

**Television's Pasts**  
**AMH3931.8LN1 (10390)**  
**Spring 2020**

Instructor: Dr. Louise Newman

Course Meets on Zoom, Tues periods 5-6 (11:45-1:40), Thurs period 6 (12:50-1:40pm)

Office Hours: Via Zoom, hours to be determined

**Course Description and Objectives**

This course, Television's Pasts, is so named because it looks at the intersection of television and history in a number of different ways:

- first, the course examines moments when television, as a news media, played a significant role in U.S. history and culture, so for example, its role in taking down Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s or its reporting on the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War during the 1960/s1970s, or its televising the landing on the moon in July 1969. Less well-known, but important nonetheless, are the moments when fictional events that took place in a television program had an unforeseen impact on the larger culture -- so for example, Vice President Dan Quayle's disparagement in 1992 of Murphy Brown (the title character in the series *Murphy Brown*) for her decision to have a child as a single mother, or the public reaction to Ellen Degeneres, both as the title character on her show *Ellen* (1994-98), and then as the actress herself, for coming out as gay in 1997, or the depiction of gay marriage on the show *Modern Family* in 2014, one year after California legalized same-sex marriage and one year before the Supreme Court declared same-sex marriage constitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment.
- second, the course examines TV's representations of and responses to important social issues, as seen through selected prime-time programming, focusing on certain themes (e.g., women's changing social roles, racial representations, and historical (re)imaginings.)
- third, the course highlights some of the "successes" of television programming in changing cultural practices: most notably, on the development of pre-school educational programming (*Sesame Street* and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* in the late 1960s, which led to a host of children's educational shows including *The Electric Company*, *Barney*, *Teletubbies*, etc.)

Although this course provides historical context for what happened on television and in the television industry, it is not a course about the history of television per se. Rather, the course is intended to familiarize students with the variety of methods used by scholars to analyze and study television and encourages students to adopt many different approaches to enhance their appreciation for how production and reception, text and context, and history and culture function interdependently. As one scholar, Julie D'Acci, has written in *Defining Women*, "In television, the inter-workings of textual representations, narrative and generic norms and conventions, audience constructions, industry imperatives, spectator positionings, viewer readings and contextual forces reveal the dense complexity of the whole enterprise."

**A Disclaimer: What this course does not cover...**

This course, Television's Pasts, does not provide a comprehensive survey of the history of television as a commercial industry or as a culture-making enterprise, nor does it trace the evolution of distinct forms/genres of television programming. Because I have drawn from the genres that I know best and have selected programs that seem well suited to the course's primary themes and objectives, there are gaping holes in this syllabus. Certain genres are missing entirely – there are no soap operas, no sci/fi (how can there be no *Star Trek*?); no superheroes (*Batman & Robin*, *Superman*, etc.) only a few brief nods to the police procedurals and great crime shows that many of us love (*Hill Street Blues*, *NYPD Blue*, *The Sopranos*, *The Shield*, *Breaking Bad*, *Bosch*, etc.), no medical shows (what? No *E.R.*, no *Grey's Anatomy*, no *House*?), no prison shows (my apologies to fans of *Oz* and *Orange is the New Black*), no fantasy or horror, none of the beloved workplace sitcoms (*Cheers*, *The Office*), none of the

wonderful spy shows (*Get Smart, Man from U.N.C.L.E, Mission: Impossible, Alias, Homeland, The Americans*), and only a limited number of comedies (alas, no *Seinfeld*). With the exception of Ken Burns' work, I have not made mention of the many historical documentaries that have been made for television, even before Netflix got into the business in 2007. Furthermore, great animated series, such as *The Simpsons and Bojack Horseman*, as well as the original programming of the innovative streaming services, Netflix, Amazon, and Hulu, get short shrift for no good reason, other than I couldn't see how to fit any more programming into the course. Perhaps most egregious of all the omissions are the wide-ranging variety/sketch programming and late-night talk shows that have provided, and still provide, so much valuable political commentary and social criticism (shows like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, The Colbert Report, Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, and most notable of all *Saturday Night Live*, which deserves a whole course to itself.) I can only beg forgiveness and offer an olive branch: students will be able to choose a series not on the syllabus to write about for their final project.

#### Required Books (students must purchase)

- **Alan Sepinwall**, *The Revolution was Televised*. (New York: Touchstone, 2012). \$12.56 on Amazon prime, E-copy available through Course Reserves.
- **David Bianculli**, *The Platinum Age of Television* (New York: Anchor Books, 2016).
- **Saul Austerlitz**, *Sitcom: A History in 24 Episodes from I Love Lucy to Community*. Chicago Review Press, 2014. E-book available from Course Reserves, downloadable for free. Inexpensive used copies are also currently available from Amazon.

