

**“THOSE WERE THE DAYS...”:**  
**ALL IN THE FAMILY AND THE ‘PRIMETIMING’ OF U.S. DIVERSITY AND COUNTERCULTURE**

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In the history of American primetime television, very few programs, if any, have had as startling and as permanent effect on the television landscape or have broken as many barriers as Norman Lear’s *All in the Family*. The program, along with the spin-offs and lookalikes spurred by it throughout the early 1970’s, brought long overdue change to the American identity that network television chose to reflect, finally bringing civil strife and intergenerational conflicts regarding race, equal rights for women and minorities, anti-war sentiment and youth culture into America’s living rooms and thereby into the forefront of public discourse. Lear’s go-for-the-jugular approach to dealing with the most divisive and politically incorrect social issues is indeed legendary, as he cleverly used the Trojan horse of laughter to deliver hard truths, and as he understood that America’s deep-seated problems had to be dealt with head-on if they were ever to be overcome—so as to root out the evil, as it were, so that the country could heal.

In order to appreciate the true impact that this ground-breaking CBS sitcom had on the television landscape, it is essential to first understand just how “out of touch” the television landscape of the late 1960’s was, the laughably meager steps that had been taken to touch on themes of diversity and counterculture, and the confluence of circumstances that made such a radical change even imaginable, let alone possible.

### **Part 1: The Late 1960’s**

#### ***Sitcoms on CBS: Network Dominance through Nostalgia and Escapism***

If the mid- to late 1960’s in the United States will forever be remembered as a period of intense social and political conflicts—of civil rights marches, sit-ins, anti-war protests, race riots, deadly clashes between students and police, racist attacks and lynchings (like those of civil rights youth leaders James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner in Mississippi), and the assassination of white and black political leaders such as Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr.—primetime programming on all three American television networks blissfully reflected none of that strife and social unrest. Such hard truths would be channeled into living rooms only through the news programs before and after the primetime line-up, which was instead solely aimed at family-friendly entertainment and soothing escapism. And although CBS will forever be lauded for changing the face of television through its landmark ‘topical shows’ in the early 1970’s—not only *All in the Family* but also *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and dozens of hard-hitting spin-offs and lookalikes—in the 1960’s, the network could not have been more out of touch in terms of primetime programming, particularly in terms of sitcoms.

The three types of comedy programs that dominated the television airways throughout the 1960’s all turned a blind eye to matters of diversity, unsettling social change and the rising youth culture: these were the rural sitcom, the fantasy sitcom and the comedy hour/variety show, all of

which made CBS the network ratings leader throughout the decade. The top-ranking rural sitcoms were indeed all on CBS and included *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960-68), its spinoff *Gomer Pyle USMC* (1964-70), *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962-71), *Green Acres* (1965-71), *Petticoat Junction* (1963-70) and *Hee-Haw* (1969-71). Appealing mainly to older TV audiences, these programs were a nostalgic *madeleine* back to the America of the 1950's, and viewers were reassured by the grassroots wisdom and old-fashioned horse-sense of heroes like Andy Griffith or by the hilarious antics of country bumpkins striking it rich or, conversely, of displaced city-slickers trying to cope with life in the country. The second most popular type of program was the fantasy sitcom, which could be found on all three networks. These included *Mr. Ed* (a talking horse: CBS, 1961-65), *My Mother the Car* (a talking automobile: NBC, 1964-66), as well as *Bewitched* (ABC, 1963-72), *I Dream of Jeannie* (NBC, 1964-70), *My Favorite Martian* (CBS, 1963-66), *The Munsters* (CBS, 1964-66), *The Addams Family* (ABC, 1964-66) and *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (NBC, 1967-70),—which, while appealing to younger and older viewers alike, collectively displayed how talking animals and appliances, witches, genies, aliens, ghosts, vampires and other monsters all hilariously tried to 'fit' in the small towns and quiet suburbs of white America. In hindsight, these premises might be seen as far-fetched metaphors for the more grueling fights for tolerance and integration being fought in America, but it is doubtful that many viewers at the time made that connection. The third comedy sub-genre, also dominated by CBS, was the traditional, long-standing musical 'variety/comedy hour', such as *The Jackie Gleason Show* (1952-70), *The Red Skelton Show* (1951-71) and the infamous *Ed Sullivan Show* (1948-71). All three appealed primarily to older viewers, though the *Ed Sullivan Show* occasionally showcased popular young musical groups, like the Beatles or The Jackson Five, that drew in younger viewers—but such appearances were implicitly framed more as a way for Ed Sullivan to give his older viewers an (often censored) earful of what the 'young folks' were listening to.

The reasons for this overall obliviousness to diversity, urban life and growing youth culture may have been less political than financial. In a time before focus groups and micro-demographic viewer studies, national Nielson ratings were king and the viewing audience was basically regarded as an indivisible whole. As the head of audience research at CBS at the time, Paul Klein, has explained, all that mattered was the overall number of viewers, with the highest rated shows charging the most money for primetime ad space. The norm, especially at CBS, was thus 'L.O.P.' (the acronym for 'Least Objectionable Programming'), allowing for the widest possible appeal (Klein 16). In addition, though networks understood that there were both urban and rural viewing audiences, the philosophy was that while urban viewers would still tune in for a rural program, the opposite *definitely* was not true (Ozersky 7). In terms of diversity, CBS in particular chose to play it safe by avoiding African-American actors, as the network was still stinging from being sued by the NAACP in the early 1950's for its demeaning racial stereotyping in *The Amos and Andy Show* (48). Similarly, the networks still remembered the havoc caused by FCC intervention in the Quiz Show scandals of the 1950's, and thus feared similar trouble should they be seen in any way as anti-Vietnam War or anti-government (36). It was thus the confluence of these political and financial factors that ensured that network TV would remain uncontroversial and blissfully oblivious to America's troubled times throughout the 1960's.

There was, however, one CBS program that would be an inadvertently ground-breaking but short-lived voice for the country's youth culture. Having seen NBC's great success among younger viewers with the musical-sitcom crossover *The Monkees* (1966-68)—a pre-fabricated, well-behaved and lily-white version of the Beatles for TV (often mockingly referred to as 'the

Pre-Fab Four'), CBS decided to launch a new variety program that mixed musical performances with comedy skits designed for younger viewers. When *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* (1967-69) began, the two brothers, Dick and Tom, were clean-cut and well-behaved folk singers with an old-fashioned smart-brother/dumb-brother comedy *shtick*, and the network was sure this was a safe bet. However, by the second season Tom and Dick were letting their hair grow and wearing Nehru jackets, and the subversive musical acts on the show began to send CBS executives into a panic, as someone had apparently let the fox into the conservative henhouse! Certain critics applauded the albeit inadvertent move, such as *Variety* writer Les Brown, who declared, "For the first time in history, popular culture is not being handed down to the younger generation but handed up by it" (Brown 48). However, CBS executives also began getting regular calls of protest from the Nixon White House (Ozersky 37). The show's writers had indeed provided a wolf in sheep's clothing, especially in terms of the comedy sketches. Many regular sketches relied on the clever use of slang words that young viewers would pick up on but that older viewers as well as network executives and producers would not. For example, a regular skit was "Share a Little Tea with Goldie," in which a hippie girl used 'tea' as a clear (to some) slang word for marijuana, as well as many other references beyond the grasp of older viewers. In terms of musical performances, however, there was no masking their subversive nature. Performers included counterculture icons like Joan Baez, Cass Eliot, The Doors and The Who, whose over-charged on-stage explosions left CBS executives saucer-eyed and lead guitarist Pete Townsend partially deaf. Worse still, top CBS administrators, who were stout Republicans and feared the wrath of the Nixon administration through its FCC arm, began censoring the program. Thus Pete Seeger's performance of his anti-war ballad "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy" was cut from the program in season 2 (only to be re-performed later that season), and Harry Belafonte's musical tribute to the 1968 Democratic National Convention was cut from another episode and replaced by a five-minute pro-Nixon ad. By the last season CBS was censoring entire episodes rather than individual performances, and when new CBS president Robert Wood stepped in, in 1969, he immediately cancelled the program on a technicality (the taping of a show was turned over two days late), in the hopes that the network's conservative image had not been too tarnished by the short-lived program (Ozersky 33-38). Thus this first accidental excursion into youth culture on CBS was also one of its most patent examples of censorship.

