Sitcom Citizenship: Civic Participation within Postwar Suburban Sitcoms, 1952-1972

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mom and dad, who gave me my first book and showed me my first television program.

Abstract

Postwar suburban sitcoms such as *Father Knows Best* and *The Donna Reed Show* are traditionally thought of as wholly focusing on themes of domesticity. This project argues that such programs also served as instruments of good citizenship, modeling civic participation within neighborhoods. In their depictions of this activism, suburban sitcoms emphasized the importance of individual responsibility and the family, themes which both compelled viewers to become civically engaged and also restrained the potential radicalism of their behavior.

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Introduction

The "*Father Knows Best* Pose": What is Sitcom Citizenship?

In his 2006 memoir *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, then-Senator Barack Obama inserted a quick reference to a classic television sitcom in the middle of his analysis of the Republican Party. When describing the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980, Obama writes he was "unconvinced…by his [Reagan's] John Wayne, *Father Knows Best* pose."[1] Obama goes on to argue that "Reagan spoke to America's longing for order," a desire linked to "our need to believe…that we can shape our individual and collective destinies, so long as we rediscover the traditional virtues of hard work, patriotism, personal responsibility, optimism, and faith." This longing was specifically defined in Reagan's 1981 inaugural address, in which he described the American people as "a special interest group…made up of men and women, who raise our food, patrol our streets, man our mines and factories, teach our children, keep our homes, and heal us when we're sick."[2] In framing Americans in this way, Reagan revealed his confidence in the ability of individual citizens to improve not only their own lives but their entire communities through hard work and personal responsibility.

In the midst of this familiar history of Reagan Republicanism, Obama's reference to *Father Knows Best*, a program that went off the air roughly a year before he was even born, seems nothing more than a throwaway joke intended to satirize Reagan's folksy

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[1] Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York City, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2006), 31.
[2] Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 263.

image. However, whether intentional or not, Obama's mention of the sitcom in the same section as an analysis of citizens' civic responsibilities is deeply significant. *Father Knows Best* was far more than a program that promoted the all-American family values espoused by Reagan. Instead, the show, along with its other suburban sitcom contemporaries, offered a sustained blueprint for the type of active citizenship so important not just to Reagan, but to the postwar liberal consensus that dominated political thinking at the time such shows were on the air, and which, to some extent, continues to do so during the Obama administration. The idealized *citizen* promoted by suburban sitcoms was exactly the type of citizen valued within postwar America, both in the 1950's and beyond.

This link between postwar suburban sitcoms (like *Father Knows Best*, but also shows such as *The Donna Reed Show*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and *My Three Sons*) and good citizenship may conflict with our pre-established conceptions of these programs as bland shows entirely taking place within the domestic sphere. An online summary of *Father Knows Best* reads: "Every evening he [Jim Anderson, the title character] would come home from work, take off his sport jacket, put on his comfortable sweater, and deal with the everyday problems of a growing family."[3] How, then, would this domestic family sitcom, or any other such program from this genre, have anything to say about civic responsibility? How did the "everyday problems of a growing family," which on the shows, seemed to include bad report cards, teenage dances, or broken down appliances, relate to the civic virtues treasured by American politicians? In other words, father may

[3] "*Father Knows Best*," TV.com, accessed April 13, 2014, http://www.tv.com/shows/father-knows-best/.

"know best" in the home, but what about in the public sphere of the neighborhood or town hall?

These questions have been unintentionally reinforced by a large portion of the existing scholarship on suburban sitcoms, which has almost entirely focused on the domestic aspects of these programs. The groundbreaking research of authors such as Lynn Spigel and Mary Beth Haralovich has positioned these shows as social instruments which helped to establish a particular definition of domesticity, that of a nuclear family with an authoritative patriarch and submissive wife.[4] Spigel writes that family sitcoms like *Father* "worked to 'naturalize' family life, to make it appear as if this living arrangement were in the fact the only one possible."[5] Other research, such as Nina Leibman's *Living Room Lectures*, has explored the other types of values communicated by these television shows, such as the denial of ethnicity and the proper use of money.[6] As significant as this scholarship is, though, it has tended to overlook the equally important work of *citizenship* engaged in by suburban sitcoms. Leibman's comprehensive work, for example, contains little to no analysis of how these programs depicted the civic or communal spheres and what messages such depictions communicated to their viewers.

This project seeks to offer a new perspective on the postwar suburban sitcom by exploring how the genre served as an instrument of citizenship. By watching the fictional protagonists of these shows, viewers developed specific conceptions of what it meant to

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[4] Among other works, see Lynn Spigel's *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), and Mary Beth Haralovich's "Sitcoms and Suburbs: Positioning the 1950s Homemaker," in *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader*, ed. Joanne Morreale (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003).
[5] Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 178.
[6] See Nina C. Leibman, *Living Room Lectures: The Fifties Family in Film & Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

be a "good citizen." Far from *entirely* focusing on domesticity, suburban sitcoms featured characters who worked to improve their communities through such activities as running traffic safety campaigns or fighting to preserve parks. This model of citizenship, one that emphasized personal responsibility and initiative, aligned with the civic virtues preached by Cold War era politicians. Like other examples of postwar television, the suburban sitcom worked as a Foucauldian tool of governmentality to create citizens useful to their communities and country. Furthermore, by linking good citizenship with familial motivations and activities, not potentially radical politics, the sitcoms limited civic action in ways appealing to the liberal consensus. Even issues as socially contentious as racial prejudice could be easily resolved through sitcom citizenship.

From the genre's inception, however, this model was marked by contradictions and problematic aspects. Its limitations meant that potentially admirable displays of civic responsibility could be marked as troubling if they were performed outside of a familial context. In particular, the social issue of gender inequality, while explored on a relatively frequent basis by suburban sitcoms, was deliberately depicted as lacking civic implications. Furthermore, the model itself was only temporary. While some of its themes would persist throughout the sitcoms of the late 1960's and even the early 1970's, viewers would eventually embrace more politicized, "realistic" programming, such as Norman Lear's stable of sitcoms, which downplayed the older displays of civic activism in favor of contentious depictions of real-word political issues. Nevertheless, the foundations of suburban sitcom activism, individual responsibility and domesticity, would persist, not only within Lear's programs of the 1970s's but also increasingly

within the neoliberal politics of the 1980's and subsequent decades, a durability keyed by a nostalgia-fueled confidence in the solutions of the past. Despite ceasing first-run broadcasting in 1960, *Father Knows Best* (and its sitcom peers) continues to influence conceptions of civic responsibility.

I argue that the postwar suburban sitcom is an important instrument of citizenship for two major reasons. First, and perhaps most important, the suburban sitcom was *viewed* as a way to learn about citizenship. There is ample evidence, ranging from media articles to interviews with producers to fan mail, which suggests that both the creators of these shows and their audiences conceived of the sitcoms as not just entertainment but a teaching tool, able to communicate important lessons to viewers about how to behave within their community. This ability of sitcoms especially relates to the qualities of verisimilitude found within these shows, even within the more fantasy-driven shows like *Bewitched*. Combined with the shows' "natural" depictions of the nuclear family, these qualities distinguished the suburban sitcom genre from the more vaudeville-inspired physical comedy seen in older shows and designated them as objects worthy of identification and emulation. These sitcoms not only had the power to influence viewers, but also had writers, producers, and stars who considered it their responsibility to instill their audience with civic values important to the postwar social consensus.

Secondly, the shows' messages regarding civic activism were depicted on a sustained, consistent basis for a very long period of time. In viewing the array of programs reviewed for this project, I was struck by the consistency in messages across both different shows and time periods. While they differed in terms of their brand of

comedy or overall style, shows as varied as *Father Knows Best, Donna Reed, Bewitched,* and *The Brady Bunch* effectively featured the same messages regarding active citizenship. Characters on all of these shows worked within their communities, all performing very similar activities. The brand of citizenship thus endorsed by these shows would remain fairly constant throughout the 1950's and 1960's and continue to persist throughout future decades. The willingness of sitcom creators to instill civic values and their audiences to receive them was complemented by the almost uniform attitude the programs took regarding issues of citizenship. For these reasons, I argue that the postwar suburban sitcom's depiction of active citizenship is not simply worthy of study, but that those sitcoms were an extremely important instrument in communicating civic lessons to average Americans.

Defining the Project

In the remainder of this introduction, I want to outline the scope of this project, particularly by explaining how I am using the term "postwar suburban sitcom." I define this genre of television as consisting of a particular type of situation comedy, one that featured white, middle-class nuclear families within a "suburban" setting. I set the "postwar" period as between 1952 and 1972, the decades when this genre of programming enjoyed its highest level of success and also the time period in which the programs' concerns intersected the most with real-world socio-political concerns. Thematically, it is crucial to note that all suburban sitcoms were family comedies; all of the programs in this project feature families, not young singles, as the main characters. Most of the families on these programs are traditionally nuclear, with many of the

exceptions eventually *becoming* nuclear throughout the course of the show (Darrin and Samantha on *Bewitched* have children; Steve on *My Three Sons* marries again, etc.). Because of their familial context, the programs are generally marked by "an emphasis on familial love and relationships, moral transgression, and lessons learned," a focus that will continue to predominate even throughout the more outlandish shows of the 1960's. This emphasis is so pervasive that Nina Leibman refers to the shows in this genre as "family melodramas" as opposed to sitcoms, arguing that the more dramatic aspects of the shows outweighed their comedy elements.[7] Such a focus, as I explain next chapter, helped enhance the shows' abilities to transmit messages regarding citizenship.

I also argue that the *setting* of these programs is important. I use the adjective "suburban" to describe these shows as a way of further contrasting them from more urban situation comedies, the majority of which had highly dissimilar themes and concerns. Television programs like the working-class *Honeymooners* and *Amos and Andy* or the more nostalgic *Mama* were very different than the middle-class, melodramatic suburban sitcoms. On working-class shows like *The Honeymooners* (or even *I Love Lucy*, which for many years was set in an urban apartment building), the humor is broad, almost vaudevillian, rooted in get-rich-quick schemes and physical comedy. There is less potential in such programming for viewers to learn moral or familial lessons. Shows like *Mama* offered more emphasis on family, but were set in slightly non-identifiable contexts, such as turn of the century San Francisco or increasingly less familiar ethnic neighborhoods. George Lipsitz writes that the various genres of "urban ethnic working-class situation comedies" worked to help legitimate major changes in economic and

[7] Leibman, 7.

cultural life within 1950's America, but also notes that by the late 1950's, such shows began to disappear as "a changing society less tied to class and ethnicity demanded different kinds of entertainment."[8]

By being set in *suburbia*, these newer types of sitcoms worked as reflections "of everyday life in the white middle-class suburbs," a lifestyle increasingly more identifiable with viewers who had moved out of urban or ethnic neighborhoods in favor of newly created suburban spaces.[9] The protagonists of shows like *Father Knows Best* or *Donna Reed* did not concern themselves with the ethnic nostalgia of *Mama* or the broad get-rich-quick antics of *The Honeymooners*. Instead, they busied themselves with issues important to their families or neighborhoods, concerns that marked them as established, middle-class Americans. The comfortable setting of suburbia serves to eliminate the working-class fears so predominant in the urban-set situation comedies. As opposed to the *Honeymooners*' Ralph Kramden, Jim Anderson has the leisure and means to worry more about his family and community as opposed to winning a raise or paying the rent.

I realize that very few of these programs were set in communities that resembled the suburbs encountered by their viewers. The "Springfield" of *Father Knows Best* or the "Hilldale" of *Donna Reed* in no way resembled a Levittown. Indeed, with such fixtures as soda parlors and city halls, the settings of these sitcoms tended to resemble quaint small towns more than postwar suburbs. I would argue, though, that such nostalgic depictions represent an idealization of suburbia, not a denial. Just as ethnic urban sitcoms like *Mama*

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[8] George Lipsitz, "The Meaning of Memory: Family, Class, and Ethnicity in Early Network Television Programs," *Cultural Anthropology* 1. No. 4 (1986): 381.
[9] Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 178. Also see George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the 'White' Problem in American Studies," *American Quarterly* 47. No. 3 (1995).

used nostalgia to legitimize cultural changes, postwar suburban sitcoms hearkened back to bygone images, depicting their neighborhoods as small towns instead of the "low-grade uniform environment" denounced by critics such as Lewis Mumford or William Whyte.[10] Barbara Kelly has also written that postwar suburbanization emphasized not just conformity, but privatization and a revival of older themes about domesticity and "the doctrine of separate spheres," all themes readily explored within suburban sitcoms.[11] While the shows may not have addressed such real-life issues as suburban overcrowding or homogeneity, the core *ideals* of postwar suburbia were featured.

My use of the term "suburb" to refer to these programs' settings is also consistent with how these programs are remembered in popular culture. Shout! Factory, the company which releases *Father Knows Best* on DVD, proclaims on the package for the second season collection that the show was a "suburban dream come true."[12] Similar breezy descriptions can be found on DVD cases, reference books, and cable channel blurbs describing not just *Father*, but the other programs analyzed in this project. Furthermore, other academics consistently label these programs as suburban.[13] In her history of suburbanization, *Building Suburbia*, Dolores Hayden in fact titles her chapter on postwar development "Sitcom Suburbs," arguing that Levittown had "families similar in age, race, and income" to the idealized characters of sitcoms like *Ozzie and Harriet*

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[10] Lewis Mumford, "Lewis Mumford Points to the Failures of Modern Suburbia," in *The Suburb Reader*, eds. Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2006), 299. Note that later shows, from the 1960's, such as *Bewitched*, are actually set in suburban subdivisions, not faux-small towns.
[11] Barbara Kelly, *Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown* (Albany: State University of New York Press, Albany, 1993), 59.
[12] "*Father Knows Best*: Season Two," Shout! Factory, accessed April 13, 2014, http://www.shoutfactory.com/product/father-knows-best-season-two.
[13] Haralovich and Spigel do, for example in their previously mentioned works.

and *Father Knows Best*.[14] Regardless of how these programs literally depicted their communities, the cultural and academic consensus is that they *are* set in suburbia.

Finally, I want to briefly explain the types of sources I am using in this project. Primarily, I am conducting a close study of the texts themselves, in this case, episodes of postwar suburban sitcoms. For this project, I have reviewed hundreds of sitcom episodes from at least fifteen different programs.[15] The shows I have selected for this project aired from roughly 1952 to 1972 (with some exceptions, particularly in the later chapters) and fit the criteria outlined above regarding what constitutes a postwar suburban sitcom; the vast majority of the shows, for example, feature middle-class nuclear families. I have attempted to select programs that were commercially successful; the majority of shows featured in this project ran for multiple seasons with at least one hundred episodes. Many of these programs enjoyed at least some period of success in the ratings and almost all of them maintained some degree of "cultural durability," continuing to survive on the air in reruns or syndication. Several of the sitcoms are in fact almost synonymous with the time period; as the Hayden quote above suggests, the names of programs such as *Ozzie and Harriet* and *Father Knows Best* (not to mention *Donna Reed*) are used as a short-hand for the entire 1950's. In short, I attempted to select successful programs, believing that long-running shows with high viewership would have the highest degree of cultural impact. On a more pragmatic level, the commercial success of these shows meant it was more likely their runs would be preserved through syndication or home video/DVD release.

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[14] Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (New York City, NY: Pantheon, 2003), 128.

[15] A complete list of the episodes and programs cited in this dissertation can be found in the appendix. The appendix also contains basic information about the programs, including a list of characters.

While there are still a degree of "missing" episodes of these programs (the final seasons of *Donna Reed* frustratingly remain unavailable for viewing), most of the episodes of these shows are extant and easily available for research purposes.[16]

The cultural impact of these shows can be further traced by their frequent mentions within the popular press of the period. In this project, I will also analyze such publications as the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *PTA Magazine*, and most importantly, *TV Guide*, to show that journalists, activists, and other intellectuals did not regard the suburban sitcom as mere comedic entertainment. Rather, the interviews and articles found within these magazines reveal a serious grappling with the messages transmitted by these television programs. In particular, the *TV Guide* articles are far removed from the fluff pieces found in the magazine today, as they contain debates featuring prominent intellectuals regarding the impact of television, including the suburban sitcom. These articles show that the popular media, along with creators and viewers, took these programs and their messages very seriously.

Those writings are the primary focus of the first chapter of this project, in which I explain how the suburban sitcom worked as an instrument of civic governance in postwar society. Using media articles and press interviews with the cast and creators of the shows, I argue that the programs sought to create citizens who would be of utility to the liberal consensus of the period. In this chapter, I build upon existing scholarship to trace how the

[16] This project does not reference *Leave It to Beaver* very often, probably far less frequently than one might expect considering the show's fame within the suburban sitcom genre. Many of the show's plots seemed removed from the themes of this project, which I ascribe to the fact it is one of the few shows in which the "child" characters were by far the dominant characters on the show (even more so than *Dennis the Menace*). While this did allow for some civic lessons to be taught, it had to be done in a subtler or less direct way than the other suburban sitcoms.

media, politicians, and Hollywood attempted to use the medium of postwar television as an instrument of social change. I argue that the suburban sitcom worked in the same way as more explicitly educational and uplifting programs. In particular, I will show how the sitcom genre's emphasis on verisimilitude and domesticity enhances its power to teach viewers and create "good citizens."

After outlining the ability of suburban sitcoms to serve as an instrument of citizenship, I explore in the second chapter what particular civic messages could be found within the programs. What values of citizenship were emphasized? Why were these important to the needs of postwar society? Conducting a close reading of numerous episodes, I demonstrate how the idealized active citizens featured on these shows worked to improve their neighborhoods through such actions as preservation projects, safety campaigns, and charity fundraisers. These civic displays taught viewers that the solutions to a community's problems were rooted in individual responsibility and the nuclear family. Personal initiative was the key to creating a strong, healthy neighborhood. I end this chapter by briefly exploring how such messages related to real-life postwar liberalism; despite the apparent contradiction, sitcom citizenship had much in common with the growth of the welfare state in the 1960's, as exemplified by aspects of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program.

The next two chapters explore how postwar sitcoms defined citizenship in conjunction with increasingly fractious socio-political issues related to gender and race. These chapters trace the consistent nature of the programs' messages, as well as the centrality of domesticity within the messages, but they also reveal lingering tensions. In

examining issues related to racial tolerance, suburban sitcoms successfully used the familiar themes of family and personal initiative to demonstrate how and why "good citizens" should assist victims of bigotry. This message of tolerance fit perfectly with the demands of Cold War citizenship. In contrast, though, sitcoms were far less successful in linking good citizenship to issues of *gender* inequality. While familial or workplace frustrations related to gender were surprisingly common plots on suburban sitcoms, the solutions to these problems were never rooted in civic activity but in an embrace of domesticity itself. Both of these chapters reveal the importance of the nuclear family within sitcom citizenship, a theme that led to occasional tensions and contradictions in the civic messages being deployed.

Those tensions would contribute to the real-life breakdown of the postwar liberal consensus, an action exemplified by the arrival of more politicized suburban sitcoms of the late 1960's and 1970's. This programming, such as Norman Lear's *All in the Family* and *Maude*, serves as the subject of the fifth and final chapter. Lear's shows promised to realistically explore socio-political issues absent from past sitcoms, but in the process the model of sitcom citizenship was adjusted. In particular, the concept of working to improve the broader community was significantly downplayed. The result was that the idealized citizen of Lear's programming was both more politicized than before *and* more rooted in the domestic sphere. Despite the changing nature of citizenship in the decades following *Father Knows Best* and its contemporaries, the themes of domesticity and personal initiative remained front and center within the suburban sitcom. Sitcom citizenship would persist even as the concerns of society changed.

I finish this project with a brief conclusion that examines the role of the postwar suburban sitcom in the twenty-first century. Both the Lear revolution of the 1970's and the decline of the family sitcom in the 2000's did not eliminate the postwar suburban sitcom from the American consciousness. The programs from the 1950's and 1960's survive today, both in reruns on nostalgia driven cable channels and in frequent DVD releases. When combined with an Internet fan culture which allows fans of the show to connect with each other, it is clear that the suburban sitcom continues to play a major role in the American consciousness. More importantly, though, the civic messages perpetuated by these sitcoms are still relevant. While we would find it ludicrous for a politician to promote policies lifted from a 1950's sitcom, the idealized sitcom citizen remains the focus of very real socio-political visions, ranging from the communitarianism of Robert Putnam, the "compassionate conservatism" of Republicans like George W. Bush, and campaigns meant to "restore the family" launched by Barack Obama, all of which emphasize domesticity and personal initiative as the key to improving neighborhoods.

The ubiquity and occasional banality of the suburban sitcom has led to it being overlooked by academia, particularly in regards to its civic spirited role. The postwar suburban sitcom did more than simply entertain viewers with melodramatic comedy. It did more than provide a model of morality and domesticity for audiences to emulate. It offered something more: a blueprint for citizenship that pushed viewers to move beyond their home and immediate family and become active, productive members of their neighborhood. The fact that this blueprint was intricately connected to its other, more

domestic themes is not a coincidence. The suburban sitcom's linkage of the nuclear family and civic participation was crucial for its model of good citizenship and its attempt at satisfying the demands of the postwar liberal consensus. This project explores how this model worked, along with its successes, failures, and contradictions. In doing so, I hope to show how the idealized citizen was created, both in the 1950's and 1960's and beyond.

Chapter 1

"Built-In Moral Lessons": The Suburban Sitcom as a Civic Tool

On May 9, 1961, the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, Newton Minow, addressed the National Association of Broadcasters in a speech popularly known today as the "Vast Wasteland" speech. In his remarks, Minow noted that "when television is good, nothing—not the theater, not the magazines or newspapers—nothing is better. But when television is bad, nothing is worse." He went on to blast the endless "procession of game shows, formula comedies about totally unbelievable families," commercials, crime shows, and westerns that made up the typical broadcast day, before urging broadcasters to pay more attention "to the public interest…to teach, to inform, to uplift, to stretch, to enlarge the capacities" of both children and adults.[17] In fact, throughout 1961, Minow delivered similar comments to a variety of media outlets, indicating his sincerity regarding television's potential to educate. In May, he told *TV Guide* that "television is the most powerful instrument ever devoted for reaching the minds and hearts of men."[18] A few months later, he urged members of the P.T.A. to "think what a tremendous effect television must be having on your youngsters or your students."[19]

I begin this chapter with Minow's oft-discussed speech as a useful way of uniting several disparate thoughts about television. Minow clearly wanted television to embrace a responsibility of creating good citizens; he ends his "Wasteland" speech by referencing

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[17] Newton Minow, "Television and the Public Interest," *American Rhetoric*, accessed April 13, 2014, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/newtonminow.htm.
[18] Newton Minow, "FCC Chairman Replies to *TV Guide*," *TV Guide*, May 13-19, 1961, A-4.
[19] Newton Minow, "FCC to P.T.A.: Closer Communication," *The P.T.A. Magazine* 56, no. 2 (1961): 10.

John F. Kennedy's inaugural address, saying "ask what broadcasting can do for America."[20] By lauding news programs, documentaries, and "highbrow culture" programs, Minow aligned himself with the corporate and political leaders who had been attempting to use television (and specifically, the genres Minow praised) as a teaching tool and instrument of governance in an effort to create the idealized American citizens valued within the postwar liberal consensus. In his criticism of the more entertainment focused television genres, Minow placed westerns, quiz shows, and suburban sitcoms out of the realm of "pedagogical television."

As various scholars have noted, though, the "lowbrow" entertainment programs and genres dismissed by Minow served to educate the public in their own way. In particular, I argue in this chapter that the suburban sitcom genres worked as an especially effective teaching tool, due to the explicitly pedagogical intentions of show creators, the enthused reception of viewers, and the elements of domesticity and verisimilitude found within the programs. Shows like *Father Knows Best*, *Ozzie and Harriet*, and *The Donna Reed Show* may have been dismissed by Minow as "totally unbelievable," but for a significant portion of the viewing public, they successfully communicated moral lessons—not just about being a good family member within the domestic sphere, but also about being an useful citizen within the broader neighborhood, city, and country. Despite being dismissed by advocates of highbrow television, suburban sitcoms sought to instill the same qualities of good citizenship valued by the liberal postwar consensus.

Background: Television as Educator/Tool of Governance

[20] Minow, "Television and the Public Interest."

The desire to utilize television as a teaching tool can actually be traced back to the development of radio broadcasting. While all forms of communication and popular culture have been used to transmit ideas to the public, radio's framework in particular heralded the concerns and structures that would be found in television. Radio effectively became "a self-regulating corporate sector that was networked with the state and with private associations [sponsors]." The airwaves were dominated by "commercial licensees whose task…was to serve 'public interest, convenience, and necessity.'" Broadcasters and their corporate sponsors, out of both self-interest and sincere desires to improve the public good, created various "educational, cultural, and public affairs" shows intended to foster good citizenship.[21]

By the postwar period, the exigencies of the Cold War made the educational potential of mass communication mediums (with television rapidly replacing radio as the most popular of such mediums) seem more attractive to corporate and political elites, who sought ways to create informed, productive citizens. Television was perceived as the "ideal tool for nondirective persuasion," an instrument that "could be used to educate (or reeducate) viewers' attitudes surrounding problems in a range of areas, from industrial relations to the Jim Crow South." Producers and sponsors, both from industry and the government, valued television as an indirect means of governance, a medium that could transmit ideas of citizenship "without subjecting [viewers] to direct state control."[22]

Postwar television thus worked as an instrument of governmentality, the Foucauldian concept that concerns "the ways in which one [a governing body] conducts

[21] Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (New York City, NY: The New Press, 2010), 24-25.
[22] McCarthy, 24.

the conduct of men."[23] The indirect nature of control perpetrated by television is comparable to Michel Foucault's observation that government is most concerned about "men in their relations…customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking, etc." In a February 1978 lecture, he compared government to the captain of a ship, who not only must "take charge of the sailors," but establish a "relation between the sailors who are to be taken care of and the ship which is to be taken care of, and the cargo which is to be brought safely to port."[24] This way of controlling not only how citizens act but how they think and what they value is not administered through laws, but through methods of indirect governance that foster feelings of loyalty or concern. Instruments of governance expand the power of the state, even as the populace may believe they are making independent choices. Cold War policymakers believed that television could create citizens of great utility to their communities and country, just as Foucault's hypothetical sailor was attached to his ship.[25]

While television's ostensibly independent status made it a useful tool of indirect governance, the controlled nature of postwar television made it easy to keep pedagogical messages relatively consistent. With few networks and limited program slots, 1950's television, especially as the decade wore on, was able to maintain a "tight control of

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[23] McCarthy, 5.
[24] Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 93-94.
[25] Other analyses of various television genres that use a Foucauldian perspective include Gareth Palmer's *Discipline and Liberty: Television and Governance* (New York City, NY: Palgrave, 2003); Toby Miller's *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2007); and Laurie Ouellette and James Hay's *Better Living Through Reality TV: Television and Post-Welfare Citizenship* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

ideas," allowing for a "growing homogeneity within and across the program schedules."[26] This "growing conservatism" was supported by television's sponsor system, in which corporations financed specific shows.[27] Sponsors "were involved in every step of production" in order to make sure that programming aligned with their corporate aims.[28] These restrictions ensured that alternative messages that would contradict those of the liberal consensus rarely appeared on the air.

For postwar policymakers, television may have been an attractive and easily controllable means of communication, but what types of values did they hope to instill in the American public? Why were these qualities important aspects of good citizenship? A brief review of these values will also indicate the diverse nature of television genres being utilized as instruments of governance. One of the most important qualities promoted by 1950's television was that of self improvement, the desire and ability of citizens to "better" their life. This was the focus of the durable television genre of highbrow "edutainment," programs intended to inform viewers (while entertaining them as well) about cultural, political, and international affairs. As Laurie Ouellette writes, one of the earliest high-profile examples of such a program was the Ford Foundation produced *Omnibus*, which "coupled light entertainment with edifying segments designed to promote classical music, dance, literature, drama, philosophy, history, and science."[29] The program's contents included such hodgepodge segments as "lectures on music from

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[26] William Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 187, 253.
[27] Boddy, 204.
[28] Nina Leibman, *Living Room Lectures: The Fifties Family in Film and Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 107.
[29] Laurie Ouellette, *Viewers Like You? How Public TV Failed the People* (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), 43.

Leonard Bernstein…condensed versions of classic opera, and films and studio segments designed to expose American viewers to forms of culture from around the world."[30]

While *Omnibus* would meet a mixed reception among the public and critics, it represented the belief held by corporate sponsors and television broadcasters that self-improvement was an essential quality for good Cold War citizens. The United States required "mature, wise, and responsible citizens who can participate intelligently in a free society," and what better way to create such citizens than through the promotion of social uplift?[31] Furthermore, Anna McCarthy argues that *Omnibus*, with its emphasis on education, was rooted in American "claims for the moral and cultural superiority of capitalist democracy."[32] As opposed to the Communist countries' "cultural homogeneity and hideously bad taste," the ideal American citizen was well informed and cosmopolitan.[33]

The "edutainment" genre persisted long after the cancellation of *Omnibus*. A quick glance through the pages of *TV Guide* in the late 1950's and early 1960's reveals numerous articles about low-budget, educational programs intended to foster self-improvement. In many cases, the programs were explicitly concerned with bettering tangible aspects of viewers' lives. For example, a 1959 article entitled "This Show May Save Your Life" advertises a program called *Tactic* produced by the American Cancer Society. *Tactic*, which aired on educational stations and was available for screening by

[30] McCarthy, 124.
[31] Ouellette, 42-43.
[32] McCarthy, 128.
[33] Ouellette, 45.

community groups, had the goal of alerting "the public to cancer's danger signals."[34] Another such program, *Social Security in Action*, created by the federal government, informed viewers about issues related to "death, retirement, and disability."[35] Audiences were expected to learn how to improve their health or their financial habits while also enjoying themselves; each of the program descriptions stressed that the shows were "highly entertaining." While far less glamorous than *Omnibus*, these programs also had the goal of fostering viewer self-improvement in an enjoyable manner.

The second quality of citizenship valued by the liberal consensus was that of a cool-headed rationality, exemplified by a confidence in the political system. Rationality was one of the primary values communicated to viewers within the array of 1950's news and public affairs programs. Television shows like the discussion program *Soap Box* and the Fund for the Republic-produced Newsfilm Project documentaries taught audiences that politically contentious issues, such as school integration, were best handled through patient understanding and cooperation. For example, Anna McCarthy writes how *Soap Box* reflected the beliefs of "the intergroup relations movement," which sought to fight prejudice and racial inequality "through concerted forms of interpersonal contact rather than political agitation."[36] The staged discussions on the program featured black and white participants coming together and learning about their "universal commonalities…as all-too-human" citizens.[37]

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[34] "This Show May Save Your Life," *TV Guide*, April 18-24, 1959, 23.
[35] "Social Security Gets the Hollywood Treatment," *TV Guide*, June 27-July 3, 1959, 22.
[36] McCarthy, 88.
[37] McCarthy, 101.

This model framed peaceful cooperation as the legitimate way of achieving progress: racial inequalities ended when people began to understand each other. The converse of this was that political action *not* rooted in these interpersonal relations was denounced as "extremism," in the same way that Todd Gitlin notes how the mass media divided the political movements of the 1960's "into legitimate main acts and illegitimate sideshows."[38] *Soap Box* defined productive behavior in the work of figures like "Miss Smith, the Negro teacher" who served as "the voice of reason and conciliation" on the show through her patient responses to white bigotry.[39] The Newsfilm Project's documentaries also ended up distinguishing legitimate and illegitimate responses to issues like integration. Project director George Martin said his goal was to feature "communication between the races and…examples of peaceful [de]segregation" because "the regular news media were covering the sensational aspects of the problem."[40] Narration in episodes would denounce "extremists of both sides," equating "segregationist violence with black Southerners' efforts to claim their legal rights."[41] Cooperation and having patient faith in the system would achieve far more than "sensational" political extremism.

The news programs established this distinction between proper and improper responses under the guise of maintaining "objectivity and balance."[42] White racists were given time to air their grievances on *Soap Box*, while the "extreme" perspectives of both

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[38] Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making & Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 6.
[39] McCarthy, 105.
[40] McCarthy, 180.
[41] McCarthy, 187.
[42] McCarthy, 186.

segregationists and civil rights leaders were profiled by the Newsfilm Project. In presenting these "balanced" reports, the news shows could denounce political behavior that worked outside of the system. Nancy Bernhard has analyzed how Cold War era news shows like *Meet the Press* took a somewhat similar approach to the issue of Communism. Producer Lawrence Spivak claimed his show maintained objectivity, but *Meet the Press* consistently presented anti-Communist and pro-Joseph McCarthy viewpoints. For example, under the guise of an objective interview, Spivak vigorously depicted a McCarthy critic as an extremist unconcerned about the Communist threat.[43] Like the viewers of the Newsfilm Project, audiences watching *Meet the Press* were encouraged to trust the American system and avoid extreme reactions to political turmoil. Good citizens who showed these reactions demonstrated the value of cool-headed rationality.

Finally, Cold War era liberals used television to promote trust in capitalism and industry, the cornerstones of the American way of life. Anna McCarthy has traced many ways in which corporations attempted to improve their image through educational television, from serving as sponsors of "highbrow" programming (such as those funded by the Ford Foundation) to producing industrial films, such as those that aired as part of the series *Industry on Parade*. Companies like DuPont specifically merged educational fare with corporate propaganda; shows like *Cavalcade of America* framed DuPont as a "patron of the arts," while simultaneously airing commercials that could further improve the company's image and repair "any ideological damage caused by the New Deal,

[43] Nancy Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda: 1947-1960* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 171.

antitrust suits, labor radicalism," or other political controversies that threatened industrial strength.[44]

These pro-capital messages were not simply intended to improve individual company reputations. Rather, they fit in within the overall postwar emphasis on mass consumption described by such scholars as Lizabeth Cohen and Lawrence Samuel. Immediately after the war, policymakers and businessmen envisioned "a dynamic mass consumer market." Economist Robert R. Nathan wrote that "ever-increasing consumption on the part of our people [is]…one of the prime requisites of prosperity. Mass consumption is essential to the success of a system of mass production."[45] Television, with its ability to sell both companies and their products, was a way to expand consumer markets on an unprecedented scale. Television advertising was credited with preventing a recession after the Korean War, and, in the words of NBC executive Pat Weaver, worked as "the spark plug of a never-ending prosperity." Weaver believed that television (both through the "highbrow" programs described above and through the general airing of commercials) created such "an itch to buy, have, see, and do all the things shown on TV that everybody will work better to make more money to spend."[46] In this new postwar economy, "the good purchaser devoted to 'more, newer, and better' was the good citizen."[47] Through consumption and support of industry, the viewing audience would do their duty.

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[44] McCarthy, 39-40.
[45] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York City, NY: Vintage Books, 2003), 115-116.
[46] Lawrence R. Samuel, *Brought to You By: Postwar Television Advertising and the American Dream* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 88.
[47] Cohen, 119.

The Suburban Sitcom as Teaching Tool

The work of instilling these values of Cold War citizenship was not merely restricted to explicitly educational genres of television. Television programs ostensibly meant to provide simple entertainment were equally capable of serving as instruments of governance.[48] Indeed, the aforementioned focus on "edutainment" indicates that television producers understood their responsibility to entertain while educating viewers on issues of citizenship. Nevertheless, as the 1950's wore on, social critics became increasingly concerned that television was becoming too skewed on the side of amusement, as opposed to education. While exemplified by Newton Minow's "vast wasteland" speech which opened this chapter, discourse hinting that television had abandoned its educational responsibilities in favor of "bring[ing] Coney Island into every home" frequently appeared throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s.[49]

TV Guide articles of the period frequently lamented television's failures to work as an instrument of social change. In particular, a flurry of 1960 articles (a year before Minow's speech) featured intellectuals discussing the wasted potential of television. The director of the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania, Gilbert Seldes, wrote in January that television needed to be better used "for the general good."[50] Walter Eshelman, the president of the National Education Association, agreed, saying that he "would like to see television take far more advantage of its influence in

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[48] See Samuel's *Brought to You By*, Jason Mittell's *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2004), and Marsha F. Cassidy's article "Sob Stories, Merriment, and Surprise: The 1950s Audience Participation Show on Network Television and Women's Daytime Reception" (in *The Velvet Light Trap* 42 [Fall 1998]: 48-61) for a look at how various "lowbrow" entertainment genres transmitted some of these same ideas.
[49] Ouellette, 27.
[50] Gilbert Seldes, "The Petulant Highbrow and TV," *TV Guide*, January 2-8, 1960, 19.

raising the intellectual level and taste of its listeners instead of catering so frequently to the audience appetite for mere diversion."[51] In March, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, Erwin Canham, wrote a similar article, urging television to "push far beyond the borders of entertainment" and to "fulfill its social purpose."[52] Canham's article was praised by an April letter-writer, who agreed that "television [was] one of the most, if not the most, important communicators to the American people."[53]

In denouncing the lack of "social purpose" within television, writers like Seldes, Eshelman, and Canham agreed with Minow's assessment of the following year, which criticized genres such as the western and sitcom for their lack of educational potential. In the eyes of these intellectuals, the 1960's would see television remain a "boob tube" that "was still dominated by formulaic amusements like *Petticoat Junction*, *Gilligan's Island*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies*."[54] This perception that the television programming of the late 1950's and 1960's, particularly the sitcom, had little connection to the social purpose envisioned by Canham or Minow, has persisted in scholarship. As Anna McCarthy notes in her epilogue to *The Citizen Machine*, television scholars have traced how the "socially relevant" comedies produced by MTM and Norman Lear in the 1970's changed television by making the sitcom into "a form of public service, raising controversial issues, sparking debate, and bringing hidden assumptions out into the open," as well as delivering "prosocial messages" within the guise of entertainment.[55] This view of the sitcom, which I will discuss further in future chapters, effectively removes the shows of

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[51] "As We See It," *TV Guide*, January 16-22, 1960, 3.
[52] Erwin Canham, "It Must Cry Out," *TV Guide*, March 12-18, 1960, 19.
[53] "Letters," *TV Guide*, April 2-8, 1960, 18.
[54] Ouellette, 34-35.
[55] McCarthy, 252-53.

the 1950's and 1960's (the "suburban sitcom" genre defined in the introduction) from any connections to civic education.

However, this viewpoint ignores the role of the suburban sitcom as a teaching tool. Not only were family comedies like *Father Knows Best* and *Donna Reed* instructive in nature, but they also communicated the same idealized qualities of citizenship found in "highbrow" programming such as *Omnibus* and *Soap Box*. The creators of many sitcoms were, in fact, quite explicit regarding their intentions to create pedagogical programming. For example, Eugene Rodney, the executive producer of *Father Knows Best*, described the dual purpose of his show in a 1958 interview. "We're an entertainment show…and have never had any intention of preaching. But when you're doing a family show and the family is an intelligent one, you just naturally come up with problems and solutions," he said.[56] In an interview with the *Saturday Evening Post* the year before, Rodney was blunter, proudly proclaiming that *FKB* episodes were filled with "built-in moral lessons."[57]

Others associated with the show shared Rodney's perception. Guy Della Cioppa, the Vice-President of CBS, echoed Rodney's words by claiming that Rodney and star Robert Young "have a strong and never-ending desire to create quality entertainment with an undertone of family devotion and the preservation of American values."[58] Young, who played the title role on the show, also believed the show (and specifically the characters he and his fellow actors were portraying) could teach the viewers as well as

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[56] Dan Jenkins, "Father Still Has His Day…Because the Show Just Won't Die," *TV Guide*, June 14-20, 1958, *Father Knows Best*.com, accessed April 14, 2014, http://fatherknowsbest.us/Article3.html.
[57] Bob Eddy, "Private Life of a Perfect Papa," *Saturday Evening Post*, April 27, 1957, 172.
[58] "Life as Father *Really* Leads It," *TV Guide*, January 13-19, 1962, 25.

entertain. "I played Jim [Anderson, the protagonist] as the image of what I'd like to be and what I think, perhaps, I can be," he told *TV Guide* a few years after the show ended its run.[59] In another interview years later, Young insisted the show worked as a pedagogical tool, suggesting "it helped with the realization that a family can exist without killing each other."[60]

Rodney's goals also prominently appeared in the discourse of other creators of suburban sitcoms. Tony Owen, the executive producer of *The Donna Reed Show* (and at the time, Donna Reed's husband), told *TV Guide* in 1964 that "you [people in television] have to give them [viewers] an ideal to look up to."[61] Reed herself spent a good portion of the interview complaining about the lack of morality seen in film and television, claiming that her show tried to set a good example for audiences. Similarly, Ozzie Nelson (star and creator of *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*) proposed in a 1963 interview that "there will always be a place for a wholesome, happy approach to life."[62] In 1964, Don Fedderson (executive producer of *My Three Sons*) said his show was a "clean, nonviolent comedy, with a small message every week."[63]

In recent years, one of the most outspoken personalities on the subject of the pedagogical role of sitcoms has been Paul Petersen, who played young Jeff Stone on *The Donna Reed Show*. Petersen has frequently criticized contemporary sitcoms, comparing them unfavorably to shows like *Donna Reed*. "I think, especially today, in the absence of

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[59] "Life as Father *Really* Leads It, Part II," *TV Guide*, January 20-26, 1962, 19.
[60] Jeff Kisseloff, *The Box: An Oral History of Television, 1920-1961* (New York City, NY: Penguin Books, 1995), 345.
[61] Marian Dern, "Sweet, Sincere, and Solvent," *TV Guide*, June 20-26, 1964, 12.
[62] Vernon Scott, "A Nice Normal Family," *TV Guide*, September 21-27, 1963, 11.
[63] Arnold Hano, "*Ben-Hur* in the Suburbs," *TV Guide*, July 25-31, 1964, 26.

a strong nuclear family, family shows provide emotional instruction, in a way saying 'Look, this is a way things can be done correctly,'" Petersen stated in a 1995 interview.[64] In 2008, Petersen described *Donna Reed* as providing "22-and-a-half-minutes of moral instructions and advice on how to deal with the little dilemmas of life…The messages it sent out were positive and uplifting."[65] Petersen's modern-day observations echo what the creators of such programs were saying in the 1950's and 1960's: their shows were more than entertainment—they were teaching tools.