#### Articles and Book Chapters (PDFs available from Course Reserves)

- Alley, Robert S. and Brown, Irby B. "Beth Sullivan" [creator of *Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman*] in *Women Television Producers*, (2001), 198-217.
- Austerlitz, Saul. "I Love Lucy," in *Sitcom: A History in 24 Episodes from I Love Lucy to Community*. Chicago Review Press, 2014, 7-23.
- Bodroghkozy, Aniko. "Is This What You Mean by Color T.V.?: Julia" in *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement*. University of Illinois Press, 2012, 180-202.
- D'Acci, Julie. "Negotiating Feminism" in *Defining Women: Television and the Case of Cagney & Lacey*, 1994, 142-167.
- Dalton, Mary M. and Laura R. Linder, eds., *The Sitcom Reader*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. State University of New York Press, 2016.
- Dow, Bonnie J. "The Other Side of Postfeminism: Maternal Feminism in *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*," in *Prime Time Feminism*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, 164-202.
- Doherty, Thomas. "The Army-McCarthy Hearings (April 22-June 17, 1954)," in *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism and American Culture*. Columbia University Press, 2003, 189-214.
- Freedman, Carl [on M\*A\*S\*H]
- Gray, Herman. "Television, Black Americans and the American Dream." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6 (1989), 376-386. [on *The Cosby Show*]
- Gray, Herman. "Television and the Politics of Difference," in *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation*. 2005, 89-113.
- Hopkins, Patricia D. "Deconstructing *Good Times* and *The Cosby Show*: In Search of My 'Authentic' Black Experience." *Journal of Black Studies* 43.8 (2012): 953-975.
- Jacobs, Jason. "Arriving in Deadwood," in *Deadwood* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1-21.
- Kennedy, Liam and Stephen Shapiro, ed. *The Wire: Race, Class and Genre* University of Michigan Press, 2012), 15-32.
- Kutulus, Judy. "Liberated Women and New Sensitive Men," [Mary Tyler Moore Show] in *the Sitcom Reader: America Viewed and Skewed*, eds. Mary M. Dalton and Laura R Linder, 2nd ed. State University of New York, 2005, 217-226.
- Kutulus, Judy. *After Aquarius Dawned*.
- Milch, David. "Dramatis Personae" and "Intoxicants," in *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills*. Melcher Media, 2006, 6-9, 64-79.
- Morreale, Joanne. "Introduction," in *The Donna Reed Show*. Wayne State University Press, 2012, 1-17.

- Morrow, Robert. W. "A New Bloom on the Wasteland," in *Sesame Street and the Reform of Children's Television*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, 47-66.
- Ozersky, Josh. *Archie Bunker's America: TV in an Era of Change, 1968-1978*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2003, chapters 1-3, 1-83.
- Waters, Harry F. "Farewell to the M\*A\*S\*H Gang." *Newsweek*. February 28, 1983.
- White, Mimi. "Indy & Dr. Mike: Is Boy to Global World History as Woman is to Domestic National Myth?" *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 30.1 (2000). 24-37. Project MUSE muse.jhu.edu/article/400197

### Databases/Resources

Classic TV Database: <http://www.classic-tv.com/shows> contains lists of the top-rated shows for every year from 1950, along with the

[https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/29/arts/television/lesbian-tv-shows.html?te=1&nl=watching&emc=edit\\_wg\\_20191129?campaign\\_id=20&instance\\_id=14179&segment\\_id=19187&user\\_id=ff60407c0b41cd4f5cd24df4473a3766&regi\\_id=71160802201911](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/29/arts/television/lesbian-tv-shows.html?te=1&nl=watching&emc=edit_wg_20191129?campaign_id=20&instance_id=14179&segment_id=19187&user_id=ff60407c0b41cd4f5cd24df4473a3766&regi_id=71160802201911)

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### Assignments (1000 points)—Upload a .doc version to Canvas course website by day/time indicated

1. Viewing Notes – 1 sitcom (100 pts) (individual)
2. Midterm Exercises (200 pts) (group-- assigned)
3. Discussion Posts (Blogs) (Individual)
5. Final Assignment (300 pts) (individual or pair)

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### Grading Scale

Letter grades for the course will be assigned according to the following point scale:

Letter Grade	Total Points	GPA Equivalent
A	940-1000	4.0
A-	900-939	3.67
B+	875-899	3.33
B	840-874	3.0
B-	800-839	2.67
C+	775-799	2.33
C	740-774	2.0
C-	700-739	1.67
D+	675-699	1.33
D	640-674	1.0
D-	600-639	0.67
E	<600	0

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### General course policies

- Students are expected to arrive on time, be attentive and respectful during class, and remain until class is dismissed.