Apparently determined to cater to its key rural demographic, and to quickly correct the Smothers Brothers error, CBS instead created the variety show *Hee Haw* (1969-71), which instead showcased country music as well as the barnyard antics and the apolitical, cornball jokes of its comics dressed as hillbillies. The show was in fact a rural copy of NBC's successful *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* (1968-73), which targeted viewers in their twenties and thirties, unlike *Hee-Haw*, but steered clear of any political statements or representations of the counterculture, unlike *The Smothers Brothers*, in spite of the show's irreverent cast of younger comics and in spite of the show's misleading name (*Laugh-In* as a play on 'sit-in'). In terms of comedy especially, all of the networks seemed to be playing it safe.

### ***ABC & NBC: Diversity & Youth Culture through Spy Drama, Crime Drama, Sci-Fi and Superhero Programs***

Early attempts to present diversity and counterculture would thus not come from top-ranking CBS, nor from comedy programs, but instead from more dramatic series on ABC and NBC. Though third-ranking ABC, at the time a younger network established mainly in big cities,

likes to take credit for being the first to target the youth and counterculture demographic in the mid- to late 60's (see for example former ABC CEO Leonard Goldenson's 1991 book *Beating the Odds*), NBC was actually the first to use diversity in an attempt to bring in younger audiences, though the steps taken were far from radical. In 1965, NBC was the first network to have an African-American in a leading role during primetime, when Bill Cosby co-starred with Robert Culp in the international spy drama *I Spy* (1965-68). Cosby played Alexander Scott, a former Rhodes Scholar fluent in many languages, who used his cover as a tennis trainer to playboy-spy Kelly Robinson to solve James-Bond-style intrigues. CBS would follow suit the following year with long-running *Mission Impossible* (1966-73), by having an African-American be part of the crack spy team (Greg Morris played Barney Collier, a mechanical and electronics genius and the owner of Collier Electronics). Both shows, riding the wave of the popular Bond films, gave us 'model' successful black characters devoid of any cultural difference from their white counterparts, and without ever dealing with civil rights issues or racism. The actor Robert Culp, in an interview provided on the 2008 DVD release of the *I Spy* series, has summed up their approach to racial and civil rights issues rather well: "Our statement was a non-statement."

NBC would also follow up on this initiative by including a young African-American as part of an all-white team of do-gooders in the immensely popular *Ironside* (1967-74), in some ways inventing the 'reformed punk' image as a vehicle for putting young African-Americans into TV crime drama. Don Mitchell played Mark Sanger, a former juvenile delinquent who dreamed of becoming a police officer and worked as wheelchair-ridden *Ironside*'s bodyguard/assistant. Sanger was attending night school to study law, and as the series progressed over the years, he graduated and became a lawyer—a model of upward integration into white society that sat well with conservative viewers. ABC however, would indeed go one step further with its groundbreaking *Mod Squad* (1968-73), which used this 'converted punk' motif as vehicle to bring both diversity and youth culture to the forefront in a crime series. The premise was the creation of a special unit of the police, made up of young former delinquents, who would go undercover to stop criminals and drug cartels preying on the city's young people (thus making it the forerunner of much later shows like *21 Jump Street*). The trio of young crime-fighters included characters Pete Cochran (a troublesome, rich white kid once convicted of theft), Julie Baker (a poor white runaway) and Linc Hayes (a righteous black rebel who had had a few run-ins with the law), and ads for the program in TV magazines proudly captioned the photo of the trio as "One black, one white, one blonde" (Ozersky 46). The 'mod' in *Mod-Squad* stood for 'modern,' and this was indeed the first crime drama to both focus on, and appeal to, youth culture and to base its weekly cases on youth-related news reports. However, much like in *Ironside*, the model offered to young rebels was indeed the need to join the establishment and to respect the police and authorities.

In addition to spy drama and crime drama's attempts to bring themes of racial integration and counterculture into primetime, similar though timid attempts were made through science-fiction and super-hero programs specifically targeting a young audience. ABC's popular super-hero parody *Batman* (1966-68), in spite of its camp staging and dialogue, was indeed anti-establishment, mainly as it sought to undermine the traditional and very conservative representations of the super-hero that had been the mainstay throughout the 1950's and 1960's. In addition, the third season especially saw the presence of openly 'hippie' characters and dialogues that began to include slang and countercultural references, though racial diversity was indeed never an issue in a decidedly white Gotham City. In terms of sci-fi, NBC offered the now cult series *Star Trek* (1966-69), which offered young viewers a future utopia of racial integration, as

seen both concretely by the presence of a black woman as a key member of the crew of the U.S.S. Enterprise (Nichelle Nichols starred as Lt. Nyota Uhura, the ship's communications officer)—a crew that also included an Asian and a Russian character (helmsman Lt. Sulu and navigator Ensign Chekov)—and symbolically as much through the show's premise of a United Federation of planets as through Captain James T. Kirk's romantic conquests of alien women of various Technicolor skin-tones. Much like *Batman*, it would be in the show's final season that issues of counterculture would be given more direct treatment. For example, in episode 20 of season 3, entitled "The Way to Eden," the crew has to deal with a group of intergalactic hippies who try to take over the ship, misled as they were by their guru in a fanatical attempt to find a rare plant that will bring them to paradise. The episode, however, seems more designed to mock the hippies of the 1960's than to validate their movement, and in the end Spock and Kirk manage to get them to see the errors of their misguided ways. As always on the program, a pro-diversity stance far outweighed other youth issues, and episode 15 of that last season, entitled "Let That Be Your Last Battlefield," testifies to this. Here the Enterprise protects a political refugee named Lokai (Frank Gershin) from his pursuer Bele (Fred Antonio), who both hail from a planet caught in a violent race war. Inhabitants of the planet are all literally half-white (on one side of their bodies) and half-black (on the other), but the 'superior race' is taken to be those who are black on the left side and white on the right (like Bele), while the oppressed minority is black on the right side and white on the left (like Lokai). The crew's attempts to convince the two aliens that violent conflict over such a difference in skin color is ludicrous, but to no avail—as in the end the violent and senseless race war destroys the two visitors' home planet. Although a metaphor, very few programs in the late 1960's made such a direct attempt to address the civil rights issues dividing the nation.<sup>1</sup>