The creators of these shows may have intended for their programs to instruct viewers, but did they succeed in their goals? While it is difficult to gauge the true impact on viewers, scholarship suggests that a significant portion of the programs' audiences did believe they were watching something more than entertainment. Nina Leibman has described the vast amount of fan mail received by the stars and creators of suburban sitcoms like *Father Knows Best*, *Donna Reed*, and others. A representative letter sent to *Leave It to Beaver* star Barbara Billingsley called her show "interesting and thought stimulating" and said the program was helping to advance a "high moral tone."[66] Such letters were similar to the many thousands received by those connected with the sitcoms. According to a *Saturday Evening Post* article, many letters addressed to *Father Knows Best* claimed "this is one of the very few shows that our whole family, young and old, watches and likes. We even learn something from it."[67] *FKB* star Billy Gray admitted that

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[64] Kisseloff, 346.
[65] Glenn Garvin, "Life Was Better in 'Donna Reed' World, Cast Member Paul Petersen Says," Catholic Online, last modified December 10, 2008, http://www.catholic.org/news/ae/tv/story.php?id=30989.
[66] Leibman, 88.
[67] Eddy, 29.

it was "taken…as an example to live by…Over the years, people have said to me that they've gained a great deal of sustenance from it somehow."[68]

The belief in the programs' teaching power also helps to further flesh out the oft-told story of *Father Knows Best*'s imminent cancellation after its first season.[69] During its first year on television (1954-1955), *FKB* aired at the awkward time of 10:00 PM on Sunday evenings. Featuring low ratings and judged to contain "the built-in values of a crashing bore so far as entertainment was concerned," *Father Knows Best* was cancelled by CBS. What followed was what *TV Guide* described as a textbook example of "Viewer Demand" in which the cancelation was protested by "a handful of letters from irate viewers and a number of surprisingly vehement articles by some of the top columnists."[70] Many of the complainants insisted that the show "was telecast too late to get many children viewers" even though it had "all-family audience appeal."[71] As the letters above revealed, such demands were doubtlessly connected to audiences' belief that *FKB* was a show with influence upon viewers (especially their children).

Less discussed, though, was the fact that a similar phenomenon befell other suburban sitcoms. During its first season, *The Donna Reed Show* aired Wednesday nights at 9:00, earlier than *FKB*'s original time slot, but still in the words of Donna Reed, not quite "right for a family show."[72] The show's early episodes pulled dismal ratings, what *TV Guide* judged to be "a new low for shows which were later to become successful."

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[68] Kisseloff, 345.
[69] This story appears frequently in various histories of *Father Knows Best*, including its entry within the comprehensive *Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows, 1946-Present*, 9th ed., (New York City, NY: Ballantine Books, 2007) by Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, pages 462-463.
[70] Jenkins.
[71] Leibman, 89.
[72] "No Prima Donna," *TV Guide*, March 26-April 1, 1960, 26.

Reed and her husband/show producer Tony Owen refused to alter the show's moralistic style: there were "no drastic changes made in the storyline…no gimmicks introduced to beef up the show's appeal."[73] Like *Father Knows Best*, the deciding factor was apparently not the show's appeal but rather its time slot. Reed recalled in a 1960 interview that "we'd had too many letters from people asking us to come on earlier so their children could watch…so they moved us to Thursday night [at 8:00]," a time slot where the show flourished for years.[74] Once again, viewers, determined to "save" a show they perceived as compelling family viewing, helped to save a suburban sitcom.[75]

Even more dramatic than the "popular demand" letter campaigns were missives that claimed shows like *FKB* specifically helped mend personal problems. A letter addressed to star Robert Young came from parents who "had a serious quarrel with their two teenage children." The letter declared:

> We just happened to be together when the program came on, like an answer to all of us. After it was over, we decided then and there to live as a family, each person taking an interest in the others. Our home has been a better one since. Family living and sharing is the secret. That's what Father Knows Best.[76]

A similar letter was described in a 1959 issue of *Good Housekeeping*. Written by a mother who had fought with her daughter, it said that after both women watched *FKB*, "we both felt like fools. We didn't even need to kiss and make up. You had done it for

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[73] "Never Argue with a Woman," *TV Guide*, August 8-14, 1959, 10.
[74] "No Prima Donna," 26.
[75] An October 1962 letter to *TV Guide* from a Mrs. Harold Sullivan reveals this problem persisted (at least in some viewers' minds) into the early 1960's, as the writer laments that when "the children [are] all nicely tucked into bed, what do we find? All the good family shows I would like them to see," specifically mentioning such shows as *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, *Hazel*, and *My Three Sons*, all of which aired at 9:00 or later. Unfortunately for Mrs. Sullivan, only *My Three Sons* would ever change its time slot to air before 9:00.
[76] Eddy, 176.

us."[77] Producer Eugene Rodney claimed that emotional letters such as these were fairly common, saying "nearly every mail brings a letter from some viewer advising [*sic*] that his entire attitude toward his own children has been changed from watching the show."[78]

Even those associated with the shows could admit they too could take some lessons away from their work. Norman Tokar, a director on *Leave It to Beaver*, claimed that his experiences working on the show helped "him to be a better daddy to his own brood of three."[79] *Father Knows Best*'s Jane Wyatt admitted that an episode (in which Betty Anderson chooses to attend a college of her choice, not necessarily what her parents want) helped her relationship with her son, who similarly intended to pursue a different university than what his parents wished. "I read that script—and promptly dropped the whole thing at home," Wyatt recalled, noting "it makes you wish…you had a clever script writer or two around the house to work these things out for you."[80]

Finally, along with viewer response, sitcom analysis within mass media periodicals also demonstrated public perception of the shows' pedagogical qualities. For example, in the aforementioned *Good Housekeeping* article mentioned above, the writer praises *Father Knows Best*'s "mixture of humor, harassment, and sentiment that literally hits home with some 15 million fathers, sons, and daughters."[81] The article's good-natured use of the word "harassment" reflects an understanding that sitcoms like *FKB* were not just comedies. The *P.T.A. Magazine* published a 1962 study, which claimed that

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[77] Mary Beth Haralovich, "Sitcoms and Suburbs: Positioning the 1950s Homemaker," in *Critiquing the Suburb: A Reader*, ed. Joanne Morreale (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 74.
[78] "It's Not Always Father Who 'Knows Best' for Backstage Problems," *TV Guide*, February 16-22, 1957, *Father Knows Best*.com, accessed April 14, 2014, http://fatherknowsbest.us/Article2.html.
[79] "Busy as a Beaver," *TV Guide*, July 11-17, 1959, 7.
[80] "It's Not Always Father…"
[81] Haralovich, 74.

TV "was mentioned as an influence on children's ideas and ideals about love, marriage, and family life by more parents than was any other source except the parents themselves."[82] The article specifically signaled out family sitcoms (such as *My Three Sons* and *Father Knows Best*) as major teaching influences upon children.

A revealing article regarding the educational potential of the sitcom genre is a 1962 critical review of the show *Hazel*. The author, the aforementioned cultural critic Gilbert Seldes, reacts extremely negatively to the episode "Three Little Cubs," in which a bright if snobbish schoolboy is mocked for not being a Cub Scout. Seldes notes that "the good student…is always the butt of everyone's jokes—until he drops his books and turns into a hero." Referencing Cold War values, Seldes insists "we will survive or perish, depending on how much we *learn*" before calling for a moratorium on comedy shows mocking intelligent children.[83] The seriousness with which Seldes chastises the episode reflects his perception that the shows instill something more upon the viewing audience than simple laughs—in this case, the (negative) message that being a Cub Scout is more important than doing well in school. Indeed, Seldes' *TV Guide* reviews of sitcoms generally highlighted the shows' pedagogical qualities. In writing of *My Three Sons*, Seldes noted that while the show was "packaged as a pleasant comedy," it did provide (on occasion) an instructive "demonstration of child-parent relationship with special attention to sibling rivalry."[84] Critics like Seldes, who mocked "the petulant highbrow" who could find no worth in programs like *Father Knows Best*, clearly believed that the

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[82] Evelyn Millis Duvall, "Where Do They Get Their Ideas of Love and Marriage?", *The P.T.A. Magazine* 56.8 (April 1962): 12.
[83] Gilbert Seldes, "Review: *Hazel*," *TV Guide*, May 26-June 1, 1962, 21.
[84] Gilbert Seldes, "Review: *My Three Sons*," *TV Guide*, September 22-28, 1962, 1.

shows were indeed presenting to the public what Eugene Rodney referred to as "built-in moral lessons."[85]

The Importance of Sitcom Realism

While the discourse of viewers and creators suggest a certain vagueness in just *what* kinds of lessons suburban sitcoms were imparting (which I will discuss later in this chapter), it is clear that a large portion of fans and critics alike not only grudgingly accepted the pedagogical aims of the shows' creators but enthusiastically embraced them. What could explain the readiness of television viewers to treat sitcoms as teaching tools potentially on the same level as explicitly educational programming? I argue one of the most important factors was the sense of realistic identification that the sitcoms created among their viewers. While several modern-day writers have described the programs as "bafflingly bland" or "comfortingly escapist," viewers at the time believed such shows closely reflected the world around them, more so than many other television genres.[86] This feeling of verisimilitude, which was enhanced by the programs' domestic qualities, helped audiences to identify with suburban sitcoms.

The importance of realism was frequently discussed within other genres of television programming. In their attempts at educating viewers, documentary tele-features utilized non-professional actors as a way of creating realistic qualities. The 1956 feature *A City Decides* included a scene where parents ask questions about integration to a panel of experts. The parents' "blushing performances indicate that they are not actors but participants recruited from the community, modeling examples both good and bad;

[85] Gilbert Seldes, "The Petulant Highbrow and TV."
[86] Noel Brown, *The Hollywood Family Film: A History, From Shirley Temple to Harry Potter* (New York City, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 101, 107.

the officials on the panel…appear to be playing themselves."[87] Even if the "parents" are reading a script, their halting manner and intentionally wooden style of performing mark them as real people modeling real opinions. Similarly, the trope of professional actors ending programs by stepping out of character and addressing the audience added a sense of "sincerity and authenticity" to the proceedings.[88] This touch, despite effectively revealing the artifice of the shows, allowed the actors to explain their personal interest in and commitment to the events being depicted, thus ultimately creating audience identification.

Realism was also important in non-educational programming. Television commercials of the 1950's took disparate forms, several of which attempted to create a sense of verisimilitude. The "rational school of television advertising" presented realistic depictions of products being used, while the "integrated" commercial, airing as part of a show itself, featured the product in the hands of television personalities such as Jack Benny or Arthur Godfrey.[89] In each case, the goal of the commercial was to depict *actual* instances of products being used, by either nondescript demonstrators or Hollywood celebrities. By the early 1960's, commercials began to take on a documentary-esque "*cinema verité*" style.[90] Products were now endorsed not by stars, but through supposedly realistic "man in the street" interviews. Instead of simply outlining how a product worked, elaborate tests (such as the Timex "torture test") stressed aspects of products such as durability or reliability.

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[87] McCarthy, 100.
[88] McCarthy, 235.
[89] Samuel 30, 65.
[90] Samuel, 175.

The "realistic" nature (or at least a perceived attempt at creating realism) of suburban sitcoms was stressed early in the genre's history. As opposed to the more slapstick or vaudeville-inspired humor of comedians like Milton Berle or Red Skelton and shows like *I Love Lucy* or *The Honeymooners*, programs like *Father Knows Best* and *Donna Reed* promoted the idea of normality, depicting a "typical" family in ostensibly identifiable situations. This was not by chance. When *FKB* star Robert Young was first approached about doing the sitcom in 1949 (when it was preparing to go on the radio airwaves), he and producer Eugene Rodney wanted to create "a show to fit the actor [Young]," a self-described "pretty normal family man."[91]

In the eyes of media observers, Rodney and Young's program (both on radio and then television) represented a shift in the idea of what constituted a "family comedy."[92] In a 1956 *TV Guide* article on the show (subtitled "Robert Young Proves a TV Dad Doesn't Have To Be Stupid"), the unnamed writer contrasted *Father Knows Best* with earlier shows:

> "You take this family, see? There's this pretty wife and a couple of attractive kids who have all sorts of problems. For laughs we have the father—a real bumbling idiot, one of those guys who's always hanging doors upside down, falling in wet cement, coming up with the wrong answers for the kids' homework." And so another family situation comedy is born. And another. And another.
> And…Suddenly, there comes a switch. The father isn't a bumbler. Instead, he's a normal, intelligent businessman controlling his family sensibly, even wisely. The laughs aren't yocks; they're chuckles and smiles—warm ones.[93]

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[91] "Father Does Know Best: Robert Young Proves a TV Dad Doesn't Have to be Stupid," *TV Guide*, June 16-22, 1956, *Father Knows Best*.com, accessed April 14, 2014, http://fatherknowsbest.us/Article1.html.
[92] *Father Knows Best* was not the first "naturalized" suburban sitcom. At the very least, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (on radio since 1944, on television since 1952) preceded it; however, little comment was made on the uniqueness of this program, perhaps due to aspects of the "bumbling father" trope found in it.
[93] "Father Does Know Best…"

The article depicts *FKB* as ushering in a more subdued type of comedy rooted not in out and out humor but rather in identification, where the audience responds with "smiles" at a normal family and their normal situations. For creators like Rodney or Young, who were interested in teaching the public as well as entertaining, this type of humor suited their purposes far more than traditional belly laughs. Programs like *FKB* were thus distinguished from the broader comedy found in the "bumbling father" shows like the contemporaneous *The Life of Riley*. Critic John Crosby would go so far as to say Young's character of Jim Anderson "may be the first intelligent father they permitted on radio or TV since they invented the thing."[94]

When *The Donna Reed Show* premiered in 1958, it too was described by the media as different than other programs because of its nods to reality. During the early months of the show's run, it had, according to *TV Guide*, "a format and theme so similar to half a dozen other family situation comedies." However, gradually, the show distinguished itself from its brethren by creating what Donna Reed described as "the feeling of a real family." Reed claimed that other sitcoms were "either too full of parents who are hopelessly permissive, or populated strictly with little angels." Instead, Reed and her husband, show producer Tony Owen, insisted the show needed to feature realistic displays of bickering and emotion. "Tony and I have a family of our own, and there is no such thing as a family where arguments don't occur," Reed stated.[95] The viewers' sense of identification with the fictional Stone family would ensure the show's success, both in the ratings and in the ability to transmit lessons.

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[94] Eddy, 29.
[95] "No Prima Donna," 25-26.

Reed, like her male counterpart, Robert Young, was adamant that her program would give her an opportunity to play a "normal" role. In a 1961 interview, Reed claimed she was "fed up to here with stories about kooky, amoral or sick women…with the producers today, it has to be *BUtterfield 8*. I just don't believe the public wants a diet of these sick females." Instead, Reed sought to create "a strong, healthy woman," a part representative of much of the viewing public that "wasn't soap opera" or ridiculous slapstick. The role of Donna Stone, according to a friend of Reed's, was perfect for the actress who possessed "an old-fashioned word for an old-fashioned virtue—character."[96] Both Young and Reed, at least during the time their shows were on the air, further added to the realism by suggesting their parts were not dissimilar from their own personalities**.**

The drive for "realism" would be stressed by others attached to the programs, including writers, cast members, network executives, and representatives of the sponsors, all of whom noted that the most important element of the suburban sitcom was not the comedy, but rather the feeling of verisimilitude created by the shows. Examining behind-the-scenes perception of *Father Knows Best* reveals the importance everyone associated with the show placed on audience identification. As noted, star Robert Young insisted on playing a "normal family man" on the show. His preference was zealously shared by producer Eugene Rodney, a man who claimed to be more interested in "realistic" plots than "big action or bagfuls of jokes." In a *Saturday Evening Post* interview, Rodney said his goal was to make "a TV audience climb inside our family and feel as they do," to truly identify with the fictional Anderson family and thus be able to learn from them.[97]

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[96] "The Farmer's Daughter Who Went to Town," *TV Guide*, May 13-19, 1961, 13.
[97] Eddy, 172.

Rodney, "the heart and soul of the program" according to all sources, insisted that viewer identification was crucial.[98] According to Young, Rodney continually claimed "the show was appealing because audiences see themselves in it."[99]

To that end, Rodney used his power within the show to maintain a feeling of verisimilitude. Director Peter Tewksbury noted how Rodney "did all the casting, all the work with the writers, all the work with the editing, the props, the sets, the set dressing, the wardrobe, and the make-up…Nothing, but nothing…escaped his attention or took place without his approval."[100] Within Rodney's vision, behind the scenes issues all had to take into account the idea of realism. For the 1956 episode "The House Painter," Rodney insisted on overpaying to hire actor Parker Fennelly to play a crucial role, claiming "there'd have been no story if that painter's integrity didn't come through."[101] In regard to the show's laugh track, Rodney "stood over the laugh track man and hit him if the laugh was too loud," feeling that it hurt the show's realism.[102] Because of Rodney's zeal and his influence, it was logical that his concern for identification would be shared by others associated with *Father Knows Best*. Writers Roswell Rogers and Paul West claimed their goal was to make viewers exclaim "That's just what happened to us once!"[103] The result was an entire show built around one central idea: to depict characters and scenarios that Young and Rodney believed "would be representative of a middle-

[98] Leibman, 52.
[99] Leibman, 87.
[100] Leibman, 52.
[101] Eddy, 172.
[102] Leibman, 62.
[103] Eddy, 172.

class American family."[104] Both men knew that the show's built-in "moral lessons" would have little effect if viewers did not find their program realistic.

This concern was shared by the creators of the other suburban sitcoms. As Nina Leibman describes, such shows were typically manufactured under a "blueprint mentality," involving a "pre-established framework…[run] by a program-defining producer," like Ozzie Nelson (*Ozzie and Harriet*), Joe Connelly and Bob Mosher (*Leave It to Beaver*), or Donna Reed and Tony Owen (*Donna Reed*).[105] Such producers could thus easily mold their shows to match their own preferences, and while perhaps not to the extent of Eugene Rodney, they each shared his concerns with fostering a sense of realism and instructing the audience. Thus, they adjusted the laugh track to match actual audience reactions and claimed that "factual occurrences" (such as actual family stories) were "the impetus behind various episode ideas."[106] In a 1963 *TV Guide* interview, Ozzie Nelson, when asked to comment on why his program was successful for so long, brought up audience identification. Nelson remarked that "being a family in real life, our relationships are honest and the viewers are able to believe what they see and associate our problems and activities with their own lives."[107]

The networks too emphasized realism. An August 1957 report from CBS' Television Research Department records research subject reactions after viewing the pilot for *Leave It to Beaver*. In particular, the report favorably notes that "half the viewers described *Beaver* as realistic, typical, and down-to-earth." Beaver (the character) was

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[104] Kisseloff, 344.
[105] Leibman, 50-51.
[106] Leibman, 72.
[107] Scott, 11.

praised for being a "realistic [and] natural, typical of a boy that age, and an average American boy." The network ended up recasting the parts of Ward and Wally Cleaver after research subjects felt the actors did not come off fully believable. The comment "he did not appear and act as a real father should" comes off as especially damaging—for a show built around slapstick humor, it did not matter so much if, for example, *Life of Riley* star William Bendix did not seem like a real father.[108] However, for a show rooted in supposed identifiable pedagogical humor like *Beaver*, it was unacceptable.

In their attempts at creating realistic products, the creators of suburban sitcoms did not satisfy everyone. Even during the 1950's and early 1960's, programs like *Father Knows Best* and *Donna Reed* were met with sneering disapproval by viewers who found them completely *unrealistic*. As expected, some show business insiders took cynical attitudes towards the sitcoms. Talk show host David Susskind cracked the *Donna Reed Show* should be re-titled *The Madonna Reed Show* because of the "sublimely well-behaved picture of…Home Sweet Home as it really isn't."[109] Television writer Everett Greenbaum claimed to have been "sickened" by *Father Knows Best*, saying it "represented American life in a dishonest way."[110] Even Billy Gray, the actor playing Bud on *FKB*, was displeased with his own show. In the 1990's, Gray criticized the show for failing to "address some of the problems that are happening in society…it was as if it were in a vacuum or some kind of enchanted forest. It wasn't taking into account the reality of the world. It was just an advertiser's vision of what the world should be."[111] For

[108] Leibman, 83-84.
[109] Dern, 11.
[110] Kisseloff, 336.
[111] Kisseloff, 345-46.

men like Gray and Greenbaum, the lessons the shows were teaching were decidedly *not* rooted in realism.

More intriguing than the jibes of industry insiders was the acknowledgement by viewers that the shows seemed unrealistic. In a 1962 review of *Ozzie and Harriet*, the *P.T.A. Magazine*, a publication which continually stressed the need for clean, family humor, deprecatingly noted the characters "lead a custard life—bland, smooth, sweet, and wholesome…with reality resolutely excluded, this family romance maintains a high level of rosy monotony."[112] Not even the *P.T.A.* reviewers could accept the lack of reality on *Ozzie and Harriet*. A report later that year by the Center for the Study of Audience Reactions revealed sharply negative reactions by some respondents to the suburban family sitcoms. The study showed that "viewers who tend to reject family comedies…complain that the family life shown is supposed to be typical and true-to-life but is actually just the opposite." One person surveyed claimed "nothing serious ever happens to them [the characters]."[113] These reactions revealed that even during their initial runs, portions of the viewing public could not accept such sitcoms as realistic.

However, despite such criticisms, much of the viewing public *did* appear to sincerely identify with the programs. The same Center for the Study of Audience Reactions' report reveals that fans of suburban sitcoms (as opposed to those who rejected them in the first place) frequently described such shows as "'realistic,' 'true to life,' and 'down to earth.'" Robert Young recalled that fans who communicated directly with him shared such sentiments. "People did perceive it as real life. I know that," Young insisted

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[112] "Time Out for Television," *The P.T.A. Magazine* 56, no. 6 (1962): 24.
[113] Herbert Kay, "You Just *Think* You Know!," *TV Guide*, October 13-18, 1962, 27.

in a 1995 interview.[114] Nina Leibman describes how Young, his co-stars, and other sitcom stars received numerous letters that revealed "the conviction that the Andersons, Stones, et al., were 'real' families." *TV Guide* reported in 1955 that viewers admiringly wrote to *Father Knows Best*'s sponsor to say "they liked the show because it represents American family life as it is really is and not as some TV scriptwriter thinks it is—or should be."[115] These fans were doubtlessly the same ones who also wrote to say they had learned morals or received instruction from the sitcoms.

Critics who favorably reviewed these programs also frequently singled out their perceived realistic flavor. *Good Housekeeping* said *Father Knows Best* "is like looking through a rose-tinted picture window into your own living room."[116] *TV Guide* recommended *The Donna Reed Show* in a 1959 review that called the show "refreshing," specifically because its star "actually acts like a mother, an impersonation that hasn't been successfully perpetrated on television since Peggy Wood left," referencing the star of the older program *Mama*.[117] A later positive review of *Leave It to Beaver* called the show "one of the most honest, most human, and most satisfying" sitcoms on the air, noting that its creators "seem to know how fathers are expected to behave around the house."[118] These reviews note that while the sitcoms attracted their share of cynical jibes, many mainstream observers regarded the shows as realistic and as noted earlier, considered them prime teaching tools.

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[114] Kisseloff, 345.
[115] Leibman, 88-89.
[116] Haralovich, 74.
[117] "Review: *The Donna Reed Show*," *TV Guide*, February 14-20, 1959, 26.
[118] "Review: *Leave It to Beaver*," *TV Guide*, October 8-14, 1960, 27.

In identifying with the programs, viewers and critics were not necessarily naively accepting all aspects of the shows as believable. As mentioned above, the Center for the Study of Audience Reactions noted how even fans of suburban sitcoms "admit (though often unwittingly) that the problems [on such shows] are not resolved or treated realistically." When pressed, viewers admitted they preferred the programs as a "means of blissful but temporary escape."[119] In their report on the same study, the *P.T.A. Magazine* stressed the contradictory aspect of viewer reactions: "Viewers replied that the situation comedies are realistic, true to life, down to earth. Then they asserted that the same comedies don't treat problems realistically or find a real solution."[120] The reactions of viewers in this study reveal that it was possible to identify with *some* but not *all* aspects of the shows. In this case, viewers could identify with the characters and their situations, but not necessarily the contrived, melodramatic resolutions to the episodes. The perceived naturalistic qualities helped to trump awareness of the unrealistic conclusions, allowing audience members to enjoy and learn from the shows, even if they did not completely accept all aspects as believable.

The most intriguing way that viewers regarded the programs as realistic was the way that audiences tended to blend the fictional characters and families on sitcoms with their real life portrayers. This mixing of reality and fiction was encouraged by the creators of such shows in order to boost perceptions of verisimilitude. Thus, many magazine features conflated character with performer. For example, Donna Reed, Jane Wyatt (from *Father Knows Best*), and Robert Young appeared in *TV Guide* cover features

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[119] Kay, 27.
[120] "Time Out for Television," *The P.T.A. Magazine* 57, no. 9 (1963): 24.

on Mother's Day and Father's Day, while Wyatt and Barbara Billingsley (from *Leave It to Beaver*) also appeared in the magazine's "housewife fashion spreads."[121] A *TV Guide* profile of Billingsley described her as "a dead ringer for the mild-mannered and soft-spoken [character of] June Cleaver, housewife."[122]

No other genre performer was conflated with his character more than Robert Young. In a 1959 *TV Guide* interview, Young said that audiences regarded him not as a star but "as a known friend." The interviewer, Dwight Whitney, commented that "as a Great American Father…more may be expected of him than any other TV actor."[123] Indeed, Young was frequently invited to events perhaps more suited for his character, such as presiding over the opening of the west coast headquarters of a life insurance company (Jim Anderson was an insurance salesman on the show).[124] Young accepted over fifty public speaking engagements a year, noting that "that as far as he's [the average viewer's] concerned, Bob Young and Jim Anderson are one and the same man."[125] A 1962 article, written several years after the show had stopped production, further conflated Young with his role, calling him "the best-possible American father."[126]

Young, at least publicly, seemed to accept audiences viewing him as Jim Anderson. In the aforementioned 1962 interview, Young discussed his fans:

> On television, I was not a remote personality. I am a person who actually comes into their living rooms for a friendly visit every week. So I am someone they know rather well and they have no hesitation in coming up to shake my hand to slap my back or sit down for a nice little chat…Sometimes they call me

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[121] Leibman, 69-70.
[122] "An Expert on the Male," *TV Guide*, February 25-March 3, 1961, 11.
[123] Dwight Whitney, "The Penalty of Being Father," *TV Guide*, June 20-26, 1959, 24-26.
[124] "Father Still Has His Day…"
[125] Whitney, 27.
[126] "Life as Father *Really* Leads It," 23.

> Jim…When they ask me about the kids, I know they are talking about the television kids, not my own. And when they talk about my wife they mean Jane Wyatt, not my real wife Betty.[127]

While these reactions seemed relatively harmless, Young also admitted to confronting more emotional perceptions of his character. According to the interview, "children by the hundreds wrote him, crying 'Gee, I wish I had a dad like you.' Thousands of parents deluged him with their family problems and prayed for instant solutions."[128] The most notorious incident in this vein came in December 1959, when a girl calling herself "Terri" wrote a letter to Young describing her family—her mother "drinks all day," while her father was in prison. Terri said when she watched *Father Knows Best*, "sometimes I'm pretending that your [*sic*] my father…to me you'll always be a father that I could dream about."[129] For some viewers, the realism of shows like *FKB* extended beyond simple enjoyment.

The blending of reality and fiction even affected the performers themselves. Lauren Chapin (Kathy on *Father Knows Best*) said that she had once nursed a wounded sparrow, something her character coincidentally was asked to do in a *FKB* episode.[130] Paul Petersen (Jeff on *The Donna Reed Show*) admitted that his constant appearances with his TV parents "led to some confusion on my part as to who my real parents were."[131] His counterpart, Billy Gray (from *FKB*), rejected such ideas, saying there was nothing parental about his relationship with his co-stars, but in a telling comment in an interview, Gray stated "I never confused Jim and Jane with my real parents," using the

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[127] Life as Father *Really* Leads It," 24.
[128] Life as Father *Really* Leads It," 23.
[129] Leibman, 91.
[130] "It's Not Always Father…"
[131] Kisseloff, 340.

names of the *character* Jim Anderson and the *actress* Jane Wyatt.[132] Such comments reveal that the stressing of reality within such sitcoms had an impact on even those involved in production.

The Realistic (and Domestic) Nature of Suburban Sitcoms

What qualities marked suburban sitcoms as "realistic" in the eyes of both the shows' creators and audiences? I note three specific traits inherent to the programs that helped to instill this sense of audience identification: settings, storylines, and perhaps most importantly for the purposes of governmentality, a central focus on domesticity. The first of these traits involves the locations of the shows, which were all marked with middle-class and WASP-ish characteristics. As Nina Leibman and Mary Beth Haralovich have observed, suburban sitcom families dwelled in homes marked "unequivocally [as] middle class."[133] Filled with "tasteful furnishings, tidy rooms, appliances, and gender-specific functional spaces" (male workrooms or dens, the kitchen for homemakers), sitcom homes were obviously intended for families comfortable within a secure income yet not ostentatiously rich.[134] Leibman notes that the programs' protagonists were "wealthy enough to have their own cars" and "redecorate their living rooms" for example, but they washed the cars themselves, haggled over decorating prices, and frequently required their children to share bedrooms.[135] These sitcom houses were contrasted with the cramped urban apartments found on shows like *The Honeymooners*. A 1961 *P.T.A. Magazine* review of *Honeymooners*, which asked "what kind of a cheap

[132] Kisseloff, 340.
[133] Leibman, 230.
[134] Haralovich, 73.
[135] Leibman, 232.

set is that to represent an American living room," suggested that the middle-class sitcom homes were perceived as more representative of the "typical" family.[136]

Furthermore, these residences were found in ambiguously centered neighborhoods, small towns such as Springfield or Hilldale, whose locations were only hazily locked down. For example, *Donna Reed*'s Hilldale at times appears to be in the Midwest, relatively close to Chicago, yet the characters all root for California based sports teams, reflecting where the show was actually filmed. The geographical trickery serves to place each program in a "typical small town," away from any traits or landmarks that would tie it to a specific state or region. Wherever the settings of *Father Knows Best* or *Ozzie and Harriet*, though, they were decidedly not located in the "ethnic, working-class neighborhoods" found in older programs such as *Mama* or *The Goldbergs*.[137] The residents of suburban "small towns" (both the protagonist families and their neighbors) had no obvious ethnicities or accents that would place them in specific regions of the country, like the Bronx or the South.

The middle-class nature of suburban sitcom homes and the generic WASP-ish quality of their neighborhoods reflected the changing nature of reality for a large portion of Americans. Postwar success for most Americans involved the pursuit of a middle-class suburban lifestyle. Elaine Tyler May writes that the newly created suburbanites of the postwar period ("the comfortable group of white middle-class Americans able to take advantage of the fruits of prosperity") encountered a level of comfortable yet modest

[136] "Time Out for Television," *The P.T.A. Magazine* 56, no. 2 (1961): 20.
[137] George Lipsitz, "The Meaning of Memory: Family, Class, and Ethnicity in Early Network Television Programs," in *Cultural Anthropology* 1.4 (Nov. 1986): 355.

affluence not too dissimilar from the idealized homes of sitcom families.[138] Similarly, while Americans moving into Levittowns or other suburban neighborhoods did not encounter the charming small towns of Springfield or Mayfield, they did find homogenous communities lacking the specific ethnic characteristics of localities that had been left behind. In the words of George Lipsitz, Americans previously coded as "ethnic" were allowed "to make a break with the past" by entering "white" suburbs.[139] Audiences who had embraced their newly created middle-class or WASP status could find much in these programs that matched their own experiences.

Secondly, the new types of sitcoms featured overall plots and styles that promoted verisimilitude in a way that older situation comedies did not. Lynn Spigel has described how programs like *I Love Lucy* and *I Married Joan* involved "the backdrop of domesticity" that was frequently upstaged in favor of "zany vaudeville performance or revue-type fare." For instance, an episode of *I Married Joan* might feature star Joan Davis becoming covered in household grime during the filming of a TV commercial; the scene is "motivated not so much by the story of [protagonist] Joan Stevens' career, but rather by the comedic performance of the star."[140] Davis' comedy routines, just like Lucille Ball's famous slapstick bits (the out of control chocolate factory conveyor belt, stomping grapes at an Italian vineyard), were popular and hilarious, but served to "interrupt" the plot, taking the audience out of the storyline.

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[138] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 3rd ed., (New York City, NY: Basic Books, 2008), 166-67.
[139] Lipsitz, 359.
[140] Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 176-77.

In fact, the plots such as they were on shows like *Lucy* or *Joan* were simplistic, almost threadbare premises that were merely meant to support the comedy routines and not meant to invoke audience identification. For example, on *I Love Lucy*, the majority of storylines involve Lucy engaging in a ridiculous scheme, frequently to become a star, get into her husband's nightclub act, or meet various celebrities, all of which were undeniably humorous situations yet not ones likely to seem "realistic" for the average viewer. The scenarios seen on urban ethnic comedies, like *The Honeymooners* or *Amos and Andy*, were more sharply defined, usually dealing with domestic problems or attempts to make money, but tended to stress humor rather than verisimilitude. The audience may sympathize with *Honeymooners* protagonist Ralph Kramden and his endless desires to get promotions or become rich, yet they also laugh at his constant failures, making it difficult to truly identify with the characters or their situations.

The suburban sitcom's style and plots eschewed the vaudeville style routines of *I Love Lucy* or the zany scheming of *The Honeymooners*. Episodes of *Donna Reed* or *Father Knows Best* did not focus on celebrity chasing or get rich quick antics, but on simple, melodramatic plotlines frequently involving "sibling rivalries and the dilemmas of childrearing."[141] While audiences were expected to laugh at Lucy's slapstick or Ralph Kramden's dilemmas, they identified with and cared about stories such as Bud Anderson failing at his paper route or Jeff Stone wishing he could spend more time with his father. The contrasting styles of the different sitcoms are evident in comparing *Lucy* with *Ozzie and Harriet*. Both shows starred real-life celebrity couples who were more or less playing themselves. However, while *Lucy* frequently featured celebrities and show business

[141] Spigel, 178.

related situations, *Ozzie and Harriet* was firmly rooted in middle-class scenarios meant to invoke realism. The aforementioned viewer conflation of performers like Robert Young and Donna Reed (both well-known movie actors) with their sitcom roles would not have been possible had their programs interjected the slapstick star routines found in shows such as *Lucy* or *Joan*.

This emphasis on "identifiable" plots would continue even in the more fanciful suburban sitcoms of the mid 1960's. For example, the *Saturday Evening Post*, in reviewing the debut of *Hazel* in 1961, said it "makes the audience feel that the things that happen in their daily lives are important. By dramatizing these things—actions as commonplace, perhaps, as cleaning out a closet or washing the dishes—a show can make their lives more interesting."[142] *Hazel*'s depiction of a household with a servant potentially challenged the bonds of audience identification, but its stressing of the "commonplace" and "daily lives" marked it as more evocative of *Father Knows Best*'s realism than the slapstick of *Lucy*. Even the supernatural fantasy *Bewitched* emphasized qualities of realism. In a 1965 interview with the *Readers Digest*-esque *Pageant* magazine, show producer Danny Arnold discussed how he viewed the show:

> With this show…I saw a great opportunity to accomplish something. Fantasy can always be a jumping-off place for more sophisticated work. We can make it identifiable with people and relate to problems that are everyday. What we do in this in this series doesn't happen to witches: it happens to people.[143]

Despite the fantastical qualities of the show, Arnold said he wanted to feature plots that were "identifiable" and related to the audience's everyday problems.

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[142] David C. Tucker, *Shirley Booth: A Biography and Career Record* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008), 112.
[143] Joseph N. Bell, "TV's Witch to Watch," *Pageant*, April 1965, Harpies Bizarre, accessed April 14, 2014, http://www.harpiesbizarre.com/vintage-witch2watch.htm.

While the settings and plots of suburban sitcoms are important, the programs' overall emphasis on *family* is perhaps the most important factor to consider in regards to both audience identification and somewhat paradoxically, the programs' work as instruments of citizenship. As I noted within this project's introduction, suburban sitcoms were marked by an "emphasis on familial love and relationships," a focus so prominent that Nina Leibman refers to these shows as "domestic melodramas" throughout *Living Room Lectures*.[144] The characters on shows like *Father Knows Best* or *Donna Reed* were part of a warm, stable, middle-class, nuclear family. The sitcoms chronicled their experiences as a *family* and their relationships with each other, not with fraternal groups or fellow apartment dwellers, as in *The Honeymooners* or *Love Lucy*, among other more urban sitcoms. This project will show that these experiences frequently took families into the public sphere, but always with the filter of domesticity in mind.

By emphasizing the family and in a more realistic manner than other programs, suburban sitcoms produced a more identifiable type of programming than other television genres of the time. As Ella Taylor writes, genres such as variety shows, game shows, and anthologies, not to mention educational documentaries, were "inefficient" for either industrial or pedagogical purposes. Taylor argues that these other genres "were not sufficiently rationalized [and] not *formulaic* enough" for programmers. The "domestic melodrama" offered "both the pleasure of narrative closure and the satisfaction of a

[144] Leibman, 7.

continuing relationship with favorite characters."[145] Many viewers could seemingly identify with the "realistic" plots, settings, and families found within suburban sitcoms.

Taylor's analysis is primarily focused on corporate aims, as she argues that viewer identification with sitcom families produced "program loyalty" and brand recognition of sponsors.[146] While this industrial analysis is undoubtedly accurate, I would also argue that sitcom emphasis on domesticity and the feelings of identification it created also have major implications regarding pedagogy and citizenship. According to theories of governmentality, the molding of "good citizens" frequently occurs at the site of the family. Foucault himself claimed that beginning around the eighteenth century, "the family becomes an instrument rather than a model: the privileged instrument for the government of the population and not the chimerical model of good government."[147] The family, as Nikolas Rose argues, takes on the responsibility "of producing healthy, responsible, adjusted social citizens" who will be of use for the state, which, in turn, devises "mechanisms that would support the family in its 'normal' functioning." The government ultimately manages the population by "pro-family" mechanisms, which could include the "medical inspection of schoolchildren and the invention of 'health visitors'" to check on home child care.[148]

Under this interpretation, the state and its attendant arms (corporations, regulatory agencies, etc.) have a vested interest in helping the family to produce "healthy,

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[145] Ella Taylor, *Prime-Time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 22-25.
[146] Taylor, 22.
[147] Foucault, 99.
[148] Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Port Chester, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 128.

responsible, adjusted social citizens." With a confidence in television's pedagogical power (as outlined above), these institutions regarded the suburban sitcom, due to its emphasis on domesticity, as a powerful pro-family mechanism for the postwar period. Through sponsorship, advertising, and production methods, they could help promote the sitcom genre and spread its messages. While all of television could work as an instrument of governmentality, the suburban sitcoms' literal connections to family (and the feelings of identification among viewers created by these connections) made it a particularly relevant tool for managing viewers. The domestic filter of the genre would have a broader impact within the public sphere.[149]

The Lessons of Suburban Sitcoms

The realistic and identifiable nature of suburban sitcoms (as well as their domestic focus) may have helped to accomplish the aims of their creators, but what were the actual lessons imparted by these programs? As opposed to highbrow fare like *Omnibus*, the moral or educational messages presented by the shows were not always explicitly spelled out to viewers. Previous scholarship analyzing the suburban sitcom genre has attempted to define the types of lessons being communicated, with most authors focused on two broad (yet related) concepts: sitcoms as a way to teach the necessity of a well-behaved nuclear family, and the importance of being an active consumer.

The first of these themes has received the bulk of scholarly attention. As Gerard Jones writes in 1992's *Honey, I'm Home!*, suburban sitcom families like *Father Knows*

[149] For a similar interpretation, see Darrell Hamamoto, *Nervous Laughter: Television Situation Comedy and Liberal Democratic Ideology* (New York City, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1991), 17-26.

Best's Anderson clan served as "a model social unit for the new suburban society."[150] The shows instilled a vision of a well-run, harmonious nuclear family based around the concepts of a wise "breadwinner father, homemaker mother, and growing children placed within the domestic space of the suburban home."[151] Lynn Spigel writes that the ubiquity of these depictions within sitcoms "worked to 'naturalize' family life, to make it appear as if this family arrangement were in fact the only one possible," erasing any potential for a failed husband, a discontented wife, or juvenile delinquent children.[152]

While David Marc has described these shows as "smiling reminders," the stridency with which sitcoms promoted this definition of the family suggests that the genre's messages were a little more than just "reminders."[153] Despite stereotypes regarding the primacy of the nuclear family in the 1950's, scholarship of the period suggests the "model social unit" of the *Father Knows Best*-type family was a heavily contested idea. Nina Leibman describes how sitcom families frequently faced "internal or external threat[s]" that could only be defeated by an embrace of "patriarchy, tradition, ritual, and familial love."[154] The programs' valuation of "paternal fatherhood and masculine dominance" as well as "the glory of [feminine] homemaking" revealed cultural anxieties regarding the strength of the nuclear family.[155] Sitcoms, with their idealized images of the family, could help soothe these anxieties: in the words of a *TV Guide* writer

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[150] Gerard Jones, *Honey, I'm Home!: Sitcoms Selling the American Dream* (New York City, NY: Grove Weidenfeld, 1992), 97.
[151] Haralovich, 69.
[152] Spigel, 178.
[153] David Marc, *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1997), 53.
[154] Leibman, 172.
[155] Leibman, 216, 218.

in 1962, shows like *Father Knows Best* "resurrected a strong father figure" that had been "often forgotten" in the twentieth century.[156]

The second concept promoted by suburban sitcoms, consumption, is tied to the image of the nuclear family. Mary Beth Haralovich writes how depictions of the comfortable and content sitcom homemakers naturalized the housewife's duty to consume. Characters like Margaret Anderson and June Cleaver "effortlessly maintain[ed] the domestic space of the family environment…they are women for whom housework is neither especially confining nor completely time-consuming…they are well-positioned within the constraints of domestic activity and the promises of the consumer product industry."[157] By utilizing "the most up-to-date modern appliances (washing machines, electric stoves, electric mixers etc.)" that appeared so casually on the programs, homemakers could also enjoy domestic mastery.[158]

Furthermore, the actual messages of many sitcom episodes promoted consumption as proper behavior, albeit awkwardly connected to concepts of thriftiness and fiscal responsibility. Nina Leibman claims that the *plots* of suburban sitcoms may not have advocated mindless consumption, but they did suggest that "the most desirable result of hard work is the *ability* to purchase" and that "the acquisition of commodities functions…as a reward" for the hard worker.[159] The vagueness of just what is appropriate to consume would be filled in by the nods to domestic consumerism explored by Haralovich as well as the sponsors of such shows, whose commercials clearly

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[156] "Life as Father *Really* Leads It: Part II," 19.
[157] Haralovich, 84.
[158] Leibman, 231.
[159] Leibman, 238.

communicated to viewers that it was their responsibility as citizens to purchase things like appliances and automobiles.

To this point, scholarship regarding suburban sitcoms has primarily focused on the programs' pedagogical role wholly within a *domestic* context.[160] The work of authors like Spigel and Haralovich is concerned with how the shows inform and govern viewers about their duties as family members, such as being a proper homemaker or wise patriarch. Leibman's *Living Room Lectures*, a book devoted to the "lessons" obtained from suburban sitcoms, is almost entirely focused on how the shows modeled idealized family relationships. All of these authors pay some attention to the role played by consumption within the sitcoms, but this too is almost entirely restricted to the domestic sphere, as it is consumption practiced by wives to maintain the home or characters modeling proper purchasing skills as a way to prove "emotional maturity and selflessness."[161]

Certainly consumption and domesticity have some crucial connections to the definition of Cold War citizenship that, as explained above, appeared throughout various forms of postwar television. However, the corporate-driven documentaries and educational programming strived to create citizens that were active *both* in and out of the domestic sphere—Americans who not only purchased products and maintained familial bliss, but who also were interested in the world outside their home and the improvement of their country and community. In the words of Nikolas Rose, the family was meant to

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[160] Certainly, as outlined above, the very nature of domesticity makes the programs more successful instruments of governance. As later chapters will show, domesticity is also inextricably tied to citizenship. What I am describing here is interpretations of the sitcoms which *only* examine the domestic context (i.e., activities inside the home).