- Students are expected to have completed all reading and writing assignments by the beginning of class on the date specified on the syllabus. Usually, there will be approximately **75 pages** of reading each week (or as many as three articles), and students will also have to spend **one to two hours** watching television programs.
- In general, **no late work will be accepted** unless accompanied by documentation from the Dean of Students or Health Services of a serious illness. However, in the case of exceptional or unforeseen circumstances, students needing an extension of a deadline may request one from the instructor, preferably in advance of the deadline.
- Students requesting accommodation must register with the Dean of Students Office (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/>) and obtain proper documentation to be submitted to the instructor during the first week of the semester. Instructors are not obligated to grant accommodations after the first week of the semester.
- Students in this class are participating in the new course evaluation system called GatorEvals. The new evaluation system is designed to be more informative to instructors so that teaching effectiveness is enhanced and to be more seamlessly linked to UF's CANVAS learning management system. Students can complete their evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via [https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A\\_ufl.bluera.com\\_ufl\\_&d=DwlGaQ&c=sJ6xIWYx-zLMB3EPkvcnVg&r=1qtWVKU2uNohMAWR5pYYVu0F\\_ty9jxk4wl-DcSEfmKub76k8eaDIYyGQkZMpCQZ6&m=KCQMaruvDccGkQ95LBWWejChKpHpd3olzGps63zo0Ao&s=2ry1Ik1Sd2MT9xMTXgaRslOLmzE7-Mky8W2E\\_HUO3wQ&e=](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A_ufl.bluera.com_ufl_&d=DwlGaQ&c=sJ6xIWYx-zLMB3EPkvcnVg&r=1qtWVKU2uNohMAWR5pYYVu0F_ty9jxk4wl-DcSEfmKub76k8eaDIYyGQkZMpCQZ6&m=KCQMaruvDccGkQ95LBWWejChKpHpd3olzGps63zo0Ao&s=2ry1Ik1Sd2MT9xMTXgaRslOLmzE7-Mky8W2E_HUO3wQ&e=). Thank you for serving as a partner in this important effort. Summary results of these assessments will be made available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>.
- All students must adhere to the University of Florida's standards of academic honesty. UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states: "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code." A copy of the student code of conduct may be found at <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code>.

The student code of conduct also forbids plagiarism, which includes the following:

- Turning in a paper that was written by someone else (i.e., papers written by another student, a research service, or downloaded off the Internet); or written by you for another course.
- Copying a significant portion of work written by another author without using quotation marks and without acknowledging the source through a commonly accepted style of footnoting.
- Paraphrasing text written by another author without referencing that author within the text and without using a commonly accepted style of footnoting.
- Using someone else's unique idea or concept without acknowledging the original author and source in the text and without using a commonly accepted style of footnoting.

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**A full schedule of readings and assignments available on Canvas.**

**Topics Include:**

**TV Trajectories—Overview of television's impact on U.S. politics, culture & society**

- Bianculli, "Introduction" in *The Platinum Age of Television*, 1-14.
- Sepinwall, "Introduction" in *The Revolution was Televised*, 1-17.

*Color Adjustment*— Color Adjustment-- watch to the end of Part one (54:31). To begin the discussion, I'll replay a short segment that reflects on the question, "Can a positive image also be negative?" (42:31). After we ponder that for a while, we may talk about representing racism on T.V. (All in the Family), again watching another clip that features Archie going on about the Statue of Liberty ("That's what makes America great, buddy!"). If there's any time left, we'll then watch just a little bit of part 2, thinking about what Henry Louis Gates says about what the greatest potential and greatest failures are about *Good Times*. The key idea here is that television represents the ghetto as palatable, at precisely the moment, politicians in the 1970s are ending the social programs of the 1960s

### Main Points

- Initial concerns of elites— pundits were concerned about television's potential influence, feared its power to make audiences passive, television derisively called the "boob tube." (Newton Minow's Vast Wasteland Speech is a case in point.)
- Scholarly concerns of those who study television in a new field called "television studies" have lofty goals: how does mass culture (television) shape political participation; what is its effect on the democratic workings of public life; or from a Gramscian-inspired perspective—to what extent do contestations of elite power take place within the cultural domain of media? What does programming tell us about social relations and class tensions in U.S. culture? What cultural work does television perform? (answer: for the 1950s, sitcoms attempt to "normalize" social relations in the immediate post-war period)
- Popular TV critics today feel that television did not come into its own til 1999, when *The Sopranos* aired on HBO— Sepinwall expresses it as a "revolution" in television; exponential growth since 2000, with as many scripted tv shows made in the 20 years since as there were in the previous 50 years. (Data is from Bianculli, 10) But this revolution represented not just an explosion in quantity but a sea change in quality. *The Sopranos* (1999), *The Wire*, *Deadwood*, *The Shield*, *Lost*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *24*, *Friday Night Lights*, *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*, etc. What the shows have in common is their complexity— nuanced characters and long narrative arcs over multiple seasons. There were technological changes that made this complexity accessible to large audiences (argues Sepinwall, 5): the invention/sale of DVRs, On Demand cable stations, DVD boxed sets, and video streaming via the internet, which made it easy for people to catch up with "that great but complicated new show." At the same time, there was a gradual but noteworthy change occurring in commercial filmmaking—once there had been blockbusters, art films, and lots in between, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a film had to be either very cheap or else guarantee an opening weekend of \$50 million or it wouldn't get made. As David Chase, creator of the *Sopranos* who once wanted to get out of the TV business and write films, puts it, "Movies went from something really interesting to what we have now," (quoted by Sepinwall, 5)—so adults who wanted thoughtful drama no longer went to the movies; they stayed home and watched television.