## II. Bringing Diversity and Counterculture Center-Stage through Sitcoms

### *Stage 1: Unsuccessful Attempts at ABC & NBC*

To return to sitcoms, ABC and CBS also attempted to use this medium to showcase diversity and counterculture and thereby to dethrone 'conservative and rural' CBS, though this first stage, from 1968-1971, would also be timid and have little lasting effect. As regards diversity and civil rights, NBC would again be the first one to put African-Americans center-stage by creating the first 'ethnicoms' on U.S. television and by making black actors Diahann Carroll and Bill Cosby each the stars of their own sitcom. NBC touted this breakthrough in TV magazines with headlines like "Black is the color of your new TV," but civil rights leaders and liberal TV critics would nevertheless write off these programs as "warm, plush, middle-class [...] tokenism" (Hamamoto 90, Shayon 46). *Julia* (1968-71) was the first and, in the end, the more ground-breaking of the two programs. Julia Baker (Diahann Carroll), widow of a Vietnam helicopter pilot, raises her young son Corey in a predominantly white L.A. suburb. Working as a nurse in an all-white health clinic, she is financially independent and has fully integrated white middle-class norms. The theme of racism does occasionally crop up—in one episode she consoles

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<sup>1</sup> For another discussion of the countercultural elements of this series see Donna Spalding Andréolle, "Beam me up Scotty, there's no intelligent life down here": The Failed (Counter)cultural Message of *Star Trek the Original Series* (1966-1969) in EOLLE 1 (2012) *The Woodstock Years* [http://www.univ-lehavre.fr/ulh\\_services/IMG/pdf/andreolle\\_beam\\_me\\_up\\_scotty-2.pdf](http://www.univ-lehavre.fr/ulh_services/IMG/pdf/andreolle_beam_me_up_scotty-2.pdf)

her son after he is called an (unspecified) racial slur at school, in the pilot she has to overcome racial stereotyping during her job interview, and in the Christmas special little Corey and his best friend Earl (who is white) get into a heated argument over whether Santa Claus is black or white, bringing in the parents of both children to try to find a politically correct way to settle the argument. However, the show seemed more than utopic due to the fact that all of Julia's white friends and co-workers were remarkably color-blind. Though the show was preaching by example, showing how a black woman could move up the social ladder and how whites should not take a person's color into consideration, the label of "tokenism" came especially from the fact that Julia and the other black characters dressed and acted like fully-fledged members of the white middle class, without the slightest trace of ethnic or cultural difference, the only true signs of black culture being limited to the music and graphics of the opening theme. At the very least, the show did more to further the cause for feminism, by giving us its independent and fulfilled single-working-mother model, regardless of her color.

Similarly, the short-lived *Bill Cosby Show* (NBC, 1969-71) would be another attempt to focus on blacks living like whites—the cornerstone of Bill Cosby's career-long approach to race relations on television, spanning from the above-mentioned *I Spy* in 1965 to his immensely popular *Cosby Show* in the 1980's and early 1990's. Cosby played Chet Kincaid, a caring gym teacher in a predominantly black L.A. high school, and the program sought to demonstrate that black children and families were really no different from their white middle-class counterparts, leaving racial tensions completely out of the picture. Thus this attempt by Cosby and his producers Marvin Miller and Ed Weinberger to demonstrate successful integration was again labeled "tokenism," and the unsuccessful program was cancelled after two seasons.

Simultaneously, ABC would also try to use the so-called social-awareness sitcom as a vehicle in a failed attempt to overthrow CBS, most notably through their semi-dramatic sitcom *Room 222* (1969-74), though the younger network would opt for a more didactic approach to teaching tolerance to viewers—a technique it also used on the theme of single fatherhood in *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* (1969-72). *Room 222* focused on the faculty and student body of Walt Whitman High School, a supposed inner-city school in L.A. that looked remarkably collegiate. The main characters were the teachers, who included a white liberal student-teacher (Karen Valentine), a cynical but well-meaning white principal (Michael Constantine), and two African-American faculty members—student counselor Liz McIntyre (Denise Nicholas) and history teacher Pete Dixon (Lloyd Hayes), who augmented his History lessons in room 222 of the title with important life lessons on tolerance. If staff members could be accused of having no signs of cultural difference and of conforming to white middle-class values (much like in *Julia* and *The Bill Cosby Show* on NBC), this was not the case for the student body, a true 'rainbow coalition' of every possible minority group, symbolically seen cheerily walking together to class during the opening theme. To the show's credit, the students' cultural differences were emphasized (for example, one of the proud African-American students wore a dashiki and had an afro), and on occasion racial tension reared its angry head in the classroom, but the overall message still seemed to be that tolerance and hard work among the younger generation of any creed would allow them to integrate white middle-class norms and access the American Dream. That said, the success of the program as a vehicle for raising social awareness among all viewers and its mild ratings success should not be too greatly underplayed.

Thus NBC and ABC should be credited with first trying to bring diversity and youth culture to the American sitcom, which was still the most popular type of primetime program and the

biggest cash-cow for networks in terms of ad revenue. However, these programs did not put the slightest dent in CBS's sitcom dominance. In the late 1960's, if the times they were a-changin', CBS certainly was not, in spite of the brief Smothers Brothers fiasco. How is it then that rural and conservative CBS would be the one to revolutionize television through social awareness programs like *All in the Family* and forever reshape the landscape of American television in the early 1970's?

### **Stage 2: CBS and All in the Family**

Even if CBS, while faithfully sticking to its policy of 'Least Objectionable Programming' and its predilection for rural settings and reassuring escapism in sitcoms, was still by far the ratings leader among the networks and boasted seven out of the top ten programs in 1970, executives began to realize that this could not go on forever. This new impetus for change was in many ways the result of new demographic data from Paul Klein, the director of research at CBS (Edgerton 274). It was Klein who explained to president Robert Wood and head of programming Fred Silverman that national ratings were misleading and that specific demographic groups had to be taken into consideration. He also explained that while CBS programs were far ahead in overall national viewership, far less successful programs at other networks like *Julia* or *Room 222* were able to charge more for advertising time than top shows at CBS, as they tapped into a demographic of young, urban consumers whom sponsors were more interested in. The demographic for CBS was unquestionably poorer, more rural, less educated and only incidentally more conservative than viewers of NBC and ABC's timid efforts at programs focused on diversity and youth culture.

Advertisers were thus growing less interested in CBS's audience of modest consumers, whatever the ratings, and certain upcoming political decisions from the FCC were destined to put an additional strain on the network's revenue. For example, the FCC had announced a coming ban on cigarette advertisements on television, a high source of ad-related income, which would take effect on January 2, 1971. The government agency also announced a coming 'Prime Time Access Rule' that would take effect in May 1971 and would reduce the primetime window by thirty minutes, which meant not only that some successful programs would have to be cut but also that there would be fewer lucrative primetime ad slots. There was also the 'Fin-Syn Decree' of 1970 ('Financial Interest and Syndication Rules'), apparently initiated at the behest of the Nixon Administration (Ozersky 61). Nixon aide Jeb Magruder had sent a memo to HR Haldeman on finding a strategy to stop "unfair coverage" of conservative politics and of the Vietnam War by using anti-trust laws as a weapon to stifle network television (Edgerton & Pratt 15). The Fin-Syn Decree prohibited the networks from owning or too heavily investing in the production of their own primetime shows, thereby forcing them to look for independent producers and limiting network revenue solely to ad time, apparently in the hopes that this would break up the networks' monopoly and reduce the networks' ability to promote what the Nixon administration saw as their too liberal, anti-government agenda.

