect them. For example, Dr. Huxtable of The Cosby Show does not assume superiority over his wife. When one of his male-chauvinistic patients, Mr. Lee, asks him whether he is still the boss of the family, Dr. Huxtable directly tells him that the days when the man was the boss were thirty years ago. "The old-fashioned man is out," he advises his macho patient, "there's more to this relationship than being the boss." Similarly, Mr. Seaver of Growing Pains is married to a woman with her own career as a news reporter. In fact, Mr. Seaver decides to work at home so that his wife can manage her busy schedule as a newswoman. In Mr. Seaver's willingness to cater to his wife's professional life, we can see the progress women have made in American society since the days of Margaret Anderson and Donna Reed.
3. The Blue-collar Bumbler: Can He Be Portrayed Positively on American Television?

On fifties' prime-time TV, we have seen, the bumbling blue-collar father served as an anti-hero for the public, indirectly helping to enlarge and glorify the images of both the glamorous show business male and the suburban bourgeois father. On 1980s' prime-time TV, popular portrayals of the bourgeois father figure are likewise accompanied by contrasting depictions of the blue-collar bumblers. The juxtaposition of two very popular family shows -- The Cosby Show and The Simpsons, an animated cartoon series -- illustrates this point. In the former, a successful Black doctor works at home while dispensing advice to his well-behaved children. In the latter, an insecure nuclear plant worker has to cope with various pressures at his work place, and comes home to deal with his three rambunctious children. Dr. Heathcliff Huxtable is respectable, wise, understanding, and sympathetic; Mr. Homer Simpson is ridiculous, insecure and inept. The simultaneous popularity of the bourgeois "super-daddy" and the blue-collar laughingstock suggests that American television may need an anti-hero as well as a positive role model. When the positive father figure is all too idealistic, there must be a laughingstock, an incredibly stupid father to counterbalance the impeccable image. Unfortunately, it seems, the
anti-hero always has to be the blue-collar man. This perpetual negative portrayal of the blue-collar worker tells us that American TV producers are unable to transcend their limitations.

The first popular eighties prime-time series that featured a non-professional male figure was *Who’s the Boss?* (*ABC, 1984-present*). The show depicts a single father, Tony Micelli (Tony Danza), who serves as a housekeeper in the home of a single mother, Angela Bower (Judith Light). Both Tony and Angela have their own teenage children, Tony a girl and Angela a younger boy. But the intimate relationship between Tony and Angela eventually joins the two families. Within this semi-formal family, the conventional domestic household roles are reversed. The woman is now the actual boss, while the man keeps house. This kind of arrangement, even if on a mercenary basis, would have hardly been possible on the small screen of the past. It directly challenges the conventional wisdom that man is the boss of the household and woman is the homemaker. That such a domestic arrangement attracts large audiences shows how much the American public has relaxed its views on domestic gender roles.

A former boxer and a divorced father with his own daughter, Tony Micelli of *Who’s the Boss?* is not presented so as to win the audience’s respect, let alone the kind of admiration that Dr. Huxtable wins from his audiences. Tony
brings to the Bower household his working-class life style and mannerisms. He often wears blue jeans and a T-shirt, and his talk is accompanied by many hand gestures. When excited, he extends his spit-on hand for a handshake with his "boss" Angela. He still practices boxing in the basement of Bower's house, which reminds us of the New York cab driver and unsuccessful boxer, Tony Banta (Tony Danza) of Taxi (ABC, NBC, 1978-1983). The new Tony obviously builds on the old Tony with his coarse mannerisms and working man's life style. Above all, Tony is engaged in a job that wins him little social prestige.

Who's the Boss? resorts to the old sitcom format of featuring a strong female matched with a weak male, as typified in The Honeymooners. Although a warm-hearted father figure, Tony is inarticulate and dim-witted compared to Angela. In one episode, Tony decides to run for the President of the Neighborhood Parent Association. But on the election stump, he makes a bad speech and cannot respond to his opponent's ill-intended attacks on his personal relationship with Angela. So he has to withdraw from the election. In the end, it is Angela who makes an effective speech and helps Tony recover his reputation among the audience, and finally win the election. In this incident, Angela's fluent and effective speech contrasts with Tony's staggering, ineffective speech. A strong message conveyed here is that Tony, the macho guy and the working man, has
less brains and is less articulate. He has to rely on his intelligent girl friend to deal with a tough situation.