### Basic Narrative

- Broadcast technology on display at the 1939 World's Fair; suspended during WW2; then after the war, in 1946, television sets were manufactured for the public and programing, very limited at first, was developed
- ABC, CBS, NBC, DuMont were the four initial networks subject to the rules of the FCC and in need of corporate sponsorship. The executives who worked for these networks sought to have the widest appeal possible for any show they considered airing.
- Initial genres adopted from radio (drama, western, comedy, news analysis, variety show) and theatre (vaudeville)
- Television was a conservative medium because of its dependency on sponsors, and then advertisers, who depended in turn on the Nielsen Ratings to identify who was watching which particular shows; because shows needed to attract the largest audience possible, anything likely to offend a viewer was not broadcast.

- Within the industry, tv executives saw their job as delivering audiences to corporate sponsors (Band Aid, Coke, Gillette, Camel smoked by doctors and an elegant woman  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFrkSiCvBo0&pbjreload=10>  
Campbell's soup, Phillip Morris)
- Historians of media studies identify "revolutions" taking place in the entertainment industry about every 30 years or so. For example, in the 1950s, television emerges as a popular form of media entertainment; in the 1980s, introduction of cable channels; in the 2010s, streaming services are increasingly creating their own programming, delivered directly to consumers (Amazon, Netflix, Hulu, Youtube, Apple, Disney, Warner Media (HBO Max) and CBS's Peacock (to debut in May 2020).  
[https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/18/business/media/streaming-hollywood-revolution.html?fallback=false&recId=922004310&locked=0&geoContinent=NA&geoRegion=FL&recAllc=top\\_conversion&geoCountry=US&blockId=published-assets-bq&imp\\_id=571372834&action=click&module=trending&pgtype=Article&region=Footer](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/18/business/media/streaming-hollywood-revolution.html?fallback=false&recId=922004310&locked=0&geoContinent=NA&geoRegion=FL&recAllc=top_conversion&geoCountry=US&blockId=published-assets-bq&imp_id=571372834&action=click&module=trending&pgtype=Article&region=Footer)

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### Sitcoms of the 1950s

Assignment 1. Viewing notes and analysis of an episode from any sit-com that aired in the 1950s or 60s

#### Main Points

- Scholarship on television offers (at least) two opposing viewpoints about the ideological work that television performed in the 1950s and early 1960s: Doherty states, "During the Cold War, through television, America became a more open and tolerant place" (Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium*, 2003): 2. In contrast, Kutulus argues that in the 1950s, television "reinforced social hierarchies, majority norms and traditional values" (138). Might both be true?
- The concept of containment might be a way to describe the "cultural work" performed by television in the 1950s—i.e., the managing of the tensions that arose as the U.S. was trying to return to "normalcy" after WW2. So it's important to consider the ways in which WW2 disrupted and changed norms about gender and race.
- Women had important roles as producers/creators (Gertrude Berg, Lucille Ball, Donna Reed, Gracie Allen) despite the images they presented of themselves in their domestic sitcoms

#### Basic Narrative

- Army-McCarthy Hearings aired April 22, 1954-June 17, 1954 (36 days of coverage by ABC and DuMont networks); it was the first time a Senate inquiry was televised. (see Doherty, chapter 9, "The Army-McCarthy Hearings," 189-214)
- Many believe that Richard Nixon (R) 'lost' his television debate to John F. Kennedy (D) in 1960, when they confronted one another in the first televised Presidential debate. (See Marc's account.) Yet, in the late 1960s, President Richard Nixon embraced the medium, and with Roger Ailes' guidance, became masterful of it.
- Toast of the Town/the Ed Sullivan Show (1948-71, CBS) Variety show, grew out of vaudeville, introduced Elvis Presley 3 times in 1956-57 to 60 million viewers (half? The adult population of the U.S.)

#### Featured TV Show

- ***I Love Lucy* (1951-57, CBS)**. Philip Morris, the manufacturer of cigarettes, agreed to a non-cancelable contract for an unprecedented \$8 million; company president put the sum in perspective: "Dollar-wise, although the entire sum sounds huge, it is probably one of, if not the most, efficient advertising buys in the entire country" (51)...(3 times more efficient dollar-wise than placing ads in *Life* or [any] newspaper, "Three times more people see every Monday night's *I Love Lucy* show than watched all the major league baseball games last year." (1951, quoted in Doherty, pp. 50-51.) The episode that contained the birth of Lucy's second child, a son, Desi Arnez IV, on Jan 19, 1953 was watched by an estimated 44 million viewers, receiving a Nielsen rating of 68.8, which far surpassed the ratings/audience for the televised inaugural address of Dwight D. Eisenhower the next day (52). Watch (Season 1, Episode 12, Vitamegamin clip)