It was in this context that Fred Silverman, with the surprising approval of CBS president Robert Wood—the same man who had pulled the plug on the Smothers Brothers just a year earlier—instigated what is now known as the "great rural purge" of 1970-71. In this shocking move, CBS abruptly cancelled or wound down nearly all of its most popular sitcoms (from *Mayberry* and *The Beverly Hillbillies* to *Green Acres*, among others) and comedy hours (including those of Red Skelton, Jackie Gleason, and even Ed Sullivan)—all among the top

shows on television—in order to bring in a new generation of more urban and younger audiences (Edgerton 274-75). The new buzzword for Silverman and Wood was “relevance programming,” and the hope was that the network could shake its image of being successful but completely out of touch and attract higher revenue from sponsors given the new target demographic.<sup>2</sup> As bold and unprecedented as the move was, it was a gamble that paid off ten-fold and ensured CBS’s continued ratings dominance over its two rivals for most of the 1970’s. Thus the government’s apparent plan to stifle more liberal voices during primetime backfired, as independent producers were more likely to propose more radical programs and as the networks seemed to fear lost ad revenue far more than they feared FCC intervention.

The very first independently produced ‘relevance’ sitcom that Wood and Silverman green-lighted was *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-78, 168 episodes), produced by Moore and her then-husband Grant Tinker and his MTM Productions, which would win 29 Emmys, have three spin-offs and forever revolutionize the image of women on American television. Mary Richards—by foregoing marriage and motherhood, moving to the big city to become an independent and self-sufficient working woman (that is, “making it on her own”), and finding fulfillment in both her work environment and her social life, which involved casual dating and girls’-nights-out with her two best friends, Rhoda and Phyllis—was at polar opposites with the traditional image of women on television and instantly became a feminist icon. In fact, the show would change the television landscape in two key ways, owing to the show’s double focus of work-life and social life. On the one hand, Mary’s co-workers at the WJM newsroom in Minneapolis became her surrogate family, with Mary the wisest of the bunch, thus paving the way for work-based sitcoms throughout the 1970’s and 1980’s such as *Barney Miller*, *Taxi*, *Archie Bunker’s Place*, *Murphy Brown* and *Cheers*. On the other hand, the feminist showcasing of an independent female lead would open the door to other sitcoms on CBS focusing on single women in the big city, such as the show’s first spin-off *Rhoda* (1973-78, 109 episodes), on single (widowed) working mothers, such as *Alice* (1976-85, 202 episodes), and on (for the first time on U.S. television) *divorced* working mothers, such as *One Day at a Time* (1975-1984, 209 episodes). However, as ground-breaking as this series of programs was, the feminist issue was promoted at the expense of those of racial diversity and counterculture, which were simply not part of the scope of the *Mary Tyler Moore* model.

However, it was another independently produced ‘relevance sitcom’, first airing as a mid-season replacement on CBS in January 1971, that would take on issues of racism, government protest, conflicts between the generations and between conservatives and liberals, and a host of other controversial issues head on: Norman Lear’s *All in the Family*.

The impact of the Lear approach to social awareness sitcoms is immeasurable, and his signature approach to promoting tolerance and liberal causes was indeed far more radical and far-reaching than those originally used at NBC and ABC in the late 1960’s, with their color-blind ideals and child-like didactics. Norman Lear had been a comedy writer for such family-friendly, conservative shows as *The Colgate Comedy Hour* and *The Ford Star Revue* in the 1950’s, but in 1968 he understood that American TV needed to be shaken up and that the country’s deep-seated problems had to be dealt with head-on if they were ever to be overcome. With this in mind, Lear

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<sup>2</sup> As Josh Ozersky cleverly points out, the need for CBS to consider more ‘relevant’ programming is painfully apparent when one takes a look at the primetime line-up they had on May 4, 1970—the day of the Kent State student massacre: *Gunsmoke*, *Here’s Lucy*, *Mayberry RFD* and *The Doris Day Show*, bookended by news reports on the massacre (51).



and his partner Bud Yorkin, Jr., through their Tandem Productions company, bought the U.S. rights to two very controversial sitcoms in Great Britain in 1968, one of which would be the model for *All in the Family*.

The first 'britcom' revamped by Lear was *Till Death Us Do Part* (BBC1, 1965-68, 1972-75, 54 episodes), a gritty kitchen-sink-style sitcom that staged ruthless shouting matches within the dirt-poor Garnett household in Wapping. Here, loud-mouthed, ignorant, racist and pro-Tory patriarch Alf Garnett (Warren Mitchell) fought it out at home with his long-suffering but belligerent wife (Dandy Nichols) and the outspokenly liberal and pro-Labour tag-team of his daughter Rita and her relentless husband Mike (Una Stubbs and Anthony Booth). By putting violent political and social clashes between family members center-stage and by allowing swear words to punctuate the arguments, the program had broken many barriers in England. It was Lear's hope to do the same by adapting the premise to American issues and American audiences, and he immediately made a first pilot for ABC in 1968, which was turned down as too controversial. The unaired pilot was entitled "Justice for All" (the Bunkers were then called the Justices), was set in a lower middle-class home in Astoria, Queens (and so of a slightly higher social class than in the British original) and gave us the basic set-up for *All in the Family*. Though Lear had found his Archie and Edith in Carroll O'Connor and Jean Stapleton (two seasoned Broadway and TV character-actors), the main characters would all change significantly before any viewers would see them in the 1970's. For Archie Justice, Carroll O'Connor seemed to be doing an impersonation of Jackie Gleason's beloved loud-mouth Ralph Kramden from *The Honeymooners*, and though a 'hard hat' Archie wore a suit and tie at home. Edith was also more volatile than her later character, perhaps taking a cue from the original British show. The first daughter and son-in-law characters (Gloria and Dickie, an Irishman) were played by Kelly Jean Peters and Tim McIntyre and were so belligerent they would need far more than one episode to grow endearing to the public. The pilot also focused on Archie's racism and Dickie's *atheism*, which most likely prompted the outright cancellation of the project. The following year, Lear returned with a second pilot for ABC, this time called "Those Were the Days," a reference to the future show's well-loved theme song, a nostalgic pining for simpler days when "everybody pulled his weight" and "girls were girls and men were men," sung at the piano by Edith and Archie. For the second pilot, the son-in-law and daughter were recast (Chip Oliver and Candice Azzarra) and were far less outspoken, Edith and Archie made the characters more of their own, and nearly all talk of God and atheism was cut out—but ABC still turned it down, opting instead to channel money into safer, rosier and decidedly musical visions of new youth culture, in shows like Sherwood Schwartz's *The Brady Bunch* (1969-74) and Bernard Slade's *The Partridge Family* (1970-74). ABC also decided that a better venue for showcasing the clash between generations would be through a new game-show, "The Generation Gap" (1969), in which older contestants were asked questions on youth culture, younger ones on news and culture of the 1940's and 1950's (Ozersky 56). Not surprisingly, perhaps, the show was cancelled before the end of its first season.

It was certainly a huge error in judgment on the part of ABC, and CBS seized the opportunity when Fred Silverman, in the midst of the 'great rural purge' at his network, contacted Lear and asked him to film a third pilot for CBS for the 1970-71 season. By its season debut on January 12, 1971, all of the kinks had been worked out of the four main characters. O'Connor, an outspoken liberal in real life, made Archie Bunker the universal archetype of the loud-mouthed, right-winged bigot who inevitably stumbles over his own malapropisms and patent ignorance.

Stapleton made Edith the endearingly simple-minded and long-suffering wife viewers came to love and root for, and Lear cast Rob Reiner and Sally Struthers (respectively a former comedy writer for and a former dancer on the scandalous *Smother's Brothers* show) in the younger roles. Reiner's Mike Stivic, a Polish-American, was more sympathetic in his portrayal of the well-meaning liberal son-in-law, and Struthers took on what may have been the most difficult role, as Gloria was a young woman caught between loyalty to her father/family on one side and to her husband/liberal beliefs on the other. Lear had also found a clever way to get past CBS's chief censor, William Tankersky, head of Standards and Practices: This time Lear added lots of extra gags and bits that were rather unimportant (e.g., Mike zipping up his pants as he leaves the bathroom), so that cuts could be made to appease the network censor without taking much away from the show he wanted to air (Ozersky 64). The plan worked, CBS green-lighted the show for a thirteen-season trial season, and *All in the Family* (1970-78) was born.