[161] Leibman, 249.

create "*social* citizens." Did the "moral instructions" of shows like *Father Knows Best* and *Donna Reed* include anything beyond domestic or familial guidance? What (if anything) were suburban sitcoms teaching viewers regarding proper behavior for citizens outside the home?

In examining media and institutional reception of the suburban family sitcoms, it is clear that at the time of their original airing, the shows were *not* assumed to only depict domestic situations. As programs specifically intended for family (and thus children) viewing, the sitcoms would have presumably fallen under the auspices of the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters Television Code of Good Practices' guidelines for children's programming. The code included specific instructions to "foster and promote the commonly accepted *moral, social, and ethical* ideals characteristic of American life" (emphasis added). This command for youth (and other viewers) to learn about their responsibilities as citizens and community members as well as family members reflected the overall Code instruction to television programmers to promote "community responsibility…[and] the advancement of education and culture."[162] These edicts were taken seriously by the sitcom writers and producers who were "more than aware of the code," having "internalized it, as any employee accepts and then operates under corporate dictates."[163] They understood the need to teach social values in their programming.

More revealing is the range of causes related to "good citizenship" that quickly became attached to the various sitcoms. Once again, Robert Young and *Father Knows*

[162] "Code of Practices for Television Broadcasters," December 6, 1951, Television History: The First 75 Years, Accessed April 14, 2014, http://www.tvhistory.tv/SEAL-Good-Practice.htm.
[163] Leibman, 106.

Best serve as a key example in this scenario. A June 1958 *TV Guide* article reported that during the 1957-1958 season, the show "received legitimate requests from 22 outstanding organizations," asking "for everything from copies of scripts to personal appearances by Young" and other cast members.[164] A *TV Guide* article published the next year fleshed out the details of Young's schedule, claiming the actor received "annually between 700 and 1000 bona fide requests to do everything from spearheading a Community Chest drive to addressing the high school graduating class of Podunk, Iowa." While Young accepted about 50 public speaking engagements a year, he also allotted time for "another 50 tape sessions which he does for such causes as the Red Cross, Community Chest, Cerebral Palsy Association, Heart Fund, and March of Dimes." Young himself said while he derived "a great deal of satisfaction" from his participation in these causes, he was originally "badly frightened" when he realized "how seriously people took me."[165] As detailed earlier, many of these requests effectively conflated Young the actor with his television role, suggesting that these charity groups and other civic organizations clearly believed that a show like *Father Knows Best* was directly related to their cause.

In particular, Young had an affinity for the cause of traffic safety; the 1959 *TV Guide* interview, in fact, took place shortly after the actor had spoken at the Canadian Highway Safety Conference. Young was described as the "patron saint" of the National Safety Council and reportedly looked at his work with the group "as an all-year job," attending conventions and appearing in radio and television promotional spots.[166] He received the Safety Council Award in 1958 for his service. In fact, Young's involvement

[164] "Father Still Has His Day…"
[165] Whitney, 26-27.
[166] "Father Still Has His Day…"

with the cause dated back to his appearances on the *Father Knows Best* radio show: in 1953, the Inter-Industry Highway Safety Committee "launched a massive campaign to educate teenagers on better driving habits," with Young consistently mentioning "Good-Driver Agreements" and other tools to aid young drivers on the air.[167] This linkage between Young's sitcom and a civic crusade, begun one year before the television version of *FKB*, suggests that from the beginning, Young and the show's creators intended to teach lessons related to citizenship.

The other major suburban sitcoms did not shy away from promoting such causes, as a glance at the number and type of awards the programs received from civic-minded organizations will reveal. *Ozzie and Harriet* won the 1955 Christopher Award, a prize created "to encourage men and women to accept personal responsibility for constructive social change." *Leave It to Beaver* also received a Christopher Award as well as "over fifty-five awards (mainly from church and civic groups)," including such cause-specific citations as a the National Education Association's "School Bell Award" for an episode teaching the importance of school and honors from the Automobile Association of America for shows promoting traffic safety.[168] *The Donna Reed Show* also received many civic awards, enjoying in particular a positive relationship with the American Medical Association, a group which approved of the show's character of pediatrician Dr. Alex Stone. One of the group's former presidents would even appear on the show as himself in a 1964 episode.

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[167] "Miscellaneous Fun Stuff," *Father Knows Best*.com, accessed April 14, 2014, http://fatherknowsbest.us/Fun.html.
[168] Leibman, 267-68.

Humorist William O'Hallaren referenced sitcoms' penchant for lecturing on civic causes in his satirical 1961 *TV Guide* article "Had Your Scoldings Today?" O'Hallaren uses the hypothetical example of what occurs at the end of an episode of "that hilarious family comedy" about "Daddy Jones":

> And in his Big-Star-to-rabble voice, he [the actor playing Daddy Jones] asks 'Have you done your part today in the fight against neighborhood blight?' You writhe in your seat, almost spilling your beer, knowing blamed well you haven't done a thing all day against neighborhood blight. Then he gives us a short talk on what neighborhood blight has been doing, and believe him, it hasn't been slouching around in idleness. However, he leaves us an out. If we will jump up right now and run out and start tangling with blight, our past sluggishness will be at least partially forgiven.[169]

The fictional scene being described, in which the star breaks character in a tag sequence unrelated to the rest of the episode, is similar to several extant public service spots collected on *Donna Reed Show* DVD's, in which the star promotes giving to the community chest and maintaining traffic safety. Reed plays herself, not Donna Stone, but the spots were filmed on the *Donna Reed Show* set and were meant to air in conjunction with the program. O'Hallaren's sarcasm suggests that such spots, instructing viewers on civic issues, were fairly common sights on suburban sitcoms.

The clearest indication of the sitcoms' ability to teach qualities of good citizenship involved the famous *Father Knows Best* episode "24 Hours in Tyrantland," a never broadcast production that was "distributed to civic institutions, schools, and church groups," with the purpose of being screened for groups of young people.[170] The episode was created on a commission from the U.S. Treasury Department, as its plot features a

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[169] William O'Hallaren, "Had Your Scoldings Today?", *TV Guide*, October 14-20, 1961, 22.
[170] James W. Roman, *From Daytime to Primetime: The History of American Television Programs* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 103.

message about the importance of buying savings bonds. Despite the obvious and somewhat heavy-handed pedagogical message, the episode for the most part is constructed like any other (as opposed to the out-of-character lectures mentioned above): the audience learns about savings bonds with the fictional Anderson children. The government agency believed that its message was best communicated through the normal conventions of the sitcom; the show *itself*, not just its writers or stars, had strong potential for teaching.

These details work to further flesh out the self-expressed desire of the program creators to educate, as well as the belief of viewers that they were indeed learning. There is little doubt that the shows had much to say about raising a family and being a good son or daughter (and that viewers understood this), but the Code of Good Practices' edict to teach good citizenship, the range of causes embraced by the sitcoms, and the awards they received from civic organizations all revealed that the "American values" and "built-in lessons" were not restricted to the domestic sphere. Suburban sitcoms were instructing audiences on topics related to being a good *citizen* in addition to being a good *family member*.

The strongest piece of evidence, though, to support the linkage between suburban sitcoms and good citizenship, comes through assessing the specific episodes and plots of the programs. While civic issues did not appear in every episode of the show (and certainly nothing else as extreme as "Tyrantland" was ever produced), a significant portion of sitcom episodes addressed topics such as community safety, helping those in need, the work of civic organizations, and preserving the environment—all topics that

relate to the overall definition of what it means to be a good citizen. These plotlines regularly appeared throughout the runs of both the suburban sitcoms that began in the late 1950's, as well as the shows of the 1960's. This consistency in themes and messages in the later wave of programs like *My Three Sons*, *Hazel*, and *Bewitched* indicates that even if these shows did not receive the awards or civic-minded plaudits as their predecessors, they still continued to present messages of citizenship to a receptive public.

I argue that this definition of "good citizenship" being framed by the suburban sitcoms communicates many of the same civic lessons found within the highbrow, explicitly educational television genres of the 1950's and 1960's. This makes the sitcom, a work of ostensibly light family entertainment, as powerful an instrument of political governance as those other forms of programming. Through means of identification, fostered by verisimilitude and domesticity, it is potentially even *more* powerful than other genres. How, though, did sitcom episodes present the messages of the liberal consensus shared by corporate heads, media programmers, and politicians in the postwar era? In what way did the commonly depicted (and seemingly innocuous) plots of, for example, traffic safety, helping neighbors, or park preservation, relate to the themes of self-improvement, racial tolerance, and Cold War capitalism presented by documentaries and panel shows? Answering these questions requires an in-depth analysis of the themes of good citizenship found within the suburban sitcoms, the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

"A Good Citizen Doesn't Shirk His Duty": Sitcom Citizenship's Lessons

On March 19, 1958, *Father Knows Best* aired an episode in which at least for most of the running time, father did *not* actually know best. The episode, "Betty's Crusade," dealt with patriarch Jim Anderson's company putting up a new office building near the local college where his daughter, Betty, attends. Unknown to Jim, the construction project will tear down a local campus hangout, a diner called "Hanno's Place." Run by a friendly European immigrant, Hanno's Place is an institution, but Hanno failed to keep up with the necessary improvements to preserve his lease. When Jim finds out, he seems initially unconcerned, calling Hanno a "poor businessman" who should leave. Betty responds by organizing a campus protest to save the diner, and ultimately, after seeing the love the college has for the restaurant, Jim relents, ordering the office construction to be relocated. Knowing the building improvements still have to be performed, though, Betty, Jim, the rest of their family, and college students help Hanno in repairing the diner in order to save it once and for all. By fighting to preserve the restaurant and then repairing it, Betty and her friends and family are thus marked as good citizens; their personal actions helped solve a problem in their community.

Two years later, *The Donna Reed Show*, aired the somewhat similar episode "A Place to Go." In this episode, protagonist Donna Stone becomes upset after discovering her son, Jeff, has been caught along with his friends playing in an abandoned house. Donna decides that the boys are suffering due to the lack of a place to play. She organizes

the other mothers and the fellow members of her women's club to fix up the old house as sort of a neighborhood "youth house." "It'll keep them out of mischief," she proclaims. In particular, Donna leads the charge to paint and clean up the property as well as convince local stores to donate furniture. She recruits the rest of her family to assist in the project as well. While the boys eventually regard the youth house with ambivalence (they prefer something they can explore on their own as an adventure), Donna and her friends are typed as good citizens for their personal efforts to solve the local problem of juvenile misbehavior.

The two episodes' definition of good citizenship, which emphasizes personal responsibility and the role of the family as solutions for the problems of the community, was not isolated to these two storylines, but rather was a message that appeared consistently and frequently in the postwar suburban sitcom genre. In the previous chapter, I argued that both the creators and viewers of the genre's programs believed the shows presented important civic lessons, using the domestic and identifiable aspects of the programs to influence audiences. Despite the reputation of the genre as solely focused on the domestic sphere, it is obvious from even a cursory analysis of the programs that a high level of civic awareness and participation is present. On all of the suburban sitcoms analyzed in this project, characters were continually depicted as taking an active role in their communities, such as through participating in fundraisers, attending P.T.A. meetings, or selling raffle tickets. For example, at least fifteen *Father Knows Best* episodes featured a plot point about a community organization or activity, and there are at

least twenty *Ozzie and Harriet* episodes in the same vein.[171] While such activities were usually only depicted to set up a specific plotline, this behavior was shown to be a normal part of the average character's life. Good sitcom citizens got involved in their communities, even through such simple actions as making a cake for a fundraiser or attending a P.T.A. meeting.

While the recurring plot device of civic groups and fundraisers reveals the *overall* importance suburban sitcoms placed on community involvement, they reveal little about the *specific* messages regarding postwar citizenship that the programs transmitted to viewers. How was civic behavior being modeled on the shows? How did such messages allow the shows to work as an instrument of postwar liberalism? Answering these questions involves a close analysis of episodes entirely based around civic activity.

In this chapter, I will analyze how the suburban sitcom genre defined good citizenship through these consistent plots and themes. After briefly outlining the types of civic behavior featured on sitcoms, I will then show how the genre framed ideal citizens as educated, hard-working individuals who worked to protect their community and the benefits they believed they were entitled to. Despite the presence of the state within episodes, personal responsibility and initiative were stressed as the true key to solving problems, values very much aligned with the type of active citizenship endorsed by the postwar liberal consensus. I argue that the sitcom depictions placed civic behavior within the context of both the suburban neighborhood and the nuclear family, providing a relatable model for viewers *and* limiting any potentially radical implications of such

[171] These numbers do not include the episodes that I classify within the other categories of civic behavior below.

labor. I close the chapter by exploring how such a model persists even amid the apparent expansion of the state during the mid 1960's, as localized individual action in the vein of sitcom citizenship was at the center of several Great Society programs.

Civic Behavior within Sitcoms

The protagonists of suburban sitcoms identified themselves as "good citizens" by engaging in a range of productive civic behaviors, all of which improved the well-being of their community and the quality of their own lives. The first major category of such behaviors simply involves the act of helping other people in the neighborhood, beginning with those in trouble due to financial reasons. An early example illustrates the basic model with which the programs treated local poverty. In the 1954 *Father Knows Best* episode "Lesson in Citizenship," patriarch Jim Anderson tells his children "a good citizen doesn't shirk his duty; he does his share to help others." Through some contrivances, Jim ends up putting his words into action by giving a struggling couple, the Potters, a job performing at a youth group banquet he is running. The Potters, ex-vaudevillians, are deeply touched by the experience and are promptly hired for a tour of army camps. Jim, who is also moved, feels happy that his assistance gave the Potters "their self-respect" back. In this example, poverty is linked with an individual crisis. By obtaining a job or finding something productive to do, characters have their "self-respect" restored and are seemingly no longer needy.[172]

[172] Other *Father Knows Best* episodes to fit in this vein include 1958's "Margaret's Other Family," 1959's "The Good Samaritan," and 1959's "Hard Luck Leo." See also *Donna Reed* episodes such as 1958's "The Foundling," 1960's "The Love Letter" and "Never Marry a Doctor." This was also the theme of about five *Father Knows Best* episodes featuring "Frank the gardener," a low-income Hispanic friend of the family who frequently found himself in trouble. I will analyze this character in more detail in the next chapter.

Besides the literal poor, sitcom citizens also came to the assistance of people who were needy in more emotional as opposed to economic ways. This durable plot featured guest characters, almost always children, who were lonely or depressed. A prominent example was the recurring character of David Barker on *The Donna Reed Show*. First introduced in the 1958 episode "Guest in the House," David is first introduced as a moody child who runs away from the hospital where Donna's husband works. David is not suffering from any financial needs, but rather from emotional loneliness due to his distant father. Donna, as the good citizen, takes on the duty of helping the troubled child. This plotline was repeated throughout a variety of suburban sitcoms.[173] The key thread running throughout all of these episodes is that the productive citizen has not only the right but the responsibility to improve the lives of people in the community. Helping those with economic or emotional problems (by giving jobs, advice, or encouragement) was not the work of meddlers, but rather of good citizens.

Suburban sitcoms also stressed the importance of working to improve the overall safety of the neighborhood through such actions as ensuring that children had secure places to play. This plot is clearly seen in the *Donna Reed* episode described at the beginning of this chapter, "A Place to Go," in which Donna and her friends created a "youth house" for their children to play in. A more contentious example comes in the first episode of *Hazel*, 1961's "Hazel and the Playground," in which the title character wonders why the neighborhood does not have "a playground where people can let

[173] Other examples of episodes featuring needy children as guest characters include 1956's "The Persistent Guest" (*Father Knows Best*), 1959's "Beaver and Gilbert" (*Leave It to Beaver*), 1960's "Beaver and Kenneth" (*Beaver*), 1960's "Beaver's House Guest" (*Beaver*), 1960's "Someone is Watching" (*Donna Reed*), 1962's "Three Little Cubs" (*Hazel*), and 1964's "Little Pitchers Have Big Fears" (*Bewitched*).

themselves go." She then leads a campaign to have half of the local botanical garden converted into a playground for people to use, encountering stiff resistance from both city administrators and the rich businessman who owns the land in question. This "building a playground/clubhouse" plot was used on many suburban sitcoms, including multiple times on both *Hazel* and *Donna Reed*.[174]

Traffic safety within a neighborhood also required action from good citizens. Several sitcom episodes featured the theme of safe driving, either as a lesson taught by the protagonists or as a full-fledged campaign organized within the community.[175] More dramatic plots included citizens agitating for the installation of new traffic signals at especially dangerous intersections. In the 1953 *Ozzie and Harriet* episode "The Traffic Signal," each member of the family shows "public-spirited" concern for this issue by writing letters to or talking to government officials, requesting a signal be put in. The similar 1965 *Bewitched* episode "Red Light, Green Light" depicted protagonist Samantha Stephens organizing a rally for a traffic light and using her magic to convince the mayor that such a signal was necessary. Not all characters used such aggressive means to improve safety, but all good sitcom citizens, whether through education campaigns or the construction of playgrounds, worked to maintain a secure neighborhood.

Sitcom characters also demonstrated civic awareness by acting to protect old buildings, nature preserves, and parks. For example, in the *Father Knows Best* episode mentioned in this chapter's introduction, "Betty's Crusade," the Anderson family acts to

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[174] See also 1963's "Hazel's Day Off"; from *The Donna Reed Show*, 1958's "The Busy Body" and 1966's "My Son, the Councilman"; and from *Dennis the Menace*, 1961's "Dennis, the Campaign Manager."
[175] *Father Knows Best* episodes include 1957's "Safety First," 1958's "Betty Finds a Cause," and 1960's "Bud Hides Behind a Skirt." *Leave It to Beaver* episodes include 1962's "Wally's License" and "Lumpy's Car Trouble."

prevent the destruction of the treasured campus diner. At the end of the episode, Jim Anderson concludes that while he's "still for progress," there are "values in old things too, that we shouldn't destroy." In an earlier episode, 1955's "Lessons in Civics," Jim also denounced the tearing down of the town's historic meeting hall. "I think it's a crime to destroy something that represents the tradition and history that the old meeting hall does!" he proclaims. The good citizen thus is expected to see value in old landmarks and be willing to fight for their preservation.[176]

Later sitcoms would emphasize the value in preserving *nature* in addition to older buildings, with episodes focusing on attempts to save trees, hiking trails, parks, and lakes. Characters were even willing to take on the government or industry in the name of protecting their community's natural beauty, as explicitly seen in the plots of two late sitcom episodes. In the 1968 *Bewitched* episode "Samantha Fights City Hall," Samantha Stephens leads a protest to save a local park from being turned into a shopping center. Even though one of his clients is leading the project, Samantha's husband, Darrin, insists "if knocking down a park is progress, then I'm a monkey's uncle." Similarly, the 1971 *Brady Bunch* entry "Double Parked" features the title family protesting the pending destruction of their local park by holding signs entitled "NO CONCRETE JUNGLES, PLEASE!" and "LOVE IS GREEN."[177] Through preservation campaigns and protest demonstrations, sitcom citizens ensured that not only parks, but other beautiful landmarks

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[176] See also the 1958 *Ozzie and Harriet* episode "Old Band Pavilion."

[177] See also the 1961 *Dennis the Menace* episode "Woodman, Spare That Tree"; the 1962 *Hazel* episode "Hazel Quits" and 1964 entry "Campaign Manager"; and the 1966 *Dick Van Dyke Show* episode "I Do Not Choose to Run." Preservation was also the focus of the short-lived sitcom *The Nanny and the Professor* (1970-1971), with four episodes from its brief run specifically featuring the characters trying to protect nature.

within their neighborhood (such as trees and old buildings) would be saved for future generations.

The final type of civic behavior seen in sitcoms, institutional reform, involved sitcom citizens standing up for their rights, as well as those of others in the community, by fighting the unfair actions of politicians or businessmen. This theme of corrupt or otherwise villainous authority figures did not truly appear until the sitcoms of the mid to late 1960's, and even then, it appeared far less often than the aforementioned types of behavior. Nevertheless, sitcom citizens did directly oppose politicians who were misrepresenting their community. The plot of the 1965 *Bewitched* episode "Remember the Main," for example, centers on a campaign directed against the corrupt city council candidate John Cavanaugh. Cavanaugh doles out patronage jobs to his cronies and is using "dirty tricks" to thwart the efforts of his opponent in the upcoming election, the reform minded Ed Wright. Samantha Stephens supports Wright and uses her magic to foil some of Cavanaugh's scheming. Ultimately, her mother uses magic to create a disaster, prompting an investigation into Cavanaugh's public works projects and exposing the extent of his corruption. As good citizens, the women succeed in ensuring their neighborhood is not led by dishonest politicians, like Cavanaugh.[178]

It was not just politicians who were targeted by reform minded sitcom citizens—foolish or corrupt businessmen also were prominently seen on mid to late 1960's sitcoms. In particular, *Bewitched*, which featured the character of advertising man Darrin Stephens, aired numerous episodes in which Darrin's business clients are depicted as

[178] See also the 1964 *Patty Duke Show* episode "Patty, the People's Voice," in which the protagonists ensure their neighborhood is represented by the qualified candidate, not the well-meaning but vacuous popular candidate.

greedy or unscrupulous.[179] Again, the good citizen had a responsibility to correct such harmful behavior if it affected his or her neighborhood. In the 1963 *Hazel* episode "Hazel and the Stockholders Meeting," the title character visits a stockholders meeting of the Davidson Vacuum Cleaning Company to complain about her faulty new model cleaner. She helps to expose that the general manager is more concerned about profit than service, spurring the company's founder to action.

In fighting either industrial or political corruption, sitcom characters like Hazel do not need to hold political office or start their own companies; instead, they worked for institutional reform simply as regular citizens being active within their communities, in the same way that they pursued preservation or safety projects. Thus, both the types of causes advocated by the programs and the specific actions taken by characters formed an overall pattern that reinforced assumptions crucial to Cold War liberalism's definition of good citizenship. It is these assumptions that I will explore in the following sections.

The Weakened State

In engaging in this civic-minded behavior within their neighborhood, sitcom citizens demonstrated a feeling of entitlement, the belief that they had a "right" to a safe, beautiful, and well-run community. Characters were convinced that their neighborhoods deserved things such as traffic lights, parks, and good politicians. This expectation could be seen in how characters viewed the absence of things they perceived as essential. For example, on *Bewitched*, when faced with the very busy street corner, Samantha Stephens indignantly asks "We have been asking for a stop light on this corner for months! Why

[179] Particularly relevant episodes include 1964's "It Shouldn't Happen to a Dog" and "The Witches Are Out," 1966's "Follow That Witch," and 1969's "To Trick or Treat or Not to Trick and Treat," in which supernatural action convinces the clients to change how they are running their business or their lives.

haven't we gotten one?" "Hazel and the Playground" begins with the title character observing that "for years, people have been complaining because there was no playground in this neighborhood." These characters engage in civic action because they feel it is their community's *right* to have such things as traffic lights and pavilions.

This belief in entitlement fueled an expectation that the state, at least on some level, had a responsibility to use its power to protect and maintain the quality of life within neighborhoods. Thus, in almost all of the examples of civic behavior described above, the good citizen's work ultimately resulted in some corresponding action from the state (in most cases, the local government). On suburban sitcoms, it is the state that ultimately puts in the traffic lights, constructs playgrounds, and preserves trees. Despite the labor of individual citizens and their spirited protest campaigns, civic causes still require the power of the state to achieve results. Through its building projects and maintenance of services, the local sitcom government protected the expected entitlements of the suburban neighborhoods.

Nevertheless, despite this important role played by the state, sitcom depictions of civic behavior continually undercut the power of government, depicting the state as weak and out of touch with its constituents. While a government agency may ultimately be responsible for putting up traffic lights or building a park, suburban sitcoms suggest the true credit for these feats should go to the *individual citizens*, not government. A detailed exploration of civic behavior on the programs reveals the assumption that the state and its institutions were unable to fully meet the needs of the suburban neighborhood, necessitating the role of the good citizen.

The weakness of government can first be traced by noting the number of episodes in which civic behavior specifically excludes the role of state institutions. The *Hazel* episode "Hazel and the Playground" features Hazel organizing a petition to present to the Department of Parks. The episode ends with a new playground being dedicated, but the Parks Department was not depicted as the prime factor in the campaign's success. Rather, the wife of the businessman who controlled the land where the playground was to be built saw Hazel's passionate plea on television and persuaded her husband to support the playground idea.

In another episode, the 1960 *Dennis the Menace* episode "Dennis by Proxy," Dennis and his friends are upset when the postman, Mr. Dorfman, says that his traditional "Postman's Rest" bench will be torn down to be replaced with a parking lot. The kids decide to build a replacement bench for Dorfman, while community members protest the destruction of the bench to Mr. Wilson, a member of the committee who approved the parking lot plan. One of Mr. Wilson's neighbors insists he must save the bench and move it to a new location or she will correct her property line, forcing Wilson to give up his flower bed. Wilson hurriedly agrees to the compromise plan, and everyone is happy. Both this episode and the above *Hazel* episode stress the importance of civic activism (Hazel's petition drive for a playground, Dennis and his friends building a new bench), yet the situations are ultimately resolved not through state interference but through the actions of third party outsiders. Even when the state is technically responsible for building parks or saving forests, the role of government is downplayed in favor of the work of individuals.

Sitcom episodes also frequently presented interpersonal relationships and the creation of a friendship as more effective ways of resolving civic problems than the actions of the state. In the 1958 *Father Knows Best* episode "Betty Finds a Cause," Betty succeeds in getting her neighbor Mr. Emory to trim his hedge to improve traffic safety, but not through a petition campaign or by going to court. Instead, she delivers an emotional speech to Emory, who is touched and agrees to cut the hedge so as not to have Betty become cynical about people. Similarly**,** in the aforementioned "Betty's Crusade," the organized protest campaign by Betty and her friends has some impact on Jim, but it is not enough to convince him that his company should stop the pending destruction of the campus restaurant. Instead, Jim only comes around after visiting the restaurant and hearing alumni from the nearby college talk about how wonderful the restaurant and its owner are. As a good citizen, Betty performs civic action in both episodes (lobbying on behalf of safety groups, protesting a building's destruction), but her success comes through creating friendships (herself and Mr. Emory, Jim and Hanno the restaurateur), not through the intervention of the state.

Besides frequently playing little to no role in the ultimate solution, the state was also depicted as distant and out of touch, necessitating the actions of the good citizen to begin with. In the 1958 *Donna Reed* episode "The Busy Body," the visiting Uncle Fred is annoyed about a local ordinance barring children being in playgrounds without adult supervision, which is effectively closing the playgrounds. Fred insists that the mayor do something, asking him "are you a statesman or a budget-balancing bookkeeper?" When Donna apologizes for Fred's sharp tongue, the mayor calmly notes that it is "not a bad

question for a mayor to keep asking himself." The implication is that it took aggressive action from a "busy body" in order for the local government to be aware of the problem. The mayor on the *Father Knows Best* episode "Lessons in Civics" agrees, telling the Anderson family, "We're trying to do our job, the best that we can, but it's up to *you* to see that we do it…when we get off on the wrong foot, tell *us*!" In both episodes, the mayors of these small towns are well meaning, friendly individuals, who, when finally alerted to an issue or problem, provide some assistance. However, in each case, they seem to be completely unaware of the issues until such concerns are explicitly (in some cases, aggressively) brought to their attention by the actions of individual citizens.

In several episodes, even when government is alerted to a problem, it provides little to no help. On *Nanny and the Professor*, episodes focused on preservation causes featured commissioners in the Public Works or Parks departments unable to offer any concrete assistance.[180] While sympathetic to the ideas brought to them by Nanny Phoebe, they can do nothing due to budget constraints. Local officials on *Hazel* and *Bewitched* were also typically presented as weak, unable to do anything, including build a park or save a tree, without the authorization of local businessmen. These depictions presented a weak government generally unable to solve community problems without the help of active citizens.

On the one hand, sitcom depictions of a largely powerless government seem to conflict with the real-life impact made by the postwar state. As Lizabeth Cohen notes, the power of the federal government was essential in creating the "mass consumption-driven

[180] These episodes are 1970's "I Think That I Shall Never See a Tree" and 1971's "Kid Stuff."

economy" sought by industry.[181] Through the G.I. Bill, the construction of highways, support for the home building industry, and other spending projects, the state helped maintain economic prosperity and allowed an unprecedented level of (white) Americans to obtain a suburban home. Robert Self argues that "homeownership among white families was one of the most state-subsidized features of the postwar national economy."[182] Whether or not the average American agreed with Self's assessment, most citizens did expect the state to intervene in maintaining a high quality of life. In a 1954 survey, about 70 percent of respondents agreed that the government had a role in keeping "unemployment low and maintain[ing] prosperous times."[183] When combined with the state's maintenance of such entitlements as minimum wage laws and Social Security, the power of the postwar government seemed to be strong.

Nevertheless, even as the state played an essential role in the economy, contentious postwar debates regarding the role of government revealed a more complex picture. Alan Brinkley writes that the liberal consensus that had formed around the New Deal in the 1930's strongly supported "government-sponsored social welfare and social insurance programs…no dream was too extravagant, no proposal too outlandish."[184] This conception of a strong government began to fade during World War II and beyond as "the fear of dictatorship and totalitarianism began to affect popular thinking about

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[181] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York City, NY: Vintage Books, 2005), 118.
[182] Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 99.
[183] Cohen, 319.
[184] Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York City, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 6.

government in virtually every area of American life."[185] While their thesis of "postwar rollback" of the New Deal has been debated among historians, Theda Skocpol and Edwin Amenta accurately note that the United States "did not fashion a comprehensive welfare state out of the crucible of war," as some of its allies, most notably Great Britain, did in the late 1940's.[186]

This failure (and the perceived weakening of the state's power) was symbolized by the dismantling of the state's "right to regulate prices, rents, and wages in the interests of the nation" through the Office of Price Administration. While Eleanor Roosevelt eagerly praised the placing "of our economic system in the hands of the government," business leaders and conservative politicians claimed that "free enterprise…free of government intervention…[would] secure a larger prosperity for the nation."[187] Congress, despite President Truman's objections, failed to renew the OPA, contributing to a major spike in food and housing prices. Soon after, Congress created the Hoover Commission "to make recommendations on how to reduce and streamline the federal government." Hoover, who regarded much of the New/Fair Deal as a "socialist-fascist program," recommended dissolving the Federal Works Agency and the implementation of cuts on welfare and federal education grants.[188] While not all of the Commission's proposals were implemented, the group (which would be revived in the 1950's during the

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[185] Brinkley, 155.
[186] Edwin Amenta and Theda Skocpol, "Redefining the New Deal: World War II and the Development of Social Provisions in the United States," in *The Politics of Social Policy in the United States*, eds. Margaret Weir, Ann Shola Orloff, and Theda Skocpol (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 83.
[187] Cohen, 100-101.
[188] Jason Scott Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933-1956* (New York City, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 243, 245. Also see Gary Dean Best's *Herbert Hoover: The Post Presidential Years, 1933-1964, Volume II: 1946-1964* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Press, 1983).

Eisenhower administration) represented formal opposition to the concept of a powerful state, a movement that had the attention of both Congress and President Truman. The Commission's recommendations gained strength during the Cold War, when linkages between "a planned economy" and "the inferior standard of living under communism" contributed to public antipathy towards "big government."[189]

These theoretically clashing visions of the role of the state would more or less coexist within the "mixed economy of public and private spending" present in the postwar years.[190] This consensus allowed for government to maintain quality of life through support of industry and protection of some baseline entitlements, but also limited the state from directly intervening in many aspects of the free market. Naturally, the business community supported this viewpoint and the lack of regulation regarding mass consumption. Since the corporate world exerted tremendous influence on postwar television, it was little wonder then that television programming would frequently depict a pro-business stance in which the state played little direct role. As mentioned last chapter, through advertising agencies, corporate sponsors "determined what shows would reach the air and wielded creative control over program content," acting as a "modern potentate" within the television world and broadcasting a sustained, pro-industry message.[191] Sitcom sponsors naturally wanted programs that would not contradict this agenda; in fact, the show *My Three Sons* was reportedly conceived after Chevrolet asked

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[189] Cohen, 126.
[190] Cohen, 118.
[191] Lawrence R. Samuel, *Brought to You By: Postwar Television Advertising and the American Dream* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), xvii.

creator Don Fedderson for a program that was "representative of America."[192] With this level of corporate control, the lack of a strong, active state within the sitcoms seems logical. A weakened, out of touch local government was a better fit for corporations uneasy with the image of a powerful state that they associated with wartime regulation. While the state was ultimately responsible for resolving many of the civic problems on the programs (just as the actual state *did* maintain a large number of postwar entitlements), as the examples above indicate, sitcoms continued to show the government as unable to do much on its own.

However, despite the influence of corporate sponsorship, suburban sitcoms did not present industry as the answer to a neighborhood's problems, at least within the content of the episodes. As weak as the state is presented, a corporation is not necessarily shown to be the answer either. Businesses occasionally play a fleeting role in civic solutions; characters may overcome poverty by getting jobs and industrialists may donate space for nature preserves, yet the neighborhood is not saved by a wise corporation any more it is aided by a powerful government. Instead, it is up to the responsible "good citizen" to come to the aid of his or her community. As the next section will explore, the sitcoms' valuation of the individual citizen brought together various ideas from postwar sociology and politics, ultimately promoting messages very much aligned with the Cold War, pro-industry consensus.

The Active Citizen

[192] Nina C. Leibman, *Living Room Lectures: The Fifties Family in Film & Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 59.

Within the suburban sitcom, individual good citizens emerged in response to the weak and out of touch government, doing the state's work for it in such matters as chasing off bad politicians, helping the needy, improving safety, or preserving the environment. The labor of these hard-working community members, not the state, truly solves the problems of the neighborhood. Good citizens end up serving almost as independent troubleshooters, jumping in to the civic fray to resolve a crisis and then returning back to their normal lives. A close reading of a few different episodes will help explore how sitcoms depicted the role of the individual citizen. To show the relative consistency of the programs' depictions, I will take three episodes from three different sitcoms that each deal with roughly the same issue, that of preservation. Despite the episodes coming from different decades, the importance of the good citizen is stressed in all of the shows.

In the 1955 "Lesson in Civics" episode of *Father Knows Best*, Jim Anderson is upset about the destruction of the town's historic meeting hall. As explained earlier, after a protest campaign brings the issue to his attention, the mayor agrees with Jim. The ending of the episode sees the mayor appoint Jim as a special public representative to promote a new bond issue intended to fund the preservation of the hall. The last scene features the entire Anderson family mailing out letters to promote the bond campaign.

The 1964 *Hazel* episode "Campaign Manager" features Hazel and employer George Baxter opposed to a plan to demolish a park. Because the boorish Councilman Preston is determined to go through with the destruction, George is encouraged to run against Preston in the upcoming election. During a crucial live debate, Hazel reveals that

she has researched the park's history, discovering that George Washington once visited it, a fact Preston was unaware of. Mr. Baxter then reveals he has drafted a compromise plan for the park to remain, which involves moving the proposed new building to an area that would not demolish the park. The show ends with Preston adopting the compromise and George pulling out of the race. The city "needs more citizens like Hazel," Baxter remarks.

Finally, the 1971 *Brady Bunch* episode "Double Parked" also involves the fight to save a park from demolition. The Brady kids go around town, pushing a petition to prevent a courthouse from being constructed at the site of the park. Mike Brady, who happens to be the architect assigned to the courthouse building project, encourages his family's efforts, while feverishly trying to think of a solution that would satisfy everyone. Ultimately, he proposes that the courthouse be built where the city dump is located. The government and Mike's firm love the idea because the location is superior and cheaper.

In each of these episodes, the suburban protagonists take the lead role in resolving the problem. While government does play an important role (a bond proposal to fund preserving the town hall, agreeing to move the location of their building projects), the individual suburbanites basically do all of the work. Jim Anderson and his family bring the preservation issue to the town council's attention and then work as special representatives to promote it further. Hazel researches the park's history. George Baxter and Mike Brady carefully draft compromise proposals to allow for parks to be saved. All of these characters are private citizens, yet because the local government is too weak,

they take matters into their own hands. They, not the mayor or the town council, are the ones coming up with resolutions to their community's problems.

Along with their wisdom and hard work, the sitcom citizens are also marked by their character. First, they are frequently shown to be educated and intelligent, using research or careful preparation to tackle the problems. In many cases, they use their professional expertise to resolve situations: Mike Brady and George Baxter draw upon their architecture and legal experiences to save parks, while Darrin Stephens promotes traffic safety using his advertising agency. Secondly, sitcom citizens generally take a cool-headed and respectful attitude. While occasionally displaying a sharp tongue or going to extremes, they never resort to violence or anarchy to achieve their aims. They mostly settle issues through some form of compromise, leaving everyone involved happy. Finally, above all, good citizens are shown to be active participants in their community, informed about what is going on and willing to make a difference. While characters may begin an episode ignorant of problems or reluctant to intervene, they end up becoming enthused supporters of civic causes. The Anderson children may not have known how important the town meeting hall was, but once educated on the subject, they end up leading the fight to save it.

The idea of an educated, cool-headed private citizen stepping in to solve such problems neatly sidesteps important questions. How come Mike Brady and George Baxter can develop a simple and popular solution, yet elected officials seemingly cannot? Why is Hazel more knowledgeable about a park project than Councilman Preston? Can the local government promote preservation projects without relying on the unpaid labor

of the Anderson family? What if there were no Jim Andersons or George Baxters or other "good citizens" like them—would the state really be able to provide its important entitlements? The importance of the individual citizen in these scenarios hearkens back to the central role of volunteerism within American culture. Seymour Lipset describes the "American Creed" as one that, from the beginning, featured "a high sense of personal responsibility, independent initiative, [and] volunteerism" among its citizens.[193] This observation was also shared by Alexis de Tocqueville, who wrote that "the inhabitant of the United States learns from birth that he must rely on himself to combat the ills and trials of life; he is restless and defiant in his outlook towards the authority of society and appeals to its power only when he cannot do without it." [194]

Volunteerism was especially prominent during the Gilded Age and Progressive periods of American history. Reformers combined calls for improved governmental social services with numerous campaigns involving voluntary service. Progressives established many private institutions, such as charity organizations and settlement houses, "to care for the sick, alcoholics, poor women, abused and neglected children, and others in need."[195] Successful voluntary-based groups formed during this period included 4-H, the P.T.A., and Kiwanis International. These activists felt their status as private citizens elevated the quality of their work. Roy Lubove writes that many Progressives believed that "paid professionals lacked the spontaneity and zeal of volunteers," conceiving of

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[193] Seymour Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York City, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 268.
[194] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America Vols. I and II*, translation by George Lawrence, ed. by J.P. Mayer (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), 189.
[195] Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans in the Progressive Era* (New York City, NY: Hill and Wang, 1998), 202.

"the society without volunteer visitors" as "little better than a charitable machine lacking moral purpose…The paid worker, it was true, offered her skill, experience, and technical know-how to the poor, but the volunteer offered herself."[196]

However, the volunteerism depicted within suburban sitcoms represents something different than that seen within the Gilded Age and Progressive eras. For one, the sitcoms lacked the presence of religion, which in the late nineteenth century, had strongly influenced volunteerism in the form of the Social Gospel. Described as "the application of the teaching of Jesus…to society, the economic life, and social institutions," the Social Gospel was promoted by leaders such as Walter Rauschenbusch and Charles Sheldon.[197] Adherents, who included many Progressive and Gilded Age reformers, believed their Christian beliefs compelled them to use a "faith-based perspective" to address "the pressing social issues of the day," including relieving poverty and improving sanitation.[198]

Religion, however, is almost completely absent from sitcom activism (in fact, from sitcoms in general). Despite occasional references to God and visits to church, suburban sitcom characters were not depicted as particularly religious. Their volunteerism and civic behavior were clearly not connected to religion, which was only related to issues of personal morality. Thus, episodes focusing on matters of the church, such as *Father Knows Best*'s "Close Decision" (1955) or *Donna Reed*'s "The Good Guys

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[196] Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career, 1880-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 13-14.
[197] Ronald White Jr. and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1976), xi.
[198] Christopher Evans, "Historical Integrity and Theological Recovery: A Reintroduction to the Social Gospel," in *The Social Gospel Today*, ed. by Evans (Louisville, KY: Westminster Knox Press, 2001), 6.

and the Bad Guys" (1961), deal simply with private concerns: Bud Anderson being tempted to play baseball instead of memorizing a reading for church, or Jeff Stone getting advice from a minister about how to handle a school bully. The concept of *public* responsibility and activism being fueled by religion, as in the older cases of the Social Gospel, is completely absent from sitcoms.

More importantly, the volunteerism of the Progressive and Gilded Age differed from sitcoms in that the former envisioned a strong, active government. Social Gospel proponents, Gilded Age reformers, and Progressive era leaders supported some form of a responsive government, both on a local and national level. Many voluntary groups "pressed for public social programs" which would complement their service activities, calling for state and national provisions for war veterans, government relief for farmers, benefits for the elderly, and legislation to support the welfare of children, among many others.[199] Social Gospel proponent Washington Gladden spoke for many voluntary groups when he remarked "If the kingdom of heaven ever comes to your city…it will come through the city hall."[200]

Progressive era reformers especially envisioned a powerful government. Steven J. Diner writes how voluntary activists pushed for the government to take the lead in creating "kindergartens, vocational education and guidance programs…neighborhood playgrounds and parks…[and] sanitary improvements," as well as eliminating vice

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[199] Theda Skocpol, "How Americans Became Civic," in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, eds. Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 62-3.
[200] William Phalen, *American Evangelical Protestantism and European Immigrants, 1800-1924* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 2011), 139.

districts.[201] Furthermore, by advocating for such reforms as a commission and city manager style of government, Progressives sought to create a local government "more readily controlled by leading citizens" that "could control the conditions of urban life."[202] Reform-minded mayors like Samuel "Golden Rule" Jones of Toledo and Hazen Pingree of Detroit thus implemented the ideals of civic-minded voluntary groups through the apparatus of government itself. While voluntary leaders envisioned their work as essential, they clearly viewed it as acting in conjunction with a strong government that would similarly take an initiative in carrying out reform work.