**Other TV Shows of the 1950s (Family sitcoms, westerns, variety, comedy shows)**

- *Jackie Gleason Show* (1949-1957), *Honeymooners* (1956-1957)
- *George Burns & Gracie Allen* (1950-1958)
- *Amos & Andy* (1951-1960)
- *The Goldbergs*
- *Father Knows Best* (1954-1960)
- *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963)
- *Donna Reed Show* (1958-1966)
- *Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*
- *Gunsmoke*
- *Lassie*
- *Danny Thomas Show*

**Recommended Readings:**

- Morreale, Joanne. "Introduction," in *The Donna Reed Show*. Wayne State University Press, 2012, 1-17. (TV Milestone series)
- Spigel, Lynn. *Welcome to the Dreamhouse* (PN1992.6.s663 2001)
- Coontz, Stephanie, *The Way We Never Were* (about family life during the 1950s)
- Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound*
- Landay, *I Love Lucy* (TV Milestone series)
- Newton Minow's Vast Wasteland Speech (1961).

**Other shows**

- *Andy Griffith Show* (1960-1968, CBS, creator Sheldon Leonard) small town, rural, single fatherhood)
- *Get Smart* (1965-1970)
- *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (1961-66; CBS, creator Carl Reiner)
- *The Ed Sullivan Show* (1955-71; Feb 9, 1964 Sullivan introduced Beatles (73 million viewers)
- *I Spy*
- *The Carol Burnett Show* (1967-78, CBS)
- ***Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* (1967-69, CBS) top 20 show**, 30 million viewers each week; perhaps show episode in which blacklisted folksinger Pete Seeger appears)

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**Television's "Relevant" Sit-coms of the 1960s/1970s****Main Points**

- From the late 1960s on, media framed the evolution from Negro to Black, revealing... an increasingly assertive black voice commenting on the limits of white-majority culture. The first blacks in lead roles in movies and television during the 1960s (Sidney Poitier in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, and Diahann Carroll in *Julia*) were white-defined and fit into white worlds. Black playwright Clifford Mason complained of the "Sidney Poitier syndrome": "A good guy in a totally white world...helping the white man solve the white man's problem" (good description of Bill Cosby in *I Spy*). In the 1970s, there were more diverse black characters with fully fleshed out lives—although most were engaged in pursuing some version of the American dream in difficult circumstances. *Sanford and Son* (another Lear creation) was set in Watts in LA; the family in *Good Times* lived in the Chicago Projects. Only the Jeffersons succeeded in "moving on up" as their theme song said. Fred Sanford had elements of the "consummate Trickster, shiftless and lazy; the actor who played George Jefferson, Sherman Hemsley had to be careful to keep George from being a cartoon. There was also the sassy African American woman who verbally undermined her man (evident in *Amos & Andy*, in the *Jeffersons*, in *Doonesbury*); early 1970s culture often emasculated black male characters into comic impotence to reassure white audiences that no race war or riot was forthcoming.

Overall, white society remained more comfortable with achievement and assertion by black women than by black men (Kutulus, 112)

- In the 1960s, networks asserted more control over content, established Standards and Practices offices to monitor scripts, assuming a protective role. By the late 1960s, series like *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* and *Laugh-In* pushed hard against TV taboos, and their popularity meant that the networks loosened up some. The success of *All in the Family* in the 1970s open up television's possibilities even further. (Kutulus, 139)
- **Nostalgia for the 1950s**  
In the wake of Watergate, other themes of Fifties life were again explored on screen, particularly the McCarthy blacklist, which was portrayed in the television docudrama, *Fear on Trial* (1975). These new depictions of McCarthyism in the 1970s offered the opportunity to investigate Nixon's political origins and the beginnings of the national security state, after revelations of presidential and CIA abuses of power (in what was known as Watergate) had dominated the political life of the nation for several years. (Marcus, 230)

### Readings

- Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement* --Julia
- Kackman, *Citizen Spy: Television, Espionage, and Cold War Culture*

### Featured Shows

- A Comic Look at Bigotry: *All in the Family* (1971-1979, CBS, creator Norman Lear)
- Single Career-Girl Phenomenon: *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-77, CBS)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10Vk4PTVzTk>
- *Roots* (January 1977, ABC, 13-episode mini-series); revised popular cultural understanding of slavery, which had been indelibly shaped by the film *Gone With the Wind* (1939, first aired on television in 1976.) When Haley began his research for his family memoir, *Roots*, on which the mini-series was based, black history was just becoming a separate subfield; by the time he finished *Roots*, the academic subfield had come into its own (John Blassingame's *The Slave Community, 1972*, Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture, Black Consciousness* (1977); Eugene Genovese's *Roll Jordan Roll* (1974) Herbert Gutman's *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (1976)
- *M\*A\*S\*H*