On the night of the premiere, CBS executives feared an onslaught of calls from angry viewers and perhaps even from the FCC, given the racy language and subject matter, hiring teams of call-handlers and providing a long disclaimer before the first episodes that rather succinctly stated Lear's purpose:

The program you are about to see is *All in the Family*. It seeks to throw a humorous spotlight on our frailties, prejudices and concerns. By making them a source of laughter, we hope to show, in a mature fashion, just how absurd they are.

This serious warning was followed by the sound of a toilet flushing –something that had never been permitted on American television before and that is often referred to as “the flush heard round the world” (Bloom & Vlastnik 19)—for it heralded a program that would run, including its sequel *Archie Bunker's Place* (CBS, 1979-83), for a total of thirteen years and over 300 episodes, that would spark eight spin-offs on CBS and nearly as many lookalikes on other stations, and that would redefine both the American television landscape and the American identity it reflected.

There was no flood of angry calls, but one could still say that *All in the Family* was not an instant success: initial ratings were mediocre, and critical reviews of the season premiere were quite mixed—with, for example, *The New York Times*, *TV Guide* and the weekly *Variety* finding it the best thing on television, while *The Washington Post*, *Life*, *Time* and even the daily edition of *Variety* felt it was a disaster and “an insult to any unbigoted viewers” (Ozersky 69). However, the success of summer reruns, word-of-mouth enthusiasm about the program, and a bevy of Emmy Awards (including Emmys for all four main characters—another first), would soon make it the most watched show of the entire decade, make CBS the continued ratings leader for most of the 1970's, and make “Archie Bunker” and his snide nicknames for his wife, daughter and son-in-law (respectively “Dingbat,” “Little Gail” and “Meathead”) all household names.

The subject matter dealt with on the show was indeed designed to shock audiences, to shine a hard light on the most controversial subjects and conflicting social views, and to help white, conservative America move past its bigotry and outdated viewpoints by both giving them a voice (Archie) and making them a source of mockery. The dynamics of the main cast was perfectly designed for this purpose: the loud-mouthed head-of-household Archie, with his racist rants and his “America, love it or leave it” attitude, was pitted against the three other family members. Submissive and naïve Edith was an easy target for Archie's bullying, but she would often side with Mike and Gloria and occasionally asserted herself and got the best of Archie (to the cheers of the studio audience) or foiled his schemes through her unflinching honesty. Gloria was a

liberated young woman who shared her husband's liberal views, and Mike Stivic was of course Archie's main nemesis and most vocal sparring partner—a former hippie turned left-wing activist who was studying for a degree in sociology and would become a college professor during the course of the show's run. If this seems like an unfair fight (three against one), it was not, as Archie was both lovable in his own way and an unyielding force of nature, and the social conflicts dealt with on a weekly basis were never intended to be resolved during the course of the series, let alone during a single episode.

The topics dealt with on the show read like an entire check-list of subjects that had hitherto been forbidden on sitcoms—either explicitly by censors or implicitly by a general sense of decency. For example, whereas previous sitcoms had always swept sexual matters *completely* under the rug, it was more openly and regularly discussed at the Bunker residence, with entire episodes devoted to Archie's, to Mike's and to Gloria's infidelity (07.01-02, 09.09; 06.10; 09.12), to Edith's struggle with menopause (02.15), to Gloria's sexual appetite and her miscarriage (04.16, 01.06), to the young couple's role-play games in the bedroom (04.11), to Mike's bout with impotence (02.09), and even to the horrors of sexual assault (in the case of Gloria—03.23) and attempted rape (in the case of Edith—08.04-05)—all on a *sitcom*. And these episodes were not *nearly* as controversial as others dealing with social issues that were dividing the country.

The character Gloria was used in particular as vehicle for discussion of feminist issues (could her first name be an allusion to Gloria Steinem?). Gloria, who occasionally poses in the nude (much to her father's protests—02.02) and participates in women's rights rallies, brings the issue of 'women's lib' to the dinner table from the very first season. She chastises especially her father and even her supposedly liberal husband for their sexist views on marriage and on women's role both in the home and in the workplace (01.11, 03.04, 03.11, 04.14-16), constantly urging her mother to stand up to Archie (and occasionally succeeding). When she is fired from Kessler's department store because she is pregnant, she enlists Mike's help, stages a protest in front of the store and gets her job back (06.07). If Gloria is often perceived as playing second fiddle to Mike's militant liberalism, her key role of bringing feminist issues to the forefront and into public discourse among viewers cannot be denied.

However, it was mostly arguments between Archie and Mike that were used to showcase the clash of conservative and liberal viewpoints on politics, diversity and other hot for-and-against issues, including, for example, special episodes devoted to their very vocal opposing views of gun control (03.01), affirmative action (06.19) and euthanasia (09.20). That said, one of the biggest clashes between this bearded representative of the counterculture and this aging sentinel of the old guard regarded youth protest of the government and of the Vietnam War. This was the main theme of the first episode after the pilot (01.02)—Mike writes an angry letter of protest to the president, and in retaliation Archie writes a patriotic letter of praise to Nixon (even putting on a three-piece suit in order to do so). Archie will consistently defend Nixon tooth and nail, while Mike chastises him and canvasses for George McGovern. In terms of the Vietnam War, Archie takes no prisoners—anyone against it is a "commie" or "pinko"—and tension on the war finally comes to a head in the seventh season—for the Christmas episode, no less (07.13). Entitled "The Draft Dodger," Christmas dinner at the Bunkers' is thrown into turmoil when Mike invites a friend of his named David (a draft-dodger and thus a fugitive living in Canada), while Archie invites his military buddy Pinky Peterson (whose son died in Vietnam). When Archie discovers that David is a draft-dodger, he launches into one of the blackest rages viewers had ever seen, but it is Pinky who offers the young man the hand of friendship and makes a speech

that was intended to help America heal: the difference between his son and David, says Pinky is that “David’s alive to share Christmas dinner with us. If Steve were here, he’d want to sit down with him, and that’s what I’m going to do. Merry Christmas, David.” However, if conscientious objectors were presented in a somewhat positive light, the same cannot be said of *bona fide* hippies. Mike and Gloria were *not* (or at least were no longer) hippies, and this is also stressed from the earliest episodes—the only time Mike actually looks like a hippie is during a flashback to the day that he first met Archie (the latter in a shirt and tie, the former in a tie-dye t-shirt—02.08). The ridiculing of hippies continues when Mike and Gloria invite (and eventually throw out of their home) two long-lost hippie friends of theirs—the guests are shoeless, beaded, mindless throwbacks, one of whom has taken a vow of silence in protest of American politics. Mike and Gloria were in fact post-hippie liberals (as were most younger viewers—by 1970 true ‘hippies’ were a dying breed), who took an active role in society and in political discourse and who wanted to be part of the solution.