As a housekeeper and boyfriend, Tony has different values for work and pleasure. He wants to maintain a balance between work and leisure. His philosophy of life emphasizes freedom and relaxation, and de-emphasizes success and competition. But his values can not prevail in the show. When Angela is almost burnt out from constant overwork, Tony persuades her to take a vacation in Mexico. For a change, beautiful scenes of Mexican beach, restaurants, and dances replace her daily business routines. The vacation truly relaxes everybody, and almost changes Angela into a different person. But when Angela finds out that she has been fired from her president’s position because Tony did not deliver an important business message written in daily language, she reverts to her old self. She resumes to worry about work, status and prestige. The relaxation she has gotten from the vacation evaporates. As a result, Tony feels guilty about what he has done and has to apologize. Thus in the conflict between two different kinds of values, Tony’s inevitably lose.

Another popular series, *Married .... with Children* (Fox, ABC, 1987-present) somehow updates *The Life of Riley* for the eighties. Similar to Riley’s riveter working-class background, the male protagonist of *Married .... with Children*, Al Bundy (Ed O’Neill), is a shoe salesman. Without
the talent of an outstanding comedian like Jackie Gleason, the show has to resort to highly improbable plots, often portraying Al as a "moron" (his wife repeatedly calls him that). The "lovable" Al is either hung upside down from the roof when he goes up there for a repair job or he breaks down the living-room walls with a hammer trying to catch a mouse. The Bundy's are put up on television for audiences to laugh at. The moronic father whose sexual prowess is often the butt of the joke, the lazy mother who didn't even graduate from high school, and the rambunctious children -- a smart-aleck son and a functionally illiterate daughter. Everybody is there to put down somebody. No wonder critics call it a "heartless" show made up of cheap jokes. However, the show does effectively appeal to sex mores of the eighties. The show actually finds sexy insinuation (Kelly’s skin tight dress for example) a favorite device. But even in the eighties, the sexual scenes can only be set with Bundy's, not with the Seavers or the Huxtables.

As a husband and father, Al commands no respect. Always bumbling, he is the antithesis of a newly respectable middle-class father figure like Mr. Jason Seaver. In a typical episode, Al is depicted as a mindless glutton. Peggy (Katey Sagal) goes back to high school to take a home economics course with Kelly (Christina Applegate) in order to get her high school diploma. For a final class project, Peggy is to cook a lamb stew. After almost one night's
painstaking work, Peggy manages to cook the "project" and retires with Kelly for a short sleep. Early in the morning, the half awake Al comes downstairs and devours the stew. When the exhausted Peggy wakes up and gets ready for her final report, she finds a gluttonous Al snoring over the leftover stew. Nothing can be more disgusting than having a husband who mindlessly eats your class project for a long awaited high school diploma.

Neither does Al deserve any respect from his children. He personifies permissiveness and poor judgment. Al’s inept paternal image contrasts markedly with that of Jim Anderson in the fifties and of Dr. Huxtable today. For example, in another episode, the Bundy’s bombshell daughter, Kelly, becomes the weather reporter of a television station. A jubilant Kelly comes home to announce that she has found a job that pays her one thousand dollars a week. Instantly she becomes the "celebrity" among the Bundys. The next thing Kelly wants is a "porche" with a phone in it. Al, who is still struggling for his five-dollar pay-raise in his meager weekly salary, condones his daughter’s desire and helps her purchase a "porche" on credit. But since Kelly is a functional illiterate who can’t read the Telepromptor, she loses her job quickly, leaving Al to worry about the credit payments. In the end, when Kelly comes home, dashing the "Porsche" right into their porch, her celebrity dream has turned into her father’s financial nightmare.
The buffoonery of the blue-collar father figure climaxes in the popular cartoon series, *The Simpsons*. The show resorts to the traditional device of mocking the working-class male, making Homer Simpson a pathetic fool, an up-dated version of Chester Riley or Ralph Kramden. But the show, although in the form of a cartoon, aims at adult audiences, and at times actually becomes a social satire. It touches upon controversial social issues of our time such as political elections, environmental pollution, and adolescent problems. The integration of social commentary with a mockery of the blue-collar bumbler is new to American sitcom tradition.