### Readings

- Katherine Lehman, *Those Girls: Single Women in Sixties and Seventies Popular Culture* (University of Kansas Press, 2011)
- Elana Levine, *Wallowing in Sex: The New Sexual Culture of 1970s American Television* (UF has an online copy.) Best chapter is on how 70s soaps deal with rape.
- Bonnie Dow, *Prime Time Feminism* (1996)
- Judy Kutulus, "Roots," *After Aquarius Dawned: How the Revolutions of the Sixties Became the Popular Culture of the Seventies* (2017)

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## Television's Educational Programming, 1970s-present

### Main Points

In the 1960's, television producers and the public became more concerned about the quality of children's programming as the federal government worried about the U.S.'s ability to compete against the Soviet Union in a



Cold War world and as social inequalities (of race, gender, class) continued to grow, particularly in urban areas. Public broadcasting stations (PBS) introduced shows like *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* and *Sesame Street*, which went far beyond preparing young children for formal schooling, tackling the social issues of their day. *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* concluded its run in 2001, but old episodes from the program can still be watched on local PBS stations, on Amazon Prime Video, iTunes and the Fred Rogers Production website. *Sesame Street* is still in production, although PBS viewers have to wait nine months to watch new episodes, which are first broadcast on the subscription service, HBO.

From its inception, television aired children's programming, usually in 30-minute segments as part of a weekday series, in the evening hours (since broadcasters were only on the air for less than 6 hours a day, from 6 or 7 to 11pm). Then, in the 1950s and for decades afterward, children's programming also aired on Saturday mornings. As David Bianculli writes, "Post-World War II baby boomers were the first not only [to] grow up with television but to wake up to it as well... Waiting for Saturday morning TV to begin, especially the cartoons, was a familiar ritual for children my age in that era" (36). And as Bianculli informs us, it was one of the few times when children could select their own entertainment and prepare their own breakfast cereals while their parents slept in or were otherwise occupied. Although Bianculli clearly had wide-ranging tastes, among his favorite shows were (*Rocky and His Friends/The Bullwinkle Show* (ABC, NBC, 1959-64) and *The Flintstones* (1962-1966), a cartoon take-off on the 1950s sit-com, *The Honeymooners*. Bianculli wasn't alone in his Saturday morning viewing habits-- Matt Groening, creator of the *Simpsons* (Fox, 1989-present) also remembers waking up early to watch Saturday morning cartoons. Shawn Ryan, creator of the cop series *the Shield*, watched a lot of *Scooby-Doo*. Matthew Weiner, creator of *Mad Men*, watched *Looney Tunes* and the *Jackson Five* cartoons. I watched *The Bugs Bunny Show* (1960-1975, the longest running cartoon series of its day) and the *Mighty Mouse Playhouse* (1955-1967).

In the earliest days, the three national broadcast companies, NBC, CBS and ABC also featured their own variety of puppets and a "kindly old uncle" figure. Among these shows, the ones that meant the most to baby boomers as they were growing up were NBC's *Howdy Doody* (1947-1960); *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* (1948-1958); and *Hopalong Cassidy* (1952-1954); CBS's *Captain Kangaroo* (1955-1984); and ABC's *The Micky Mouse Club* (1955-1996).

During this period, advertisers realized the value of these shows for selling cereal, candy and toys to kids-- (Disney was especially enterprising in selling tie-ins)-- and sponsored these new shows over opposition from teachers and parents who wanted advertising banned on children's programming. This political and social climate helped shape the new educational programming that would soon appear on non-commercial stations. (Baby boomers were already in middle school or high school, too old to watch them, although many of them encountered them decades later as they were raising children.) First *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* premiered on January 2, 1967 on National Education Television (1968-2001); and then *Sesame Street*, the first production of the *Children's Television Workshop*, premiered on November 10, 1969, when the newly developed PBS network entered the broadcast world. (*The Electric Company* was the CTW's second series and it premiered on PBS on October 25, 1971. *Zoom* premiered on January 9, 1972. Source: Jeffrey Davis, *Children's Television, 1947-1990* (McFarland, 1995).

### Featured Shows

- *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* (1968-2001, NET, PBS,
- *Sesame Street* (1969-present, PBS and 2016-present-HBO, creator Joan Ganz Cooney)

### Readings

- Morrow, Robert. W. "A New Bloom on the Wasteland," in *Sesame Street and the Reform of Children's Television*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, 47-66.
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## Race and Gender in the 1980s

### Featured Shows

- *Cagney and Lacey* (1982-88, CBS)
- *The Cosby Show*, 1984-1992, NBC, creators Bill Cosby, Ed. Weinberger, Michael Leeson)

### Readings

- Daniel Marcus, *Happy Days and Wonder Years: The Fifties and the Sixties in Contemporary Cultural Politics* (Rutgers University Press, 2004).
- Julie D'Acci, *Defining Women: The Case of Cagney and Lacey* (1994)
- Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time* (1985)

### Other Shows

- *I'll Fly Away* (1991-1993, NBC)