In depicting good citizens as operating outside of both religion and a powerful government, suburban sitcoms were not drawing upon the Progressive era or Gilded Age, but rather discourses particularly relevant within the postwar moment. As seen through such examples as the television show *Omnibus* and the magazine *Saturday Review*, the Cold War-era "middlebrow" culture promoted a society "in which citizens strive constantly to improve themselves," specifically through education and the development of self-control.[203] By learning about culture and public affairs, Americans could embrace uplift and become better citizens. The middlebrow culture also relates to the postwar mania for self-improvement which Philip Cushman argues took place "in a form and to a

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[201] Diner, 206.
[202] Diner, 205-6.
[203] McCarthy, 128. For more on these examples of middlebrow culture, see William C. Hughes' *James Agee, Omnibus, and Mr. Lincoln: The Culture of Liberalism and the Challenge of Television, 1952-1953* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004) and Christina Klein's "Family Ties and Political Obligation: The Discourse of Adoption and the Cold War Commitment to Asia," in *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism, 1945-1966*, ed. Christian G. Appy (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 35-67.

degree unknown before."[204] Along with educating themselves, Americans strove to improve their health and character through such pursuits as pop psychology and cosmetics. As opposed to older concepts of citizenship, the emphasis here was upon individuals striving to better themselves, independently of the church or state.

Furthermore, the figure of the educated, socially responsible citizen held great currency within the more politicized context of the postwar liberal consensus. As Leerom Medovoi writes, the "responsible Cold War citizen-subjects" had a "public duty to inform and become informed about political [or civic] questions of the day," armed "with the social knowledge" required to tackle problems.[205] The good citizen was the hard-working, socially active "doer," the figure contrasted by Arthur Schlesinger Jr. with "the sentimentalists, the utopians, the wailers."[206] The latter, lumped in with the despised image of the conformist or "other-directed man," were unable to offer strong leadership within a community. Thus, sitcom citizens did not just fruitlessly bemoan the civic problems in their neighborhood. Instead, as Adlai Stevenson urged in a 1955 commencement speech, they armed themselves with knowledge and purpose and played "a direct part in the unfolding drama of our free society."[207]

Political and industrial leaders welcomed the development of an active citizenry because of the variety of problems threatening the United States after World War II. The

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[204] Philip Cushman, *Constructing the Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1995), 79.
[205] Leerom Medovi, *Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 142-43.
[206] K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2005), 30. Chapter three of this book offers a strong overview of the "beleaguered male self of the 1950's," including sociological conceptions of the conforming individual.
[207] Cuordileone,122. Stevenson is addressing a women's college and while he links both men and women to the "unfolding drama," he clearly envisions different civic roles for the two genders, a distinction I will discuss more in future chapters.

American Heritage Foundation argued civic participation was necessary in the wake of "the grave trials of postwar economic readjustment," which had ushered in "lawlessness and cynicism" and given a platform to the "voices of discord."[208] Hard-working citizens loyal to their country—in other words, not lawless radicals—would help their neighborhoods endure these "grave trials." In addition to this, the Cold War context also required an American citizenry rooted in what Colin Flint identifies as "discipline, individualism, and morality," traits that would allow the United States to overcome its "geopolitical vulnerability" in the postwar period.[209] By becoming educated, socially responsible citizens, the American people, not the power of the state, would demonstrate to the world "the moral and cultural superiority of capitalist democracy."[210] Harry Truman's vision of man as a "self-sustaining, thriving individual" in contrast with the Soviet "downtrodden, impoverished vassal" would only work if citizens were willing to do their part within their neighborhoods.[211]

The sitcom offered a way to link these images of strong, active citizenship with the *suburban* community itself, a landscape besieged by postwar critics. In 1967, writing in *The Levittowners*, Herbert Gans observed that "postwar suburban developments…have been blamed for…the country's alleged and real ills, from destroying its farmland to emasculating its husbands."[212] More relevantly, critics of suburbia alleged that the

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[208] Richard M. Fried, *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!: Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America* (New York City, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 21.
[209] Colin Flint, "Mobilizing Civil Society for the Hegemonic State: The Korean War and the Construction of Soldiercitizens in the United States," in *War, Citizenship, Territory*, eds. Deborah Cowen and Emily Gilbert (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2008), 357-58.
[210] McCarthy, 128.
[211] Cohen, 125.
[212] Herbert Gans, *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community* (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), xvii.

landscape produced weak citizens with little interest in civic involvement. Lewis Mumford believed that the suburbs created "an encapsulated life…untouched by human hand at one end: untouched by human spirit at the other." The landscape offered "poor facilities for meeting, conversation, collective debate, and common action," ultimately producing "silent conformity," not the spirit of active leadership promoted by sitcoms and postwar liberals.[213]

Suburbia's connection to the work of citizenship was explored in more detail by William Whyte in *The Organization Man*. Whyte wrote how suburbs like Illinois' Park Forest were "a hotbed of Participation," with Park Forest probably swallowing up "more civic energy per hundred people than any other community in the country."[214] By "civic energy," Whyte did not mean that the residents of Park Forest were being active, responsible citizens; instead, he argued they incessantly busied themselves in "the court social life" of the neighborhood, joining seemingly trivial groups such as "poker clubs" and "*kaffeeklatsch*" morning sessions.[215] Whyte believed this "civic" life created conformity, not responsibility, as suburbanites worried more about following neighborhood customs than working to solve problems.

The suburban sitcom challenged these critical images by featuring protagonists who were neither encapsulated nor conformist, but who instead lived out the liberal

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[213] Lewis Mumford, "Lewis Mumford Points to the Failures of Modern Suburbia," in *The Suburb Reader*, eds. Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2006), 299.
[214] William Whyte, *The Organization Man* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 286-87.
[215] More recent scholarship, such as Sylvie Murray's *The Progressive Housewife: Community Activism in Suburban Queens, 1945-1965* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), and Lisa McGirr's *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) has made connections between these ostensibly mundane activities and civic action. I include Whyte's analysis merely as an example of how contemporary critics perceived such actions as acting outside of the "public" sphere.

values of self-improvement and social responsibility. While writers such as Whyte and Mumford bemoaned suburban listlessness, sitcoms communicated the message that civic responsibility was not only possible but expected within the suburban neighborhood. Characters like Jim Anderson and Donna Stone were able to solve civic problems in a cool-headed, educated manner, one very much in keeping with the idealized citizen envisioned by liberals such as Adlai Stevenson and Arthur Schlesinger. While this was a rather improbable vision within the suburbia envisioned by social critics, it became a normal, weekly occurrence through its appearance on television.

Furthermore, the programs provided a more specific context for the "middlebrow" and liberal definitions of citizenship. Stevenson's commencement address urging involvement in the "unfolding drama" of society is marked by its generality: *what* is the drama? What role does the average citizen play in it? After all, the admirable virile citizen described by Schlesinger in *The Vital Center* existed primarily within a political context and was meant to grapple with the broader, national issues of Cold War containment and the arms race, concepts that occasionally seemed removed from the daily lives of most Americans. Even the simpler example of the TV show *Omnibus* posed the question of what viewers should do after being exposed to the program's cultural "uplift." How could such disparate examples as "lectures on music from Leonard Bernstein" and short films about "Yugoslavian ballet" make Americans into better citizens?[216]

Through the lens of the sitcom, the active citizenry being espoused by Truman, Stevenson, and the American Heritage Foundation was placed in a context familiar with

[216] McCarthy, 124.

the average American. As last chapter suggested, the content of suburban sitcoms, however idealized and fanciful, was, for the majority of viewers *identifiable*, a window into communities and neighborhoods much like theirs. The sitcoms thus could define good citizenship in potentially clearer ways than the political or middlebrow definitions. "Helping a neighbor find a job" or "saving a tree" were small scale, concrete actions. Sitcom citizens engaging in this behavior not only challenged the sociological critique of suburbanites as isolated conformists, but also offered some explicit models of what it meant to participate in the "unfolding drama of our free society." Through their roles as pedagogical tools, sitcoms invited viewers to emulate their fictional counterparts and work as active citizens within their neighborhood. They, not the state, would take the initiative in preserving the quality of life that suburbanites expected.

Importance of the Family

In pursuing the work of civic activism, sitcom citizens did not operate as independent agents within a community, but rather as members of a very distinct social unit: the *nuclear family*. On sitcoms, the suburban nuclear family serves as the true keystone of volunteerism, providing the means and motivation for characters to carry out their work. By connecting the family with civic labor, sitcoms further defined what it meant to be a "good citizen," limiting the types of causes and strategies that fell within the category of civic participation.

The sitcom nuclear family first promotes civic behavior by serving as a mechanism for citizens to become informed of problems. In almost all of the episodes, characters only become aware of a looming problem when it is brought up by a family

member. The Brady parents learn about the destruction of a park after being informed by their children. Jim Anderson reconsiders destroying a campus hangout after his daughter's passionate plea. The Nelson family members are spurred to work for a traffic signal after Ozzie and Harriet mention the dangerous corner at the breakfast table. "None of us can overlook a thing like this," Harriet points out. Instead of a community center, the family is presented as the conduit for individuals to stay informed about their neighborhood. In a pointed scene on *Bewitched,* Darrin arrives home to discover a political rally taking place in his living room. "There's a lot going on in this town that you don't know about," Sam chidingly points out. Without family to keep them informed, suburbanites risk becoming ignorant and unaware of what needs to be done.

Similarly, the nuclear family serves as a strong motivation for civic behavior. In particular, children were frequently mentioned by sitcom protagonists. Kids deserved a safe neighborhood; the slogan "stop risking your *child*'s life" is successfully proposed during the traffic light campaign on *Bewitched*. They also deserved to have places to play. On *Bewitched,* after hearing that a park will be turned into a shopping mall, Sam angrily says "But this is a public park!...the kids need this park!" In the *Hazel* pilot, Hazel argues that "kids are more important [than a garden]…kids need a playground where they can develop their muscles and grow." If the entitlements of children were threatened, characters had no choice but to engage in civic behavior. On one episode of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, 1966's "I Do Not Choose to Run," Rob Petrie speaks out in opposition to the construction of a shopping center that will destroy a park. "I don't know how to tell my son that I sold his park for a crummy three dollars," he says, referring to a potential

reduction in property taxes the construction signifies. Rob is motivated by thoughts of his son in working as a "good citizen."

Finally, the family plays a crucial role in the actual work of civic volunteerism. Family members frequently provide additional sources of labor during activist campaigns. Jim Anderson's children distribute letters promoting building preservation and work to save the campus restaurant. Through his job at an advertising agency, Darrin Stephens helps promote the work of his wife in advocating for a traffic signal. On *Hazel*, the title character (a maid, but effectively a family member) provides crucial information about a park's historical value to assist her employer in his debate with a politician. The Brady children go door to door (and are even branded "radicals") in an effort to save their beloved park, while the kids on *The Nanny and the Professor* put on a talent show to raise money for their park. This volunteer assistance provides support for the protagonists as they engage in solutions.

The importance of family is also signified by the charity-focused episodes which are about constructing or rebuilding a nuclear family. For example, "The Foundling," a *Donna Reed* episode, begins with Tony the milkman shamefacedly giving away his baby because he thinks he cannot support it as a widower. It ends with Tony being encouraged by Donna to take back his child, just as he also is poised to begin a romantic relationship with a woman (and potential mother figure for his child) as the episode fades out. The *Father Knows Best* episode ("The Persistent Guest") that ends with an orphan being adopted by a childless couple or the *Bewitched* episode ("Little Pitchers Have Big Fears") ending with a neurotic mother finding romance with her son's baseball coach all feature

the creation of a new nuclear family, which is essential for the reproduction of good citizenship. Without families, civic behavior lacks a foundation.

In placing the nuclear family at the center of citizenship, suburban sitcoms were merely part of what Nina Leibman refers to as the 1950's "social obsession with American family life."[217] The family was a prime topic of Congressional committees, best-selling books, and successful films of the period. As Elaine Tyler May writes, the "potentially dangerous social forces of the new [postwar] age," such as Cold War fears and juvenile delinquency, might be tamed" within the walls of the home.[218] Americans, at least those in the white middle-class, believed that the well-run suburban nuclear family "would fulfill virtually all its members' personal needs through an energized and expressive personal life."[219] While this ideal would remain out of reach for many Americans, the suburban sitcom, even more so than other forms of popular culture of the period, emphasized domestic strength—a powerful father and a supportive mother, with the solution to all problems resting within the families themselves.[220]

Yet the consistent focus on *civic* behavior within these programs emphasizes that the nuclear family is not just the answer to each family member's *individual* needs, but also the needs of the entire *community*. Suburban sitcoms positioned the hard-working, socially active citizen within the neighborhood; by linking their work to that of the nuclear family, the programs fleshed out the good citizens' motivations and means of achieving their goals. The idealized citizen worked within the community on behalf of his

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[217] Leibman, 250-251.
[218] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008), 16.
[219] May, 14.
[220] A capsule summary of these themes can be found in the conclusion to Leibman's *Living Room Lectures*.

or her family, frequently using family members as part of a civic crusade. Besides addressing broader social issues, the nuclear family could ultimately resolve the localized issues important within suburban neighborhoods.

However, the centrality of the family within sitcom citizenship leads to the formation of clear limitations on civic action. On all of the programs, characters are discouraged from pursuing interests or causes, however civic-minded, which directly oppose the needs of the nuclear family. For example, the *Hazel* episode "Mr. B on the Bench" has George Baxter in line to be appointed to the municipal court, making him an "important politician" in the neighborhood. This duty is treated with the utmost seriousness; George consults with the mayor's office and his family is very supportive of the position. Unfortunately, Hazel prematurely tells everyone in the community of George's future appointment, a major security violation. If George goes through with the appointment, it will embarrass Hazel and possibly result in her being fired. Rather than harm a loved one and "member of the family," George removes his name from consideration. Preserving the domestic sphere trumps any outside political activity, no matter how important the cause.

Even when suburban sitcom characters actually embrace their political opportunities, the impact is downplayed. In *The Dick Van Dyke Show* two-part episode "I Do Not Choose to Run/The Making of a Councilman," Rob Petrie is reluctantly persuaded to run for city councilman after giving a speech in favor of preserving a park. At various points in the episodes, Rob considers abandoning his campaign, but unlike the majority of similar sitcom episodes, things end with Rob actually elected to the position

and embracing it. However, at no point in the remainder of the show's run does this emerge as a plot point, nor do we ever see Rob doing any work as a councilman. This singular episode may have featured Rob deciding a political career was significant, but it does not disrupt his domestic life at all. When political action is required, suburban sitcom characters come in, perform their needed service, and then retreat to the comfort of their family.

Sitcom citizens were not just wary of the effects of direct involvement within politics on their family, but also too much civic involvement in general. As ubiquitous as community organizations such as the P.T.A. were on suburban sitcoms, they were clearly depicted as a negative force whenever they disrupted neighborhood or domestic harmony. A fascinating *Dick Van Dyke Show* episode, "The Vigilante Ripped My Sports Coat," illustrates this point. In this story, Rob's neighbor, Jerry Helper, forms a "vigilante group" because he and the other neighbors are opposed to someone who has just moved in, Gilbert Bester. Bester has crab grass on his lawn and the other neighbors do not want Bester's weeds to spread. They plan to forcibly destroy Bester's crab grass. Rob tries to stop the "posse" and asks "Why don't you guys put hoods over your heads?" In the ensuing conflict, Jerry calls Rob a weasel and rips Rob's sports coat. Jerry's group is ostensibly formed to protect neighborhood values, but it is heavily satirized and portrayed negatively due to the disruption of Jerry and Rob's friendship.

Several *Donna Reed* episodes also explore how civic-minded groups could end up destroying domestic harmony. In this case, the generally venerated P.T.A. is to blame. In "Character Building," Donna writes an anonymous letter to the local paper, urging

parents to exert consistent, strong discipline with their children. The letter becomes a big hit among parents, and a P.T.A. leader (who knows Donna wrote the letter) asks Donna to speak on discipline at an event. In light of this, Donna decides that she needs to get tougher in her own home, and becomes something of a taskmaster with her kids before realizing at the end, that she was better off parenting her own way without worrying about her article or the P.T.A. The following season, it is Alex's turn to go overboard in the episode "Alex the Professor." After reading a book on child psychology and being invited to speak at a P.T.A. event, Alex is sure he's developed a top parenting method which involves constant praise and little discipline. Everyone in the P.T.A. is impressed, but the method predictably fails to be successful and Alex must eventually denounce it. In both instances, the P.T.A.'s foolish support of obviously flawed parenting methods results in nothing but trouble for the neighborhood families.

In both episodes (more dramatically in "Character Building"), the Stone family's *domestic* harmony is jeopardized indirectly by the P.T.A.'s actions. In this case, the community organization has interfered with the running of the family. This dynamic is also on display in some of the harshest depictions of neighborhood organizations in two *Father Knows Best* episodes. In "Margaret Goes Dancing," Jim and Margaret quarrel, with Jim announcing he is going off to his "club…to see the boys." The gentlemen's club, which is never mentioned again in the series, is a depressing place mostly filled with complaining older men who lack domestic happiness. All of Jim's old friends are gone and he cannot enjoy himself there. Soon, he returns to reconcile with Margaret. The "club" is a pitiful substitute for family. While men's (and women's) clubs on suburban

sitcoms were frequently presented as worthwhile for their running of fundraisers or educational campaigns, here the "club" is an extremely negative place. Jim's brief decision to embrace the club over his family is condemned.

A slightly different dynamic (albeit with the same overall message) appears in the *Father Knows Best* episode "Father's Biography," in which Kathy writes a "biography" of her father, proclaiming him to be a "square-sided man." She will read the piece at the P.T.A. meeting. Meanwhile, Jim is asked to attend a Chamber of Commerce meeting, his opportunity to finally become "an important man in this town." The meeting falls the same night as the P.T.A. event, and Jim's family encourages him to attend the business meeting. While there, Jim feels guilty and ultimately shows up at the P.T.A. meeting instead. He concludes "a man could be great and be lonely, or he could be ordinary and have the warmth of companionship." Jim ends up choosing one community organization over another, but he is clearly motivated by *familial* concerns in choosing the P.T.A. The more negative group (the "lonely" one) is the one that threatens to separate man from family. Despite the opportunity the Chamber of Commerce provides him to become an "important" man (implicitly allowing him to serve the needs of his neighborhood), Jim opts to value his family over any idea of civic duty.

Through the nuclear family, sitcom citizens acquired the desire and the ability to engage in civic-minded behavior. However, as the above examples indicate, the family also limited such work. The good citizen could engage in causes that benefited the family, such as building parks, keeping the neighborhood safe, and restoring the domestic harmony of their neighbors. In pursuing these causes, their motivations (safety, places to

play, etc.) were almost inevitably related to the needs of the family. Any causes that potentially threatened familial bliss, even if done within such venerable civic organizations as the P.T.A. or the Chamber of Commerce, were seen as negative. Furthermore, sitcom citizens were expected to inevitably retreat from the civic sphere once they had finished their duty as citizens. Besides some very few and limited exceptions, characters avoided becoming official public servants; their roles as detached problem-solvers were more conducive to maintaining the strength of the family.

The importance of the family within civic behavior (and the attendant limitations it caused) can clearly be seen within real-life suburban activism during the 1950's and early 1960's. In pursuing their causes, suburbanites frequently framed their behavior as not simply that of good citizens but also in keeping with the concerns of the nuclear family. For example, Sylvie Murray's *The Progressive Housewife* traces neighborhood activism in a suburban Queens community from 1945 to 1965. Much of the activity described reveals the residents' desire to make the neighborhood safer for children. In scenes similar to that of the specific episodes described above, Murray describes how suburban housewives staged dramatic protests regarding traffic safety. As early as 1948, one Queens newspaper editor wrote, in describing the busy Horace Harding Boulevard, that "your chances of crossing the street without running are low. Try this sometime with a baby carriage and watch the cars charge at you."[221] In 1950, the newspaper reported how "half a hundred mothers…formed a human blockade across Main Street at 72nd Avenue…after more than a year of unsuccessful attempts to obtain a signal at the corner…the parents finally resorted to a mass demonstration and held up traffic for more

[221] Murray, 120.

than a hour."[222] The protest used slogans such as "Safety first, a dead child never" and "the cost of a light is the price of a life."[223] In 1955, Queens residents again "threatened to blockade [a] street with baby carriages unless" a traffic light was installed at a dangerous signal.[224]

Suburban preservation causes were also connected to the needs of the family. In *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, Adam Rome describes how the building of subdivisions resulted in "the destruction of nearby open spaces [which] robbed children of beloved places to play—and the losses hit home more vitally than the threats to far-off-sites…ever could."[225] Rome further traces how the "open space movement" of the late 1950's lamented this loss of natural beauty within the suburban neighborhood itself, particularly the destruction of sites that had special significance for families and children. A poignant example of the connection between preservation and the family involves a letter written by a seven-year-old in California to John F. Kennedy in 1962, protesting the suburban destruction of a nearby canyon's environment. The child stated "Dear Mr. President…we Have no Place to go when we want to go out in the canyon…so could you setaside [sic] some land where we could Play?"[226] This simple request of a child wanting a place to play made national news, undoubtedly because of its emotional message framed within the needs of children.

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[222] Murray, 122.
[223] Murray, 123.
[224] Murray, 125.
[225] Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 8.
[226] Rome, 128.

By emphasizing themes of the family, suburban activists seeking traffic lights or places to play may have attracted public attention and goodwill. However, their focus on the family as the driving force behind their behavior could also limit their activities. The Queens protests or the "open-space" movement could have been framed as public insistence on an expansion of state entitlements (would stronger government agencies help to maintain safety or green spaces?) or as meditations on the nature of capitalistic growth and expansion (how did the growth of suburbia itself result in the destruction of parks?). Instead, both movements positioned their work merely as that of families requesting a small state solution to resolve a simple problem. While suburban activists frequently succeeded in achieving parts or all of their goals through their family-attuned discourse, the nature of their work was limited as a result.

This limitation had clear political implications. If suburban sitcoms served as an instrument of governance by positioning the active individual as working for the benefit of his or her neighborhood, they similarly worked to rein in the potential for such work to turn radical. In linking civic involvement with the nuclear family, the sitcom connected the labor of good citizens with an institution intricately bound within the postwar consensus. The relatively "apolitical tenor of middle-class [suburban] postwar life," which avoided being sucked into "political causes such as peace and women's rights," fit nicely within the Cold War era's overall fear and persecution of radicalism, a viewpoint fervently held by liberals as well as traditional conservatives.[227] Sitcom citizens may

[227] May, 16-17. For more on Cold War-era repression of the left, see Ellen Schrecker's *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (New York City, NY: Little, Brown, and Company, 1998) and Mary Dudziak's *War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (New York City, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012).

bend the law or stand up to corrupt politicians (just as the Queens residents described by Murray might wage pacifist or pro-integration campaigns), but all such work, both on television and in real life, primarily ended up strengthening the family and "the well-being of the residential community."[228]

Sitcoms reinforced the linkage between civic labor and the middle-class, capitalistic institutions of the suburban neighborhood and the family, severely downplaying the radical possibilities of such work. Betty Anderson protests the destruction of the campus diner, yet ultimately finds a way to work out a compromise, satisfying the needs of both capitalism and the community. The diner remains, not because of intrusive regulation or ideological shifts, but through the work of hard-working individuals. At the same time, Jim's company simply finds another, more efficient location for its office building. The lasting image of the episode is not Betty as a disruptive radical, but of the entire family working together with other community members to improve the diner. Like so many other suburban sitcom episodes, the potentially threatening politicization inherent in characters challenging corporations or businesses is tempered to fit postwar concerns. The family serves to both guide *and* limit the civic work performed by sitcom citizens.

Conclusion: Great Society and Beyond

During the mid-1960's, the development of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society appeared to mark a potential conflict between suburban sitcom depictions of civic behavior and the real world. In his 1964 commencement address at the University of Michigan, commonly cited as introducing his domestic program, Johnson spoke of

[228] Murray, 88.

expanding state-provided entitlements, saying "The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice."[229] In the next few years, the Johnson administration's creation of such initiatives as the War on Poverty and Medicaid and the concomitant expansion of consumer/environmental protection seemingly shifted the responsibility for the problems of the neighborhood from individual citizens (acting within their nuclear family) to the state.[230]

On the one hand, the Great Society and the federal commitment to "education, medical care, civil rights, environmental protection, and other spheres" it represented did mark an increase in power and responsibility of the state, a shift I do not wish to downplay.[231] On the other hand, though, a focus on domesticity and *individual* responsibility remained prominent in several aspects of the Great Society, a persistence that suggests the strength of the tenets of sitcom citizenship even in the age of so-called "big government." For example, Johnson continued to stress the role of the individual citizen in his Great Society rhetoric. During the aforementioned Ann Arbor speech, he proclaimed that the solution to the nation's problems "does not rest on a massive program in Washington, nor can it rely solely on the strained resources of local authority." He proposed "a creative federalism" connecting the state and the community, and then ended the speech by directing questions at the individuals listening. "Will *you* join in the battle

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[229] Lyndon Johnson, "The Great Society, U. Michigan, 1964," *American Experience*, PBS, accessed April 24, 2014, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/lbj-michigan/.
[230] Several histories that stress the increased role of the state during the Great Society (regardless of its actual successes or failures) include the essay collection *The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism*, eds. Sidney M. Milkis and Jerome M. Mileur (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005) and John A. Andrew III's *Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 1999).
[231] Hugh Heclo, "Sixties Civics," in *The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism*, eds. Sidney M. Milkis and Jerome M. Mileur (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 58.

to give every citizen an escape from the crushing weight of poverty?...Will *you* join in the battle to build the Great Society?"[232]

Similarly, the Great Society in many ways continued to position the family as the central institution of society. Robert O. Self argues that Great Society liberals tried to create the ideal nuclear family through programs he labels part of "breadwinner liberalism." Working on the assumption that "male-headed breadwinner nuclear families" were both natural and ideal, programs such as the War on Poverty and pieces of legislation like the Economic Opportunity Act sought to train men to find "employment and stabilize families."[233] The Great Society did little to change traditional models of the family; for Johnson and his advisers, the "'citizen worker' and the nuclear family he headed" remained "an organizing mythology of social life…the bedrock of…a sound society."[234]

Among Great Society programs, nowhere would the merging of individual initiative with the concerns of family be clearer than the Johnson administration's focus on improving both the urban and rural environment, a topic that unsurprisingly received increased focus throughout the sitcom plots of the 1960's. In a 1964 *P.T.A. Magazine* article, Secretary of the Interior Stuart Udall decried "the pell-mell rush to push out metropolitan borders."[235] Udall claimed that America was becoming "a land of vanishing beauty, of increasing ugliness, of shrinking open space."[236] President Johnson, in his

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[232] Johnson.
[233] Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960's* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2012), 37.
[234] Self, 18.
[235] Stewart Udall, "Thoughts on the Quiet Crisis," *The P.T.A. Magazine* 58, no. 9 (1964): 21.
[236] Lewis L. Gould, *Lady Bird Johnson and the Environment* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 43.

1965 State of the Union address, echoed Udall's concerns. "We must make a massive effort to save the countryside and to establish—as a green legacy for tomorrow—more large and small parks, more seashores and open spaces than have been created during any other period in our national history," Johnson declared.[237]

While the Johnson administration succeeded in passing such legislation as the Wilderness Act and Motor Vehicle Air Pollution Control Act, the face of the pro-environment agenda became Lady Bird Johnson and her beautification campaigns. In February 1965, Lady Bird announced "The time is ripe—the time is now—to take advantage of this yeasty, bubbling desire to beautify our cities and our countryside."[238] In a September 1964 speech, she praised the "women…cleaning up the cities of our country…those who make the small places…blossom—the backyard, the schoolyard, the town park."[239] By the end of the decade, such campaigns had achieved such tangible results as the 1965 Highway Beautification Act and the 1966 "Project Pride" effort to clean up the nation's capital. *Individual* civic-minded citizens, Lady Bird stressed, needed to lead the way in cleaning up their communities, motivated by the needs of their family. In promoting wilderness preservation, she told Americans to "enjoy the beauty of your hills, and protect it for your children," while in a speech about city beautification, she noted that "children may be wolf cubs" without beautiful places in their neighborhoods.[240] Small-scale actions by good citizens would be the best way to fight

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[237] Lyndon Johnson, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union—January 4, 1965," The American Presidency Project, eds. John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, accessed April 24, 2014, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26907.
[238] Gould, 58.
[239] Gould, 44.
[240] Gould, 38, 44.

environmental blight. According to the First Lady, "it is in *our own communities* [emphasis added] that we can best participate in creating an environment which has beauty, joyousness, and liveliness."[241]

These environmental campaigns, with their emphasis on small-scale activities, were a clear example of the persistence of sitcom citizenship even within the political changes of the Great Society. In beautifying highways or neighborhoods, citizens were being encouraged to engage in localized actions that would benefit neighborhood families, or, in other words, follow the example of Samantha Stephens helping the boy next door, Ozzie Nelson requesting a traffic light, and Hazel trying to save a neighborhood park. All of these actions were framed by sitcoms, the popular press, and politicians as the cornerstone of a strong and harmonious society. As President or Lady Bird Johnson defined it, these actions would be performed by the front-line soldiers of the Great Society: active, responsible nuclear families that were strengthened through the Society's other programs. There would remain, then, an important place within the Great Society for the work being done by sitcom citizens. There would still be social problems best solved not necessarily through the role of the state, but through the small-scale work of individuals demonstrating active citizenship.

However, were all of these social problems able to be vanquished by good citizenship? Would the localized activities promoted by sitcoms be able to solve far more complicated problems than a busy street corner or a threatened park? Throughout the postwar years, two such "problems" involved the growing debates over race and gender within the United States. The battle over the expansion of civil rights for non-white male

[241] Gould, 55.

Americans eventually led to a shattering of the liberal consensus amid the perceived failures of the Great Society. However, prior to those fractures, postwar liberals believed the issue of racial bigotry could be resolved through the context of active citizenship. In particular, the liberal consensus believed that instead of resorting to political unrest or agitation, Americans could achieve racial harmony through public displays of tolerance and the strengthening of familial order. Once again, suburban sitcoms could act as an instrument to communicate these messages. Their attempts at doing so and the varied results they produced are the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Sisters (and Brothers) at Heart: Sitcom Citizenship, Race, and Domesticity

Character actor Natividad Vacio is not a familiar name to the television viewing audience. However, the prolific performer has an important distinction within sitcom history. The Hispanic Vacio was the only "non-white" performer to play a recurring role on *Father Knows Best*, appearing five times throughout the show's run in the role of gardener "Frank Smith."[242] The character is highly stereotypical, talking with a thick accent, frequently making humorous blunders due to his inability to understand English, and always depicted working in menial positions. However, many scholars discussing the show instead focus on the character's *name*. In *The Way We Never Were*, Stephanie Coontz jokes that the show's protagonists, the Anderson family, were so "completely white and Anglo-Saxon that even [their] Hispanic gardener…went by the name of Frank Smith."[243] Coontz's humorous yet incisive observation appears within various other academic texts, including David Marc's *Comic Visions* (1997) and Cary O'Dell's *June Cleaver Was a Feminist!* (2013).[244] This joke brushes Frank aside as nothing more than a "white, Anglo-Saxon" parody of a racial minority.

However, this observation is not completely accurate. As the first episode to feature Frank makes clear, "Frank Smith" is not his real name at all. Instead, the character's real name is Luis Mendoza, he is a Mexican immigrant, and he deliberately

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[242] The definition of "non-white" is, of course, fraught with debate. For the purposes of this project, I classify Vacio's character as non-white as he is specifically identified as an immigrant born in Mexico. Furthermore, his speech patterns and mannerisms clearly separate him from the WASP protagonists.
[243] Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Were Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, 2nd ed. (New York City, NY: Basic Books, 2000), 30.
[244] David Marc, *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1997), 46; and Cary O'Dell, *June Cleaver Was a Feminist!: Reconsidering the Female Characters of Early Television* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 2013), 33.

chose a "first-class USA" name when entering the country. Furthermore, Frank is not a seamless part of the white neighborhood that only exists to offer comic relief. Rather, in most of Frank's appearances, he faces serious legal trouble and even racial discrimination. While Frank may indeed still be a racial stereotype, he cannot simply be dismissed as a symbol of the show's white-bread nature. Despite his name, he is clearly signified as a racial "other." Indeed, the very presence of the character raises serious questions about the nature of race, the sitcom genre, and good citizenship. Why would a suburban sitcom like *Father Knows Best* feature recurring plots about a racial minority in trouble? What solutions did the show offer for Frank's problems? How do such resolutions fit within the matrix of sitcom citizenship outlined last chapter?

These questions do not just apply to *Father Knows Best*. Despite the postwar sitcom genre's reputation as purely white, numerous programs aired episodes focusing on minority characters and the problems they faced. Such episodes positively depicted racial tolerance and would on occasion specifically present and condemn examples of bigotry. In this chapter, I will analyze these sitcom texts, in particular focusing on the relationship between racial minorities and good (white) citizens. I argue that these sitcom messages of racial tolerance consistently positioned minorities as childlike victims in need of protection from upstanding white benefactors. The good citizen assisted minorities not through radical or political actions, but instead through the daily work of the family. Sitcom tolerance thus not only promotes a specific behavior important to Cold War conceptions of good citizenship, but it also provides a useful context (domesticity) within which the problems of race in general can be solved.

Race, Suburbia, and Sitcoms

The very presence of race within suburban sitcoms tends to be overlooked by television historians. David Marc writes that shows like *Father Knows Best* (which he refers to as an "Aryan melodrama") valorize "suburbia as democracy's utopia realized, a place where the white middling classes could live in racial serenity."[245] Gerard Jones adds that sitcom settings, such as *FKB*'s Springfield or *Donna Reed*'s Hilldale, were marked by their "uniform whiteness."[246] Certainly, none of the programs analyzed in this project featured regular characters typed as racial or even ethnic minorities. Within sitcoms, minority characters were generally featured on "urban, ethnic, working-class situation comedies," such as *Mama* or *The Goldbergs*, not on suburban set shows.[247] Many histories of television thus follow Vince Waldron's conclusion that the sitcom "taboo [of] racial prejudice" would not be confronted until the late 1960's or early 1970's, when more realistic programs produced by MTM Enterprises and Norman Lear appeared on the scene.[248]

However, despite the overall absence of minorities, suburban sitcoms presented consistent messages regarding race and ethnicity. For example, Nina Leibman writes that many programs were "surprisingly attracted" to the plot of racial or "ethnic minorities"

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[245] David Marc, *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1997), 42.
[246] Gerard Jones, *Honey, I'm Home!; Sitcoms: Selling the American Dream* (New York City: Grove Weidenfeld, 1992), 100.
[247] George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 40.
[248] Vince Waldron, *Classic Sitcoms: A Celebration of the Best Prime-Time Comedy* (New York City, NY: Collier Books, 1987), 187.

entering "the hermetic world of the white upper-middle class."[249] She claims that of the over five hundred sitcom episodes she studies, "at least one-tenth" prominently feature a minority character, in effect roughly a couple episodes per season. These minority characters took on different forms, ranging from foreign exchange students to menial laborers to full-fledged neighbors of sitcom protagonists. For the most part, the racial status of these characters (which marked them as "others") is a clear focus of episodes. In several cases, specifically pedagogical episodes made a plea for tolerance of minorities and denounced racial bigotry. While this hardly signifies real diversity, it belies the assumption that these programs featured "uniform whiteness."

Such depictions occurred within a postwar context of greater attention paid to racial issues. As George Lipsitz has famously argued, white America as a whole was expanding in the postwar period as newly created "suburbs helped turn [formerly urban] European Americans into 'whites' who could live near each other and intermarry with relatively little difficulty."[250] At the same time, in response to the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War, political and cultural leaders increasingly valorized the idea that the United States was "a harmonious nation made up of people from diverse ethnic, racial, national, and religious backgrounds," and (white) America had a responsibility to address issues of racial discrimination or inequality.[251] Because of this, the growing population of white Americans would perceive racially focused campaigns

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[249] Nina Leibman, *Living Room Lectures: The Fifties Family in Film and Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 164.
[250] George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the 'White' Problem in American Studies," *American Quarterly* 47.3 (1995): 374. Also see David Roediger's *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White* (New York City, NY: Basic Books, 2005).
[251] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1946-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 11.

for civil rights and tolerance as having a connection, if potentially an ill-defined one, to their daily lives.

Racially focused sitcom episodes would thus be directed at an audience primed to think about issues of race. These fictionalized depictions presented a model for positioning tolerance within the more familiar realm of the suburban neighborhood and the daily lives of white citizens.[252] In order to explore these depictions, I will first use as case studies two of the more prominent sitcom episodes to specifically address racism, the 1959 *Father Knows Best* episode "The Gardener's Big Day" and the 1969 *Bewitched* episode "Sisters at Heart." I have deliberately chosen two episodes from very different points in the time period in question. Despite airing after years of the civil rights movement and racial upheavals, I argue that the messages regarding tolerance in the *Bewitched* episode are basically the same as the messages found in earlier sitcoms, demonstrating the relative consistency with which the suburban sitcom genre depicted race. Since they specifically address bigotry, these two episodes in particular serve as a useful way to draw out assumptions regarding racial tolerance and minorities.

"The Gardener's Big Day," an episode from *Father Knows Best*'s last season, features the aforementioned guest character of "Frank Smith," the Hispanic gardener who is a beloved friend of the Anderson family despite typically involving them in comic mishaps. However, this episode begins with Frank not in trouble but rather about to

[252] This model intentionally did not depict many specific racial issues of the period, such as school integration. For example, despite the obvious prominence of the black civil rights movement at the time, there were far more sitcom episodes about tolerance featuring Asian-American (or visiting foreigner) characters than African-American. In analyzing these episodes, I acknowledge this clear limitation yet believe the messages of tolerance being depicted have application for all Americans marked as racial minorities.

receive a great honor. Governor Bradbury is coming to Springfield to dedicate a new park, and since the town is a tractor production center, a resident will present the governor with a gold model of a tractor. Frank, now working for the city as a gardener, receives a telegram saying that *he* will be the lucky resident to meet the governor. Unfortunately for him, the town leaders are unaware of Frank's class or ethnic status. When he drives up to City Hall, a council member complains about the noisy vehicles driven by "transient workers," who make the parking lot "look like *The Grapes of Wrath*." He and the rest of his colleagues are then stunned to discover that the shabbily dressed, Hispanic gardener is *the* Frank Smith selected to meet the governor.

After the initial meeting, one of the council members, Charlie, visits Jim Anderson to explain the situation. Charlie says that "we wanted to be democratic [and] draw the name of some plain, American citizen" to meet the governor, but maintains that it is ridiculous to have a "broken-down tramp" participate in the ceremony. Jim defends his friend, saying Frank is an excellent selection. Charlie refuses to listen, fuming "Think how he looks!...He can't even speak English!" Jim promises that his family will take care of the situation. Frank then temporarily moves into the Anderson home; he receives a new suit he can wear to the ceremony and practices speaking English. Unfortunately, he makes little progress, and after seeing Frank still speak haltingly and with a thick accent, Charlie has had enough. He privately tells the family that Frank is an unacceptable candidate and will disgrace the town. While the Andersons protest, Frank, having overheard, runs away in shame.

At the dedication ceremony, Frank does show up, but he is wearing his typical work clothes, not his new suit. He nervously addresses the governor and in his broken English delivers a speech about his job as a gardener, which involves making the town beautiful. Frank talks about plants and flowers before noting that all kinds of trees "bow to one another in the wind" and grow peacefully together, making a veiled yet obvious plea for equality and tolerance. Instead of presenting the governor with a tractor, Frank then gives him a plant. While the council members are stunned, the governor seems both bemused and touched. He is pleased to receive the plant, saying it signifies a town of great beauty, and offers to join Frank in placing it in the new park. The episode thus ends on a happy note as despite the fears of the town council and even the Anderson family, Frank has represented Springfield well.

This episode does not feature explicit discussion of anti-Hispanic bigotry, as none of the council members use racial slurs and they seem to oppose Frank equally because of his class standing. Furthermore, the reference to *The Grapes of Wrath* calls up images of poor whites, not racial minorities. Nevertheless, the episode makes it clear that part of their antipathy to Frank stems from the fact is that he is an immigrant who cannot speak fluent English and is thus associated with the "transient workers." The episode thus works as a denunciation of racial bigotry and as a text designed to promote racial tolerance.

Airing about ten years later, the *Bewitched* episode "Sisters at Heart" presented a clearer depiction of racial bigotry, yet the storyline is very similar to the earlier episode. Despite being produced after years of civil rights activism, "Sisters at Heart" aligns itself

with *Father Knows Best* in its depoliticized vision of racism. The episode begins with star Elizabeth Montgomery, out of character, talking to the audience, inviting them to watch "a very special *Bewitched*, conceived in the image of innocence and filled with truth." Aired around Christmas time, the plot features one of Darrin's co-workers at his ad agency, Keith, going on a business trip with his wife. The couple, who is black, leaves their daughter, Lisa, at the Stephens home while they are gone; Lisa is one of the best friends of Tabitha, Darrin and Samantha's daughter.

The girls begin referring to each other as "sisters." Shortly after, one of Darrin's prospective clients, Mr. Brockway, comes to the Stephens home. Brockway, a fussy type, makes it a policy to inspect the personal lives of people he does business with. Lisa answers the door and refers to Tabitha as her sister to Brockway. Based on her innocent responses and not knowing she is merely a guest, Brockway assumes that Darrin is in an interracial marriage, and requests a different person handle his account, saying Stephens is "not stable."

A confused Darrin and Samantha invite Brockway to a party at their house in order to show their stability. Brockway patronizingly tells Darrin that what he is doing "takes a lot of guts," but soon discovers the truth about Darrin's relationship with Lisa. Darrin's boss, Larry Tate, is disgusted with Brockway, though, telling him that if he did not want to work with a man in an interracial marriage, he should do his business at a different advertising agency. Brockway sputters that he is not prejudiced and that "some of my best friends are Negros," but Samantha casts a spell that makes Brockway see

everyone in the room as black, an effect achieved by having the actors wear blackface. He flees the home in confusion.

The next day, a contrite Brockway returns to the Stephens home. In front of Darrin, Samantha, Keith, and Keith's wife, Dorothy, Brockway states that he just experienced "the equivalent of 20 years on the psychiatrist's couch…I found out I'm a racist…a sneaky racist." He apologizes for his actions and says he will be happy to have Darrin represent him if possible. Darrin agrees and Keith accepts the apology as well, noting a person defining his problem "is the first step towards solving it."

A subplot makes the moral of the episode even more explicit. After being told by a girl in the park that she and Lisa cannot be sisters due to their different colors, Tabitha reveals to Lisa she is a witch and then casts a spell turning both girls into the same color: a polka-dotted combination of black and white. They remain in this odd condition for a large portion of the episode until Samantha convinces them to change back. Sam gives a speech saying that "sisters are girls who share something…good feelings, friendship, love," so they don't have to be the same race. "All men are brothers, even if they are girls," she concludes. Like Frank's speech climaxing "The Gardener's Big Day," Samantha's dialogue ensures that the episode clearly stands as a condemnation of bigotry and defense of tolerance.

The most obvious point regarding these episodes is that racial tolerance is treated as a basic, common sense attitude, as none of the major characters on the show struggle with it for an instant. For example, while the Anderson family may grow frustrated with Frank's inability to properly speak English, they firmly and continually oppose the town

council's underhanded attempt to remove him from the ceremony. "You couldn't have made a better selection," Jim insists, and the family forms a "lobby group" pleading with Charlie to give Frank a chance. Since the viewing audience has seen Frank's honesty and charm in earlier episodes, little time is spent showing why Jim is right to defend his friend. It is basic common sense that Frank, a good man and hard worker, deserves to be part of the ceremony, and none of the Andersons disagree.