Homer’s emphasized foolishness contrasts strikingly with his children’s cleverness. In a typical episode, the Simpsons send their smart-aleck son, Bart Simpson, to France in an exchange with an Albanian pupil, who is actually a well-trained spy. While Homer ends up letting the young spy take pictures of the nuclear equipment in his plant, Bart, on the other side of the Atlantic, helps arrest his two host-farmers who have had criminal conduct in their wine-making business. In another episode, Homer sets free the baby-sitter bandit whom his smart-aleck children have caught. The following conversations after Homer frees the baby-sitter bandit vividly reveal his foolishness:
Report: "Excuse me sir, are you saying to the world that you've just aided and abetted the escapable and notorious baby-sitter bandit?"
Homer: "The what?"
Report: "The baby-sitter bandit."
Homer: "Oh, well. Are you, are you sure this microphone works? Oh, well. Ah, I wouldn't say I aided her. This is alright (Testing microphone)? Because actually it was.... quite a struggle."
Bart: "Oh, Homer (helpless)!!"
Homer: (on TV now) "Have you ever seen a Kungfu that...? But now I knew she moves. So if you are listening to me lady, you'd better think long and hard before you try something like this. I'm Homer Simpson again."
Homer: (Watching his own conversations on TV in bed) "Lord help me. I'm just not that bright."
Marge: "No, Homer, don't say that! The way I see it, if you raise three children who could knock out and tie a perfect stranger, you must be doing something right."
Homer: Yah, yah. (They kiss.) Honey, can we make up again?"

The repeated messages about Homer's foolishness help maintain the longstanding stereotypical image of the blue-collar worker as a buffoon.

As a father figure, Homer Simpson can't provide his family with a positive role model. He is incompetent as a worker and unsuccessful as a father. He eats doughnuts at work, and crashes his electrical vehicle into an equipment and gets fired right in front of his son's visiting class. The same episode then features how a dejected Homer Simpson copes with unemployment. He indulges in alcohol, sleeps through his days at home, crushes his son's piggy bank to get the few pennies for beer, and finally decides to take his own life. Before leaving home to commit suicide, the producers make sure that Homer leaves a testimony of his failure. Here is what he writes to his family:
Dear family,

I am an utter failure. And you'll be better off without me. By the time you read this, I'll be in my watery grave. I can only leave you with the words my father gave me: 'Stand tall, have courage, and never give up.' I only hope I can provide a better model in that I didn't die (weeps).

Homer Simpson

Although later Homer dramatically abandons the idea of dying (he suddenly has the idea of putting up a stop sign at a dangerous intersection on the bridge where he is to commit suicide), the image of Homer as a failure comes across well in this episode.

In the making of the character Homer Simpson, the cartoon series resorts to a traditional popular culture device, that of the pathetic fool. While the show makes Homer the loser, it also makes him the underdog who wins our sympathy. Through all his hard times, Homer's wife is the first person to sympathize with him. As with Ralph Kramden, every time Homer faces deep trouble, his loyal wife consoles, supports and encourages him. When Homer becomes dejected about being fired for an accident, Marge comforts him with the words: "You've had plenty of industrial accidents and you've always bounced back." When Homer feels bad about setting free the baby-sitter bandit, Marge reminds Homer that it was his three children who caught the bandit in the first place. The episode that fictionalizes Homer's executive dream ends with Homer being transferred from an executive position back to his regular job as a worker.
Aiming to cheer the crestfallen Homer, Marge sings for him: "You are so beautiful to me, you are so beautiful to me." These scenes, reminiscent of scenes from *The Honeymooners*, are both moving and effective in winning at least our partial sympathy.

In contrast to other American TV series that mock the bumbling father figure, *The Simpsons* uses satire to address current social issues. For example, when Homer's plant manager, Mr. Burns, runs for governor, the show stages a bitter satire on American politics. In an attempt to catch up with his opponent in the polls, Mr. Burns and his campaigners come to visit the Simpsons to polish his public image. In this political drama, Homer Simpson is, as expected, the pawn to be used by the politicians. He is overwhelmed by Mr. Burns' visit, tries to persuade his wife and kids to support Mr. Burns. Ironically, it is Marge who deals a deadly blow to the phony drama. She prepares three-eyed odd fish, a side product of Mr. Burns nuclear plant, for dinner. When Mr. Burns is to swallow his "nature's own variety," he spits out the fish in front of the reporters. Thus Burn's manipulative drama turns out to be a political disaster. He leaves the Simpson's home warning Homer that all his dreams will remain unfulfilled. So the satire on politics is deftly combined with the buffoonery of the inadequate father. This addition of the
social dimension marks a move towards sophistication of this type of TV shows in the eighties.