Finally, in addition to these hot-button social issues, it was most of all Archie’s signature and unabashed *bigotry* that sparked endless arguments at the Bunker residence—and this included bigotry in terms of religion, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity and race. The Bunkers were middle-class WASPS, and though Catholics were often ridiculed (e.g., 04.09), Jews and atheists took the brunt of Archie’s insults. The fact that Mike and his daughter became atheists over the course of the show did not help matters, of course. Archie’s anti-Semitism, however, was a signature feature of his weekly rants, in which he shamelessly used slurs like “hebe,” but his prejudice against Jews would be put into question in two key episodes that sought to focus on the subject: In the episode “Archie Is Branded” (03.19), Archie finds a swastika painted on his door and learns that he has been mistaken for a Jewish member of the school board who lives on another street. The Bunkers are then visited by Paul Benjamin, a member of the Hebrew Defense Association (in reference to the actual Jewish Defense League), who wants to protect them from further anti-Semitic attacks. Archie takes to Paul, somewhat changing his view of Jews, until, at the end of the episode, the Bunkers stand on their porch, swastika in the background, and witness a car-bomb explosion in front of their house that kills Paul—again, *on a sitcom*. Though less radical in nature, a later episode will further advance Archie’s education in matters of the Jewish faith, when he attends the funeral of his best friend from the docks, Stretch Cunningham, and learns that he was Jewish, filling Archie with remorse for all of the times he had used anti-Semitic slurs in Stretch’s presence (07.17). By the show’s final season, Archie has to deal with the fact that little Stephanie, the distant relative they adopted after Mike and Gloria moved away, as well as Archie’s business partner when he bought Kelcy’s Bar were both Jewish, completing Archie’s slow but undeniable rehabilitation over the course of the initial show’s nine seasons.

Archie’s bigotry also extended to matters of sexual orientation, making him a mouthpiece for homophobic clichés and slurs, but at the same time bringing the matter of homosexuality into intense public discourse for the first time, through a sitcom. In fact, the most talked about episode of the first season dealt squarely with homosexuality. It was entitled “Judging Books by Covers” (01.05), the premise of which was that Mike and Gloria had invited over an effeminate male friend who Archie is convinced is a “pansy” / “fag” / “fairy” / “tinkerbelle”; an argument inevitably ensues with Mike, in which Mike uses England as an example of fairer treatment of gays, and Archie famously declares that “England is a fag country” and that “their whole society is based on a kind of a *fagdom*.” However, the tables are turned when Archie learns not only that

“Roger the fairy” is straight, but that one of his drinking buddies at Kelsy’s Bar, a ruggedly handsome ex-football star, is in fact gay. Reactions to this episode were often violent and could be heard in workplaces and at dinner tables around the country, and, amazingly, even in the Oval Office. Among the Watergate tapes that President Nixon reluctantly turned over to authorities in 1974 was one dated May 13, 1971 (tape #498-005), on which President Nixon and his top aides John Elrichman and Bob Haldeman can be heard discussing this very episode of *All in the Family*, which the president happened to come across after watching a football game. In a fifteen-minute rant, Nixon sums up the plot of the entire episode for his aides, voices his moral outrage, listing the supposed irrevocable dangers of such “glorification of homosexuality”, and then explains how the fall of the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church, the British Empire and the glory that was France were all due to such casual acceptance of homosexuality—and how the USA could be next. He even goes so far as to praise fascist methods used in Russia and elsewhere to weed out gays without compromise (see appendix for full transcript)—declarations that make Nixon sound far more irrationally homophobic than even Archie was. In a later episode, it is lesbian rights that gets the main focus, when—again at a funeral—it is discovered that Edith’s ‘Cousin Liz’ was a lesbian and that her surviving lifelong partner, Victoria, sadly had no recognition from Liz’s family or from society (08.02). As with Archie’s anti-Semitism, Archie’s homophobia subsides somewhat in the last seasons, as the Bunkers become close friends with Beverly LaSalle—a transvestite that Archie had first mistaken for a woman... when he gave him CPR. Though Beverly’s frequent appearances in later seasons were often comic relief, he was ultimately used to send a strong message against gay-bashing (08.11). When Beverly is beaten to death in the streets by gay-bashers, Edith loses here hitherto unshakable faith in God—declaring that she could never again pray to a God that would allow something like this to happen—and once again, this shocking turn of events occurred on a *Christmas* episode.

In addition, as Archie was an equal opportunity bigot, as it were, he held sharp prejudices in terms of a person’s national and ethnic origins—hence his unabashed use of slurs like “spic,” “chink,” “wop” and “dago,” “mick” and, most often, “dumb Polack” (his favorite label for Mike), all of which were exacerbated by his reliance on the most unflattering stereotypes of each group. His prejudiced remarks in this area especially were so politically incorrect that we would have a hard time even imagining them being made on a *current* sitcom. Take for example Archie’s explanation for voting for what he called “a balanced ticket” in a local election:

I call this representative government. You’ve got Salvatori, Feldman, O’Reilly, Nelson—that’s an Italian, a Jew, an Irishman and a regular American there. That’s what I call a balanced ticket. [...] ‘Cause, how else are you going to get the right man for the right job? For instance, take Feldman there. He’s up for treasurer. Well, that’s perfect. All them people know how to handle money. Know what I mean? [...] Well, then you got Salvatori running for D.A. He can keep an eye on Feldman. You know, I want to tell you something about the Italians. When you do get an honest one, you really got something there. [...] Then here you got O’Reilly, the mick. He can see that the graft is equally spread around, you know. You got Nelson, the American guy. He’s good for TV appearances, to make the rest of them look respectable (01.19).

That said, African Americans, or “spades” and “jungle-bunnies” as Archie tended to call them, took more heat from Archie than any other group, as his racism was his signature form of bigotry. In the first season, this was established by Archie’s failed efforts to prevent a black family, the Jeffersons, from moving in next door and by his refusal to befriend them (unlike the rest of the

family), when they did (01.08, 01.13). Though Archie made racist comments in nearly every episode, it was in the second season that the show made its strongest statement on America's inherent racism. Entitled "Sammy's Visit" (02.21), the episode stages the encounter between Archie Bunker and the celebrity Sammy Davis, Jr. (both black *and* Jewish), who leaves his briefcase in Archie's cab and later comes to Archie's house to pick it up. Archie is star-struck, and the more he tries to claim a pro-black outlook and prove that he is not prejudiced, the more he puts his foot in his mouth. At the end, as Sammy is leaving, he allows a neighbor to take his picture but insists that Archie pose with him; as the flash goes off, Davis plants a soul-brother kiss on Archie's cheek, triggering the longest continuous moment of laughter ever recorded by a live studio audience. Yet the comic overtones allowed for the most direct discussion of racism in America ever broadcast, kissing away even the *unheard-of* use of the "n-word" on network television, and thereby perhaps the clearest illustration of Lear's method. Throughout the following seasons, the situation comedy would often revolve around Archie getting stuck in the company of blacks—by walking in on burglars (02.04), getting trapped in an elevator (02.14), dealing with a black repairman or a black woman judge in court (03.20, 06.12), or, in the hospital, first by belatedly discovering that he was sharing his room with a black patient (03.14) and later by learning that his life-saving blood transfusion came from a black female donor (07.05)—not to mention his inability to avoid regular and exasperating encounters with his black neighbors, the Jeffersons. Archie's lily-white America was changing, and it seemed he would fight it every step of the way—and his anti-black rants were balanced by the anti-white rants of his just-as-stubborn neighbor, George Jefferson. Yet, by later seasons, there seemed to be at least a small crack in Archie's racist armor, as he gradually got to know some African Americans—not only the Jeffersons but also, much later, a young black nurse named Teresa whom the Bunkers take in as a boarder. In a key episode in season 8, Archie unknowingly and very innocently joins the local chapter of the KKK (here the 'Kweens Kouncil of Krusaders'), but when he tries to leave the group and the members threaten to burn a cross on both his and his son-in-law's lawns, Archie claims that he himself is in fact black, as he has a black woman's blood in him, and that he will get his black soul brothers to get together and hunt them down if they dare burn any crosses.