## Looking Forward (Innovation in Programming as cable TV begins to emerge)

### Main Points

- DVRs and Cable TV (subscription service) are game-changers – eliminate commercials
- PBS as a purveyor of the Historical Documentary (Ken Burns) and the docudrama (*Downton Abbey*, 2011-16)
- HBO's premium programming (*The Sopranos*, 1999-2007, *The Wire*, 2002-08, *Deadwood*, 2004-2006, *Boardwalk Empire* 2010-2014, *Game of Thrones*, 2011-19)
- The Networks have to keep up (NBC's *I'll Fly Away*, 1991-93, *ER*, 1994-2009; *The West Wing*, 1999-2006, *Friday Night Lights*, 2006-11, and *This is Us*, 2016-present, ABC's *Twin Peaks* 1990-91, *NYPD Blue*, 1993-2005, *Grey's Anatomy*, 2005-present and *Modern Family*, 2009-present, CBS's *Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman*, 1993-1998 and *The Good Wife*, 2009-2016)
- And then there's Netflix....

### Shows

- ***Hill Street Blues*** (1981-1987, NBC, Seven Bochco, creator; introduced multiple continuing subplots David Milch was a writer for it). Critics loved it but it was moderately rated.
- ***Cheers*** (1982-1993, NBC, Glen and Les Charles). A flop at first but it eventually became one of the most popular sitcoms of all time; although still traditional in that episodes were self-contained, nonetheless it was always aware of what had already happened to its characters, which is used in constructing jokes and character development. It paved the way for more heavily serialized sitcoms, like *Friends* and *Seinfeld*, and HBO comedies like *Arrested Development*, *the Office*, *Parks and Recreation*. "It helped condition viewers to the basic idea that TV shows were disposable, that it was possible to see characters transform beyond just seeing sitcom kids get older with each season." (Sepinwall, 11)
- ***Roseanne*** (1988-1997, ABC, Creator Matt Williams) premiered at the start of the 1988-89 season and by the end it was ranked as the No. 2 show in the country, right behind *The Cosby Show* (see Bianculli, p. 281)
- ***Frank's Place*** (1987, CBS, creator Hugh Wilson)
- ***Lonesome Dove*** (1989, 8-hour mini-series. based on novel by Larry McMurty, western) *Could move it to the next week to pair with Dr. Quinn*

## Television Revolutionizes Itself, 1990s

### Main Points

- Impact of Fox and Cable networks on traditional television networks revolutionizes television programming—much broader range of programming (cable networks not beholden to corporate sponsorship market/audience fragmentation worked to their advantage—did not have to generate mass audiences, could create niches, could use profanity, nudity, sexuality and violence), War Channel, Sports Channel, Arts & Entertainment, etc., Emergence of 24-hour news cycle (CNN, Fox News)
- Sea change in structure of series— nuanced characters and story arcs that extend over a season and then multiple seasons
- 1994: **ER (NBC, 1994-2009)**. End of an era for Network television. *ER* was a mass-appeal scripted drama that in its second season, with George Clooney leading the way, averaged **32 million viewers** a week (one of its episodes attracted 48 million). It was a hospital drama by genre but an action movie in style. As Sepinwall writes, even compared to something like *Hill Street Blues*, or the year before *NYPD Blue*, “this sucker *moved*—from doctor to doctor, patient to patient, often throwing the audience right into the middle of a story without bothering to explain anything about what was happening or what all the medical lingo meant....*ER* assumed that its viewers would be smart enough to keep up. (Sepinwall, 17)

### Featured Shows

- *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* (1993-1998, CBS, created by Beth Sullivan, now avail thru Amazon Prime—still a “family show”)
- *The Simpsons* (1989-present, Fox, creator Matt Groening)

### Other TV Shows

- *The Simpsons* (1989-present, Fox, creator Matt Groening)
- *The Civil War* (Ken Burns, PBS, 1990 aired over five successive nights in late Sept 1990; there had been six previous Ken Burns documentaries televised on PBS, beginning with *Brooklyn Bridge*, 1981); this miniseries drew an unprecedented 31 million viewers.
- *Twin Peaks* (1990-91, ABC, creators Mark Frost, David Lynch)
- *OZ* (HBO)
- ***Homicide: Life on the Street* ( 1993-1999, NBC, Tom Fontana, producer David Simon writer, never a hit but it expanded the level of artistry.**
- ***NYPD Blue*** (1993-2005, ABC, Stephen Bochco and David Milch). Protagonist, cop Andy Sipowicz was a deeply flawed character who in an earlier age would have been the villain but instead was portrayed with such shading, depth and empathy that audiences began rooting for him. A cop drama that was more adult in its use of language and nudity than anything before it.
- *Ellen* (1994-98, ABC; DeGeneres character and then the actress came out as gay in 1997, “Puppy Episode,”)
- *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2001, WB, 2001-2003, UPN, creator Joss Whedon)—which it seems is the most studied TV show in history (Bianculli, 405)

## 2000s. Imagined/rewritten histories

### Main Points

- Impact of HBO as an emerging premium channel changed programming on Cable/Streaming channels in significant ways—breakthrough programs for HBO were *The Sopranos* 1999-2007, *the Wire* (2002-2008) and *Deadwood* (2004-2006) (very good article by Jason Mittell, “The Wire in the Context of American

Television" in Liam Kennedy and Stephen Shapiro, ed. *The Wire: Race, Class and Genre* University of Michigan Press, 2012), 15-32.