In retrospect, despite some trendy changes in the characterization of the father in some new prime-time series, the overall pattern of prime-time television's representation of the father figure in the eighties was remarkably resemblant to that of the fifties. The glorification of the suburban middle-class father was accompanied by the mockery of the working-class father. It may not be a mere coincident that this new celebration of the bourgeois way of life happened in a social and cultural environment that was surprisingly similar to that of the fifties. The connection between a respectable bourgeois father figure on prime-time television and a conservative social era indicates that television can react to a complacent audience more readily than to a divided audience. It also shows to us that it is easier for the prime-time television to reflect the conservative national sentiment than the progressive sentiment.
CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSIONS

The preceding chapters have sought to answer some pertinent cultural questions through analysis of the salient features of the "television father" through four decades. The dissertation has delineated historical changes in post-World-War-II America and examined changes in the representation of the father figure on prime-time television, attempting to establish relationships between cultural changes in society and representational changes on television. In order to fully understand the significance of the construction of a popular television image, the study has also attempted to uncover the cultural and social values embodied in popular television father figures, and to discover the agents and influences responsible for the creation of TV fathers. Further, the dissertation has sought to answer the question of whether popular TV father figures and the values embodied in them are, as often claimed, mere reflections of public sentiments, or whether they are representations of TV producers' values and interests.

In earlier chapters, successive historical decades have been scanned in order to identify predominant themes and popular sentiments. Such historical sketches present the fifties and the eighties as complacent and conservative decades, the sixties as a progressive era, and the seventies
as a decade of liberal persuasion and confusion. Father figures in popular prime-time TV series from each decade have been analyzed in connection with various historical and social phenomena that seem to bear on their creation; repeatedly, such analysis reveals intimate but varied kinds of connections between father figures and the times in which they emerge.

In the broadest sense, American prime-time television has created images that fit prevailing cultural and social stereotypes and that reflect national sentiments. This is especially apparent in the connection between the conservative eras and the popularity of the bourgeois suburban father figure. In the complacent and conservative decades of the fifties and the eighties, bourgeois father figures were prominent on prime-time television; i.e. they truly wore the pants in the family.

The historical examination of father figures suggests that American television has produced three important prototypes of father figures over the past forty years: the bourgeois suburban father figure; the blue-collar bumbler; and the legendary and rural common-sense hero. Among these prototypes, the bourgeois suburban father figure has been the most important and durable. He was popular in the fifties, sixties and eighties, and remains popular today. From the fifties to the present, he has not changed very much. He is still known for his wisdom, authority,
responsibility as a parent, his prestigious profession, his willingness to understand his children, and his tolerance for different opinions. He values education, security, hard work, honesty and integrity. In a word, he is an embodiment of traditional bourgeois values and, often, of the producers' role model for the public.

In comparison, the blue-collar bumbler represents everything the suburban bourgeois father figure does not: ineptness, ineffectiveness, bigotry, permissiveness, blue-collar mannerisms, and general clumsiness. He too has been perennially popular, but mostly as an antithesis to the respectable bourgeois father figure.

Finally, the rural common sense hero was particularly popular in the progressive and liberal years of the sixties. He embodies rural and pre-industrial values such as informality, good neighborliness, common sense, simplicity, and honesty. Most of his specific social values are outdated today, but they tend to have a nostalgic appeal to the American public.

This overview of American TV father figures throughout four decades combats the argument that the American prime-time TV father differs completely from his predecessors. 157

157 Observing several new prime-time family sitcoms of 1987, Alice Hoffman concluded that images like Ozzie and Harriet had given way to different types of parental figures. While Hoffman may be right for a subcultural trend of the time, she neglected to see the reincarnation of the fifties style sitcoms in the eighties. Alice Haffman, "Move Over, Ozzie and Harriet" in New York Times 14 Feb. 1988.
Actually, he does not. It is true that alterations in his depictions reflect cultural changes in American society since the 1950s. For instance, today he may respect women and their careers more than did his predecessors. But in many other important social indexes such as authority, profession, traditional values, and respectability, he remains fundamentally what he was two or three decades ago. Jason Seaver today is not that different from Alex Stone in the fifties. They are actually both popular today. Since the TV series producers of our time have not changed much, and their reasons for constructing images for the American public have changed even less, there is little reason for the paternal portrait they create to differ dramatically from what it used to be.