It is thus clear that Archie slowly evolves over time, even if he only takes a few baby steps toward some middle ground. By the time the series ended and its sequel, *Archie Bunker's Place*, began, Archie's bigotry and staunch opinions seemed even more outdated, and Archie found himself reluctantly tolerant—running a bar in which all of his employees, business partners and friends hailed from the many national and ethnic groups he had so long criticized. The same could be said of Mike Stivic's staunch early-1970's liberalism. Mike's unbending left-wing beliefs were also put in into question as the series wore on—as when he doubts his belief in pacifism after he punches a man who assaulted Gloria on the subway (07.19), or when he goes back on his support of Affirmative Action when he loses his dream job to a black applicant (06.19). Of course, Mike will always be a liberal "meathead" and Archie will always be a reactionary bigot, but the overall message of the program seemed to be a call for tolerance on *both* sides of the divide and the need to somehow meet each other half way.

### ***Conclusion: Reverberations of the Lear Effect***

Once Lear had planted his seed with *All in the Family*, the television landscape quickly grew into a dense array of unabashed social awareness sitcoms set in urban surroundings and drawing in the new viewer demographic that networks had so long either ignored or only taken timid steps to capture—again assuring CBS’s ratings dominance albeit in a totally different domain. With the success of *All in the Family*, the Norman Lear label and method was quickly in high demand, and by 1975 Lear would be simultaneously producing six of the nation’s top sitcoms, all at CBS. In 1971, the network immediately green-lighted Lear’s project to adapt the *other* British sitcom he had bought the U.S. rights for in 1968 (*Steptoe and Son*—the BBC1 comedy about the quarrels of two dirt-poor ‘rag and bone men’ Edward and Albert Steptoe—a lascivious old man and his ne’er-do-well son). Lear changed the setting from Shepherd’s Bush to the Watts ghetto in Los Angeles, cast the notoriously foul-mouthed black comic Red Foxx (the anti-Bill Cosby if there ever was one) as the junkman Fred Sanford, and created the first successful ethnicom on U.S. television, *Sanford and Son* (1972-77)—succeeding where NBC had failed with *Julia* and *The Bill Cosby Show*. Compared to *All in the Family*, the social issues treated were limited to questions of race and to the plight of poor blacks in the U.S., but the program appealed to both black and white audiences, and in loud-mouthed, stubborn and prejudiced Fred Sanford, Lear had basically given us a poorer black version of Archie Bunker, with nearly as much success. Simultaneously, NBC was enjoying high ratings from its top-ranking show of the period, *The Flip Wilson Show* (1971-74), a variety series hosted by the controversial and politically incorrect African-American comic of the show’s title, who openly joked about welfare mothers and racism. The show quickly rose to number two in ratings, just behind *All in the Family*. At the same time, CBS started production of its long-running satirical sitcom *M\*A\*S\*H* (1972-83), which cleverly used the backdrop of the Korean War to criticize and lampoon the ongoing Vietnam War. Suddenly, racism, the country’s social ills and anti-war sentiments *were* a laughing matter.

Then came the bevy of spin-offs of *All in the Family*, and spin-offs of those same spin-offs. When *Sanford and Son* hit the airwaves Lear simultaneously launched *Maude* (1972-78). Maude Findlay (Bea Arthur) was Edith Bunker’s liberal, upper-middle class aunt from Westchester, and her visits to the Bunkers’ showed her to be Archie’s most formidable sparring partner, as she was an outspoken, middle-aged, quick-witted, *über*-liberal feminist on her fourth husband, who worshipped FDR and JFK as much as Archie did with Eisenhower and Nixon, and who, on her own show, had no qualms about speaking out in favor of gay rights, civil rights and even abortion when arguing with her own family. By the following year, Lear created his first spin-off of *Maude* (itself a spin-off of *All in the Family*), *Good Times* (1973-79), the first black ethnicom to be written (initially at least) by black writers and showrunners, including Eric Monte (who based the show on his own childhood) and Mike Evans (who played Lionel Jefferson on *All in the Family*). The story focused on Maude’s former maid, Florence Evans (Esther Rolles), and her chronically unemployed husband James (John Amos), as they tried to raise their three children—would-be artist J.J., saucy Thelma, and their youngest, Michael, the budding militant—in a mock-up of the impoverished Colibrini-Greene housing projects in Chicago. The first few seasons especially were very controversial, shining a hard light on the plight of minorities and showcasing black slang, fashion and culture.

Then NBC countered with its own *All in the Family* lookalike, *Chico and the Man* (1974-78), though with a slight twist, as it staged the confrontations between a prejudiced and grouchy old “seventh generation WASP” named Ed Brown (Jack Albertson) with his sole employee, street-smart mechanic Chico Rodriguez, played by the extremely popular Hispanic comic, Freddie Prinze. Thus, by copying the Lear formula, we now had a loud-mouthed, conservative white man dealing with the fact that his L.A. neighborhood had become a black and Hispanic ghetto/*barrio*, and that his only friends and contacts were from ethnic groups he had so long been prejudiced against. Then came the second spin-off of *All in the Family*, when George Jefferson struck it rich in the dry-cleaning business, left Hauser Street in Queens and ‘moved it on up’ to a ‘deluxe apartment’ on the Upper East Side. The incredibly popular and long-running *The Jeffersons* (1975-85) focused on the arguments and situational comedy that occurred as the hot-headed and anti-white patriarch, George, settles in very *white* upper-middle class surroundings, and has to deal with the disturbing fact that his neighbors, George and Helen Willis (his son Lionel’s future in-laws) are an interracial couple (another Lear first).

The top ranking sitcoms and comedy programs on primetime television from 1971 to 1975 could thus be put under the heading ‘All in the *Lear* Family’. The Lear method of confrontational social awareness comedy had found both its moment and its audience, and the television landscape, as well as the American identity reflected by that landscape, would never be the same again. Lear gave us a landscape full of loud-mouthed bigots of all colors and creeds, as well as a wide array of equally loud-mouthed “bleeding-heart” liberals, whose endless shouting matches echoed deep with the psyche of American viewers until the bigotry and ultra-conservatism eventually started to ring hollow and outdated. Although it is true that all of these programs would grow less controversial and less confrontational after 1975—as for example, *All in the Family* began to focus more the Bunkers’ changing family dynamics (Mike and Gloria’s baby and their subsequent move to California, Edith’s health problems and eventual passing, etc.) and as *Good Times* lost its black-militant edge in exchange for the popular buffoonery of its teen star Jimmy Walker—this was mainly because Lear had so thoroughly and successfully addressed the nation’s problems in the early seventies that the viewing audience, it seems, was ready to move past them and on to rosier presentations of diversity and youth culture much like those that had failed in the late 60’s on NBC and ABC.

It would thus be hard to overstate how sharp a change the early 70’s sitcoms were from those of the late 60’s. Thanks especially to Lear and kindred spirits like Bud Yorkin and Mary Tyler Moore, sitcoms no longer catered to older rural viewers but to younger audiences, and for women, mini-skirts and pants-suits replaced poodle-skirts and crinoline house-dresses. Networks no longer feared FCC or other government intervention if they did not toe the line with conservative values, and anti-war protest and youth counterculture were finally given a voice, as well as a face. The TV screen no longer reflected a would-be lily-white America where the few minorities on screen were denied their own cultural identity and language, and a world of political correctness and twin beds was replaced by one of unabashed opinions, open discussion of sexual matters, and heated debate. Even canned laughter was replaced, again thanks to Lear, by live studio audiences, whose applause, guffaws or gasps of shock were the echo of those of viewers in their living rooms, who then continued those debates at the dinner table or in the workplace. Only one thing did *not* change, it seems—CBS was still number one.