This notion of common sense tolerance is even clearer in "Sisters at Heart." The episode begins by introducing Keith, a black employee at Darrin's ad agency. While the viewing audience has never seen the character before, he and his family are immediately shown to be good friends with the Stephens family (friendly enough to allow their daughter to spend a few nights at the Stephens house). The idea that any of the show's protagonists struggle with racist views is thus quickly dismissed. By establishing its characters' tolerance early and making it seem entirely natural, the show avoids having to explicate a defense for potentially controversial issues such as interracial marriage. When Larry Tate, Darrin's boss, discovers that Brockway is opposed to interracial marriages, he rejects Brockway as a client. This is despite Larry's consistent portrayal on the show as a greedy, cowardly character. Thus, with even Larry firmly rejecting racism, the episode defines tolerance as something so obvious that it is shared by *all* of a sitcom's citizens, even imperfect ones.

This message is reinforced through the depiction of the lone racist character, Brockway. In plotting to make a surprise visit to the Stephens house to check on Darrin's character, he reveals himself to be snoopy and suspicious. Brockway has a fussy and

paranoid personality, always jumping to the worst possible conclusions. Besides his racism, Brockway is thus a rather despicable and strange character in general. The implication is that anyone with a modicum of decency and empathy for others (which Brockway lacks) could not possibly be a racist.

The obviousness of tolerance is demonstrated in many other sitcom episodes focusing on race. For example, a multitude of episodes of the sitcom *My Three Sons* present sympathetic depictions of Chinese and Japanese characters that feature "validation of other customs and cultures," such as ritual meals or religious traditions.[253] Protagonist Steve Douglas regularly worked with a Chinese associate named Ray Wong, and at least twice in the series, the family would travel to Hong Kong or Tokyo to accompany Steve on business trips. In each of these episodes, racial tolerance is taken for granted; none of the Douglas family demonstrates any concern (or anything close to bigoted attitudes) in interacting with Asian characters.[254]

Furthermore, controversy surrounding interracial romances, a potentially combustible issue, is downplayed within suburban sitcoms, as only the episode "Sisters at Heart" addresses the notion that racists were shocked at such relationships. David Nelson on *Ozzie and Harriet* dates a Mexican woman in the 1957 episode "The Duenna." The elder Douglas son on *My Three Sons*, Robbie, romances a Japanese woman in the 1962 episode "Weekend in Tokyo" and a Chinese woman in 1966's "Robbie and the Slave

[253] Leibman, 169. There were roughly one or two *My Three Sons* episodes a year that featured Asian characters.

[254] See also the 1961 *Donna Reed* episode "The Geisha Girl," in which Donna becomes angry at her friends after she (erroneously) believes they intentionally snub a Japanese woman that has moved into town. The implied message is that tolerance is so natural she cannot conceive of any reason why her white suburban friends could be bigoted towards a Japanese woman.

Girl." In all of these instances, while cultural barriers may interfere in the relationships, the actual interracial aspects of the romances are not commented upon. It is taken for granted that it is not an issue. Like racial tolerance in general, it is common sense for the sitcom characters to accept.

The obvious nature of tolerance within these episodes is similar to that of other pedagogical examples within postwar popular culture. For example, the 1945 theatrical short *The House I Live In* (starring singer Frank Sinatra) and the 1945 animated short *Brotherhood of Man* both contained explicit messages of racial and religious tolerance. In the former, Sinatra, playing himself, leaves his recording studio to discover a gang of boys attacking a Jewish child because they "don't like his religion." Sinatra compares the attackers to "a bunch of Nazi werewolves," making it clear that prejudice has no place in America. "Religion makes no difference, except maybe to a Nazi or somebody just as stupid…God created everybody," Sinatra declares, and the film ends with the children replacing their bigotry towards the Jewish boy with signs of friendship.[255] While *The House I Live In* is explicitly concerned with religious tolerance, Art Simon argues that "its various exhibition contexts fashioned it as a film about race" as well. Indeed, the film's first public screening occurred at a 1945 "community meeting to deal with a racially charged encounter between Los Angeles youth."[256]

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[255] *The House I Live In*, directed by Mervyn LeRoy (1945; RKO Radio Pictures), YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=woZVlroHqPU.

[256] Art Simon, "*The House I Live In*: Albert Maltz and the Fight Against Anti-Semitism," in *'Un-American' Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*, eds. Frank Krutnik, Peter Stanfield, Steve Neale, and Brian Neve (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 181. Simon also notes that the full lyrics of the song "The House I Live In," which were deliberately cut from the film, explicitly describe "my neighbors white and black."

Brotherhood of Man similarly presents tolerance as a natural behavior. Produced by United Productions of America (UPA) on behalf of the United Auto Workers "to help the union overcome racial prejudice when the auto manufacturers opened integrated plants in the South," the short was based on the anthropological pamphlet *The Races of Mankind* by Ruth Benedict and Gene Weltfish.[257] In the cartoon, a white man wakes up to discover that his home is now next door to various people from different races, who are represented as stereotypical versions of Africans, Mexicans, and Chinese people, among others. Even though the white man believes "the future is brotherhood," his "evil side" (as well as those of the other races) convinces him that they cannot get along because they're "all different." Just as Sinatra served as the voice of reason in *The House I Live In,* this short features an omniscient narrator who calmly notes "let's look at the facts." The narrator tells the white man that "if you take their [different races'] skins off, there's no way to tell them apart" and different lifestyles "come from…cultural experience or environment," not biology. The white man and the representatives of other races conclude that all they need is "a little understanding and…brotherhood" before befriending each other.[258]

In each short, a wise figure (Sinatra, the narrator) promotes tolerance as a common-sense behavior that should be practiced by anyone who takes the time to logically examine the facts. These figures are thus similar to the voices of reason seen within the suburban sitcom episodes; no one needs to convince Jim Anderson or

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[257] Karl F. Cohen, *Forbidden Animation: Censored Cartoons and Blacklisted Animators in America* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 1997), 176.
[258] *Brotherhood of Man*, directed by Robert Cannon (1945; UPA), YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fnrxbkajy9M.

Samantha Stephens of the importance of racial tolerance—it is obvious to them. People who do not practice it are nothing more than "Nazi werewolves," or, in the sitcom world, stubborn fools. Like their sitcom successors, the postwar shorts depict racial tolerance as a behavior easily practiced by all good citizens.

However, the depictions of tolerance within these postwar shorts would soon be replaced in light of more specific political concerns. The shorts' simple calls for racial brotherhood would soon appear naïve or even dangerous within a Cold War context. In 1947, Hearst columnist Lee Mortimer wrote that *The House I Live In* was merely a set of "class struggle or foreign *isms* posing as entertainment" as part of an attack by the conservative Hearst press on Sinatra's supposed left-wing sympathies.[259] Albert Maltz, the short's writer, soon fell victim to the show business blacklist and would later face imprisonment as one of the "Hollywood Ten." *Brotherhood of Man* also faced controversy in 1947 when the English edition of a Ukrainian Communist newspaper commented positively on it. Conservatives, already suspicious of the short's implicit support for "international cooperation through the United Nations and an expanded social welfare system," now had "evidence" linking it to Communists.[260] Furthermore, like Maltz, its writer, Ring Lardner Jr., was accused of Communism and would also become one of the Hollywood Ten. *The Brotherhood of Man*, intended to be shown in American-occupied Germany, was withdrawn on the recommendations of military leaders, partly

[259] Chris Rojek, *Frank Sinatra* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2004), 11.
[260] Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 1997), 52.

for racist reasons but also, in the words of Secretary of War Kenneth Royall, because of the "controversy in the Congress, in the press, and elsewhere."[261]

This did not mean, though, that the United States would abandon the pursuit of racial, ethnic, and religious tolerance during the Cold War. As historians such as Thomas Borstelmann, Mary Dudziak, and Penny Von Eschen have argued, tolerance became increasingly valued as an important political weapon against Communism. During the postwar period, "the Soviet government and its allies…delighted in publicizing news of American racial discrimination and persecution," providing an "irresistible opportunity to respond to American publicity about repression of individual liberties in the Soviet bloc."[262] Robert E. Cushman, a member of President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights, noted it was both unpleasant as well as accurate that Soviet propaganda highlighted "our continuing lynchings, our Jim Crow statutes and customs, our anti-Semitic discriminations, and our witch-hunts."[263] In light of these embarrassments, "efforts to promote civil rights within the United States were increasingly viewed as consistent with…the more central U.S. mission of fighting world communism."[264] While some of these efforts involved lending political support to the mainstream civil rights movement, the government and other, more private stakeholders also promoted tolerance through the creation of popular culture productions meant to change the "hearts and minds" of both Americans and foreigners alike.

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[261] Cora Sol Goldstein, *Capturing the German Eye: American Visual Propaganda in Occupied Germany* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 65.
[262] Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 75.
[263] Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 29.
[264] Dudziak, 12.

In these pedagogical productions, the common-sense nature of racial tolerance as seen in the earlier shorts was combined with the more pertinent need to represent the Cold War-era United States as free of bigotry. These popular culture examples ranged from educational pamphlets produced by the United States Information Agency, television public affairs shows such as *Soap Box*, and articles in *Reader's Digest*. In each instance, American tolerance is defined with relative ease. The USIA pamphlet *The Negro in American Life* framed "American history," for example, "as a story of redemption," telling the story of "a nation that had sinned but was on the road to redemption…and where the people were sufficiently good that, at least in time, they willed for the right things."[265]

The USIA also worked with the State Department to sponsor cultural tours of Latin America, Africa, and Asia which featured African-American performers staging productions like *Porgy and Bess* or integrated orchestras putting on jazz concerts. Government officials regarded such performers as symbols of the country's racial progress and a counter-example to what a USIA report condemned as "Communist propaganda of racial discrimination and maltreatment of Negroes."[266] Performers like the white bandleader Benny Goodman stressed the ease of race relations in the United States. Goodman claimed foreign audiences "had been fed a lot of Communist

[265] Dudziak, 49-54.
[266] Ellen Noonan, *The Strange Career of Porgy and Bess: Race, Culture, and America's Most Famous Opera* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 197.

propaganda…we've had colored musicians in the band for twenty-five years. That was probably more than enough to offset what they've been hearing from the other side."[267]

Even when more nuanced pro-tolerance productions acknowledged racial tensions within the United States, they featured a confident sense of optimism regarding the ease with which such tensions could be removed. Anna McCarthy analyzes how the educational series *Soap Box*, for example, would admit the issue of racial integration was "stressful" and depict such potentially tumultuous incidents as white parents complaining about black teachers. However, through role-playing exercises, the show calmly made the claim that "we [a white parent and black teacher] both are fearful" and that "face-to-face interaction" would bring "understanding" from all parties.[268] Through simple discussion and explanation of facts and emotion, the racial tensions present within the United States could be smoothed out. Racial tolerance was becoming (and would soon become) a fact of life for most Americans, even in these "stressful" times.

Suburban sitcoms fit in neatly within this blueprint during the Cold War era. By presenting hopeful images of white protagonists engaging in displays of tolerance, the shows reinforced the "obviousness" of such behavior. However, suburban sitcoms did more than simply urge racial harmony. Unlike older models of tolerance, the sitcoms did not claim that the problems of race would be eliminated through the active cooperation of all men in "brotherhood," a theme that hinted at such solutions as increased opportunities for minorities. Instead, sitcoms actively communicated two other ideas important within

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[267] Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 44-45.
[268] Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (New York City, NY: The New Press, 2010), 84-85.

Cold War attitudes towards race: that minorities were little more than passive victims, and that the problems of race would be resolved simply through the actions of the (white) individual citizen.

Depiction of Minorities

Within suburban sitcoms, minority characters were continually depicted as passive or childlike (or literally children in some cases), generally incapable of taking the lead to resolve the problems they faced. While always depicted as innocent victims of their circumstances, minority characters are depicted as just that: victims who must let others help them. For example, in "Sisters at Heart," while Keith, Dorothy, and their daughter, Lisa, are the victims of Mr. Brockway's bigotry, they do nothing to resolve the problem. Keith and Dorothy are absent for much of the episode, and in Lisa's few scenes, she is left to marvel at Tabitha's magical powers. The only time a minority character actively does anything in the episode is at the end when Keith forgives Brockway. The black characters in the episode only react to the proceedings.

In *Father Knows Best*'s "The Gardener's Big Day," Frank is also depicted as powerless. After he overhears Charlie tell the Andersons that the town council regards him as an embarrassment for the town, he does not defend himself but simply runs out of the home. When he does show up at the ceremony, he seemingly has a chance to exercise power by delivering a speech before the governor, but he enters, as Nina Leibman notes, "cowering, hair disheveled" to recite a "sentimental monologue" pleading for his superiors to tolerate him.[269] It is the governor who must accept Frank's gift of a plant and

[269] Leibman, 166-67.

praise his speech; without the white politician's approval, Frank would presumably be immediately rejected by the town as a failure.

This weakness is also seen in Frank's other appearances on *Father Knows Best*. In the first two episodes to feature the character, "Margaret Hires a Gardener" and "Sentenced to Happiness," he is arrested for vandalism (for attempting to "beautify" a piece of private property) and becomes wanted for theft (for borrowing a truck from work to give Kathy a ride). When faced with these accusations, Frank can do nothing but become anxious and appeal to his good friend "Señor Anderson" for help. In these and his other appearances, Frank is depicted as completely unable to resolve his own problems.

Frank, though, is not just powerless; he is also *childlike* as well. In "Sentenced to Happiness," Frank gets a job working for the city, but even then, he does not save his money. He uses his wages to buy gifts for the Andersons and even skips work to help Margaret or Kathy. At the end of the episode, a judge notes that Frank has good intentions and cannot survive in a typical nine to five job. "That's like shutting a rare mountain flower into a box and expecting it to grow," he concludes. While the judge's intent is to praise the gardener, the implication is that Frank can never be what the white politician describes as a "steady, responsible citizen." Instead, he is only a "rare mountain flower" who simplistically beautifies the world around him. He is nothing more than a likeable child who can do nothing on his own.[270]

[270] Sitcom episode titles also tended to refer to minority characters as children. The title of the *My Three Sons* episode "Robbie and the Slave Girl" refers to the adult college student played by twenty two-year-old Irene Tsu. Even more dramatically, the title of the *Donna Reed* entry "The Geisha Girl" labels the adult

The powerless nature of minority characters on suburban sitcoms is further reinforced by their limited and segregated appearances. Within the sitcoms, racial minorities did not appear as show regulars, but rather only as guests, frequently within the category Nina Leibman refers to as the "ethnic exotica." This characteristic refers to guest characters that model the attractive virtues of "tradition, spirituality, and culture" but despite this (or rather, because of it) they become "too distinct to be subsumed into [the] WASP culture" of the suburbs.[271] Thus, the Douglas family may be great friends with the Wongs on *My Three Sons*, but the Wongs live in Chinatown, not the Douglas' suburban community. When the Douglases visit the Wong home in "Robbie and the Slave Girl," everyone wears traditional Chinese robes, and Ray Wong's "wise grandfather" is introduced with stereotypically "Oriental" music in the background. They are presented as characters worthy of respect yet distant from the white Douglas family.

Similarly, many racial minorities on sitcoms, despite their likeable natures, were marked in some way that segregated them from the protagonists. The Japanese newcomer to town, Jio, in the *Donna Reed* episode "The Geisha Girl" always wears a kimono. Frank on *Father Knows Best* has a language barrier which makes it difficult to communicate with him; a recurring joke is that he pronounces his own name as "Fronk." When the Anderson family hosts an exchange student in the episode "Fair Exchange," their Indian guest, Chanthini, is polite but distant due to her inability to understand American culture or idioms. She views football as "mayhem" and is confused by references to the "Indian rope trick." The studio's official plot summary of this episode claims that such cultural

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woman played by thirty-year-old Miyoshi Umeki as a "girl." While such terminology could also apply to white female characters, it seems particularly pervasive in this regard.

[271] Leibman, 168-170.

confusion "has dampened the Andersons' plan to entertain" Chanthini, suggesting the serious problem caused by her isolation from the family.[272] These barriers (in dress, language, or culture) weaken the strength of minority characters.

These images of minorities have a long history within American popular culture. The bumbling Frank or the passive Jio, for example, easily fit within the racial categories outlined by Stuart Hall: the "slave-figure [who is] dependable, loving in a simple, childlike way" or the "native…portrayed in a certain primitive nobility and simple dignity."[273] While these classical tropes are still relevant within the 1950's and 1960's, these passive depictions of minorities must also be placed within Cold War-era attitudes towards racial tolerance. As documented above, political and cultural leaders perceived American racism as a potential propaganda tool; these perceptions inevitably framed racial and ethnic minorities as weak victims, unable to act from a position of power. Thomas Borstelmann argues, for example, that President Eisenhower believed that southern blacks were primarily victims of both the "violent white response" and "outside agitators from the North," who manipulated them to choose radical solutions.[274] White politicians inaccurately believed minorities either lacked the power to help themselves or were foolishly considering unproductive solutions. Both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson viewed civil rights leaders as "unruly followers inclined to jump out of line," a paternalistic analogy comparing minority leaders to disobedient children.[275]

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[272] "Screen Gems Storylines," *Father Knows Best*.Com, accessed April 17, 2014, http://fatherknowsbest.us/Episodes/EP4.PDF.
[273] Stuart Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media." In *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader*, eds. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 1995), 21.
[274] Borstelmann, 93.
[275] Borstelmann, 157.

Popular culture depictions of racism, ranging from both the sincere to the commercial, also tended to emphasize the weakness of minority characters. John Nickel writes that the suffering black character in race message movies of the period was often portrayed as "weak, passive, dependent, vulnerable, persecuted, humble, and innocent…sympathetic and not too threatening."[276] Nickel cites such postwar films as *Body and Soul*, *The Well*, *Red Ball Express*, *Edge of the City*, *Nothing but a Man*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (almost all pro-tolerance films made by liberal or leftist directors) as pop culture examples where the abuse or deaths of black characters serves as a central cornerstone of the plot. A non-fiction example includes Edward R. Murrow's famous 1960 CBS documentary *Harvest of Shame*, which documents the horrific exploitation of Hispanic farm workers. Murrow and his producers sincerely wished to improve the laborers' working conditions, but Murrow's conclusion is significant. "The people you have seen have the strength to harvest your fruit and vegetables. They do not have the strength to influence legislation," he states, effectively labeling such workers as helpless victims of racial and economic oppression.[277] They can do nothing on their own to solve their plight.

The conception of racial minorities as weak and childlike in some instances becomes central to various Cold War strategies to promote racial tolerance. As Christina Klein documents in *Cold War Orientalism*, author Pearl Buck founded the Welcome House adoption agency "as part of a solution to America's [racial] foreign policy

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[276] John Nickel, "Disabling African American Men: Liberalism and Race Message Films," *Cinema Journal* 44, no. 1 (2004): 32.
[277] *Harvest of Shame*, directed by Fred W. Friendly (1960; CBS), YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJTVF_dya7E.

problems: in her view…hybrid Asian and American families created through adoption" could improve political and cultural relations, enhancing America's cosmopolitanism and tolerance.[278] In the adoption model, racial acceptance is connected to domesticity and familial sentiment, an emotion only possible if the non-white figures are children. It is highly logical, then, that Walt Disney's 1964 paean to international racial tolerance, the amusement ride It's a Small World, represents the different races of the world not as adults (the "Brotherhood of Men") but instead as small children, figures which can perfectly unite the different races.[279]

The theme of passiveness appeared, sometimes with a bit of tension, within ostensibly stronger depictions of racial minorities in the sphere of popular culture. On the public affairs show *Soap Box*, the black teacher ("Kindly Miss Smith") appeared as "the voice of reason and conciliation," calmly answering the sometimes blustery questions of white parents.[280] Indeed, Anna McCarthy notes that many such educational series or short films depicted a black character as "the universal liberal subject and truth teller," offering models of liberal humanism by patiently defending tolerance.[281] Despite such positioning, though, the minority characters' strength is tempered with aspects of weakness. Miss Smith may be the voice of reason, but the host of the show and the ostensible authority figure was the (white) National Conference of Christian and Jews representative, Dr. Jean Grams. The black "liberal subjects" are valuable models of morality, but they do not

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[278] Klein, 144.
[279] Despite the large amount of critical studies of race within Disney productions, critical analysis of It's a Small World remains lacking. Carol Magee's *Africa in the American Imagination: Popular Culture, Racialized Identities, and African Visual Culture* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2012) offers a short chapter about the ride's usage of children to represent race.
[280] McCarthy, 105.
[281] McCarthy, 102.

actively confront problems or take the lead; they can merely offer advice or plead for tolerance. Their power to influence (and implicitly that of shows like *Soap Box*) paradoxically comes from the fact that they are not "powerful" characters.

McCarthy makes this clear by offering the counter-example of the black character, Alex, in the short film *The Cry of Jazz*. Alex is not just a "truth teller," but a "provocateur," aggressively challenging white Americans' conceptions of race and serving as the clear authority figure in the film.[282] The controversy this short created, as opposed to the more mainstream programs, indicates the uniqueness of a powerful minority character within this genre. The Cold War liberal model of racial tolerance and education could not support the minority as an aggressive provocateur; instead, it required a foolish child such as Frank or a supporting voice of reason such as Miss Smith.

The Good (White) Citizen

If the racial minority figure was necessarily framed as weak, then the "problem solver" in these examples becomes that of the heroic white liberal. This image of the white benefactor is dominant within suburban sitcoms; the white protagonists of these shows have the strength and will to come to the rescue of the minority characters. Thus, the white good citizens are not just racially *tolerant*, but also willing to act on the behalf of minorities. In returning to the two case study episodes, it is important to note the central role played by the white benefactor characters in both "The Gardener's Big Day" and "Sisters at Heart." With one exception, the important plot points are all triggered by the actions of the *white* characters, as opposed to the ostensible focus of the episodes, the minority guest characters. In the former episode, Frank is selected by the town council as

[282] McCarthy, 107

part of a random drawing; he does nothing to actually "earn" the honor of meeting the governor.[283] After he is judged to be unacceptable, Frank is aided by his longtime patron, Jim Anderson. Jim and his family plead on behalf of Frank, let Frank stay at their house, buy him a suit, and attempt to teach him English. Frank's only proactive action in the episode is to utilize his sentimental, childlike qualities in pleading for tolerance. Even then, it is the white governor who praises Frank and the community, temporarily replacing Jim in the role of Frank's benefactor.

As mentioned earlier, "Sisters at Heart" effectively contains no scenes in which the minority characters are allowed to demonstrate strength (aside from forgiving the bigot at the very end of the episode). All throughout the episode, white benefactors come to the aid of Keith and his family. After hearing that she cannot really be Lisa's sister because of the girls' different skin colors, Tabitha uses her magic to turn the girls into the half-white/half-black color. When Brockway's racism is exposed, Larry Tate tells him off and Samantha uses her magic to drive him away. These white characters and their heroic actions become the focus of the episode.

The image of the crusading white benefactor appears throughout racially focused suburban sitcom episodes. Donna Stone attempts to solve the dilemma of why the community seems reluctant to support the Japanese neighbor Jio in "The Geisha Girl." Dennis Mitchell is happy to entertain the lonely daughter of a visiting Chinese businessman in "The Chinese Girl" because, as he points out, "she's a foreigner" and his teacher has instructed him to "be nice to foreigners." Most notably, Jim Anderson

[283] In *Living Room Lectures*, Nina Leibman erroneously claims that Frank receives the honor by winning an essay contest.

continually comes to the rescue of Frank on *Father Knows Best*. Prior to "The Gardener's Big Day," Jim has bailed Frank out of jail in the episode "Margaret Hires a Gardener" and become his business manager in "Sentenced to Happiness." As an example of a truly "steady, responsible citizen," Jim can help the childlike Frank stay out of trouble, manage his finances, and resolve his problems. The white sitcom protagonists have a responsibility to protect and aid beleaguered minorities.

This theme is also prominently illustrated in the well-publicized behind the scenes production history of the *Bewitched* episode "Sisters at Heart." The original script for this episode was created by a mostly black high school class at Jefferson High School, a decaying inner-city school in Los Angeles. Star Elizabeth Montgomery and her husband, show producer William Asher, had invited the class to visit the set after hearing about the problems at the school and about how many students enjoyed the program. After touring the studio and meeting the cast and the crew, the class was inspired to create a "thank you gesture" of a script presenting a message of tolerance. While the script would obviously be revised, Montgomery was impressed. "We were overwhelmed…we've had bad scripts submitted by professional writers that weren't as well written or creative," she said.[284] The origins of the script were presumably well known by the time the episode aired, as Montgomery's opening comments about the episode being "conceived in the image of innocence," are an obvious reference to its production history.

An article in the mainstream publication, *TV Picture Life*, places this story in the context of the paternalistic white benefactor. The article depicts the students' teacher,

[284] Herbie J. Pilato, *Twitch Upon a Star: The Bewitched Life and Career of Elizabeth Montgomery* (Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2012), 213.

Marcella Saunders, asking "what was the answer? Was there an answer, any help for these young people?"[285] Her "solution" involved Montgomery and Asher, "people who care, who want to help" and who sincerely believe in "[inviting] minority groups into [their] lives." The *Bewitched* producers not only allowed the children to tour the set and write a script, but they created a fund to allow the students to buy equipment for their classroom. The article ends by declaring students "have now been turned on to achievement," with one individual saying "We're not going to blow it now—not now that Mr. and Mrs. Asher have given us our chance."

This article omits certain details in order to more strongly emphasize the power of the responsible white citizen. In the article, the black students are depicted as talented if directionless; their visit to the studio and the encouragement of the Ashers (as well as the financial gifts) inspire them to work. However, the article does not explain why the children were so interested in *Bewitched* in the first place. According to show writer Barbara Avedon, at least one of the children noted that he liked the show because it featured "a mixed marriage," interpreting the Stephens' marriage as a metaphor for interracial couples in general.[286] The omission of this detail denies the ability of the children to actively shape material for their own purposes; instead, they can only receive. Furthermore, the *TV Picture Life* article phrases the creation of the educational fund in terms that deny the students' power: Elizabeth Montgomery states that "a fund was created and into the fund was placed the money they were paid" for writing the

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[285] Joan Mayher, "The Secret Liz Montgomery Shares With Her Husband," *TV Picture Life*, December 1971, Harpies Bizarre, accessed April 17, 2014, http://www.harpiesbizarre.com/vintagesisters.htm.
[286] Charles Martin, *The White African American Body: A Cultural and Literary Exploration* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 74.

episode.[287] A 1970 *Jet* article on the episode explained the fund's creation in this manner: "The *students* [emphasis added] will donate money for writing the script to a foundation."[288] While such differences may be minor, the *TV Picture Life* wording frames the foundation not as a student-led initiative, but almost as a gift to the students by their benefactor, the white "good citizen," Elizabeth Montgomery.

Thus, just as the fictional Samantha Stephens works as "the benefactor and protector of black people," so her portrayer, Elizabeth Montgomery, becomes characterized in the same manner.[289] Without her involvement, the Jefferson High School class would never have had a chance to show their potential. They would never have been "turned on to education." The article suggests that their teacher's only recourse is to effectively appeal to the wealthy white couple to provide "a chance," which in literal terms involves money, gifts, and opportunities. In a 1989 interview reflecting on both the episode and the series as a whole, Montgomery said the show itself was a metaphor for discrimination, "how people can sometimes get off track, and [get on] the outside trying to belong."[290] In both this real-life example and in the resolutions of *Bewitched*'s episodes (as well as other suburban sitcoms), the solution to people being "on the outside" is the receiving of assistance from a helpful white citizen.

The trope of the white benefactor reinforced the discourse of racial tolerance found within postwar political and popular culture, in which the responsibility and power of the *white* citizen was emphasized over that of the racial minority. If, as noted above,

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[287] Mayher.
[288] "22 Black High School Teens Write 'Bewitched' Series Script," *Jet*, December 3, 1970, 19.
[289] Walter Metz, *Bewitched* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 87.
[290] Pilato, 214.

minorities were little more than children in the eyes of political leaders, then it was logical for men like Dwight Eisenhower to view themselves as the "protector[s] of the majority of moderate blacks."[291] Eisenhower, hardly a liberal in the field of civil rights, demonstrated both his concern for the law and his attitudes of "sympathy, understanding…and paternalism" through such actions as sending the military into Little Rock to enforce school integration.[292]

It was not just political leaders though who could (and should) serve as white benefactors. This trope was also prevalent in the many local narratives of neighborhood integration focusing on the wise actions of white citizens. The 1957 Dynamic Films short *All the Way Home*, made on the behalf of the NAACP, offered a template for improved racial integration in a suburban community. In the short, an unseen black family has purchased a home in a previously all-white suburb, causing much neighborhood friction. The short ends with a town meeting in which the frenzied hysteria of the bigoted or fearful residents is contrasted with the calm, educated reason of others. A white bank president provides statistics that indicate property values do not decline when black values move in, saying it is "sound economics" to judge neighbors not on their skin color but their worth. The white man who sold his home remarks that he did it partially because he became aware of the ghettoization of blacks outside of the suburbs.[293] The film clearly places "the responsibility for improving housing conditions for African Americans on the

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[291] Borstelmann, 93.
[292] Garth E. Pauley, *The Modern Presidency & Civil Rights: Rhetoric on Race from Roosevelt to Nixon* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 65.
[293] *All the Way Home*, directed by Lee R. Bobker, 1957; Dynamic Films, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eBJc-0IaUs.

shoulders of white home owners."[294] Integration is made possible only through the helpful actions of good white citizens, who aid black families by smoothing out the problems that await them.

This narrative was repeated in media coverage of real-life events. A 1957 *Redbook* article claimed that the community of Teaneck, New Jersey, is "a heartening example…against race prejudice, and a model for hundreds of other traditionally all-white communities confronted with Negro home ownership." There, the Teaneck Civic Conference strove to enhance integration through education programs teaching diversity and the importance of high neighborhood standards. The relative success of the community in integrating is due to the efforts of these good (white) citizens, who acted as "a kind of moral dike which keeps the neighborhood from being inundated" by panic and prejudice.[295] The efforts of the white citizen thus became crucial in the integration narrative. Those interested in both their neighborhood and the protection of minorities had a moral responsibility to act. Sargent Shriver once noted that a citizen concerned about racial justice "resembles the missionary conversing with a foreign people" when it came to promoting integration, but that racial discrimination would only end after "people have become sufficiently enlightened."[296] Such enlightenment could only come from the efforts of hard-working white citizens.

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[294] Stephen Grant Meyer, *As Long As They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2000), 147.
[295] Selwyn James, "*Redbook* Examines Integration Efforts in Teaneck, New Jersey, 1957," in *The Suburb Reader*, eds. Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2006), 339.
[296] Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 208.

This ethical responsibility placed on white Americans—to be a protector and benefactor to racial minorities—again clearly fit within the contours of Cold War politics. Citizens had not just a moral, but a national, duty to stamp out horrific displays of prejudice. Doing so, in the words of Dwight Eisenhower (in talking about the need for peaceful integration in Little Rock), would restore "the image of America and of all its parts as one nation, indivisible, with liberty, and justice for all."[297] In this line of thinking, the United States would benefit if white citizens aided not just African Americans, but all racial minorities or foreigners. As Naoko Shibusawa documents, a 1956 episode of the drama *Navy Log* (made with the endorsement of the U.S. military) featured soldiers helping a young Japanese man to attend college in America. The soldiers' action "demonstrate[s] America's goodwill, benefit[s] U.S.-Japan relations, and [helps to] prevent future Japanese aggression."[298] Travel writer Horace Sutton even claimed that American tourists could not view their trip "as the purest of larks" but rather as part of their job as America's "millions of ambassadors."[299] Being a benefactor to minorities within their neighborhood was thus not just a moral task for white Americans; it was a part of their overall duty to their country.

Nevertheless, these depictions of passive minorities aided by crusading white citizens were occasionally troubled within the suburban sitcom. In several episodes, minority characters appear to uncomfortably wield power over the white protagonists. For example, in the *My Three Sons* episode "Robbie and the Slave Girl," Robbie Douglas

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[297] Dudziak, 133.
[298] Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 178.
[299] Klein, 106.

saves a fellow college student, Terri Wong, from being hit by a car. Terri, as part of an attempt to romantically attach herself to Robbie, claims that Robbie's action must be paid back with service, saying it is a familial tradition. Terri begins acting as Robbie's "slave," following him around and doing all of his chores. This irritates Robbie, but he is unable to extricate himself from her. By acting as a "slave," Terri actually comes off as more powerful than Robbie, who lacks the strength to escape her.[300] The episode reflects white America's "deep and unconscious" distrust of minority characters that lack appropriately passive qualities, as Terri deliberately uses her submissiveness to obtain power over Robbie. Stuart Hall notes that the images of the black slave or Asian servant were viewed with suspicion and the belief that they were "plotting in a treacherous way" against their white masters.[301]

Besides depicting these feelings of uneasiness, several sitcom episodes also venerated minority characters in ways that subtly diminished the power of white citizens. As mentioned above, the conclusion to the *Father Knows Best* episode "Sentenced to Happiness" features the Hispanic Frank being compared to a "rare mountain flower" that exists to beautify a community. Frank's childlike innocence, while positioning him lower than the white Jim Anderson, nevertheless allows him to "bring a little beauty into the world" through his service and positivity, something that the white citizens are implicitly unable to accomplish. In describing Frank, the judge wistfully notes "if we had just one half of his formula for happiness…"[302] In this example, the "ethnic exotica" is prized by

[300] Similarly, in the *Ozzie and Harriet* episode "The Duenna," David is rendered uncomfortable by his inability to speak Spanish to his date.
[301] Hall, 21.
[302] See the various *My Three Sons* episodes that venerate aspects of Asian culture.

white culture as it represents a type of spiritual or moral strength that white Americans may not inherently possess. Minorities possess a "primitive nobility" or "rhythmic grace" lacking in "modern" civilization.[303] In its most extreme form, this tension was manifested in what Hernán Vera and Andrew Gordon dub the "white racial masquerade" story (such as in books like *Gentleman's Agreement* or *Black Like Me*), in which whites pose as a minority "to overcome white self-loathing and racial guilt" and appropriate "the imagined attributes of an idealized other."[304]

Solutions of Tolerance

These potentially problematic aspects complicated the responsibility of white citizens to be racial benefactors. How could racial tolerance be possible if minorities represented either a threat to whites or a symbol of deficiencies within white culture? Suburban sitcom episodes demonstrate that these tensions can be resolved through the specific ways that tolerance is demonstrated on the shows. Sitcom racial tolerance thus plays a deeper role than simply reflecting the patriotic duty of white citizens. While it is part of an overall Cold War imperative, this type of tolerance also places the social "problem" of race within the more manageable context of domesticity and modernity. Such a model acts as a way to control the potentially dangerous or upsetting elements of race, operating as Wendy Brown has argued, as a Foucauldian tool of governmentality. Tolerance "does not resolve but manages antagonism or hostility toward difference." Through acts of tolerance, citizens specify "the conditions within which the tolerated practice [or in this

[303] Hall, 22.
[304] Hernán Vera and Andrew M. Gordon, *Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2003), 116.

case, people] remains tolerable," enabling them to manage the tensions that emerge from difference.[305]

Indeed, for the most part the sitcom methods of racial tolerance do involve two types of conditions that serve to regulate potential problems. These categories involve modernization (frequently in conjunction with consumption) and the family, characteristics that perfectly aligned with the nature of suburban sitcoms as "family [domestic] narratives which…continually underscored capitalistic superiority" and consumption.[306] The solution of modernization features minority characters, with the assistance of their white benefactors, overcoming social barriers through their acceptance of "modern" culture. For instance, the Indian exchange student Chanthini (from the episode "Fair Exchange") begins to fit in with the Anderson family on *Father Knows Best* when Bud teaches her how to play football. By learning that the American sport is not necessarily a violent game, she begins to enjoy herself and become an accepted member of the neighborhood. Similarly, in "The Chinese Girl" episode of *Dennis the Menace*, Dennis demonstrates his acceptance of Sen Yuen by buying her a banana split, an action which Mr. Wilson plans on describing in an article called "East Meets West." The racial tolerance demonstrated by the Anderson family and Dennis in these episodes hinges on the minority characters' own acceptance of aspects of "white" culture.

The most striking example of this type of solution comes in the *Donna Reed* episode "The Geisha Girl." At the end of the show, Donna talks to the newly arrived Jio about why the other doctors' wives seem uncomfortable around Jio and her husband.

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[305] Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 28-29.
[306] Leibman, 61.

Donna says the wives love Jio, but they do not approve of her appearing to wait on her husband's every need. "The customs are different here," Donna points out, and takes Jio shopping to become "truly American." When Jio arrives home, she is not in a kimono (as she was wearing all throughout the episode) but rather clothes similar to Donna's. "I have decided to be an American wife," Jio remarks, and becomes less submissive to her husband, implicitly becoming part of the neighborhood. Racial tolerance is achieved not through social or political action but rather Jio embracing modernity and becoming "an American wife," a process achieved through shopping (consumption).

The other common solution presented within the sitcoms involves the creation of familial bonds, in which white benefactors effectively make minorities part of their family, a process that logically flows from the conception of minorities as childlike. In *Bewitched*'s "Sisters at Heart" episode, the plot rests on the fact that the black Lisa is not just a friend of the white Tabitha, but is staying in the Stephens home as a "temporary sister" for Tabitha. Because they are told to be sisters, the girls begin referring to each other in this manner and even attempt to adopt the same color to be true sisters. It is this verbal confusion that causes Brockway to assume Darrin is in an interracial marriage when he hears Lisa refer to Tabitha as her sister. The plot and message of the episode falter if Lisa does not become a member of the white Stephens family, even on this temporary basis. The reactions of the protagonists against Brockway (Samantha's magic, Larry Tate's denunciation) have greater weight because Brockway's racism is directed against a family. By "adopting" Lisa, Samantha and her family now have the ability and the responsibility to defend her against bigotry.

The creation of a literal family is also seen in the case of *Father Knows Best*'s Frank Smith. Certainly in "The Gardener's Big Day," the Anderson' solution to Frank's problems is to effectively adopt him by having him stay at their home where he can receive new clothes and English lessons. An even clearer example, however, is seen in the fifth season episode "Frank's Family Tree," in which Frank reveals he has no family to visit during his vacation. In order to make Kathy not feel sorry for him, Frank lies and says that his family is a group of musical performers. When Jim suddenly needs entertainment for an insurance convention he is hosting, Kathy suggests Frank's "family," and eventually the gardener must admit he was lying.

In the climax to the episode, a frustrated Jim is trying to cover for the lack of entertainment at the convention when Frank appears with a guitar. The Anderson children accompany him and perform as a singing and dancing troupe; they are a huge hit with the crowd. Frank thanks the kids for helping him out by posing as his family, saying "it's the best one I ever had." In this episode, Frank *literally* becomes part of the Anderson family when the children pose as his relatives. Frank is saved by his white benefactors through the creation of a new (white) family, which is so good it erases any memories of Frank's actual family. Through the creation of these familial bonds, minority characters can receive protection. In each instance, though, these bonds are only temporary. Despite being Tabitha's "sister," Lisa only appears in the one episode of *Bewitched*. Frank is an honorary member of the family who appears once a season with a crisis. The characters are treated like family members, yet only for the brief duration of their specific episodes.

The solutions of modernity and the family serve to smooth over the aforementioned cultural tensions involving race. The ambivalence of characters such as "Geisha Girl" Jio or "Slave Girl" Terri is removed when they modernize their appearances and behavior. In the *My Three Sons* episode, Robbi is annoyed by Terri's "slave girl" act, but after her grandfather rebukes her for doing it, she resumes acting like a "typical" college student and Robbie happily agrees to go on a date with her. These solutions also allow for white characters to benefit from the supposedly idealized qualities possessed by minorities. Through "adopting" Frank, the Anderson family can enjoy the beauty he provides to the community. Furthermore, these solutions implicitly set certain conditions for tolerance. White sitcom citizens would support minority characters who became part of their family (on a temporary basis) or who accepted "mainstream" culture through modernization or consumption. They rarely interacted with minorities outside of these specific conditions.

The suburban sitcom method of racial tolerance linked the political and cultural model framing minorities as childlike victims and white citizens as heroic benefactors with solutions rooted in consumption and domesticity. In doing so, sitcoms defined tolerance as the action of *individual* good citizens within a neighborhood. Through the work of their family, characters like Jim Anderson, Donna Stone, and Samantha Stephens resolved the problem of prejudice, a problem now positioned "as personal and individual" as opposed to political.[307] The potentially troublesome issues of race, something white Americans were told it was their civic and Cold War duty to engage with, were subsumed within the domestic realm represented by the sitcom. Displaying

[307] Brown, 15.

racial tolerance becomes simply another in the list of the civic duties outlined last chapter. For the sitcom citizen (and implicitly viewers as well), aiding minorities is no less a responsibility than saving a park or fighting for a traffic signal, a comparison that both normalizes racial tolerance and limits its radical potential.

Conclusion: Tolerance as Pathology

Throughout the 1960's and beyond, the sitcom model of racial tolerance was prominently utilized by political leaders. In 1965, Lyndon Johnson announced that the end of racial oppression would be a chief goal of his administration. As Robert Self has argued, Johnson's vision of expanding "social and economic citizenship" was rooted in many of the assumptions explored above. Johnson regarded himself as a paternalistic crusader protecting helpless and ignorant victims. In a private conversation, he said his aim was "to teach these nigras that don't know anything how to work for themselves, instead of just breeding."[308] He believed that the Great Society would improve the lives of minorities in the same way that his foreign policy would assist in the development of "backward regions" around the world.[309]

Johnson and the Great Society also drew upon sociological studies that framed minorities as pathologically weak, using such reports as Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 study *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. The most notorious section of the Moynihan report claimed that African American men were "trapped in a tangle of pathology" and that a broken family structure which fueled dependency on welfare was

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[308] Robert Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York City, NY: Hill and Wang, 2012), 29.
[309] Heather Marie Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era* (New York City, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 150.

"the 'fundamental problem' in the contemporary black community."[310] Sociologist Oscar Lewis, the author of *The Children of Sanchez* and *La Vida*, framed a similar "culture of poverty thesis," which stated that many minorities developed "patterns of behavior inconsistent with socioeconomic advancement," including deviant familial patterns, such as "an absence of childhood, an early initiation into sex, a prevalence of free marital unions, and a high incidence of abandonment of mothers and children."[311] While Moynihan and Lewis also argued that the structural conditions of society helped to perpetuate this behavior, they concluded that minority communities were marked by passivity and dependence on others.

Because of these pathological weaknesses, minorities would benefit from the family-focused solutions depicted within suburban sitcoms. Many Great Society programs took as their goal the "promoting [of] nuclear families with breadwinning fathers."[312] This goal took more obviously politicized approaches than sitcom episodes, yet the central focus on domesticity is striking. In his vision of the Great Society, Johnson viewed racial minorities as weak victims that needed help, particularly in the area of the family. It was an optimistic vision that, in many ways, did not resolve the real life social turmoil of the 1960's. The sitcom model of racial tolerance would ultimately be forced to confront a more volatile civil rights movement, a backlash from white Americans, and other socio-political trends, all of which would reveal the limits of the postwar conception of good citizenship.