The recurrent glorification of the bourgeois father figure and the exposure of the buffoonery of the blue-collar father figure have been two prominent features of American prime-time television. Both images indicate the strong bourgeois value orientation of American television and of the American public. The time-honored popularity of the bourgeois suburban father figure suggests that both the television industry and the public look to middle or upper

158 Of all the fifties and sixties sitcoms being rerun on today's cable TV, The Donna Reed Show is especially endurable. While other sitcoms come and go, this "ideal" parent show has been rerun from 1988 to present.
middle-class people for role models. In contrast, the consistent buffoonery of the blue-collar father figure indicates television's and the public's rejection and denigration of the life style of working-class people, which indirectly affirms the bourgeois life style as well.

The discussion of American television's and the American public's value orientation has raised the question of the role of TV producers in the process of image creation and value dissemination. Are the values embodied in popular father figures simply expressions and extensions of the audiences' values? Within the television industry people have argued that television simply gives what audiences want. 159 The evidence presented in the preceding chapters clearly indicates that this is not entirely the case. It is true that the networks and TV producers are always trying to sense what the public tastes are in order to cater to them. But it is also true that when the network executives and TV producers perceive a fundamental change or chaos in public sentiments they may try to define public tastes by providing images that are irrelevant to public sentiments or images that embody their own bourgeois values. The sixties' escapist father figures and seventies' nostalgic paternal

159 Some respondent to a study of the important factors that determine the staging of successful TV shows claims that the public is largely responsible for what is on television. Alex C. MacKenzie Jr., Descriptive Analysis of the Factors That Influenced the Creation, Introduction, and Impact of Selected Television Programs of the Years 1946 to 1976 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1979), 41.
images exemplify the attempts made by producers and network executives to define public tastes. Therefore, it is imperative to emphasize the perspectives of the TV producers and their role as intermediaries between audiences and the images eventually projected on television. The images network executives and TV producers project on television first and foremost embody their own bourgeois values.

The predominantly bourgeois backgrounds of network executives and TV producers and their powerful control of the image-making process have kept American prime-time family television essentially conservative and complacent. New popular family series or images -- those with breakthrough impact -- were often carefully thought out in relation to public sentiments. Prime examples of such careful contemplation and designs are All in the Family of the seventies and The Cosby Show of the eighties. In the conservative fifties and eighties, TV producers and network executives created the predominant suburban father figure who embodied traditional American values of family, honesty, security, and respectable profession. In the progressive sixties, however, the producers and executives were

160 According to a recent study, Hollywood TV producers and executives are predominantly white male, well educated and extremely well paid. Most have a religious background, yet have adopted secular outlooks. Although politically liberal, they generally endorse free enterprise on economic issues. Robert S. Lichter, Linda S. Lichter, and Stanley Rothman, Watching America (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991), 12 - 14.
extremely cautious about what to project on the prime-time small screen. When the mentality of TV producers was still lagging behind the times, escapist and irrelevant programs and images were the answer. Throughout the past four decades, the only time when American prime-time TV series underwent dramatic changes was during the seventies when they debunked the bourgeois suburban father figure and mocked an imaginary blue-collar bumbler. But this transformation occurred about ten years after the heyday of progressive social movements in America. In other words, if radical social changes and movements can have repercussions on American television at all, they can only happen about a decade later when network executives and producers are assured of the character of public taste, sentiments and needs.

Of course, the efforts made by network executives and series producers to appeal to national sentiments are to a large degree dictated by commercial interests. Profit is the ultimate success test for any television program. 161 It is true that network television at times can be topical and "socially relevant," as in the seventies. But to a large extent, network executives and producers endeavor to meet the commercial needs of network television or to maintain

161 Alex C. MacKenzie Jr. best reveals the business nature of network television when he quotes the opinions of TV producers and executives on this matter. Alex C. MacKenzie Jr., Descriptive Analysis, 34 - 36.
and recruit the maximum number of viewers. The "socially relevant" series of the seventies appeared at a time when audiences were themselves diversified and searching for alternative values. When at the end of the seventies the sense of "cultural crisis" and chaos began to dissipate and audiences' needs began to change, popular television series changed accordingly, abandoning the topical issues and resuming traditional topics.