### Featured Shows

- *Mad Men* (2007-2015, AMC, Creator Matthew Weiner)
- *Deadwood* (2004-6, HBO; Creator David Milch (Attempt to recreate with historical accuracy actual place and personages from the past. Gold discovered in 1874 in the Black Hills, and two years later miners established the town of Deadwood)
- *The Good Wife* (2009-2016, CBS, creators Robert and Michelle King)

### Readings

Sepinwall, "A lie agreed upon...The profane poetry of *Deadwood*," in *The Revolution was Televised*, 96-129.

### Other TV Shows

- *The West Wing* 1999-2006, NBC, creator Aaron Sorkin)
- *The Sopranos* (1999-2007, HBO, creator David Chase)
- *The Wire* (2002-2008, HBO, creator David Simon)
- *Grey's Anatomy*, 2005-present, ABC)
- *Friday Night Lights* (2006-2011, NBC, creator Peter Berg)
- *Longmire* (A&E, Netflix; based on books by Craig Johnson)
- *Justified* (based on books by Elmore Leonard)
- *Damages* (2007-2012, FX)
- *Modern Family* (2009-present, ABC, creators Steve Levita, Christopher Lloyd)
- *Louie* (2010-, FX, creator Louie C.K.)
- *Downton Abbey* (2010-15, ITV (UK) and 2011-16, PBS, creator/writer Julian Fellowes)
- *Boardwalk Empire* (2010-2014, HBO)
- *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019, HBO, creator David Benioff)
- *This is Us* (2016-present, NBC, creator Dan Fogelman)
- *The Crown* (Netflix, 3 seasons so far, 2017-19). How NYT covered the events of the 1960s-70s:  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/19/arts/television/the-crown-season-3-netflix-history.html?action=click&module=MoreInSection&pgtype=Article&region=Footer&contentCollection=Television>

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### **Conclusion: *Mad Men's* Phantasmic History of the 1960s**

This series, *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015, Matthew Weiner creator), offers an opportunity to revisit one last time many of the questions posed by this course: questions concerning television's representations of the historical past; of race and gender; its mixing of historical realities and current-day desires, and so forth.

Critics have noted, often with skepticism and bemusement, how easily viewers have fallen for the *historicism* of the show, a historicism that is both rooted in surface details-- what Levine has called "the banal" (the look of clothes, the office decor, the ever-present cigarette smoke), and in the show's referencing of large-scale events that took place during the 1960s-- presidential elections and assassinations, the British invasion of rock n roll the struggles of African Americans for equality and agency, and so forth (Polan, 42).

Some critics have faulted the show for allowing its audiences to revel in smugness, feeling a sense of distance from this elite narcissistic world. Mark Greif's comment in the *London Review of Books* 2008 is often quoted to capture this perspective: "*Mad Men* is an unpleasant little entry in the genre of Now We Know Better. We watch and know better about male chauvinism, homophobia, anti-semitism, workplace harassment, housewives' depression, nutrition and smoking. (cited in Levine, 138).

It's easy to lose patience with and sympathy for characters who bemoan their fates without recognizing their privilege-- and for that reason, many viewers haven't been able to make it to the end of the series. However, other critics, like Caroline Levine have argued that *Mad Men* is far more progressive than any other show on television for showing us the huge and beneficial impact that social movements of the 1960s have had on our reshaping U.S. society over the past forty-to-fifty years. Thus, while the show and its audiences may luxuriate in banal historical details, there's also no denying that the show explores social practices and belief systems that we now recognize as detrimental if not abhorrent, and which are arguably less pervasive than they once were: ways of conducting gynecological exams and attending women during childbirth, assumptions about divorce, sexist treatment of women in the workplace, sexual objectification and harassment, psychologists' dismissal of women's complaints, acceptance of homophobia, casual racism and anti-Semitism, and so forth. All of this-- the banal and the significant-- are presented in a way that as Levine writes, "invites us ...to honor the social movements of the late 1960s, which rise up between our present and the past represented, creating the shock of historical difference." (Levine, 144).

Just as we had to sidestep the realism-is-reality trap in our discussion of *The Wire*, so too we must be wary of treating *Mad Men* as a documentary of the early 1960s. Instead, we might approach the show, as Jeremy Varon does, as a "'phantasmic 'history ' [that] functions as a broad-ranging ...social critique." (258) Whether we feel that the show somehow implicates us in that critique, or gives us permission to smugly float above it, will be the focus of this module's activities and discussion.

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