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[310] Self, 27-28.
[311] Douglas S. Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 5.
[312] Self, 37.

Near the end of his administration, in light of rampant domestic unrest, Johnson asked his staff "How is it possible…that all these people could be so ungrateful to me after I had given them so much?"[313] Johnson's question is obviously paternalistic, yet it conjures up images of *Father Knows Best*'s Jim Anderson reacting to the situations Frank Smith roped him into. The white Jim has given everything to the Hispanic Frank—job opportunities, new clothes, a place to stay, advice—and yet, in every one of his appearances, Frank again blunders into trouble, frequently embarrassing Jim and squandering the goodwill. "How can you do this to me, Frank?" Jim pleads. The difference, of course, is that on the sitcom, the white citizen can calmly work out a solution to resolve the problems faced by the racial minority.

While such a vision is clearly idealistic, sitcom unreality is less important than the fact that it reflected actual political and cultural foundations. Suburban sitcoms defined racial tolerance in a way that aligned with both Cold War conceptions of citizenship and cultural tensions regarding minorities. By offering up domestic focused tolerance featuring good citizens as white benefactors and minorities as childlike victims, sitcoms framed race and prejudice as social problems on par with traffic safety and the lack of parks. Just as these issues were solved by individuals operating within their families, so too can citizens solve the dilemma of race—not just prejudice but the potential threat represented by race as well. Ultimately, race becomes another problem addressed through the sitcom model of good citizenship.

However, this model was not applicable for every issue. Another cultural problem frequently addressed in sitcoms would require completely different conceptions of civic

[313] Borstelmann, 173.

responsibility for its solutions. While sitcom citizenship fit the Cold War era concerns surrounding racial tolerance and bigotry, it would not as neatly correspond with the growing discontent regarding gender inequality. As opposed to the social problems discussed in this chapter and the previous one, the dilemmas faced by frustrated housewives and other women, both in sitcoms and beyond, could not be so easily solved by the work of responsible citizens. As next chapter will trace, suburban sitcoms would attempt to champion a powerful form of active domesticity to combat gender inequality while simultaneously downplaying the role of civic participation, a balancing act fraught with internal tensions.

Chapter 4

Just a Housewife?: Sitcom Citizenship vs. "Powerful Domesticity"

In the beginning of the 1960's, the image of domestic suburban bliss was challenged by a series of pointed, highly gendered criticisms. In a 1963 text, Americans read of the experiences of a "mother of four who left college at nineteen to get married." Her story seemed symptomatic of the "strange feeling of desperation" present in many suburban housewives:

> I've tried everything women are supposed to do—hobbies, gardening, pickling, canning, being very social with my neighbors, joining committees, running PTA teas. I can do it all, and I like it, but it doesn't leave you anything to think about—any feeling of who are you…I love the kids and Bob and my home. There's no problem you can even put a name to. But I'm desperate. I begin to feel I have no personality. I'm a server of food and a putter-on of pants and a bedmaker, somebody who can be called on when you want something.

The woman's story ends with the emotional question "But who am I?" In her attempt at pleasing her husband and children and accomplishing the variety of domestic responsibilities, she has no identity of her own.[314]

Another text from around the same period, this one from two years earlier, contains an ostensibly similar situation. The focus here is on a mother of two, a former nurse who retired after having children. She is also active in PTA meetings and committee work. In her story, the woman becomes irritated when people like her husband use the phrase "only a housewife," saying that it suggests wives are nothing more than "a faceless glob." When asked by her husband how else to describe a woman who stays home, cleans house, and takes care of the children, the woman replies "Mule!" The next

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[314] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 2nd ed. (New York City, NY: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1974), 21.

day, she imagines her vacuum cleaner mockingly calling her a "housewife," leading her to become frustrated at the very concept of domesticity.

Most people would recognize the first example as being one of the anecdotes from the first chapter of Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique*, in which Friedan outlines the infamous "Problem That Has No Name" by sharing the haunting experiences of various mothers and housewives. The second example is perhaps more surprising, coming from a 1960 episode of *The Donna Reed Show*, a program associated with images of domestic bliss, and one of the many shows Friedan described as depicting the "moronic housewife image."[315] Indeed, both cultural critics and average viewers alike have tended to link suburban sitcoms like *Donna Reed* with images of the submissive "happy homemaker." As earlier chapters in this project have demonstrated, though, sitcoms depicted and naturalized domesticity while at the same time presenting more complicated images of civic involvement and citizenship. In the previous chapter, I traced how this mixture of domesticity and citizenship led to sitcoms taking on the issue of racial bigotry. Gender inequality, as faced by the frustrated housewives described by Friedan or by women trying to find opportunities in the public sphere, would similarly appear as a topic within suburban sitcoms.

In this chapter, I trace the depiction of gender inequality within the postwar sitcom genre, primarily using episodes of *Father Knows Best* and *Donna Reed* as case studies. After outlining the representative types of plots and resolutions with which these sitcoms explored gender issues, I will explore how such depictions relate to the programs' overall emphasis on civic activism and good citizenship. I argue that as

[315] Betty Friedan, "The Monsters in the Kitchen," *TV Guide*, February 8-14, 1964, 21.

opposed to the other social or community issues explored in this project, civic involvement was never proposed as a solution for the problems of gender inequality. However, I also argue that the programs claimed that the true solution was the development of "powerful domesticity," in which women became stronger through an embrace of their roles as mothers and housewives, roles which as other chapters have shown, required a great deal of civic involvement as well. Ultimately, suburban sitcoms could indeed connect the dilemmas faced by housewives with the duties of good citizens, albeit through a solution riddled with internal tensions.

Sitcom Gender Storylines

In the American cultural consciousness, the suburban sitcom, particularly the late 1950's-early 1960's wave of programs (such as *Father Knows Best, Donna Reed*, or *Leave It to Beaver*), is inextricably linked to what Darrell Hamamoto refers to as the "1950s sitcom cult of domesticity," which valued the devoted mother and housewife.[316] In an episode titled "That Damn Donna Reed," the title characters of the 2000's program *Gilmore Girls* defined this cult, by describing Reed as "the quintessential '50s mom with the perfect '50s family…never without a smile and high heels," who constantly says things like "There's nothing more satisfying than washing windows." Even the names of sitcom characters have become shorthand to represent an image of the "happy homemaker." In particular, the name "June Cleaver" (admittedly a far more limited character than the other female sitcom protagonists) has appeared in the titles of various books, academic or otherwise, that suggest alternative visions of femininity than that of

[316] Darrell Y. Hamamoto, *Nervous Laughter: Television Situation Comedy and Liberal Democratic Ideology* (New York City, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1991), 27.

domestic perfection.[317] The 1994 collection *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America…* referenced *Beaver* in its title to conjure up what editor Joanne Meyerowitz refers to as "this tenacious stereotype…[of] white middle-class housewives who stayed at home to rear children, clean house, and bake cookies," all symbolized by sitcom housewives.[318]

While media and television historians present a more nuanced vision, they have nevertheless also tended to focus on the genre's depiction and naturalization of domesticity. Susan Douglas, for examples, denounces 1950's and 1960's sitcoms, saying their portraits of "cookie-cutter moms" contributed to the "physical and linguistic containment of women."[319] In her article "Sitcoms and Suburbs," Mary Beth Haralovich argues that suburban sitcoms worked "to mask social contradictions and…naturalize woman's place in the home."[320] She focuses on how fictional women like Margaret Anderson and June Cleaver were shown to "effortlessly maintain the domestic space of the family environment."[321]

These critiques are important and accurate. It is clear that suburban sitcoms intended to promote and naturalize particular models of traditional domesticity. Nevertheless, the postwar suburban sitcom also consistently depicted challenges to these

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[317] These include the essay collection on parenting *I Killed June Cleaver* (ed. Deborah Werksman, Bridgeport, CT: Hysteria Publications, 1999), another parenting book titled *Even June Cleaver Would Forget the June Box* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications Incorporated, 2007), and Cary O'Dell's revisionist piece of television history, *June Cleaver Was a Feminist!* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 2013).

[318] Joanne Meyerowitz, "Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960," *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Meyerowitz (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994), 1.

[319] Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York City, NY: Times Books, 1994), 51.

[320] Mary Beth Haralovich, "Sitcoms and Suburbs: Positioning the 1950s Homemaker," in *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader*, ed. Joanne Morreale (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 71.

[321] Haralovich, 83.

models through episodes focusing on gender inequality. In particular, two recurring storylines would anticipate (and eventually respond to) the real-life concerns of the second-wave feminist movement. In the first of these plot templates, housewife characters (almost always the main protagonist of the show) expressed frustration with the limitations and disproportionate responsibilities they faced as wives and mothers. In the second such storyline, a variety of female characters challenged male chauvinism, attempting to show that they were just as successful as men. In some instances of this plot, that challenge took place outside the domestic sphere, as female characters attempted to enter the workplace and obtain equal standing. In the majority of cases, these plots featured sympathetic treatments of women challenging constraints.

In order to trace these plots, I will first primarily focus on two older examples of the genre, the programs *Father Knows Best* and *The Donna Reed Show*. More than any of their contemporary shows (such as *Ozzie and Harriet* or *Leave It to Beaver*), *FKB* and *DR* were willing to sympathetically depict the frustrations faced by female characters, both in the private or (to a lesser extent) in the public sphere. In limiting this analysis to those two programs, both of which addressed issues of gender quite frequently, I believe I can more easily trace the assumptions surrounding domesticity and civic involvement found within the genre.

First, I will review the "frustrated housewife" storyline, using the characters of *Father Knows Best*'s Margaret Anderson and *Donna Reed*'s Donna Stone as case studies. On *FKB*, Margaret occasionally drops her usual cheerful disposition to reveal her inner anxieties about being a mere "housewife." In the 1958 episode "A Medal for Margaret,"

the Andersons prepare to construct a trophy room in their basement for the various trophies and medals the children have won for their athletic and academic successes, as well as the awards Jim has won for his work as a salesman. The children are surprised that Margaret has no medals of her own, and Margaret becomes dismayed that her children seem to believe she has lived a "lifetime of failures." In a more extreme plot using similar themes, 1959's "Good Joke on Mom" begins with Margaret being named the chairwoman of a building project planned by the women's club to construct a new children's clinic. Jim and the children find such an appointment ridiculous, with Jim noting "Those women should realize that washing dishes, making beds, and cooking beans hardly qualifies" Margaret as a building contractor. A seething Margaret thinks her family regards her as "the dumbest person in the world."

In the latter episode, Margaret's anger at being perceived as a failure by her family results in her attacking her role as a housewife. The beginning of that episode features Jim noting Margaret did not bring the day's mail in. "Who has the time?" she asks, pointing out that she has had to do dishes, clean up the home, and repair the vacuum cleaner. This seemingly throwaway scene takes on greater importance after her family mocks her appointment. In talking with the next door neighbor, Margaret says that according to her family, "a mother is good *only* for cooking and scrubbing." While she does not want to end her identity as a housewife and mother, she clearly would not mind the opportunity to prove her family wrong by becoming something more in their eyes.

These frustrations are most clearly seen in the intriguing 1957 episode "Brief Holiday." In this story, Margaret is bombarded with chores and requests from the kids to

fix things. Jim calls them "little slave drivers," but gives his wife even more chores to do before he goes to work. Trapped at home while her family is out, Margaret muses to herself that she cannot "look at another dirty dish" anymore. While talking to her neighbor, Margaret explains a fantasy of just getting up and leaving her "work" for a few hours, pointedly referring to her home as a place of *work*. When her friend is confused, Margaret points out that she has a wonderful family and "security," but she wants to do something more that day. Indeed, she ends up abandoning the chores to spend a day shopping at Springfield's exotic Orleans Street.

Later that day, Jim and the children are confused why Margaret did not do the chores they requested. She explains she felt a "ridiculous urge" to go to Orleans Street, but Jim presses her for a deeper explanation. "You're not the type…You're the steady type, dependable, even-tempered," he insists. He does not get angry at her about the incident, but Margaret is upset that Jim cannot understand her desire to (if only temporarily) abandon her lifestyle as a housewife for something else. Jim is confused why his wife would want to have personal time all to herself, away from her family.

In contrast, on *The Donna Reed Show*, protagonist Donna Stone's identity as a doctor's wife meant that she was already more than a "housewife." Indeed, since the focus of the show was on Donna, her character had more of a presence within the public sphere than Margaret Anderson, who as the title of her show indicated, was more of a supporting presence for "father."[322] Thus, while *FKB*'s Anderson family ridicules

[322] According to David C. Tucker in *The Women Who Made Television Funny* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 2007), the proposed title for *The Donna Reed Show* was, in fact, the half-facetious *Mother Knows Better*, which while rooting the title character within domesticity, did position her as a strong presence (118).

Margaret's appointment to a hospital project, Donna is involved in many projects of that nature throughout the series. Overall, she seems far more comfortable than Margaret in taking leadership positions for her various clubs and associations. Despite this, she also becomes frustrated at the limitations she faces as a woman and in particular, as a stay-at-home mother. The first season featured two such episodes where such feelings serve as the main plot. In "Three Part Mother," Donna must decide between attending a meeting of Mary's club, Jeff's basketball game, or Alex's speech in front of a medical society. Donna becomes frustrated over her children's pleadings and the fact that Alex seems to ridicule her anxiety about missing his speech. She eventually says she is sick of being the "mother of the year" and storms to her room.

A similar scene occurs in that season's episode "The Ideal Wife," in which Donna becomes annoyed when she is continually praised as "sweet," saying she feels like a "goody-goody" or a "Pollyanna." Donna realizes that in her interactions with her friends and family, she is *expected* to accede to everyone else's wishes (give the children money even though they did not do their chores, let Alex cancel on theater plans). Finally, she angrily points out that "because of my celebrated sweetness, I have been used, victimized, and exploited" and stridently insists the children do the chores they promised to do. Like Jim in "Brief Holiday," Alex cannot understand Donna's point of view, calling her "a reasonable, sensible woman." In other words, a bold insistence on satisfying personal needs seems out of character for her.

The 1960 episode "Just a Housewife," which was the episode described at the beginning of this chapter, connects these frustrations specifically to the role of being a

stay-at-home mother. In that episode, Donna becomes exasperated over an incident at the local supermarket. The local *Housewife's Corner* radio show broadcasts from there, a show that Donna claims always features interview segments with women who apologetically say they are "just a housewife." Donna is chosen for an interview by the radio announcer, but ends up mocked, prompting her to complain to her family about how the show depicts housewives. Like the other examples, Donna's husband and children cannot seem to understand why she is so upset, which only causes her to become further discouraged.[323]

In all of these examples, the frustrations faced by Margaret and Donna are treated sympathetically. The characters take center stage within the plots, ensuring that their concerns seem more legitimate than that of their family members. Their children's constant requests are depicted as obnoxious, and their husbands appear foolish due to their chronic inability to understand their wives' feelings. While the female characters eventually become objects of humor in some of these episodes (which I will discuss later in this chapter), their *initial* concerns are viewed with respect. The problems faced by women, and specifically housewives, are marked as actual problems that need to be resolved.

As I suggested in my comparison that opened this chapter, the concerns present within these episodes anticipate the arguments of Betty Friedan's 1963 best-seller *The Feminine Mystique*, which explicitly defined the "housewife's dilemma" faced by characters like Margaret or Donna as the infamous "problem that has no name." Like Friedan's subjects, who wrote that their "days are all busy, and dull, too" and that they

[323] A similar plot also occurs in the 1962 episode "Rebel With a Cause."

felt like they were "trapped in a squirrel cage," sitcom mothers too could chafe at the overwhelming expectations they faced in their daily routine. One could easily imagine both fictional characters writing this plaintive statement found in Friedan's book: "The problem is always being the children's mommy, or the minister's wife and never being myself."[324] The succinct critique is at the heart of the episodes described above: sitcom housewives, too, felt frustrated at not getting to be themselves.

Despite Friedan's argument that the "ideology of 'the happy housewife' [was] unchallenged" throughout the postwar era, these 1950's and 1960's sitcom episodes suggested mainstream popular culture was quite aware of challenges to such an image.[325] While certainly *The Feminine Mystique* helped to raise public consciousness of criticisms of domesticity, it did not obviously awaken women *en masse* to an awareness of their problems. The critiques found in both the episodes and Friedan's book are similar to those of the wives from the Kelly Longitudinal Studies traced by Elaine Tyler May in *Homeward Bound*. Writing in the 1950's, women, regardless of their satisfaction in marriage, discussed their discontent at having husbands who simply wanted "a good housekeeper to keep everything comfortable at home and peaceful."[326] Suburban sitcom plots, whether intentionally or not, were depicting real-life frustrations doubtless shared by many of their target audience members.

The sitcoms also explored gender inequality through regular plotlines featuring women's attempts to fight male chauvinism in a more public arena than the domestic

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[324] Friedan, 27-28.
[325] Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York City, NY: Basic Books, 2011), 143.
[326] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 3rd edition (New York City, NY: Basic Books, 2008), 188.

sphere. In these episodes, female characters fought against the discriminatory practices of men, frequently by attempting to gain access to traditionally male focused occupations. Again, I will first briefly describe these plots using case studies from *Donna Reed* and *Father Knows Best*, although in the latter program's case, episodes with this theme tended to focus not on the character of mother Margaret, but rather her daughter, Betty.

For example, in both the 1956 episode "Betty, Girl Engineer" and the 1958 episode "Betty, the Pioneer Woman," Betty confronts a chauvinistic male character who resents her intrusion into a masculine environment. The former episode features Betty getting a high school internship with a county surveying team. She is confident she can fit in with the crew, telling her mother "girls enter all kinds of professions now." On her first day on the job, Betty meets the condescending young surveyor, Doyle Hobbs. Hobbs tells her she should go home "where little girls belong…a woman's place is in the home," while smugly informing her that "the plan of life was worked out long ago." Doyle treats Betty rudely until she finally walks off the job.

The antagonist of the second episode is Tom Wentworth, a college student and descendant of the Springfield native and pioneer hero Jonas Wentworth. Tom and Betty are paired together to recreate Jonas' feat of pulling a cart across hilly terrain in order to settle the town. Tom thinks that this physical activity is no place for a woman. Modern women, he argues, are "coddled, overprotective…as soft as a three minute egg." Like Doyle Hobbs, he treats Betty with rudeness and condescension, hoping to make her drop out of participating in the project. Unlike the former episode, though, Betty refuses to

give in to the chauvinist's wishes. "I'll finish this trek if I have to walk in on my elbows," she tells Tom.

The idea of women being unsuited for physical activities would also appear in several *Donna Reed Show* episodes, such as 1958's "The Hike" and 1963's "Pioneer Woman." In these episodes, Donna's ability to go camping is questioned by various male characters. In the former, Donna volunteers to take her husband's place as leader of a camping expedition with her son and his friends. Alex, her husband, is skeptical, patronizingly telling her "You wield a wonderful dust cloth, [and] you set a fine table," before insisting "there's a male world and a female world," a scoffing dismissal of Donna's physical abilities that is also echoed by his friend Red in the later "Pioneer Woman." In each episode, Donna is clearly upset by the male characters' skepticism and attempts to prove them wrong by successfully "roughing it."

One of the stranger examples of this type of plotline occurs in the 1963 *DR* episode "A Woman's Place," in which Donna engages in one of the most potentially radical invasions of the "male world" by running for political office. Donna's women's group, W.I.V.E.S. (Women Independent Voters and Entertainment Society), encourages her to run for a seat on the town council. She is at first reluctant, pointing out that "I have a full time job just taking care of my family," but her children urge her to run, saying they and Alex can maintain the household in her absence. "This country needs you!" Jeff enthusiastically proclaims, and Donna begins her campaign. The spectacle of a female sitcom character as a viable political candidate is striking; at no point in the episode, is Donna's lack of *ability* suggested as a reason why she cannot run. Shelley Fabares, who

played her daughter on the show, would reference this episode in a 2011 interview as proof the character of Donna Stone "was very much in the foreground of women being in charge…[doing] a lot of things moms on TV didn't do at that time."[327]

While the conclusion to this episode, which I will explore below, explicitly closes any possibility of radical potential from this episode, it, at least initially, offers a sympathetic view of sitcom women attempting to overcome gender barriers. Indeed, as with the "frustrated housewife" episodes, the concerns of female characters in reacting to the inequalities they face are presented with a good deal of respect. The male characters in these episodes, such as *FKB*'s chauvinistic Doyle Hobbs and Tom Wentworth or *DR*'s swaggering "Red," are depicted as obnoxious. The audience is invited to empathize with Betty or Donna as they try to break through the barriers crafted by male society. Their quests (to go camping or to take up an engineering internship) may seem quite trivial compared to the real-life campaigns run by working class-feminists in the 1950's "for equal pay, minimum wage, pregnancy benefits, and other rights," but such issues of labor were unlikely to be found anywhere within the mass entertainment genres of television. Dorothy Sue Cobble has traced how "the postwar era was a period of mass mobilization, intense activity, and even advancement" for the cause of the working woman.[328] In simply depicting women pushing through their claims on the public sphere, sitcoms like

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[327] Susan King, "Classic Hollywood: 'The Donna Reed Show,'" *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 2011, online, accessed April 17, 2014, http://articles.latimes.com/2011/dec/26/entertainment/la-et-classic-hollywood-20111226.

[328] Dorothy Sue Cobble, "Recapturing Working-Class Feminism: Union Women in the Postwar Era," in *Not June Cleaver, Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994), 74.

FKB and *DR*, however trivially, acknowledged the work of these activists in the difficult period "in between" waves of feminism.

On one level, in comparison to the theme of race discussed last chapter, suburban sitcoms paid far more steady attention to issues of gender. In terms of sheer numbers, a "frustrated housewife" or "male chauvinist" plotline appeared more frequently on programs like *Father Knows Best* or *Donna Reed* than episodes focused on racial bigotry. It could be argued, in fact, that sitcoms actually represented women's concerns much more substantially than those of racial minorities. This is perhaps not surprising; the suburb was marked as domestic space, associated with white women, so it would seem logical for programs set there to address the desires and concerns of women.

Sitcom Solutions to the "Gender Problem"

The significant contrast, though, between the "race episodes" and the "gender episodes" (to use an inelegant set of phrases) comes in the way the programs framed the solutions to the social problems they explored. While both "race" and "gender" episodes suggested family and domesticity were ultimately the answer to such problems, the specific details of the solutions are striking. To begin with, in a number of sitcom episodes, the resolution requires female characters to become apologetic for their "radical" behavior in challenging gender inequalities. For example, in "The Ideal Wife," after Donna loses her temper and insists the children do their chores, she begins to feel guilty when they spend the next afternoon working around the home instead of hanging out with friends. Donna explains her feelings to a deliveryman (whom she got angry at the other day as well). "It was like everyone was taking advantage of me and I just had to

take a stand somewhere," she says. The deliveryman responds by saying "everybody has to be what they are. You tried to be something you aren't. It worked, and you're unhappy." Donna agrees and responds by buying gifts for her children as rewards for doing chores. The message of the episode appears to be that however valid Donna's frustrations were, her aggressive attitude was unacceptable and highly unattractive.

This apologetic scenario also appears at the end of the *Father Knows Best* episode "Good Joke on Mom." In an attempt to show her family she is more than a "mother," Margaret strongly plays up her position within the hospital building project, even though she discovers it is merely a figurehead post connected to fundraising. With the help of her friend, she fakes receiving phone calls from the builders and going to important meetings. Jim and the older children discover this deception, but end up helping to perpetuate it to make Margaret seem important in front of Kathy and her classmates. Margaret apologizes for being a "fraud" and is comforted by Jim, who reassures her that she is extremely important to the family.

In both of these examples, the resolutions, which feature the female characters apologetic and the gentle butt of humor, serve to undercut their initial valid concerns. Donna is depicted as a tyrant for insisting her children do the chores she wanted them to do at the beginning of the episode. Margaret may have been a fraud, but her deception seemed understandable considering her family's mockery of her lack of ability. Both women's "infractions" are presented as being equally as wrong as their family's boorish behavior. The frustrations faced by housewives like Donna and Margaret can thus be addressed as valid, but also not important enough to require their "extreme" reactions.

Besides needing to show a contrite attitude for any rebellious actions, female characters in these episodes also frequently took a secondary role behind men in crafting a resolution. Even though Margaret may be the focus of *FKB* episodes like "Brief Holiday" and "Good Joke on Mom," her husband, Jim, is the one who correctly realizes her feelings of frustration. By the end of the former episode, Jim has realized that Margaret's desire to (temporarily) escape the home was simply a sign of boredom. When the children begin to bombard her with requests again, he steps in and points out that Margaret is not "just a woman we keep in a cage whom we bring out to work for us." Jim then takes Margaret out to dinner at the exotic Orleans Street.

The *Donna Reed* episode "The Ideal Wife" features a similar dynamic. The deliveryman who points out that Donna is "unhappy" also gives Donna advice to adjust her aggressive behavior. After she apologizes to her family, she does insist that the Stones do not "go back to our slovenly ways." Alex agrees and manages to end the episode by asserting control of the situation by insisting that despite Donna's protestations, the two keep theater reservations for that evening. "I can't go through another revolution," he tells her, indicating he has learned his lesson and now properly understands what is best for their marriage. In both of these scenarios, male characters ultimately manage to wrap up the dilemma by recognizing the problems facing female characters and offering them crucial advice and solutions in response. Such resolutions undercut any potential strength of the female characters. Jim may call Margaret the "hub" of the family in "Brief Holiday," but she would become hopelessly depressed without his intervention and insistence that the family change its attitude.

In requiring female characters to both apologize for their "problematic" behavior and to take a secondary role behind perceptive male characters, the gender inequality episodes seem to be following a similar formula to sitcom episodes focused on racism, which also featured caring citizens stepping in to "improve" the lives of troubled characters. However, in other respects, the solutions in the gender-focused episodes are quite different, suggesting an alternative focus present within these episodes. For instance, as opposed to the race episodes, a number of episodes dealing with domestic frustration or chauvinism end with the central dilemma of the episode dismissed as not particularly a problem in the first place. The audience is thus left with the impression that while gender inequality has problematic *aspects*, it is not worthy of the civic solutions needed to confront real community problems.

This is effectively the conclusion in "Betty, Girl Engineer," in which, despite her initial resolve to prove the chauvinist Doyle Hobbs wrong, Betty never returns to the engineering field. Before she can attempt to demonstrate any of her newfound skills, a somewhat chastened Doyle visits her at home. While firm in his belief that Betty is unsuited for the work of an engineer, he admits he finds her attractive and describes his image of an ideal girl. "I like to think of somebody in a pretty dress, that you can give a box of candy to…not a sack of…stakes and a sledgehammer!" he says to Betty's father. Betty, who has overheard, then appears in a dress and jokingly explains how to ask a girl out to Doyle in the same condescending manner that he treated her with when she was on the job. The two agree on an upcoming date, and Betty seemingly abandons any thought of returning to work. The resolution to the episode is presented as positive, yet it does not

resolve the initial conflict, that of Betty battling chauvinism in the workplace. Instead, that cause is subtly dismissed through her obtaining power in the romantic relationship with Doyle.

On a slightly more ambiguous note, this is also the ending message of *Donna Reed*'s "Just a Housewife" episode, in which civic activism is teased and then rejected. Throughout the episode, Donna protests being labeled as a "housewife," going so far as to return to the supermarket and again talk to the *Housewife Corner* announcer, the man who mocked her in the first place. She asks the man to explain what he means by the word "housewife," pointing out that the "housewife solves all the problems that come up around the house." Donna insists the housewife is a "psychologist and diplomat" and that "every housewife has a personality. We're not part of a herd." Her speech makes her a hit to the listening audience; one of her friends points out "When every husband gets home, he's going to have new respect for his wife!" In contrast to the other episodes, this one frames civic activity as a potentially helpful way to combat the problems faced by housewives. The "revolution," as Donna calls it (explicitly identifying it as politicized social protest), even succeeds in getting the radio show to change its name to *The Shopper's Hour*.

Nevertheless, the very end of the episode undercuts any political or social power Donna may have wielded by trivializing the entire problem. A door to door salesman asks her what women would prefer to be called other than housewives, saying his company has changed his policies after hearing some "screwy dame" on the radio. Donna slams the door in the man's face, but after a beat, she and the entire family laugh at the whole

affair, with the episode awkwardly ending there. Donna is clearly no leader of a revolution; in the minds of most people, she is merely a "screwy dame" and she (and her family) ultimately realizes this. The episode suggests Donna was correct in taking on the condescending radio announcer, praises some of her initial successes, yet ultimately concludes that to go any further would be "screwy." The potential radicalism of women actively protesting their treatment as wives is dismissed as unnecessary. After all, as the positive laughter Donna shares with her loved ones indicates, she has a family that supports her; a revolution is not needed in the Stone household. Like "Betty, Girl Engineer," by the episode's fadeout, the central dilemma of gender inequality has been both mocked and subsumed by images of domestic bliss.

Indeed, the running theme of sitcom episodes about gender is that domesticity serves as the foundation of all solutions—not just a helpful conduit, as in the race episodes, but in some cases, the literal answer to the problem. In the case of "frustrated housewife" episodes, this can lead to apparent paradoxes, in which the anger over merely being "just a mother/housewife" can also be resolved by activities that hinge on a woman's identity as a mother/housewife. At the end of *FKB*'s "A Medal for Margaret," for example, the trophy-less Margaret is honored by her children, who give her trophies and plaques reading "Most Valuable Mother" and "Mother I'm Most Proud Of" for all she does for them. *DR*'s "Three Part Mother" (in which Donna is angry at having to be at three places at once) ends with a brief apology from her family, which encourages Donna to appear at all three events for a little while anyway.

In these resolutions, Donna and Margaret's frustrations are not really addressed (Margaret still is typed as someone who has accomplished "nothing" besides her mothering, Donna still had to appear at each engagement), but they are content knowing that they are loved and appreciated by their families. "Three Part Mother" ends with the bizarre scene of Donna dreaming of her family members continually asking for her help (shouting "Mother!" and "Donna!"), with her only reaction being to smile contentedly. The force with which Donna and Margaret's concerns disappear despite not being resolved at all is striking. Their sudden contentment with their situations does not stem from key changes within the domestic landscape (husbands taking on more chores, children viewing their mother as a person with a distinct identity outside of the home), but instead displays of love and affection within the family.

At their core, the resolutions of the various episodes focused on chauvinism are not overly dissimilar, making sure to confine the crusading behavior of female characters within the limited framework of the domestic, familial sphere. This is obviously featured at the end of "Betty, Girl Engineer" with Betty abandoning her work clothes for a dress, conforming to the image of the idealized woman that Doyle talks about. Such a change actually seems to give her power; in talking about dating, she seems far more comfortable and in charge of the situation than the flustered Doyle. In this case, embracing domesticity appears to be a way of getting power otherwise unavailable for female characters.

The two episodes about women emulating pioneer living (*FKB*'s "Betty, the Pioneer Woman" and *DR*'s "Pioneer Woman") are theoretically different, as it features

Betty Anderson and Donna Stone earning the respect of various chauvinists by displays of physical strength. In Betty's case, it is quite impressive, as her arrogant partner, Tom, twists his ankle during the wagon pulling ceremony, leaving Betty to pull an injured Tom and the wagon across the finish line all by herself. However, the female characters' physical displays again still conform to idealized images of womanhood. Donna and her daughter show they can "rough it" while camping, yet they primarily display this by fixing up an abandoned cabin to resemble a cozy home. Betty pulls a wagon all by herself, forcing Tom to apologize, yet his praise of Betty does not deal with her abilities as a modern woman but rather shows he views her in the image of his grandmother, whom he constantly brought up as an example of proper womanhood. The characters in these episodes are eventually praised for their ability to disprove men's assumptions, but only by living up to idealized images of womanhood. Again, the solution to the initial problem of male chauvinism comes through embracing aspects of domesticity.

An episode that unites some of these disparate resolutions is *DR*'s "A Woman's Place," in which Donna (after being encouraged by her family) runs for the town council position. Donna's absence from the home leads to chaos, as Alex is woefully ill-prepared, bungling such tasks as sewing buttons on clothes or preparing breakfast. Tired of being called a "candidate's wife," he has a dream in which Donna is President and Alex is the "First Lady," consigned to vacuum the White House. Alex insists that Donna end her campaign, saying "we need you more than the country does!" Donna agrees because she only ran for the council because she thought her family wanted her to do so. "Now all

you have to do is concentrate on being a wife," Alex tells her, to which she replies that she is "so fortunate" to have such a loving family.

In this episode, Donna's initial desire to run for town council challenges traditional assumptions about gender and domesticity. However, Alex's rather heavy-handed, chauvinistic reaction to it is presented as ultimately correct: the household *does* need Donna, who did not want to serve in the first place. The initial question regarding a woman's ability to serve in a traditionally male dominated field is sidestepped—Donna does not abandon the campaign because she would make a bad councilwoman, but because her abilities are needed in the home. Donna is not unhappy with this because her true delight and contentment comes from loving her family, who end the episode by bombarding her with chores for her to accomplish.

Overall, the resolutions in the "gender inequality" episodes fit in with what Nina Leibman describes as the sitcoms' goal of "producing and maintaining sex stereotyping."[329] The domestic sphere, despite its difficulties, was positioned as the appropriate place for women, who found true contentment in a role as wife or mother, not a worker or politician. Leibman argues that the sitcom episodes teach "that strong women must learn to subjugate themselves" and sublimate their complaints or desires in order to enjoy "the glories of being a housewife."[330] While this analysis is accurate, it is also clear that these episodes consistently avoid positioning gender inequality as a *public* problem. The racially focused sitcom episodes, however limited, claimed that civic solutions and the works of "good citizens" could (and should) end bigotry. In contrast, episodes

[329] Nina Leibman, *Living Room Lectures: The Fifties Family in Film & Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 174.
[330] Leibman, 194-5.

focusing on gender concerns generally avoided any civic context. The crusading "good citizen" who stood up for the downtrodden was generally absent in these episodes. Instead, characters (both female and otherwise) were depicted as calming their frustrations and overcoming chauvinism through their own, frequently introspective, actions. There is no need for the work of community organizations or even an enterprising outside citizen; in almost every case, the solution is handled entirely within the family sphere.

More importantly, as opposed to the episodes about bigotry, the problems of gender inequality are ultimately judged to not be problems at all, either through the trivialization of the dilemma (Betty not really caring about being an engineer) or by having female characters finding satisfaction through the domestic conditions they face (as in most of the frustrated housewife episodes). It is difficult to imagine resolutions to episodes about racism (or other community problems) in which the original problem was downplayed or ignored in such a fashion. As simplistic as the conclusions of those problems were, the sitcoms framed them as valid *problems* worthy of a solution devised by a civic-minded citizen. Jim Anderson or Donna Stone does not just simply accept or ignore, for example, the destruction of a town hall or the lack of a park for children to play in. In contrast, Donna not only accepts but usually ends up taking joy in her role as housewife and mother, despite it frustrating her in so many episodes. The inability of such episodes to truly frame gender inequality as a problem in the first place means that despite its prominence as a theme within early suburban sitcoms, it cannot be linked to

the civic sphere or good citizenship, at least not in the same way as other issues facing the neighborhood.

Limitations…and Solutions

Why is the suburban sitcom incapable of linking civic behavior with the theme of gender? In other words, why could the programs not envision community organizations working to protect the rights of housewives or, at the very least, publicly spirited citizens identifying the problems facing women as civic problems? I would argue there are two primary reasons, with the first being rooted in the deep-seated fears regarding family instability in the postwar period that were particularly fixated on the role of women. As Elaine Tyler May has traced, both academic sociologists and popular magazines alike in the Cold War era were concerned with the "grave disruption of the family system." These sources stressed that "outside the home (or even inside the home without a strong male authority), they [women] would become a dangerous, destructive force," one that would break up the family and corrupt normal patterns of living.[331] Recurrent postwar images of women in improper family settings included the tempting "bombshell" or power-hungry harridans denounced by such authors as Philip Wylie or Edward Strecker. David Considine writes that the "bad mother" became a standard figure within pop culture in the 1950's, with her shrillness and "overinvolvement" serving to mark her as a woman "totally lacking in sensitivity and incapable of functioning" as the good housewife.[332]

Such feelings of paranoia, which claimed that a woman venturing outside of the domestic sphere can lead to familial chaos, provide some context to the melodramatic

[331] May, 104-105.
[332] Leibman, 198.

sitcom scenes found in episodes focused on gender inequality. For example, Margaret Anderson's scheme in which she deceives her children by pretending to have power is not just a harmless prank (or a justifiable reaction to mockery), but a dangerous disruption of domestic norms, in the same way that Donna Stone's angry chastisement of her family also was. This should be contrasted to other episodes focused on civic behavior, in which potentially rebellious behavior (like resisting the government) is seen as admirable. In the context of gender equality, though, women could not challenge domestic norms, lest the very idea of the family fall apart.[333] Indeed, it is striking to note that simple transgressive acts by female characters result in what appears to be hyperbolic reactions: Donna running for town council causes her husband to question his sexual prowess, while Margaret declining to do the dishes leads to her family treating her like a lunatic. If these small-scale actions could result in such disarray, what would be the results of more organized civic behavior? The potential chaos was not something suburban sitcoms were willing to explore.

More importantly, television's longstanding relationship with a vision of domesticity centered on an attentive, stay-at-home housewife meant the genre was understandably reluctant to offer alternative conceptions to traditional gender roles. As described in the first chapter, the postwar television industry was rooted in consumption; advertisers soon became delighted to have a "selling machine in every living room." Lizabeth Cohen records that by the end of the 1950's, television was "the source of more

[333] See Leibman, 200-201.

than half of all revenues at most big advertising firms."[334] In particular, advertisers targeted the "captive audience" of housewives, working with broadcasters to create a distinct product tailored to what the industry believed were women's "specific needs and desires."[335] Daytime "women's magazine shows," combined with specific commercials, featured "an integrated sales message" aimed at receptive housewives.[336] While postwar television advertising targeted all parts of the family, the housewife, theoretically in charge of the family's purchasing power, was an especially ideal target.

Both *Father Knows Best* and *Donna Reed*, along with their other suburban sitcom brethren, fit into this confluence of consumption and domesticity through their sponsors. For most of their runs, the two programs were sponsored by companies associated with family products, such as Scott Paper, Campbell's Soup, or Nabisco; in fact, one of the most unsuccessful seasons of *FKB* came in its first year on television, when it was sponsored by Kent Cigarettes.[337] Each program featured various subtle yet pervasive attempts at linking the sponsor's products to its fictional depictions of domesticity. Over the years, *FKB*'s opening narration would proclaim that "Scott Paper [are] the creators of today's finest paper products for you and your family," or that "Scott products all through the house" result in "happy, healthy homes."[338] Similarly, Donna Reed (wearing her

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[334] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York City, NY: Vintage Books, 2003), 302. Also see Lawrence R. Samuel's *Brought to You By: Postwar Television Advertising and the American Dream* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001) and Janet Thumin, *Inventing Television Culture: Men, Women, and the Box* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[335] Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 80.
[336] Spigel, 83.
[337] Leibman, 58.
[338] Vincent Terrace, *Television Introductions: Narrated TV Program Openings Since 1949* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group Inc., 2014), 15.

Donna Stone clothing and standing in the Stones' "kitchen") would close episodes with commercials for Campbell's Soup, who would frequently place their logo within the show's closing credits as well. These touches were hardly fortuitous; as Nina Leibman records, advertising executive David Levy, representing Scott, "read every script of *Father Knows Best* and would discuss it by telephone from New York with producer Eugene Rodney," making sure the goals of the sponsors were being met.[339] With the very livelihood of these sitcoms reliant on a sponsorship system rooted in idealized domesticity, it is unsurprising that the programs did not depict solutions towards the problems facing women, which would "threaten" the domestic sphere.

While I believe these concerns regarding family stability and sponsorship play major roles in why sitcoms did not treat gender inequality as a civic issue, the programs presented a more complex message than just telling women to be obedient wives, mothers, and consumers. I also argue that the depictions of the "problems of gender," combined with the patterns of behavior seen in other episodes, constructed an idealized image that offered power, strength, and satisfaction for suburban women. In other words, the sitcoms were presenting an answer to the complaints increasingly being raised by second-wave feminism. The problems faced by women in the home or society would be solved if they became "good citizens," a concept which encouraged wives and mothers to think of their domestic work (and its related actions) as being firmly placed within the sphere of productive citizenship.

In linking citizenship to the work of housewives, sitcoms reinforced a message persistent in both postwar mass culture and the writings of academics. As briefly

[339] Leibman, 110.

mentioned in a previous chapter, in 1955, former Illinois Governor and presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson addressed a group of female students at Smith College's commencement ceremony. Stevenson argued that "the humble role of housewife, which…is what most of you are going to be whether you like the idea or not just now," was absolutely crucial within modern society. A housewife, Stevenson claimed, had the goal of restoring "valid, meaningful purpose to life in your home…to keep him [husbands] truly purposeful, to keep him whole."[340] He framed women's work as wives and mothers as a lofty task fraught with civic responsibility:

> The primary task of making homes and whole human beings… [is where] the rational values of freedom, tolerance, charity and free inquiry can take root…I hope you'll not be content to wring your hands, feed your family, and just echo all the group…I hope you'll keep everlastingly at the job of seeing life steady and seeing it whole. And you can help others—husbands, children, friends—to do so too. You may, indeed you must, help to integrate a world that has been falling into bloody pieces.[341]

For Stevenson, homemaking was not just "feeding your family" but instead engaging in a "job" to preserve the values of society.

The following year, sociologist David Riesman conducted a survey of various male college seniors regarding their ideal wife. Many polled described women who fit Stevenson's description. For example, students consistently wanted a wife who would not work but also not be a "stay-at-home wife," instead embracing a proper range of community activities. A Princeton senior said he hoped his wife would "be centered in the home" but would "go in for hospital work and so on," as well as strive to improve

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[340] Adlai Stevenson, "Women, Husbands, and History," in *Antifeminism in America: A Collection of Readings from the Literature of the Opponents to U.S. Feminism, 1848 to the Present, Redefining the New Woman, 1920-1963*, eds. Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant (New York City, NY: Garland Publishing Inc., 1997), 276-279.
[341] Stevenson, 283.

"herself culturally and thus [bring] a deeper sense of culture into our home."[342] Like Stevenson, students wanted wives and mothers who would do more than simple household chores. While "centered in the home," the ideal wife would be active in the community, bring culture into the home, and perhaps also succeed in the lofty goal of integrating a broken world.