Since the beginning of American television, the father figures it has created have been dichotomized into the first two prototypes, that of the nearly impeccable father and that of the laughingstock father. Of particular interest and curiosity to the author, as a Chinese observer, is the frequency with which fathers are ridiculed on American prime-time television. In the Confucian Chinese culture and in modern Chinese popular culture, this phenomenon of mocking the father is barely existent. The three cardinal principles of Confucianism maintain that ruler guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife. Accordingly, father's guidance, teaching, and dignity are crystallized in the Chinese father-and-son relationship. The inviolable paternal authority in the Chinese culture is an extension of a strict feudal system, in which the father and son have an unequal social relationship. The inequality between the Chinese father and son insists upon the son's respect and obedience for the father, and does not leave
much room for a sense of humor about his father. In comparison, the popular male buffoon in American culture suggests that although America may still be a patriarchal society, to Americans the father's authority is challengeable and even laughable. This eventually means a less strict social system where the son enjoys much more equality vis-a-vis his father than his Chinese counterpart. With social equality and latitude naturally comes the son's greater levity and sense of humor regarding his father. Unfortunately, American middle-class TV producers have tempered this sense of humor with their class prejudice, so that the buffoon is now exclusively the blue-collar man.

In the design of the dissertation, the interpretations of the most popular or mainstream prime-time television programs from different decades have been treated as clues to media workers' mentality as well as signs of prevalent public sentiments. This design, however, has left out subcultural programs which tend to represent different viewpoints, usually quite contrary, if not subversive, to values embodied in the mainstream prime-time family programs. Two cases in point are: The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour of the sixties and Saturday Night Live show of the eighties. Each targeted a different type of audience than the prime-time family audience and each presented a cynical or even critical opinion of dominant cultural values. A specially designed study of these subcultural
expressions in different decades or throughout television's history may also produce meaningful and interesting results in the study of American culture and society.

In light of the contemporary reader-oriented criticism, audience experience and reading of television programs are multicultural and socially diversified. Acknowledging its own cultural situation, this study concentrates on what Stuart Hall calls the dominant messages intended by the image producers. This, to a large extent, leaves other possible audience responses, interpretations and readings unattended. A study designed to have the researcher interpret fewer texts in a shorter historical span -- thus leaving him capable of including different types of audience readings -- would inevitably produce a more in-depth cultural study.

Using popular prime-time TV programs and images as a sign or suggestion of public sentiments or value orientation involves another important question that needs discussion: the issue of the seemingly universal appeal certain popular shows obviously have to audiences of different times. In the hall of fame of American television, such prime-time TV shows include, *I Love Lucy*, *The Honeymooners*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, *The Donna Reed Show*, and a few others. This phenomenon may lead the reader to have some reservations about the conclusions being made. In other words, if there are shows with transcendent appeal,
claims about the power of contextual events are much diminished. However, since the popularity of most of these old shows is greatly reduced in magnitude as compared with the popularity when they were first created, their popularity today can in no way be compared with their past popularity. In addition, people today may like them for different reasons. Therefore, the historical explanation of their popularity should still be more valid than any artistic or cultural explanation.

As the 1990s begin, America faces serious social, economic and political problems. A slow economic recovery, urban riots triggered by racial tensions, and an unprecedented election year voter discontent have led politicians to intensify their rhetoric on "the disintegration of the American family." Obviously, this renewed attention to "family values" is in part a continuation of the seventies' public discourse of "crises in the American family." It is politically expedient for politicians to use this subject to evade important issues of the time. However, preoccupied by issues like a troubled economy and the deficit, the American public is hardly convinced of the urgency of "the disintegration of the family." In synch with such public sentiments, American prime-time television has not reacted to this renewed discourse of "family disintegration" as it did in the seventies.
How will American prime-time television react to new social conditions of the nineties? Having provided the TV viewing public of the eighties with a renewed version of the comfortable suburbia, American prime-time television can no longer attract massive audience with similar series like *The Cosby Show* or *Growing Pains*. It is now waiting for crucial events that will help define the new decade, and is, therefore, at a crossroads to come up with new series and images that will capture the nineties' audience. Whatever the predominant series or father figures will be in the 90s, we can be assured of television's fundamental motivation to capture the maximum number of viewers. If the conservatism of the Reagan-Bush era continues, it is likely that prime-time television will come up with newer versions of the suburban family to appeal to a conservative audience. If, on the other hand, idealism and progressivism replace conservatism in the coming decade, prime-time television is likely to insulate itself again from such sentiments by resorting escapist programs and images. Under no circumstances is it likely for American TV producers and network executives to free themselves from their prejudices against the working-class people. There must be another era of social reforms and some real shifts in audience perspectives and tastes before there can be any meaningful changes in the characterization of the father figure in American prime-time television.
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