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## Appendix

### President Richard Nixon's Discussion of Episode 5 of Season 1 of *All in the Family*

*Transcript of White House Tape #498-005, recorded in the Oval Office on May 13, 1971, in the presence of John Ehrlichman and Bob Haldeman. Recorded by Nixon's own clandestine recording system.*<sup>3</sup>

*NIXON:* I'm against marijuana. Period. I am against it. Why the hell shouldn't I say it? So I told Bob the other day. I was trying to tune into the damn baseball game on NB- CBS. And the game went off and CBS came on with a movie, one that they made themselves, and I'll be—the damnedest thing I ever heard, two magnificent handsome guys and a stupid old fellow and a nice girl—they were glorifying homosexuality. I mean, the guys were admitting they were homosexuals and so forth. And this other poor guy is going, “Gee whiz, you know, I [unintelligible] this guy's [unintelligible].” And I'm like, is this what people listen to?

*EHRlichman:* A panel show?

*NIXON [raising voice]:* Hell, no! It's a movie!

*HALDEMAN:* No, it's a regular show. It's on every week. And usually it's just set in this guy's home. It's usually just that guy, who's a hard hat.

*NIXON:* That's right. He's a hard hat.

*EHRlichman:* And he always looks like a slob.

*NIXON:* Looks like Jackie Gleason.

*HALDEMAN:* And then he has this hippie son-in-law.

*NIXON:* Yeah.

*HALDEMAN:* ...and usually the general trend of it is to downgrade him and upgrade...

*NIXON:* Upgrade the hippie son-in-law.

*HALDEMAN:* ...make the square hard hat out to be bad. But apparently a couple of weeks ago, they had an episode where the guy, the son-in-law, wrote a letter to you; he said, “I'm writing it to President Nixon, and I'm going to raise hell about something or other.” And the guy said, “You will not write that letter from my home. No letter like that will be sent from here.” Then he said, “I'm going to write President Nixon. He went upstairs and apparently took off all these sloppy clothes he wears all the time, got himself all dressed up, all cleaned up, shaved, and combed his hair and everything, and came back down, cleared his whole desk, got his paper out, and got ready to write his letter to President Nixon, which he did. And apparently it was a good episode, but most of them go the other way.

*EHRlichman:* What is it called? I've never seen it.

*NIXON:* Arch is the guy's name. But the point is, you can't imagine—for example. Arch is sitting here in his sloppy clothes and here's this hippie son-in-law, who's married to a screwball-looking daughter. And you know, [unintelligible] and Arch is saying, and they said, Freddy or someone is coming home or something or other or John is coming home. “Oh, you can't let him,” the Arch said, “I mean, you can't let him come in here—he's queer!” [unintelligible] flower [unintelligible]. And the hippy son-in-law says, “Nah, nah, nah, he really isn't.” I think the son-in-law obviously—apparently, goes both ways, likes the daughter and all the rest. So the guy

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<sup>3</sup> Main source: “Richard Nixon on Civil Rights.” October 2011. ‘*On the Issues*’ Website. 10 May 2012. [http://www.ontheissues.org/celeb/Richard\\_Nixon\\_Civil\\_Rights.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/celeb/Richard_Nixon_Civil_Rights.htm)

comes in the door, but he comes in and he's obviously queer—he wears an ascot and so forth and he uses the language—but he's not offensively so. Very cleverly, he comes in and uses this nice language and shows the pictures of his trip and all the rest, and Arch is there. And so then Arch goes down to the local bar. And he's sitting around the bar, and his best friend, Archie's best friend, turns out to be a guy who for two years had played professional football as a linebacker and who has a photo store down the way. And this guy, his name is Freddy or something like that. God, he's handsome, virile, strong, and this and that. They're talking about this, and then this fairy comes into the bar. And the guy who owns the photo shop sees the fairy. "Oh, how are ya?" And they shake hands and so forth. The bartender over here, he [unintelligible], "Jesus, I just hope—I don't mind Freddy here, but I don't hope, this other guy doesn't come back here [unintelligible]. He could see what this was all about. His hippy son-in-law says, "Look if you talk about [unintelligible] your friend Freddy." "Why, he played for the Bears, buh-buh-buh-buh. He goes back to the bar. He's talking to him. He says, "Gee, we've been friends for many years and so forth. What's this deal where you grasp him and so forth?" And he said, "You know, why that crazy son-in-law of mine, you know, we've got this fag here at the house." He said, "Do you know him?" and he said, this virile guy, he says, "Go ahead and say it." "All right." He smiled with a nice smile on his face. "He thinks I'm that way too." Well, he says, "Of course, I didn't think that." "It's true, Arch. It's true. How long have you known me?" He said, "Twelve years." "Have you ever seen me with a girl?" Well, especially a bachelor! Hell, I know why you don't see—Now, it's true I turned the goddamned thing off. I couldn't listen any more.

*EHRlichman*: Now that's real family entertainment, isn't it?

*NIXON*: But the point is, I do not mind the homosexuality. I understand that... (*a 14-second beep covers names of supposedly gay statesmen*). But nevertheless, the point that I make is that, Goddamn it, I do not think that you glorify, on public television, homosexuality. The reason you don't glorify it, John, any more than you glorify whores. Now we all know that people go to whores, and we all know that people are... just do that. We all have weaknesses and so forth and so on, but Goddamn it, what do you think that does to kids?

*EHRlichman*: Yeah.

*NIXON*: What do you think that does to 11- and 12-year-old boys when they see that? Why is it that the Scouts, the, why is it that the Boys Clubs, we were there, we constantly had to clean up the staffs to keep the god-damned fags out of it. Because, not because of them, they can go out and do anything they damn please, [unintelligible] all those kids? You know, there's a little tendency among them all. Well, by God, I can tell you it outraged me. Not for any moral reason. Most people are outraged for moral reasons, why, it outraged me because I don't want to see this country go that way.

*EHRlichman*: You know there are...

*NIXON*: You ever see what happened, you know, what happened to the Greeks? Homosexuality destroyed them. Sure, Aristotle was a homo, we all know that, so was Socrates.

*EHRlichman*: But he never had the influence that television had...

*NIXON*: Do you know what happened to the Romans? The last six Roman emperors were fags. The last six. Nero had a public wedding to a boy. Yeah. And they'd [unintelligible]. You know that. You know what happened to the Popes? It's all right that [stutters] Popes were laying the nuns, that's been going on for years... [*EHRlichman* laughs] centuries...but, when the Popes from the Catholic Church went to hell, in, I don't know, three or four centuries ago, it was homosexual. And finally it had to be cleaned out.

*EHRlichman*: Uh-huh.

*NIXON:* Now, that's what happened to Britain; it happened earlier to France. And let's look at the strong societies. The Russians. Goddamn it, they root them out; they don't let them around at all. You know what I mean? I don't know what they do with them!

*EHRlichman:* Yeah.

*NIXON:* Now, we are allowing this in this country when we show [unintelligible]... Dope? Do you think the Russians allow dope? Hell no. Not if they can allow—not if they can catch it. They send them up. You see, homosexuality, dope, immorality in general—these are the enemies of strong societies. That's why the Communists and the left-wingers are pushing the stuff; they're trying to destroy us.

*HALDEMAN & EHRlichman:* Sure, sure. Yep.