Riesman and Stevenson were echoing messages that had appeared within the postwar popular press for years. Joanne Meyerowitz's research suggests that women's magazines in the late 1940's and 1950's "advocated both domestic ideals and nondomestic achievement for women." They not only presented housecleaning and cooking tips, but also "spotlighted women of public achievement, addressed women as workers, and promoted women's participation in community activism and politics," albeit bounding all of these images within an overall domestic ideal.[343] Publications like *Life* and the *Ladies Home Journal* urged housewives to see themselves as strong, active citizens. A 1947 *Life* article rejected the image of women falling "back on numbing rounds of club meetings and card-playing," urging them instead to "make useful, satisfying careers out of civic and charitable work," that is, unpaid, community focused work that did not interfere with domestic duties.[344] Similarly, Margaret Hickey wrote in

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[342] David Riesman, "The Found Generation," in *Antifeminism in America: A Collection of Readings from the Literature of the Opponents to U.S. Feminism, 1848 to the Present: Redefining the New Woman, 1920-1963*, eds. Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant (New York City, NY: Garland Publishing Inc., 1997), 295-296.

[343] Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994), 249.

[344] Frances Levinson, "American Woman's Dilemma," in *Antifeminism in America: A Collection of Readings from the Literature of the Opponents to U.S. Feminism, 1848 to the Present, Redefining the New Woman, 1920-1963*. Eds. Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant (New York City, NY: Garland Publishing Inc., 1997), 219.

the *LHJ* that "voting, office holding, raising your voice for new and better laws are just as important to your home and your family as the evening meal or spring house cleaning."[345] Being a good housewife also involved being a good citizen.

Thus, by focusing on the "problems" faced by women, sitcoms could also promote specific solutions keeping in tune with this expanded definition of citizenship. Margaret Anderson, Donna Stone, and their daughters could chafe at the frustrations of the home and male chauvinism in the workplace (all of which were acknowledged to some extent as problems), but the episodes carefully denounced solutions which threatened proper domestic behavior. Instead, the episodes end with female characters finding contentment through an embrace of their role as women: Donna becomes happy to have her children bombard her with requests, while Betty becomes powerful in her relationship with her former supervisor once they move out of the workplace into the home. Women did not need to embrace political movements to become strong; strength instead came naturally in their domestic lives.[346]

This linkage of (gendered) domesticity and strength is made most explicit in two almost identical episodes of *Father Knows Best* and *Donna Reed*, "An Extraordinary Woman" and "The Career Woman," respectively. In both episodes, former classmates of Margaret and Donna are arriving in town—Dr. Mary Lou Brown and dress designer

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[345] Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique," 240.

[346] This ideology anticipates the ideology of "positive womanhood" or "true feminism," outlined by anti-feminists like Phyllis Schlafly and Midge Decter in the 1970's and 1980's. Both Schlafly and Decter argued that women should not turn to political feminism, but rather embrace their inherent femininity (including domestic duties) in order to achieve strength. See Schlafly's "Excerpts from *The Power of the Positive Woman*" and Decter's "The Intelligent Women's Guide to Feminism," both in *Antifeminism in America: A Collection of Readings from the Literature of the Opponents to U.S. Feminism, 1848 to the Present, Reaction to the Modern Women's Movement, 1963 to the Present*, eds. Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant (New York City, NY: Garland Publishing Inc., 1997).

Molly Duncan, respectively. Both women are internationally famous and very successful "career women." In each episode, the visitor's status causes some friction (Margaret is self-conscious that she has not accomplished as much as Mary Lou; Molly is unsure if she can get married to her fiancé, a small town doctor).

At the end of each episode, the situation is resolved through the realization that the housewife characters are actually powerful. Mary Lou admits to Margaret that the latter woman "always seemed to know the true value of everything," while she (Mary Lou) had a desire to win contests and awards to be happy. As she leaves, Mary Lou tells Margaret "the way you go about being a wife and mother makes it an enviable art…you have the world at your feet. You have everything any woman could want." In the *Donna Reed* entry, Molly despairs of living in a small town until she sees Donna complimented for her work on a hospital fundraising campaign. Donna then feigns anger at having a doctor husband who is always called away, leaving Molly to exclaim "if you want happiness, don't you have to give up a few things for your man?" Molly realizes the lesson Donna has taught her and accepts the idea of being a small town doctor's wife. Margaret and Donna are empowered by their actions as wives, mothers, and community members.

Indeed, as previous chapters have indicated, the suburban sitcom housewife (or other female characters) frequently showed signs of strength by performing actions in keeping with those performed by the "ideal wife" praised by both Adlai Stevenson and the *Ladies Home Journal*.[347] The female characters who lobbied for traffic signals, fought

[347] This is also the type of actions discussed in Sylvie Murray's *The Progressive Housewife: Community Activism in Suburban Queens, 1945-1965* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

for parks, and helped out neighbors in need were both good citizens and good housewives, as sitcoms consistently framed such work as being part of the needs of both the family and the broader community. In looking at other sitcom episodes not explicitly focused on gender inequality, the frustrations explored in this chapter seem almost superfluous: we know that Donna is not "just a housewife" because she does so much for the community already. The problems faced by women would be solved through the appropriate, domestic-focused performance of good citizenship.

This solution offered by suburban sitcoms was not without various tensions. One of the more blatant tensions involved race, as the idealized postwar woman was implicitly white. The whiteness of wives and mothers (both in real life and sitcoms) reinforced their status as productive citizens. In terms of the themes discussed last chapter, the caring benefactors who could give speeches or craft solutions are white, whereas minority characters are childlike victims. In "The Geisha Girl," the white Donna Stone, regardless of her own personal problems or frustrations faced as a wife or mother, could assume a position of strength by helping the Japanese housewife, Jio. Jio is depicted as a passive character, unable to solve her problems of loneliness or confusion on her own and in fact, only able to achieve some strength in the home after she literally emulates Donna by dressing like her. White female characters on sitcoms could become productive citizens through their work in and outside the home, but minority characters lacked this option.

Another tension in this solution was the way that it could be (and to some extent, was intended to be) co-opted for corporate purposes. Advertising agency employee Ernst Dichter noted that sponsors did not want to depict housewives, their primary selling

audience, as mindless drones. "Weak women made poor consumers…the passive conservative 'True Housewife' was threatened by modern, labor-saving products," Dichter concluded.[348] Instead, sponsors wanted a woman who believed she was a powerful "career woman," with the career being the management of a home. These active, confident housewives were apparently more willing to adopt lifestyles which required consumer products. Certainly, their sitcom counterparts like Donna Stone or Margaret Anderson did not hesitate to continually consume products to improve conditions in their home.[349]

The final, perhaps most significant tension involved the contradictory aspects of pairing powerful citizenship with domesticity. Such a solution suggested that despite women's frustrations with various aspects of gender inequality, true vindication would only come when they embraced traditionally feminine or domestic characteristics. A woman could only be powerful if her aspirations and motivations were severely limited, a constraining solution that uneasily threatened to undercut any power housewives and mothers could obtain as citizens. This contradiction is perhaps exemplified by the personal life of Donna Reed herself. Reed was not just the star of her namesake sitcom, but also a producer with some degree of creative control over the show. Reed's daughter, Mary Owen, claimed her mother "was an early feminist who wasn't afraid to speak her mind" and accurately pointed out that the actress would go on to co-found the anti-Vietnam War and nuclear power group Another Mother for Peace.[350] Even in the *Gilmore Girls* episode described earlier in this chapter, "That Damn Donna Reed," Rory Gilmore

[348] Leibman, 192.
[349] See Haralovich's "Sitcoms and Suburbs" article.
[350] King.

ends up impressed with Reed's behind the scenes clout, calling her "one of the first woman TV executives."[351]

Nevertheless, the tension between Reed's television persona and private personality was obvious. In 1964, Reed remarked that "maybe every woman *shouldn't* necessarily be married and have children—and a lot of women would be happier and more fulfilled if they didn't." She denounced film depictions of women as "passive…poor stupid souls who couldn't help themselves."[352] In 1970, Reed divorced her husband and co-creator of *The Donna Reed Show*, Tony Owen, remarking "it was always a difficult marriage…you get to the point where you say to yourself, 'is this how I'm going to spend the rest of my life—not doing any of the things I enjoy doing?'"[353] Reed's personal endorsement of women finding fulfillment outside of marriage and service to family, as also seen through her professional and political interests, was tempered by her involvement (as star and producer) of a show which could not conceive of such solutions. Donna Reed, the person, suggested divorce as an option and threw herself into politics; Donna Stone, the character, abandoned a minor town council position as soon as it threatened the comfort of her family.

On some level, these tensions were observed by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*. In writing about "a new life plan for women," Friedan described a woman who could very well be both the fictional Donna Stone and her real life portrayer. Friedan writes about interviewing a housewife who "involved herself in an endless whirl of

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[351] Rory claims that Donna was a director on the show as well, a claim unsubstantiated by any source.
[352] David C. Tucker, *The Women Who Made Television Funny: Ten Stars of 1950s Sitcoms* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 2007), 118-121.
[353] Brenda Scott Royce, *Donna Reed: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990), 10.

worthwhile community activities," none of which serve to "truly utilize her exceptional intelligence." The interviewee states that "I never had any real feeling of satisfaction. You raise your kids, sure, but how can that justify your life?...you need real work."[354] As Sylvie Murray has noted, the guarded denunciation of community activities was personal for Friedan; she had herself been involved in various Queens civic campaigns during the previous decade, only to find them frustrating due to their limited scope and the lack of interest from other participants.[355] For both Friedan and Donna Reed, the model of female strength through both domesticity and civic activism was illusory; it may offer apparent satisfaction, but it was temporary and ultimately soul-killing. It was a tension that contrasted with the image of a smiling Donna Stone, not only delighted *but strengthened* in being able to serve her family and community.

Future Developments

Throughout the 1960's, even as these tensions became more obvious and issues of second-wave feminism rose to greater prominence in the socio-political world, suburban sitcoms continued to approach the topic of gender inequality in much the same way as the earlier examples of the genre. Sitcoms may have anticipated some of the concerns found in *The Feminine Mystique* (published in 1963) or in the 1961 report from the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, but they did not explicitly grapple with the politicized activities inspired by those texts. In general, the next wave of programs continued to view the frustrations faced by housewives and working women with sympathy, while still prescribing solutions in which women found strength in domesticity

[354] Friedan, 346.
[355] Murray, 152. Chapter 7 in general describes Friedan.

and (limited) degrees of citizenship. For example, in the 1964 *Bewitched* episode "Witch or Wife?", Samantha Stephens grows bored at home, especially when her husband is so consumed with work. Her mother, Endora, mockingly describes the scenario: "busy husband, neglected wife sitting in front of the television set…" Sam ends up using her magic to go to Paris to enjoy herself, but unfortunately, her husband, Darrin, reacts negatively after he finds out. As with so many of the older gender inequality episodes, the story is told mostly from Sam's perspective and provides a sympathetic treatment to her boredom. Nevertheless, the resolution of the episode involves Sam saying all she wants is to be a "normal housewife" and the couple becomes reconciled after Darrin goes to Paris with her. The resolution to boredom or frustration is once again domestic satisfaction in response to the family.[356]

Furthermore, attempts by wives or mothers to obtain strength or "fulfillment" outside of the home were generally frowned upon, especially if they seemed to disrupt the harmony of the family. As the above example notes, Samantha being upset that her husband is never home is a valid concern; however, running off to Paris without her husband is treated as rebellious and problematic. Suburban sitcoms' somewhat paranoid fear of familial disruption is exemplified in the satirical 1965 *Addams Family* episode "Morticia, the Sculptress." In this episode, family matriarch Morticia decides she needs a higher calling than simply being a mother. "A person must contribute something to the world," she insists, so she takes up sculpture. Almost instantly, her sculpture takes up so much of her time that her husband, Gomez, becomes lonely, and that the children become

[356] This is effectively the overall message of the show *Bewitched*, in which a powerful woman chooses to more or less deny such power in embracing domestic bliss.

disturbed, as indicated by their choosing to make fudge instead of their usual grotesque creations. Morticia immediately abandons sculpture, declaring that "the most important role a woman can have" is being a mother "and lover." While intentionally over the top in nature, the episode reveals that cultural fears about publicly active housewives continued to persist in the 1960's.[357]

Nevertheless, there were also signs that suburban sitcoms were acknowledging the greater socio-political tension involving gender issues. The 1963 *Hazel* episode "Hazel Sounds Her 'A,'" for example, offers a slightly different take on workplace discrimination than in past episodes. The episode's plot involves the new conductor of the local orchestra firing Hazel's friend, a female violinist, because he does not approve of women working. "She belongs in the kitchen!" he proclaims. Hazel resolves to get her friend re-hired but can only do so by unwittingly getting the conductor's wife angry at him; the wife than forces her husband to rehire the violinist. The episode not only suggests that the sort of chauvinism held by the conductor is wrong, it also explicitly declares that women have a right to work. Unlike Betty Anderson, the violinist does not abandon her career but remains in the workplace.

Most notably of all, *Bewitched*, a program labeled by a recent *A.V. Club* article as "one of the first feminist sitcoms," featured a literally powerful female character who frequently chafed at the constraints imposed on her as a housewife.[358] Susan Douglas claims the show positioned Samantha Stephens "at the intersection between middle-class

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[357] See also the *Dick Van Dyke* episodes "Washington vs. the Bunny," "To Tell or Not To Tell," and "My Part-Time Wife," all of which deal with the "threat" of powerful women.

[358] Todd VanDerWerff, "*Bewitched* Tweaked '60s Gender Roles and Became One of the First Feminist Sitcoms," *A.V. Club*, September 24, 2012, online, accessed April 18, 2014, http://www.avclub.com/article/ibewitchedi-tweaked-60s-gender-roles-and-became-on-85280.

definitions of the ideal young wife and rebelliousness against those definitions."[359] Despite her husband's demands that she refrain from using magic and live a normal life, she still persisted in using her powers for both her and the community's benefit. More than the other sitcoms analyzed in this chapter, *Bewitched* seemed to offer feminist models of behavior. In the 1967 episode "Long Live the Queen," Sam is actually appointed "Queen of the Witches," a position she is at first opposed to because she has "a child and a house to take care of." Ultimately persuaded by her mother and other witches to take the post, Sam serves as queen, but Darrin becomes infuriated as he views her work as interfering with his. Darrin temporarily leaves Sam, yet finally returns, admitting "being queen is part of what you are and if I love you, I have to accept that." Unlike many of the other episodes described in this chapter, Sam does not abandon the public sphere and even receives her husband's endorsement regarding her activities.

Still, Douglas' assessment of the show as "both conforming and rebellious" is accurate.[360] Samantha's public activity as queen is vindicated, but her success (like every other episode) pivots on Darrin's ultimate acceptance of the situation and the restoration of domestic bliss. The possibility of Sam completely rejecting her husband and marriage, leading to her finding fulfillment through some other means, is not explored. Furthermore, the supernatural metaphor of "queen of the witches" made it difficult to conceive of the episode as a potential model for normalizing feminist behavior, compounded by the fact that Samantha's status as queen is rarely mentioned again for the rest of the series. As Douglas' reaction to the series suggests, there is some clear radical

[359] Douglas, 128.
[360] Douglas, 133.

potential in the show, but in general the show tended to reinforce traditional sitcom conceptions of addressing gender issues.

For that matter, even the sitcom episodes that depicted some challenges to the older models of domesticity avoided any signs of political or social radicalism. Guest characters could find some fulfillment outside of the home, but depictions of working, *married* protagonists on sitcoms would have to wait until the next decade. Furthermore, until the late 1960's, the programs continued to avoid presenting issues of gender as worthy of civic or political involvement. For example, in the aforementioned *Hazel* episode about the female violinist, Hazel resolves the situation by using personal persuasion, not by waging a political campaign. Unlike her crusades for the creation of parks or playgrounds, Hazel does not go around the neighborhood, armed with a petition. Instead, she gets a conductor's wife to intervene, using the model of the traditional family to achieve her own ends.[361] Even as what Robert Self describes as "the most ambitious and far-reaching assault on women's second-class economic status" took place throughout the mid to late 1960's, suburban sitcoms avoided depicting these cultural or political battles.[362]

Thus, it would not be until the end of the decade when sitcom citizenship could seriously grapple with the social problems related to gender. As opposed to the socio-political issues (including racism) that were the subject of the previous chapters, the

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[361] Of course, many of the works of civic activism discussed in previous chapters were only completed through the actions of the family as well. However, in the case of gender (and to a lesser extent, racial) issues, the episodes did not present even the veneer of political or civic activity.

[362] Robert Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York City, NY: Hill and Wang, 2012), 104. Self's fourth chapter contains a useful bibliography of sources on this topic.

gendered frustrations faced by housewives and working women alike remained relatively separate from the realm of civic participation. Even the limited models of activism that characters utilized to save parks or protect minorities were inapplicable due to the potentially radical implications. Ultimately, then, domesticity, the centerpiece of all sitcom citizenship, became the answer in and of itself to the problem of gender inequality.

Eventually, though, the genre could no longer avoid addressing the political tensions surrounding not just gender issues, but those of race and class. More and more programs, even otherwise innocuous family sitcoms such as *The Brady Bunch*, began to admit that, for example, feminism was a legitimate and impactful political movement. Suburban sitcoms also appeared whose entire focus appeared to be on issues related to race and gender, such as 1968's *Julia*, a sitcom whose protagonist was a professional black woman. Most importantly of all though, producer Norman Lear created a series of 1970's programs which not only sought to address numerous political issues (including race, gender, and class) but also challenge many of the taboos imposed on the sitcom genre since its inception. This new wave of sitcoms would, in many ways, be completely different from *Father Knows Best* or *Donna Reed*, but would the concept of "good citizenship" and civic involvement be one of those differences? In what ways would these newer programs address issues such as neighborhood improvement, racial bigotry, and gender inequality? These differences will be explored in the next and final chapter of this project.

Chapter 5

Living in That Damn Chair: Citizenship within the Politicized Suburban Sitcom

The August 30, 1975, edition of *TV Guide* featured an article set in "the sprawling urban savanna of New York City's biggest borough," Queens. The author, Rowland Barber, is visiting the borough to compare a typical Queens family to the Bunker family, the main characters of the hit sitcom, *All in the Family*, which was set in the same area. Barber's mission is to see "if they [the real family] feel any special kinship to the Bunker household." In Barber's interview with the representative family, the Rawalds, he was surprised to find that the biggest difference between the (real) Rawalds and the (fictional) Bunkers involved community involvement. "The one universal objection in Queens to the character of Archie Bunker is his sloth," Barber concludes. The Rawald family and their neighbors were frequent participants in the activities of their community, proudly describing their work for the local church, their membership in bowling leagues, and their service on various committees. Tillie Rawald said "people here care," pointing out that several years ago, "all the families got together and called a meeting with the police and demanded action. We put in a task force…and we wiped the neighborhood clean."

In contrast, *All in the Family*'s protagonist, Archie Bunker, seemed to come up woefully short. After finishing her story about the neighborhood task force, Tillie noted that "you don't see Edith and Archie Bunker ever involved like that, even though they're supposed to live in the same kind of neighborhood." Others in the community were far blunter. A house painter remarked that Archie "sings about the good old days when 'everybody pulled his weight,' then he plops *his* weight down in the easy chair and pops

a can of beer and watches TV…Woodside [his neighborhood] is a place where everybody pitches in."[363] Tillie's husband, Paul, was the most critical, telling Barber that Archie Bunker was "a recluse [who] lives in that damn chair…I just don't feel comfortable being comfortable. Too much to be done."[364]

The Rawalds' criticism of *All in the Family* is striking for two main reasons. First, the Rawalds' framing of civic involvement is firmly in line with the type of "good citizenship" on display in the suburban sitcoms of the previous chapters. If the real-life Queens residents would have preferred to see programs featuring active members of a community, older programs such as *Father Knows Best*, *The Donna Reed Show*, or even *Bewitched* offered plenty of examples. Implicitly, the more contemporary *All in the Family* came up short for its lack of depiction of civic activism. This leads into the second reason why their critique stands out: *All in the Family*, like almost all of producer Norman Lear's sitcoms, was positioned as a "politicized" program, one that offered a realistic look at socio-political issues. The Rawalds' observation that *All in the Family* was depicting characters blissfully ignorant of their neighborhood's reality is thus fascinating *precisely* because it seems to conflict with the goals of the show's creators.

All in the Family represented a shift within the sitcom genre that began in the late 1960's and 1970's, during which programs such as *Julia*, *ATF*, and *Maude* began to explore political issues in a manner never before seen on television. As opposed to older sitcoms, these shows explicitly addressed topics such as homosexuality, abortion, and

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[363] The line "everybody pulled his weight" appeared in the lyrics to *All in the Family*'s theme song, which featured Archie wistfully reminiscing about the past.
[364] Rowland Barber, "Through Queens with Pad and Pencil," in *All in the Family: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Richard P. Adler (New York City, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1979), 245-251.

sexual harassment; they also began to depict themes like racial bigotry and feminism in a newly politicized manner. This change in content potentially also offered new ways for the suburban sitcom to address issues of citizenship, although as the above example indicates, depictions of active citizenship were not inherently linked to these depictions of politicized issues. In dealing with socio-political issues more complex than "helping a neighbor" or "saving a park," how would the sitcom genre define what it meant to be a good citizen? What pedagogical and civic goals did the creators of this "next generation" of suburban sitcoms have in mind for their audiences?

In this chapter, I explore how the more "socially realistic" wave of suburban sitcoms redefined the concept of good citizenship established within older programs. After briefly describing the breakdown of the Cold War consensus crucial to suburban sitcom citizenship, I analyze how newer, seemingly more politicized shows emerged to address issues created out of this breakdown. In particular, I focus on two Norman Lear programs (*All in the Family* and *Maude*), which for many Americans, became the face of the new style of realistic sitcom. Lear intended for his shows to educate viewers and to help them improve their lives, but as opposed to earlier sitcoms, this was a personalized, *domestic* form of improvement. In watching sitcom families overcome bigotry or chauvinism, viewers too were invited to work through their socio-political problems, with both real and fictional families marked as good citizens in the process. However, as opposed to the previous decade's protagonists, these "good citizens" did their work entirely within the domestic sphere. The balance between family and community crucial

to older sitcom definitions of citizenship was replaced with a model which framed the ideal citizen *only* as the ideal family member.

New Sitcoms and the Breakdown of the Postwar Consensus

As discussed in earlier chapters, a political consensus emerged in the postwar United States, one rooted in liberal and capitalist ideals. Cold War-era Americans believed they were entitled to a consumer-driven, suburban "good life." While the postwar welfare state, as Gary Gerstle argues, would stand "as the guarantor of economic opportunity, national security, and [an] anti-Communist consensus," it also relied upon the work of responsible, driven "good citizens" to guarantee these entitlements. Furthermore, as chapter three explored, this postwar consensus also included "a growing interest in the expansion of rights for individuals and groups," particularly racial and ethnic minorities.[365] This consensus was centered on the idealization of the responsible, white (frequently male) good citizen symbolized by *Father Knows Best*'s Jim Anderson, an American who was both a productive family *and* community member, someone who could do the work of the state, including help those in need.

However, as historians such as Gerstle and Alan Brinkley have traced, this consensus would soon be shattered by the political and social turbulence of the 1960's. "The effort to expand the notion of individual and group rights—and the related efforts to move race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality to the center of political life," Brinkley argues, "ultimately produced a series of divisive cultural battles that most liberals had not

[365] Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 267-269.

anticipated."[366] While Brinkley perhaps oversimplifies the nature of this shift, he correctly notes how increasingly, the idealized Cold War conception of citizenship, which had uneasily been able to "deal with" issues such as racial prejudice and domestic frustrations, began to seem insufficient. The solution of a white male citizen aiding a distressed racial minority (or a fatigued housewife!) seemingly could not apply to the politicized concerns expressed by feminist organizations, the black power movement, or any number of increasingly more organized socio-political movements, such as those related to gay rights or the concerns of Chicano-Americans.

The suburban sitcom genre would gradually begin to acknowledge these shifts by offering depictions of the politicized activities of the late 1960's. Initially, these depictions were very tentative, with otherwise traditional programs, such as *The Brady Bunch* and *The Nanny and the Professor* (which mostly aired in the early 1970's), mixing familiar plots with some references to political movements, particularly feminism. For example, in the 1971 *Brady* episode "The Liberation of Marcia Brady," Marcia tells a television reporter that she believes girls are the equal of boys and that she supports "women's lib." When the family sees the report, Greg calls her a "kook" and even Mike thinks that women's liberation is a little extreme. Marcia responds by joining Greg's Frontier Scouts group in an attempt to prove that women are equally as capable as men. While on the surface this episode seems very similar to other "battle of the sexes" type episodes featured on *The Brady Bunch*, it stands out because it is squarely centered within the political rhetoric of feminism and women's liberation. The episode is hardly a

[366] Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York City, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 270.

detailed (or accurate) depiction of second-wave feminism, yet Marcia's desire to prove equality is presented as having inherently *political* roots, a concept not featured within the older suburban sitcoms, in which the desires of characters like Donna Stone or Betty Anderson were framed as merely personal crusades.[367]

The most notable example of the sitcom genre addressing newly politicized issues was the 1968-1971 program *Julia*, which starred African-American singer Diahann Carroll as nurse Julia Baker. While not technically set in a suburb, *Julia* took place in an upscale apartment building located in a fairly middle-class city. Julia was a widow with a small child who worked in a thoroughly integrated aerospace industry clinic. Most of the critical attention directed against the show, both at the time and years later, accused *Julia* of being highly unrealistic. Aniko Bodroghkozy has documented the critical castigation of the show "for being extraordinarily out of touch with and silent on the realities of African-American life in the late 1960's," for example having a widow and underpaid nurse residing in an apartment building instead of a tenement.[368] Bodroghkozy recounts how the shows' creators received many letters claiming *Julia* "was unrealistic and was not 'telling it like it is.'"[369] In 2003, Joanne Morreale claimed the show "presented an uncomplicated world with trivial problems" that "ignored the racial strife in the world outside of the sitcom."[370]

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[367] See also the 1970 *Nanny and the Professor* episode "The Masculine-Feminine Mystique."
[368] Aniko Bodroghkozy, "'Is This What You Mean by Color TV?': Race, Gender, and Contested Meanings in *Julia*," in *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader*, ed. Joanne Morreale (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 130.
[369] Bodroghkozy, 136.
[370] Joanne Morreale, "Introduction: On the Sitcom," in *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader*, ed. Joanne Morreale (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), xvi.

These criticisms obviously have some validity, but as Bodroghkozy and other critics have admitted, *Julia* still posed a "threat to entrenched racist positions" by positively depicting an African-American family within an integrated setting, a feat that had not been accomplished on television before.[371] More to the point, *Julia* did occasionally act as, in the words of Angela M.S. Nelson, "a dramedy," by explicitly addressing political debates regarding race and gender.[372] For example, the 1969 episode "Dancer in the Dark" featured the character of Dave "The Dancer" Boyd, an African-American football player and supposedly "righteous militant." Dave is depicted as having a chip on his shoulder, continually being suspicious of white authority and accusing Julia and other black employees of being sell-outs working for "the man." In the later episode "The Gender Trap," Julia argues female equality with her boss, Dr. Chegley, and her current boyfriend, Steve. Chegley chides her as a "subversive, radical, card-carrying feminist," while Steve, after hearing Julia insist women can have jobs like astronauts, dismisses her by saying she should attend a "bra-burning ceremony."

These episodes were hardly politically adventurous; in particular, the latter episode undercuts any potential feminist implications by having Julia mend her relationship with Steve by pretending to have car problems. Nevertheless, like *The Brady Bunch* episode, they were part of the family sitcom's explicit acknowledgment that the social problems addressed in the past were becoming *political* problems. Dave Boyd was not a mute victim or a comedic buffoon, but an outspoken, politicized character. Julia's

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[371] Bodroghkozy, 142. See also a favorable review of the show in "Julia," an article in the November 1968 issue of *Ebony*.

[372] Angela M.S. Nelson, "The Objectification of *Julia*: Texts, Textures, and Contexts of Black Women in American Television Situation Comedies," in *Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue*, eds. Devoney Looser and E. Ann Kaplan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 239.

insistence on gender equality caused her to be viewed by male characters, not as a confused woman but rather as a radical feminist. This political focus, however occasional and muted, was something unseen to this point on suburban sitcoms and seemingly offered alternative ways of thinking about civic participation. How would working within a black power or feminist movement fit in within traditional models of good citizenship? How did the activities of such movements relate to the civic duties performed by suburban family and community members?

Still, *Julia* and the occasional "feminist" episodes of programs such as *The Brady Bunch* would largely prove to be insufficient in answering these questions, mainly because the shows were at their heart still very traditional sitcoms. The politicized behavior of characters like Marcia Brady or Dave "The Dancer" could be treated respectfully but not seriously: Dave is denounced by Julia, and both Julia and Marcia endorse feminist ideas but specifically position themselves outside of any political movements by the end of particular episodes. Furthermore, these plots were rare. Episodes featuring traditional displays of civic participation and domestic comedy were by far the more common storylines seen on these programs. When *Julia* aired explicitly anti-bigotry episodes (such as 1968's "Paint Your Waggedorn"), the plot is distinctly non-politicized and features familiar character tropes such as individual bigots and crusading white "good citizens." The full impact of the politicized suburban sitcom would not be seen until the 1970's and a later generation of comedies.

The "Lear Revolution"

The rest of this chapter analyzes that generation of programming, which for the purposes of this project, is primarily represented by the Norman Lear created programs *All in the Family* and *Maude*, shows that enjoyed unprecedented levels of critical and commercial attention. The former program, about working-class bigot Archie Bunker and his Queens family, premiered in January 1971, and by the end of the 1971-1972 season became the number one rated show on television, a position it held for five straight years. In 1972, it gained a spin-off, *Maude*, whose title character was the liberal cousin of Archie's wife, Edith. While not as successful as *ATF*, *Maude* would air six years, with the program ranking in the top ten in ratings in four of those years. Based on their ratings, the two Lear programs were obviously commercially successful, but more importantly, the shows represented, in the words of David Marc, "the breakthrough that situation comedy had been waiting for," shows that "would finally bring something like realism to sitcom representationalism."[373] Indeed, *All in the Family* and *Maude* became infamous for their explicit uses of language (including profanity and racial slurs), emotional confrontations, and frequently serious plots, many of which involved controversial socio-political issues. In *Classic Sitcoms*, Vince Waldron writes that *All in the Family* broke down "every established notion of how TV comedy should be written, performed, edited, and scored…[it] changed forever the way we look at television."[374]

Lear's sitcoms were hardly the only sitcoms of this time period to offer such innovations. For example, the contemporary programs *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*

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[373] David Marc, *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1997), 144.
[374] Vince Waldron, *Classic Sitcoms: A Celebration of the Best Prime-Time Comedy* (New York City, NY: Collier Books, 1987), 187.

(*MTM*) and *M*A*S*H* also addressed serious political or cultural issues, and featured more explicit content than older sitcoms. In *Comic Visions*, Marc classifies *ATF*, *Mary Tyler Moore*, and *M*A*S*H* as the three shows which constituted "the sitcom at [its] literate peak."[375] I have chosen to specifically focus on the two Lear shows because they clearly fit within the continuity of the suburban sitcoms explored in the previous chapters. As opposed to *MTM* and *M*A*S*H*, which focused on a "workplace" setting, Lear's shows emphasized domesticity. Even amid the socio-political dialogue, the home and the family were front and center on both *All in the Family* and *Maude*, just as they were on the otherwise quite different *Father Knows Best* or *Bewitched*. *ATF* and *Maude* also featured suburban settings that more or less resembled the types of neighborhoods featured on older sitcoms. The blue-collar Queens neighborhood of *ATF* was a far cry from the neatly groomed Springfield of *FKB*, yet it was also not the urban ghetto. The Bunkers did not live opulently, but as David Marc notes "the mere fact that [they] live in a detached single-family dwelling is enough to bestow upon them the middle-class status of *alrightniks*."[376]

Lear and his staff also had pedagogical goals similar in spirit, if not in style, to the creators of previous family sitcoms. In a 1972 interview with *Ebony*, *All in the Family* star Carroll O'Connor acknowledged that "we're doing something that needs to be done, and that is show a racist what *he* is doing…Our intention is to show him just what he is."[377] His co-star, Jean Stapleton (who played Edith), framed the show's overall goal in similar terms in a 1979 interview. From her perspective, the show "has touched the social

[375] Marc, 136.
[376] Marc, 149.
[377] Charles L. Sanders, "Is Archie Bunker the Real White America?", *Ebony*, June 1972, 192.

awareness of Americans," and she cited a minister's quote that the show "had done more in one half hour to uncover the nature of bigotry than he could accomplish in a year of preaching."[378] Lear himself also would frame *All in the Family* as educational in nature. In 1973, he told the *New York Times* that he wanted to "reach, to understand the Archie Bunkers" of the world.[379] By depicting Archie's prejudice or Maude's social views, Lear's intent was to use such humorous presentations as "a remarkably effective weapon" against prejudice.[380] In a 2005 interview, while dismissive of his programs' overall impact, he admitted that he hoped "somebody may change somebody else's mind" in light of the conversations started by his "26-minute television show."[381]

Lear's pedagogical intent was even more clearly visible in his discussion of the show's impact regarding other issues besides race. In 1979, Lear claimed that *ATF*'s episodes focusing on specific issues produced clear effects:

> When we did a show in which Edith was afraid she had breast cancer, the response across the country was measurable. Women by the thousands called local chapters of the American Cancer Society. Rape prevention centers…were contacted by thousands of women when *All in the Family* dealt with that subject, too. We have seen similar responses in episodes that dealt with mental retardation, obesity, heart disease, etc.[382]

Lear would also stress this success in the 2005 interview, offering the example of one of his later shows, *Good Times*, doing an episode on hypertension and including a segment

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[378] "A Symposium," in *All in the Family: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Richard P. Adler (New York City, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1979), 256.
[379] Martin Kasindorf, "Archie and Maude and Fred and Norman and Alan: A TV Dynasty," *New York Times*, June 24, 1973, 16.
[380] Norman Lear, "As I Read How Laura Saw Archie…", in *All in the Family: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Richard P. Adler (New York City, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1979), 107.
[381] Tasha Robinson, "Norman Lear," *A.V. Club*, April 27, 2005, online, accessed April 18, 2014, http://www.avclub.com/article/norman-lear-13929.
[382] "A Symposium," 256.

"advising where people could turn for help."[383] These comments reveal both Lear's realization of his shows' ability to teach lessons and also his willingness to produce such episodes. Lear shared this goal of education with earlier stars like Robert Young and Donna Reed, who also conceived of their shows as teaching moral and social lessons. In discussing these goals, it is clear that Lear believed his programs had something to say about good citizenship.

The key difference, of course, between Lear's suburban sitcoms and their comedic antecedents was that in the course of teaching such lessons, Lear's shows explicitly addressed political and cultural issues that had rarely appeared on television before, especially within the situation comedy genre. On *All in the Family* and *Maude*, for example, episodes addressed such controversial topics as homosexuality, the racial integration of neighborhoods, interracial relationships, sexual assault, sexual harassment at the workplace, drug use, and abortion.[384] All of these issues were almost entirely absent from the sitcoms of the previous two decades, meaning that the "suburban living room" was now, for the first time, bombarded with "the charged rhetoric of race, class, and political polarization."[385] Furthermore, these topics did not just appear in throwaway lines of dialogue; instead, they were the entire focus of episodes. They were issues with a clear personal impact on the protagonists of the show, not random guest characters (Archie's wife and daughter were sexually assaulted or harassed, Maude herself had the

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[383] Robinson.
[384] In order, the episodes are the *All in the Family* entries "Judging Books by Covers" (1971), "The Blockbuster" (1971), "Lionel Steps Out" (1972), "Gloria, the Victim" (1973), and the *Maude* episodes "Carol's Promotion" (1976), "The Grass Story" (1972), and the two-part "Maude's Dilemma" (1972). Other episodes of the series addressed some or all of these issues as well.
[385] Marc, 152.

abortion). Characters discussed and argued these issues, frequently advocating ideas that much of their viewing audience may have disagreed with in an attempt to raise awareness, provide instruction, or spark conversation. It was impossible to view the Lear programs without recognizing their newly enhanced socio-political focus.

Viewers certainly seemed to approve of such a move, at least judging by the high ratings *ATF* and *Maude* pulled in. Critical reaction, on the other hand, was far more mixed, with many reviews of the show focusing on the types of lessons the shows communicated. What initially caught much critical attention was how the shows framed their main characters. Unlike a Jim Anderson or even a Julia Baker, Lear's protagonists were not depicted as calmly rational types who were quick to offer a correct solution. Instead, characters on Lear's shows (mainly Archie and Maude, although certainly others) were frequently shown to not only be in the wrong but also guilty of despicable behavior. In nearly every episode, Archie used racial or ethnic slurs, displayed greedy or brutish traits, and acted quite insensitively to the needs of his family. Lear, using a description commonly used in reviews of *ATF*, labeled Archie "a lovable bigot," but even that term reveals that the "loveable" aspects of Archie would go hand in hand with his odious behavior.[386] For her part, Maude was not a racial bigot, but she was depicted as tyrannical, selfish, and hypocritical, what Bonnie Dow refers to as the "nightmare…figure of feminism."[387]

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[386] Laura Z. Hobson, "As I Listened to Archie Say 'Hebe…'", in *All in the Family: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Richard P. Adler (New York City, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1979), 99.
[387] Bonnie Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement Since 1970* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 61.

It was this trait of *ATF*, in particular, that attracted much of the earliest negative press. Some reviewers believed that in depicting Archie's despicable behavior, the show was simply satirizing it and opening it up for mockery. The *Los Angeles Sentinel* said Archie was "a funny and instructive cat…[a] non-cosmetized portrait of the 'master race.'"[388] Writing for *TV Guide*, Cleveland Amory enthusiastically praised the show, saying that the humorous depictions of Archie's prejudice would ultimately serve to defeat bigotry. In his opinion, the show "brilliantly holds the mirror up to our human (or is it inhuman?) nature."[389] For other reviewers, though, the show's approach ended up perverting its intended pedagogical intent.[390] The negative reviews of *All in the Family* did not critique the show for addressing controversial social issues per se; instead, they vehemently objected to what they perceived to be the horrible example of the "loveable bigot." For example, John Leonard, writing for *Life*, labeled the show "wretched," with Archie's racism only serving as "a form of dirty joke" that "we are invited to snigger" at.[391] A 1972 *Ebony* article questioned "what psychological damage is done to the black children who…absorb Archie's racial assaults on Saturday evenings."[392]

More incisive criticisms came not just from media reviewers but well-known civil rights activists. Whitney Young, the leader of the Urban League, wrote that *All in the Family* was an "irresponsible" program. Young accepted the show's premise "to satirize

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[388] Pamela Haynes, "New TV Comedy Takes Hard, Realistic Poke at Bigotry," in *All in the Family: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Richard P. Adler (New York City, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1979), 85.
[389] Cleveland Amory, "'All in the Family': A Review," in *All in the Family: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Richard P. Adler (New York City, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1979), 90.
[390] Almost all of the reviews about this topic address the "shock factor" in *All in the Family*, as opposed to *Maude*. I ascribe this to the fact that *ATF* premiered first and thus seemed more initially shocking to critics, as well as the fact the main character (Archie) was depicted as more explicitly offensive.
[391] John Leonard, "Bigotry as a Dirty Joke," in *All in the Family: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Richard P. Adler (New York City, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1979), 90-91.
[392] Sanders, 188.

that kind of [bigoted] mentality" exemplified by Archie, but he believed that its attempted satire "only succeeds in spreading the poison and making it—by repetition—more respectable."[393] In one of the more infamous critical reviews of the show, Laura Z. Hobson, the author of the famous expose of anti-Semitism *Gentleman's Agreement*, wrote that the show simply made racism more acceptable with its depiction of the "lovable bigot." Hobson stated, "I don't think you can be a bigot and be lovable…and I don't think the millions who watch this show should be conned into thinking that you can be." Like Young and the *Ebony* reviewer, Hobson wondered what kinds of lessons the show communicated. "To teach other children that it's quite all right to go around saying spade and Hebe and coon and spic…that seems to me pretty cruel," she concluded.[394]

Lear countered by saying the show taught something else altogether:

> *All in the Family* simply airs it [bigotry], brings it out in the open, [and] has people talking about it. And here, in my opinion is the big effect *All in the Family* can have on children. They will ask questions about the bigotry they see on *All in the Family* and parents will have to answer. Conversation in the home; how bad can that be?[395]

By discussing bigotry, by working through these problems through conversations, Lear suggests that individuals and their family members can work through social issues. In his same rebuttal to Hobson, Lear quotes social service worker Mrs. Fay Love, who wrote that Archie was "a loveable bigot who helps us all to laugh at ourselves and view our own behavior with new insights."[396] By *learning* from Archie's bigotry, viewers would

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[393] Whitney M. Young Jr., "Irresponsible Television Production Aids Racism," in *All in the Family: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Richard P. Adler (New York City, NY: Praeger Publications, 1979), 86.
[394] Hobson, 104.
[395] Lear, 110
[396] Lear, 109. This idea is also expressed in various letters to the editor in favor of the show that were published in *Ebony*'s August and September 1972 issues.

hopefully be inspired to improve their (and perhaps their loved ones') behavior. In a charming 1971 interview, Jean Stapleton described a letter exemplifying this hope, in which the letter writer said her husband stopped swearing after he realized he sounded "just like that ass on TV."[397]

Shows like *All in the Family* could be interpreted as Lear's way of retroactively accomplishing familial teaching he had failed to do in his youth. Lear had always claimed the character of Archie was inspired by his own father. "My father and I fought all those battles…I never forgave him for being a bigot…If I had been smarter, and not his kid, I could have *reached* him, affected him in those attitudes," he said in a 1973 interview. That article describes Lear's sitcom output both as "penance for not having won more battles with his father" and "a humorous means of converting the world's Archie Bunkers."[398] While the interviewer engages in some armchair psychology, there is no obscuring Lear's hope that he could use his sitcoms to improve the thinking of people like his father, forcing them to question their racism.

Clearly, these different perspectives revealed intense debate: was the show teaching that bigotry was *wrong* or *acceptable*? David Marc summarizes the situation by writing that "the sitcom had lost its innocence, everyone agreed, but were we looking at a fulfilling new relationship or a rape?" Would *All in the Family* "help purge the culture of long-term and lingering sins" or did it make racism seem lovable?[399] In making their objection, critics like Young and Hobson were implicitly agreeing with Lear's perception that the shows taught viewers: they simply believed that audiences were learning the

[397] Judy Stone, "What's It Like Being the Wife of a Bigot?", *New York Times*, August 29, 1971, D13.
[398] Kasindorf, 13.
[399] Marc, 146.

wrong messages about bigotry. The debate is important and instructive, yet it obscures many other important aspects surrounding Lear's programming. As central as the concept of the "lovable bigot" was to *All in the Family*, it was not the only facet of the show; as Lear himself suggested, he hoped his shows would educate on social or personal issues (such as sexual assault or heart disease) independent of racism. Furthermore, while their comedic depictions of bigotry could be seen as presenting unclear messages, Lear's shows also presented several other socio-political messages that were crystal clear in terms of consistency and intent. The next section of this chapter will analyze these "other" themes of the Lear sitcoms, which relate not only to the shows' vision of racial tolerance but also their depiction of good citizenship.

Lear's Civic Messages

While Lear's sitcoms accurately earned a reputation for destroying television's boundaries by addressing controversial, even offensive, issues, the programs consistently strove to avoid being labeled as "radical." Despite their explicit depictions and discussions of socio-political issues (from both liberal and conservative perspectives), both *All in the Family* and *Maude* maintained a critical, even mocking attitude towards political and cultural radicalism. Society was filled with problems on these shows, but the answer did not lie in embracing potentially threatening political movements. A fairly straightforward example of this message appears in the 1973 *All in the Family* episode "Archie is Branded," which begins with Archie discovering a swastika painted on his front door. A man named Paul Benjamin soon arrives to clarify the situation, explaining that anti-Semitic bigots confused Archie's house for someone else's. Benjamin offers to

protect the Bunkers and says that he is a member of the Hebrew Defense Association which fights back against extreme bigots. Despite his own prejudices, Archie is impressed with Benjamin's group and grows to respect the HDA's ideology of fighting a "war" against its opponents.

Representing mainstream liberalism, Mike and Gloria dismiss Benjamin's group as a "vigilante" group interested only in "revenge." They insist that the militant tactics of the HDA will only increase racial hatred. Paul insists that peaceful discussion is impossible because "you can't talk to bullets." At the end of the episode, as he leaves the Bunker home, his car explodes, killing him. The conclusion, one of the more downbeat endings ever on *All in the Family*, features a stunned Archie mumbling "they blew him up in his car!" as he views the wreckage. While Paul's death is presented as a tragedy, the episode clearly links the car bombing with Mike and Gloria's earlier criticism of the HDA; by engaging in militant actions, even ostensibly to protect people, the group merely perpetuated the cycle of violence. The radical politics represented by the HDA (a fictional group, but one clearly inspired by real-life groups, both Jewish and non-Jewish) are not a viable way to solve the problem of bigotry.

On a much softer note, the title character of *Maude* was also used to mock radicalism, with many episodes centered on the ridiculousness of Maude's political views and behavior. Watching Maude go "too far" in her liberalism is the central premise of the show. *Maude*'s executive producer, Rod Parker, noted that "Norman Lear wanted to do with liberals what he did with Archie Bunker…Maude would just go overboard with her

white liberal guilt."[400] Episodes like 1972's "Maude and the Radical," for instance, depicted Maude as a bumbling hypocrite, throwing a fundraiser for a black militant she has never met which featured her maid as the only actual black guest. A common strategy of the writers, though, was to contrast Maude with even more radically politicized guest characters, such as the feminist author Stephanie in 1975's "The Christmas Party" or the duplicitous women's liberation activist Leslie in 1977's "Walter's Temptation." Thus, even Maude could get upset at Stephanie when the latter denounces Christmas images like Santa Claus as a "put down to women." Maude calls Stephanie a "militant flake," dismisses her complaints as "trivia," and insists that Stephanie not disrupt Walter's Christmas party. Maude thus ends up looking like a "reasonable" liberal through her moderate behavior, as opposed to the foolish behavior of radicals.

By making this distinction, *ATF* and *Maude* communicated the message that extreme politicized behavior was not the proper approach to resolve social problems, a concept that as I will explore below, fit in perfectly with the pedagogical intentions of Lear and his writers. This was not a particularly innovative message—after all, political radicalism was never depicted as an appropriate solution in the suburban sitcoms of the past either. What *was* innovative was another, far more subtle message communicated by the Lear sitcoms regarding the unimportance of civic responsibility. As previous chapters have documented, older family sitcoms depicted small-scale civic involvement (contacting local politicians, distributing petitions, going to neighborhood organization

[400] Yael Kohen, *We Killed: The Rise of Women in American Comedy* (New York City, NY: Sarah Crichton Books, 2012), 74.

meetings, even staging local protests) as the backbone of a healthy community and the true solution for the problems plaguing a neighborhood.

This involvement, previously the sign of a "good" citizen, is absent from Lear's shows; the protagonists were far less likely to be active in their community in the same way as the characters of the sitcoms of the 1950's and 1960's. Certainly, liberal characters like Mike or Maude would stage a protest or speak out on political issues, but these actions were usually as part of a throwaway plot device (to set a story in motion), an activity worthy of mockery (as described above), or as simply part of an internal debate with family or friends (such as Mike's incessant political arguments with Archie). The consistent sitcom plot of the previous decades of suburbanites sincerely acting to improve their *community* is basically absent. As politicized as Lear's shows were, the *civic* aspects of sitcoms suddenly seemed muted.

What explains this change in focus? One explanation is rooted in the Lear programs' antipathy for politicized or civic behavior that disrupts the family, a trait shared with the older programs. As chapter two documented, suburban sitcom protagonists would decline political office or involvement in clubs like the Chamber of Commerce (or even the P.T.A.) if such behavior appeared to disrupt domestic harmony. This message remains prominent in Lear's shows, with *Maude* serving as an instructive example. In the majority of the show's episodes, Maude more or less successfully combines domesticity with her liberal causes. She is able to do this, of course, primarily because of her class status—she can afford to hire various housekeepers.

Nevertheless, there are occasional flash points that reveal the tension between Maude's civic and domestic responsibilities, most notably in a five part episode in 1975 that begins the show's fourth season. In this series of episodes, Maude is faced with an opportunity to run for the state senate of New York. It is a chance for her to undertake a great civic responsibility and make a real impact; instead of staging silly protests or fund-raisers, she can actually wield political power. Unfortunately, her husband, Walter, is vehemently opposed. He angrily tells Maude he is "not a hermit" and does not want his wife going off to work without him. She will run, he coldly informs her, over his dead body. Maude asks "if I choose to run, our marriage is going to end?" Walter insists he is not bluffing and despite Maude's plea that the election is something vitally important to her, Walter walks out on her when she refuses to reconsider.

In part four of this arc, a guilty Maude decides to drop out of the race, mainly because a miserable Walter has resumed his drinking problem during their separation. Walter's friend Arthur chastises him, comparing him to "a baby pulling a temper tantrum." Walter realizes how happy Maude was in preparing for the election and tells her to continue her campaign; the episode ends with the couple embracing. In the conclusion to the storyline, Maude loses the election by a very low amount of votes. Walter says he voted for "our marriage," which is implied to mean voting for his wife. Nevertheless, Maude is not disappointed. "I'm back to being a full-time wife again," she says and the episode again ends with the couple embracing.

While a more complex and sophisticated depiction of the conflict between domesticity and civic responsibility than anything produced in the 1950's or 1960's, this

series of episodes ultimately delivers a message entirely in line with the older programs: family trumps civic involvement. Walter eventually comes around to support Maude's campaign, but the tension of their initial conflict cannot simply go away in the light of an epiphany and an embrace. Could their marriage truly survive Maude taking on an identity rooted not in domesticity but in politics? What would happen to their relationship (or Walter's sobriety) if Maude did not return to being a full-time wife?

The explicit realism of the show also served to increase the stakes as compared to older treatments of the plot. Jim Anderson would "merely" have disappointed his children if he chose a Chamber of Commerce meeting instead of the family-focused P.T.A. assembly. In this episode, Maude's embrace of civic responsibility temporarily drives Walter to alcoholism and ruins their marriage. The arc may have presented Maude's political campaign as laudable and Walter's chauvinistic embrace of traditional values contemptible, yet the storyline suggests an irreconcilable conflict between the family and politics. Furthermore, by presenting Maude as happy to return to her role as "full-time wife," the show ends up endorsing the domestic position within that conflict. It is telling that while Maude will eventually get her chance at political service by being appointed to a national congressional post, those events take place within the show's final episodes and Maude is shown holding office in just one episode. Implicitly, the series cannot survive without a domestic focus.

The conflict between family and "good citizenship" though can only partially explain the lack of civic participation within the Lear sitcoms. In the past, Jim Anderson or Donna Stone always valued his or her family before civic service, but those characters

still found time to sincerely become involved within their community. In contrast, as the *TV Guide* article that began this chapter noted, Archie Bunker is completely inactive within his neighborhood. He rarely attends church, the only local group he seems to participate in is a foolish lodge, and as the 1971 episode "The Election Story" reveals, he is not even registered to vote. These traits may make sense if we consider Archie to be an object of ridicule, an example of "negative" behavior, but the other characters are hardly exemplars of civic engagement either. As documented above, characters like Mike and Maude are frequently satirized and even when their causes are treated with respect, they are more often than not framed as broadly general causes with little relation to the neighborhood. Mike protests "Pentagon control of our government" at the United Nations, but we do not see the protest, nor does it seem relevant to his community. Maude tries to help a black radical, yet none of her neighbors in Tuckahoe seem to care.

Even scenarios that would seem to logically require civic action do not display it. For example, in the 1977 *Maude* episode "The Gay Bar," Maude contends with her conservative neighbor Arthur's rants against "homosexual pansies" and their opening of a gay bar in town. "You just want to persecute people you don't understand," Maude insists. Undeterred, Arthur plans on using a city ordinance to shut down the bar. While Maude is firmly against Arthur, she refrains from making it a *civic* issue. There are no pro-gay rights demonstrations or appeals to the local government to save the bar. Maude, the supposedly firebrand activist, instead simply engages with Arthur on a personal level, attempting to deter him from his crusade. While interpersonal solutions usually did indeed solve problems on older sitcoms, those programs typically featured far more of a

civic-minded focus. If the 1950's equivalent of "The Gay Bar" were (however improbable as this may seem) to air on *Father Knows Best*, we would expect the Anderson children to organize a petition or for Jim to make an impassioned speech before the mayor in defense of the bar owners.

The *Maude* episode lacks this focus. Arthur goes down to the bar and discovers that it is outside the city limits, making his campaign inapplicable. Maude notes that despite being bigoted, Arthur is "a man of principle" for agreeing to respect the law. As a pedagogical episode about homosexuality, "The Gay Bar" challenges stereotypes, as Arthur's conception of gay men as pansies or deviants is proven to be wrong once he visits the bar. However, all of this happens on a personal, depoliticized scale independent of any civic-minded context. Arthur abandons his campaign and potentially learns something about homosexuality without any campaigns (or really any action whatsoever) from a "good citizen." Maude may be a politicized liberal, but at least in this instance, she refrains from truly involving herself in the affairs of her community. Civic action is not depicted as necessary.

The importance of such involvement was further deemphasized through the attitude of cynicism running through Lear's sitcoms, a style that, as Todd Gitlin points out, was "particularly appealing to audiences of the Nixon era and its cynical, disabused sequel."[401] As much as Lear intended his shows to raise serious questions or provide teaching moments, *ATF* and *Maude* would frequently take a mocking attitude towards their characters' involvement in community affairs. In contrast to the straightforward

[401] Todd Gitlin, "Television's Screens: Hegemony in Transition," in *American Media and Mass Culture: Left Perspectives*, ed. Donald Lazere (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 249.

sincerity of previous sitcoms, Lear's shows were not afraid to satirically toy with conceptions of the "good citizen." For example, in 1974's "Maude's Guest," the title character takes in an African-American girl from the ghetto as a temporary boarder, pretentiously announcing that the child will bring "diversity" to the community in a clear parroting of liberal truisms. Maude's sanctimonious attempts at assuaging her white guilt should be contrasted with the earnest attitudes of the earlier "white protectors" such as Jim Anderson or Donna Stone. Ultimately, "Maude's Guest" has a happy ending similar to any *Father Knows Best* episode, but the episode's satirical point makes it hard to view Maude's community involvement as worthy of emulation.

A more biting example comes in the 1972 *ATF* episode "Archie and the Editorial." After seeing a television editorial about gun control, a furious Archie uses the "equal time" provision involving television news in order to get on the air to deliver a rebuttal. Archie's own editorial is filled with exaggerated conservative points, but he is still shown to be engaging in the same sort of behavior as his suburban sitcom predecessors: delivering a passionate speech about a civic issue. As the family celebrates Archie's editorial in a bar, though, a man enters and offers effusive praise to Archie, saying he just saw the editorial and agreed with every word of it. He then immediately draws a gun of his own and robs the Bunkers. The ending is almost entirely played for humor, but there is a cynicism to the sequence that mocks Archie's determination to become politically involved. While it is unclear how much Archie's editorial influenced the mugger (if it did at all), the episode suggests that Archie's message did not have any positive effects and may have simply encouraged criminals to act. The audience is left

with the belief that perhaps doing nothing may have been the better course of action. Archie's civic activity ends up being not something worthy of praise or emulation, but an action that indirectly supports criminals and only leads to him losing money. It is a pessimistic conclusion to the episode that mocks involvement in community affairs.

The most cynical depictions within Lear sitcoms involved sympathetic portrayals of civic action that still failed to generate results. In 1972's "The Grass Story," Maude and her friends are planning a protest of behalf of a teenager who has been arrested for marijuana possession and could conceivably face a very long prison term. Maude and her clueless upper-class white friends plan on exposing the stupidity of the law by being arrested on possession charges themselves. Much of the episode satirizes Maude and her friends' inept attempt at protesting—Maude cannot obtain marijuana and must use oregano; the women sing "We Shall Overcome" at the police station where the cops simply find them annoyances. Nevertheless, at the end of the show, the issue at hand (the teenager's original arrest) is suddenly revisited and with stark seriousness. A police officer suddenly informs the protesting women that the teenager's trial is over and that he has received three years in prison, causing the group to sadly return home.

This episode cynically questions the ability of individual citizens to make a difference through their civic behavior. Maude is portrayed as someone sincerely interested in improving society. Her cause, standing up for a teenager facing the brunt of an unjust legal system, is presented as one worthy of respect, something even the police officers at the end of the episode acknowledge. While she and her group can be mocked for their ineptitude, their intentions are shown to be good. Nevertheless, despite such

intentions, they can accomplish nothing. As opposed to the older suburban sitcoms, which ended with a park being saved or a crisis averted, the teenager receives the maximum jail sentence. The episode presents the issue of drug laws as something too large for an individual citizen to handle. Maude's civic behavior is sincere and respected, yet it is also ridiculous and ultimately futile.

These programs' depiction of political behavior could be contrasted with another of Lear's sitcoms, the *Maude* spin-off *Good Times*, which premiered in February of 1974. *Good Times* was set in the Chicago projects and focused on the Evans family, whose matriarch, Florida, had previously been seen as Maude's maid. Star Esther Rolle, along with Lear, initially had lofty pedagogical goals for the program. "I feel an obligation to do something that will make him [a black child] stick his little chest out and say, 'Did you see that!?'" Rolle told the press.[402] Indeed, many of the episodes featured, in the words of Darrell Hamamoto, a "sense of social consciousness and a degree of serious purpose rare in television situation comedy."[403]

Thus, while civic activity could be mocked or treated with cynicism on the more middle-class *All in the Family* or *Maude, Good Times* aired many episodes, especially in its early seasons, that dealt with "overtly political issues," including busing, poverty, and public housing.[404] Unlike the other Lear sitcoms, members of the Evans family and their friends involved themselves in both substantial and sincere political activities. For example, Florida became an active campaign supporter of youthful alderman candidate

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[402] Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 129.
[403] Darrell Hamamoto, *Nervous Laughter: Television Situation Comedy and Liberal Democratic Ideology* (New York City, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1991), 104.
[404] Acham, 135.

Jimmy Pearson ("The Politicians") and organized neighborhood women in a protest of the unhealthy meat sold at the local market ("Florida's Protest"). In each of these episodes, Florida's behavior is treated with respect; her political behavior is not depicted as ridiculously as Archie or Maude's. Furthermore, the causes (true political representation, healthy food) are presented as important ones worthy of civic participation. In one of the most politicized episodes, "The Dinner Party," a neighbor of the Evans family, Gertie, admits she eats pet food on occasion because she lacks money. After being encouraged by Florida, Gertie says she will organize her friends to fight for more anti-poverty laws. "We've not only got black power, we've got Medicaid power!" she triumphantly says as the episode ends on a seemingly pro-political note. In these contexts, where the stakes were high and possibly even life or death, active citizenship was still seen as admirable.

Still, despite these messages, even *Good Times* could not fully offer an endorsement of active civic participation. Florida's political activities may be admirable, but they fail to obtain results: Pearson loses the alderman election, and the market does nothing to improve the condition of its food. The tone of these endings are different than the sledgehammer cynicism seen in the other Lear sitcoms, as Florida and James get revenge on the supermarket manager by tricking him into eating the unhealthy meat, but the daily life of the Evans family is not changed one way or the other by civic behavior. The constant string of housing inspectors or welfare administrators seen on the show could usually provide little help. Even Gertie's call to political activism ends up blunted, since she never reappears on the show again. Furthermore, for viewers who could *not*

identify with the harsh reality of life in the Chicago projects, the civic activities engaged in by Florida may not have seemed as compelling as the middle-class displays of citizenship featured in previous chapters.

On the whole, then, Lear's sitcoms thus appeared to present a confusing depiction of good citizenship. Like older programs, *Maude* and *All in the Family* disassociated citizenship with political radicalism or behavior that threatened the family. Unlike those shows, they did not triumphantly depict small-scale, productive civic activities intended to take the place of such behaviors. Civic involvement within the neighborhood, on the rare occasions it actually appeared as the focus of an episode, was almost inevitably treated with cynicism or mockery, or at best, was presented as unsuccessful. *Good Times* offered an alternative viewpoint, but ultimately, not one that threatened the core messages of the Lear oeuvre. *The New Republic*'s Roger Rosenblatt once observed that "no solutions are ever offered or desired on *All in the Family*," and that "serious issues [are] deliberately raised and left to die."[405] In other words, characters on *ATF* may engage with and debate socio-political issues, but they could not actually resolve these issues through their work. The idealistic vision of community activism solving the problems facing the neighborhood was replaced with a far more cynical vision of more substantial problems and an absence of solutions.

The Power of Family

The Lear programs' dismissal of civic activity, though, should not be construed as the shows being consumed with purposeless cynicism. Rosenblatt's contention that

[405] Roger Rosenblatt, "*All in the Family*," in *All in the Family: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Richard P. Adler (New York City, NY: Praeger Publications, 1979), 198.

serious issues were "left to die" is not quite true; as Lear's interviews make clear, it was certainly not his intent to merely exploit socio-political issues. Despite their satiric bent, he and his writers had pedagogical goals related to civic responsibility. Instead, the cynical style to their shows merely reflected a change in conceiving of what it truly meant to be a good citizen. The model of citizenship developed in the 1950's and 1960's programs, one rooted *both* in domesticity and neighborhood involvement, ends up being adjusted in the Lear sitcoms. What remains is a concept of citizenship *entirely* based within the family. The truly good citizen on *All in the Family* and *Maude* thus demonstrates his or her responsible nature not through saving a park or joining a charity drive but through operating within the domestic sphere.

This focus can first be seen in the numerous episodes where family members challenged each other's' behavior. Within Lear's sitcoms, the writers enjoyed seeing the two main protagonists (Archie or Maude) "put in their place" through a comedic or dramatic rebuke delivered by a family member. An ecstatic studio audience reacted with glee, for example, to see Edith refuse to obey Archie's chauvinist orders to serve him or for Maude's maid, Florida (like Hazel before her, effectively a member of the family), to mock her employer's fake concern regarding minorities.[406] In response to such outbursts from a family member, an embarrassed Archie or Maude would abandon their insensitive behaviors, at least for the duration of that episode. It is a humorous situation used as a teaching moment for both the rebuked family member and perhaps the audience.

[406] Particularly strong examples include 1976's "Edith's Night Out" (*ATF*) and 1972's "Maude Meets Florida," although scenarios of this nature occur in numerous episodes.

More importantly, though, are the more serious usages of this resolution, in which the rebuke carries with it more emotional weight. A recurring plotline on *All in the Family* involved Archie learning something about a friend or relative that forced him to rethink his views.[407] Two such episodes involved revelations with clear domestic ties. In 1977's "Cousin Liz," Archie and Edith learn that Edith's deceased cousin Liz was homosexual, while in 1979's "Stephanie's Conversion," Archie discovers his niece Stephanie (who was adopted by the Bunkers) is Jewish. In both episodes, Archie initially reacts badly. He is disgusted with Liz's partner, a woman named Veronica, and he insists that Stephanie convert to Christianity. He goes so far as to threaten to tell Veronica's employers about her sexuality in order to prevent her from making a claim to Liz's heirlooms.

However, in each instance, love of family (*domestic* responsibility) causes Archie to change his behavior. At the end of "Cousin Liz," Edith insists Archie not reveal Veronica's secret and to let her have the heirlooms. "I can't believe you'd do anything that mean," she exclaims. Archie, despite his bigoted views towards homosexuals, agrees to go along with Edith because his love for her causes him to feel ashamed at her rebuke. Similarly, Archie ultimately agrees to respect Stephanie's Jewish identity out of his love for his niece, as well as receiving encouragement from Edith and a rabbi. That episode ends with Archie buying Stephanie a Star of David necklace and saying he loves everything about her. In each instance, we are unclear how much Archie's actual views have changed about either homosexuality or Jewish people, but it is clear that he is

[407] Besides the episodes described here, other plots in this vein include 1975's "Archie, the Hero" (Archie discovers the "woman" whom he saved is actually a transvestite) and 1977's "Stretch Cunningham, Goodbye" (in which Archie learns a deceased friend was Jewish).

willing to change his behavior in regards to these issues because he loves his family. It is also unclear, though, how Archie would have reacted without the domestic prompting. Without Edith rebuking him, he presumably would have callously ruined Veronica's life; if it wasn't his niece, it is unlikely Archie would have bought a Jew a Star of David necklace. The familial context is responsible for Archie's changed behavior.

The plot device of the familial rebuke-as-solution is also prominently seen in the *All in the Family* episode "Edith's 50th Birthday," in which Edith is attacked in her home by a rapist. While she manages to escape in time, she is traumatized by the attempted attack. After the police arrest the rapist, they need Edith to make an identification so that they can press charges. Edith is reluctant, but Gloria confronts her. "You've got to do it for every woman who's a possible victim…You don't want to go on living like a scared rabbit," Gloria insists. When Edith, paralyzed by her fear, refuses to go, Gloria gets even more aggressive. "My mother always helped other people…you are selfish. You're not my mother anymore!" Enraged, Edith slaps Gloria, but the shock of this action snaps her out of her fear. The episode ends with a more resolute Edith insisting on making the identification of the rapist.

This famous episode should be contrasted with an earlier episode addressing the same issue, one that is in fact referenced several times in "Edith's 50th Birthday." The far lesser-known 1973 episode "Gloria, the Victim" features *Gloria* the victim of a would-be rapist, who attacked her while she was walking home. In fact, while she is not raped, her clothes are ripped off, suggesting the attack was a more physically severe one than what happened to Edith. "Gloria the Victim" ends with a completely different resolution,

though: a detective tells the family that in rape cases, the victim is frequently blamed and presented as "asking for it." Mike and Archie do not want to see Gloria humiliated and convince her not to make an official complaint. When Edith suggests Gloria's attacker may strike again, Archie says "I ain't responsible for all the girls in New York…we take care of our own." The episode ends with a close-up on a distraught Gloria's face; despite Archie's attempts to shield her from the events of a rape trial, his solution is clearly an unsatisfactory one, offering little closure to his daughter.

In this earlier episode, *All in the Family* suggests that the family is somewhat insufficient in addressing the socio-political issue of sexual assault. Archie insists "we take care of our own," yet the episode ends with the male family members unable to recognize Gloria's desperate desire for something more than simply Archie and Mike's heavy-handed efforts to prevent her embarrassment. The intentionally downbeat ending, similar to those of the episodes described earlier in the chapter, cynically depicts a problem that domesticity cannot solve because the family is shown to be more concerned about their "own" as opposed to the welfare of the community. In contrast, "Edith's 50th Birthday," while no less explicit or dark as the earlier entry, positions the family at the very heart of the solution to such a problem. After Edith's assault, she is reluctant to press charges but is convinced by Gloria to do so; when Edith ultimately decides to go down to the police station, she has the clear support of Archie and Mike. By confronting her mother, Gloria helps Edith overcome her trauma and realize that her duty as a good citizen is to help put the rapist in prison. In a more dramatic fashion, Gloria does what Edith and others did in the above examples: she prodded a family member to rethink his

or her problematic behavior (being bigoted, insensitive, or uncaring) and instead act in a more responsible manner. The episode reveals that, especially as the show evolved, *All in the Family* emphasized that "good citizenship" emerged from familial interaction.

If the family could serve as a tool to improve individuals' behavior, it could also serve as an important motivation to become involved in the affairs of the community. This is seen within the striking two-part 1977 episode "Archie and the KKK." In these episodes, Archie joins a group called the "Queens Council of Crusaders," which is ostensibly "dedicated to law and order" and stopping rioters. It is not until Archie becomes a member that he realizes the group is a branch of the Ku Klux Klan and that the members plan to burn a cross on Mike's lawn to send him a message about his support for minority rights.

In a crucial scene, an anxious Archie tries to warn Mike and Gloria about the Klan's action but happens to reveal that he joined the group. Gloria calls him a "cross burner," and Mike refuses to let his son (Archie's grandson) near Archie. The couple says they will move away from Archie if he remains connected to this group. Chastened, Archie shows up at the Klan headquarters as the two leaders prepare to leave for the cross burning. Archie says that while he agrees with some of the group's views, he does not want them to burn the cross. "I got a little grandson…and I want him to grow up normal…and if he sees a cross burning, he might get the wrong idea about what the cross really means," he stammers. The Klan members get angry and threaten to burn a cross at Archie's house, warning him "there's a whole lot of us." In a crowd-pleasing scene, Archie proclaims there are "a whole lot of us…us blacks!" Archie says that because he

once received a blood transfusion from a black person, he now has the right to call upon his "black brothers" to "come up here and bust your honky heinies." The episode ends as the stunned Klan members look on as Archie proudly but nervously leaves.

Despite the humor in the confrontation sequence, the scene stands as one of the more dramatic presented in a Lear sitcom due to the apparent high stakes. This is not Archie sparring with Mike in the comfort of his home or Maude humorously clashing with the conservative Arthur over a protest. Instead, we have Archie confronting a group associated with violence and despicable bigotry in the Klan. The sequence especially gets its power because it is rooted in Archie's defense of his family. His breaking point with the group is their decision to burn a cross on Mike's (and by extension his daughter and grandson's) lawn. He then confronts the Klan members directly and threatens them after being shamed in his conversation with Mike and Gloria. In one of the few times on *All in the Family*, Archie is prompted to leave his home and defend his community. His speech to the Klan members, as politically incorrect as it may be, has a similar feel to those found in older suburban sitcoms, in which bigots are put in their place by a well-timed speech from white liberals. Like those examples, Archie confronts the Klan members because of concerns about his family. He becomes a good citizen purely to defend them and prove himself worthy. Without this motivation, it is difficult to conceive of Archie becoming civically involved at all.

Finally, family members provided support within the home for characters grappling with politicized issues, as seen within arguably the most famous episode of *Maude*, the two-part 1972 entry "Maude's Dilemma," in which Maude discovers that she

is pregnant. The entire family is stunned, and Carol suggests Maude get an abortion. "It's as simple as going to the dentist…it's not your fault," she tells her mother. Walter says he will support any decision his wife makes; Walter and Maude each believe the other wants the baby and thus make plans to tolerate the surprise pregnancy. When they finally realize that neither wants the child, Maude has the abortion. At the end of the episode, a still unsure Maude asks if she is "doing the right thing" by not having the baby. "For you, Maude, and for me, and the privacy of our own lives, you're doing the right thing," Walter insists.

The episode predictably resulted in a flurry of media attention and criticism, with two CBS affiliates refusing to air the segments and a number of sponsors pulling their advertisements.[408] As the *New York Times* reported, "the dust-free, non-allergenic, flameproof, tidy world of television" underwent the equivalent of "major surgery."[409] What was overlooked in the firestorm was the positioning of a controversial socio-political issue (abortion) as a wholly personal, *domestic* issue. The title "dilemma" of Maude is actually fairly straightforward. She does not want the baby; as it turns out, her husband does not either. Access to a legal abortion is not the issue. Privacy is not a problem. The events are not brought up again during the course of the series. Thus, the issue at hand is simply whether or not having an abortion is appropriate within Maude's specific familial situation. It is resolved through her loved ones (including the normally peevish Walter) encouraging the idea to have an abortion. In this episode, the political

[408] Kohen, 75.
[409] Aljean Harmetz, "Maude Didn't Leave 'em All Laughing," *New York Times*, December 10, 1972, D3.

issue of reproductive rights is resolved by an individual making a decision and receiving support from her family.

Even on the more "politicized" program *Good Times*, the strongest messages of the show involved individuals experiencing growth as a person or as a family member, not necessarily as a public citizen. While star Esther Rolle and other cast members would eventually become disenchanted at the preponderance of "pure sitcom" plots featured on *Good Times*, Christine Acham has documented that the show's politicized and pedagogical episodes focused more on individual than political change. For example, in "The Checkup," an episode referenced by Norman Lear earlier in this chapter, James learns about the dangers of hypertension from his family and adopts a low-cholesterol diet.[410] Similarly, in episodes like "Florida Flips," Florida realizes that she needs to have a life outside of the home and eventually decides to attend night school, a decision she only reaches through the support of James and the children. In both episodes, the two characters (James and Florida) grow as individuals through the prodding and encouragement of their family. While both plots (one involving public health, the other about feminism) could involve political action, neither is really presented as a solution. Instead, personal growth with familial support forms the crux of the resolution.

As these examples show, in their responses to socio-political issues, characters on the Lear sitcoms changed their individual behavior thanks to being challenged by family members (Archie learning to become less bigoted) or offered support to loved ones (Gloria prodding Edith to overcome the trauma of rape, Walter supporting Maude's decision to have an abortion). Whatever social messages the episodes themselves carried,

[410] Acham, 134.

their plots and resolutions hinged almost entirely on characters' personal growth and satisfaction; their displays of good citizenship are presented wholly within the domestic sphere. Archie only stops the Klan once they threaten the security of his family. He learns to accept his niece's Jewishness, but not necessarily Jewish people in the neighborhood. Maude's abortion is right for her own individual situation. Even at the end of "Edith's 50th Birthday," when Edith suddenly realizes it is her duty to put the rapist in prison, the focus of the episode is on Edith overcoming her own personal trauma; we never hear if the rapist is convicted or if he poses a threat to the community—what is important is that Edith is back to normal. By framing the resolutions in this individualized, domestic manner, Lear framed the "good citizen" as the "good family member," someone who responded to socio-political issues not through radical political activity or civic participation but through educating, supporting, and protecting within the domestic sphere. Archie (or Maude) did not have to attend P.T.A. meetings, protest a park's destruction, or run for political office. They truly displayed their good citizenship through their politicized work *at home*.

The Domestication of Citizenship

How were viewers expected to respond to these depictions? Lear intended for viewers to improve themselves and potentially change their bigoted ways, just as Archie himself might do, but, as the episodes indicated, audiences were not being pushed to develop a politicized or even a civic-minded conscience. Instead, the type of improvement Lear's sitcoms advocated was *self-improvement*, as an individual and as a family member. Lear's co-producer, Bud Yorkin, claimed that the show made "both a

psychological as well as a sociological change" in viewers, as it "held up a mirror for the viewer to look at." The viewer "in turn delved introspectively within himself in a positive manner."[411] Viewers learning from Lear's sitcoms would thus enrich themselves, not necessarily their neighborhoods. This focus on personal growth has been frequently noted by various scholars, both at the time of the show's airing and later. Richard Adler provided a slightly different analysis in 1979, suggesting the show positioned "the family as a political arena—as *the* political arena."[412] The messages of the show thus were not meaningless, but their true meaning could perhaps only be seen within the domestic sphere, presumably because that was the only setting the shows regarded as important.

Adler's opinion reflects a pointed pun used in the 1992 documentary *Color Adjustment*, which chronicled televised depictions of African-Americans. The Lear programming, the documentary claimed, made the television family, "like in real life…a political battleground." Families were affected by political and social conflict, but through love, understanding, and working together, the narrator wryly notes, social problems could be solved "*all in the family*."[413] The comment reflects a pervasive critique of the political limits imposed by the shows' domestic focus. Todd Gitlin has written how socio-political problems, while ignored or sublimated by the programs of the 1950's and 1960's, were *domesticated* by 1970's programs like *All in the Family*. Gitlin places this domestication within television's overall hegemonic process. The hegemony is

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[411] "A Symposium," 258-259.
[412] Richard P. Adler, "Introduction," in *All in the Family: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Richard P. Adler (New York City, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1979), xxxix.
[413] *Color Adjustment*, directed by Marlon Riggs, 1992; California Newsreel.

maintained through "domesticating divisive issues," which are depoliticized and constrained within the boundaries of the family.[414]

As the authors of *Prime Time* write, these socio-political problems end up only being approached "in relation to one particular family…Discrimination wasn't some inherent evil of a racist or sexist system; it was what made it hard for the black Lionel Jefferson to find an apartment."[415] This meant that "solutions to problems were practical and specific, not sweeping reforms that changed laws and social practices." While Gitlin does accurately note that the Lear sitcoms' use of "downbeat, alienating endings" present problems "that cannot, in fact, be solved by the actions of the Bunkers alone," this ends up only reinforcing the importance of improving one's individual condition.[416] Racism itself could not be eliminated in the world of *All in the Family*, yet Archie could become more tolerant and the family could support minority relatives or neighbors. The domestication of socio-political issues within the Lear sitcoms framed these potentially controversial ideas within discrete boundaries.

However, the Lear sitcoms were not just domesticating these political problems. Rather, with their abandonment of the community participation aspects of civic involvement in favor of personal introspection, the shows were also *domesticating* the definition of good citizenship so important to the sitcoms of the past. The problems faced by the Bunkers or the Findlays would be solved "all in the family," yet the characters (and perhaps, more importantly, the viewers) were still being marked as good *citizens* for

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[414] Todd Gitlin, "Prime Time Ideology: The Hegemonic Process in Television Entertainment," *Social Problems* 26, no. 3 (1979): 256.
[415] Linda S. Lichter, S. Robert Lichter, and Stanley Rothman, *Prime Time: How TV Portrays American Culture* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing Inc., 1994), 153.
[416] Gitlin, "Prime Time Ideology," 262.

doing so. By confronting their bigotry, by grappling with their political or social consciousness, and by changing their behavior, Lear's fictional families were not only demonstrating their civic responsibility, they were modeling it for the show's viewership. The audience of *All in the Family* and *Maude*, through watching the programs, talking about them, and potentially changing *their* behavior as well, could thus become equally improved, productive citizens.

The result was, just as Lear and various critics have noted, an inversion of the old sitcom messages, but one far more subtle than what these observers recorded. Lear claimed that "the biggest problems those sitcom families [from previous decades] faced" were stories like "the boss is coming to dinner and the roast is ruined…America was being told that the biggest problem it faced was that the roast was ruined."[417] As previous chapters have documented, this is inaccurate; older sitcoms certainly took on far more challenging problems, particularly in relation to the needs of the neighborhood. A dangerous street corner, a bulldozed park, or an abused gardener were problems far more pressing than the ruined roast. Like Lear's sitcoms, these problems were solved "in the family" (through the actions of the nuclear family), yet they were also *community* problems requiring the civic participation of good citizens. The Lear programs addressed far more substantial problems—racism, homosexuality, sexual assault—yet these were not community problems, they were *individual or family* problems. The good citizen was not out standing in front of a bulldozer about to run over a park; he was teaching a family member (or learning himself) about racial tolerance. Through domestic actions of support and learning, these citizens solve the social problems that small-scale civic action *cannot*.

[417] Kasindorf, 19.

In the context of the 1970's, this shift occurs for two primary reasons. The first involves television being forced to adjust to the display of controversial and politically focused content. The editor of *Daily Variety*, Dave Kaufman, once stated that the success of Lear's shows proved the public "wanted shows dealing with problems…delving into social areas, with social significance," instead of just "utter escapism."[418] There is obviously truth to this statement, but it sidesteps the power and role of the television industry. As Todd Gitlin notes, the television industry in the 1970's was forced to recognize changes in social values and the demands of both audiences and writers. The industry's hegemonic power, however, meant that it would also work to take such social conflicts and frame them, "form and content both, into compatibility with dominant systems of meaning."[419] While the hegemonic theory of television is critiqued for ignoring viewer agency, Bonnie Dow has written "that hegemony theory *assumes* oppositional thinking" which the television industry responds to and negotiates with.[420] In doing so, Gitlin argues, the "television-industrial complex" attempts to reinforce its "fundamental politics" of being "useful to advertisers…capitalism and the consumer society."[421] Television can never forget that independent of content, its commercial goal "is to deliver an audience for the messages of advertisers."[422]

Using this interpretation, the Lear sitcoms and their incorporation of politicization within domesticity becomes television's attempt at placing the types of socio-political issues which viewers and creators were eager to explore into a framework palatable to

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[418] "A Symposium," 260-261.
[419] Gitlin, "Prime Time Ideology," 264.
[420] Dow, 11.
[421] Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time*, 2nd ed. (New York City, NY: Pantheon Books, 1985), 269.
[422] Dow, xix.

mass audiences and advertisers. In accurately describing the "political domestication" of issues within the 1970's sitcoms, Gitlin does not explore the full consequences of the shift. The model of good citizenship and civic responsibility within 1950's and 1960's sitcoms, *combined* with the socio-political focus of shows like *All in the Family*, is an extremely threatening one. In previous decades, sitcom citizens engaged in potentially unruly actions, such as protesting the government and forming community action groups. As chapter two argued, television framed this behavior both as part of a Cold War civic responsibility and an attempt to protect the suburban family's "good life," a framework that made sense if sitcom citizenship involved traffic lights, parks, and schools. The issues raised by the Lear programs (racial equality, feminism, abortion) were harder to fit in that framework. Samantha Stephens taking on the mayor's office and organizing her neighbors to protest a park's destruction were one thing. Maude organizing her neighbors to protest abortion restrictions is far more threatening and something that did *not* appear within Lear's shows. Thus, Maude does not take on abortion within the neighborhood; instead, she grapples with it within her family and reaches a personal catharsis, just like (ideally) the viewers at home. "Conversation in the home; how bad can that be?" Lear sheepishly asked Laura Z. Hobson. The question could perhaps also be asked to network executives and their advertisers. By domesticating citizenship, the Lear sitcoms could explicitly address socio-political issues within the constraints of television's hegemony.

Besides industrial limitations, though, this domestication also can be connected to changing conceptions of "good citizenship." Increasingly in the late 1960's and 1970's, the definition of the Cold War citizen (and his or her attendant rights, responsibilities, and

values) was challenged by various political and cultural perspectives. The concept of "the personal is political," first developed within the women's liberation movement (and related to the similar strategy of consciousness raising), questioned the idealization of a citizen as someone solely defined by political or civic participation. Writing in 1969, Carol Hanisch argued that "personal problems," such as childcare and housework, "were political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time."[423] While Hanisch was certainly not arguing for a retrenchment of civic engagement, she suggested that a person who adopted notions of gender equality within the home was equally as good a citizen as someone who fought for women's voting rights in the public sphere.[424] Alternatively, political conservatives increasingly focused their attention on the personal as well, seeking to find what Lisa McGirr has referred to as "a search for authenticity" through their "middle-class counterrevolution against 1960s 'permissiveness.'"[425] Seen through the rise of evangelical Christianity and cultural movements promoting family values and strong marriages, this trend, like its liberal counterpart, framed the idealized citizen as less a neighborhood crusader (although this remained an important component of conservative politics) and more of a strong family member.

For many Americans, the concept of the "personal is political," both in its radical form or in its conservative co-optation, would play out within the endless debates surrounding the family that would serve as "the battlegrounds on which conservatives

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[423] Carol Hanisch, "The Personal Is Political," January 2006, Writings by Carol Hansich, accessed April 18, 2014, http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html.
[424] See Doug Rossinow, "'The Revolution is About Our Lives': The New Left's Counterculture," in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960's and 70's*, eds. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, 99-124 (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002).
[425] Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 243.

would wage war against liberalism" throughout the 1970's.[426] This did not mean that such cultural debates lacked *any* political component, a fact that should be evident from the myriad of "culture wars" within the political sphere of the 1970's and beyond. Rather, what was happening was a broadening of the scope of such conflicts. If Cold War citizenship rested on assumptions surrounding the supremacy of the nuclear family and domesticity, the questioning of those assumptions could result in the alteration of citizenship itself. The focus of citizenship could switch from the surrounding neighborhood and world (the public sphere) to the home itself (the private sphere). In their domesticating of citizenship, Norman Lear and his sitcoms recognized that the domestic sphere and the family were now, as Richard Adler pointed out, "a political arena…*the* political arena" in American culture.[427] Political and cultural debates would now take place both *in* and *out* of the home, with the former site being as equally important as the latter.

The significance of the Lear domestication becomes clearer with a reexamination of the Queens-set article that began this chapter. The Rawald family believed the Bunkers were recluses, who shirked their responsibility to participate in the affairs of their community. In making this judgment, they were effectively using the criteria of Cold War citizenship and civic participation promoted in older sitcoms. From Lear's perspective, though, the Bunkers may have been recluses but they were equally important citizens as the Rawalds, not just through their own actions but through their ability to

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[426] Robert Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York City, NY: Hill and Wang, 2012), 310. Throughout the book, Self especially documents how these battles both had *private, individual* components and *public, political* components, and how the two aspects are related to each other.

[427] Adler, xxxix.

inspire viewers. Archie Bunker may not have joined a bowling league or worked at a church fundraiser, but he learned to tolerate racial minorities and ideally could help audience members to do the same. Such an approach may have been necessitated by the limitations of the television industry, but it also depicted the domestic sphere as the central arena for potentially more important socio-political change than the behavior engaged in by the Rawalds within their neighborhood. The characters of *All in the Family* and their audience demonstrated their citizenship by acting within the "political arena" of the home. In other words, both Archie and his viewers could become good citizens without leaving "that damn chair."

Changing Citizenship

In going from Jim Anderson to Julia Baker to Archie Bunker, the suburban sitcom genre was marked by both significant change and consistency. Norman Lear's idealized citizen, who could become more racially or socially enlightened through viewing sitcom families, differed in emphasis from the idealized citizens targeted by *Father Knows Best* or *The Donna Reed Show*, who were expected to improve their *neighborhoods*, not necessarily their social philosophy. This difference reflects television producers' intent on making the domestic sphere the central arena of civic participation. As striking as this difference appeared, it was not a complete reversal of the themes within older suburban sitcoms. To begin with, the sitcom genre continued to be perceived as a useful instrument of communicating civic values. Even as the Cold War consensus broke down amid socio-political tumult, men like Norman Lear shared the ideals of Robert Young or Donna Reed that the family sitcom could continue to positively influence "good citizens."

More importantly, the prominence of family and the domestic sphere within the sitcoms of the 1970's built upon the link that older sitcoms had made between family and citizenship. As earlier chapters indicated, older sitcom citizens were motivated by domestic concerns to resolve civic problems through the work of their family, a balancing act that was not always harmonious. The Lear sitcoms would resolve this potential tension by focusing entirely on the family as the key to productive citizenship. Because of this, even as Lear's programs offered newly politicized messages, they arguably stressed domesticity more prominently than even the first generation of suburban sitcoms. Family, not the traditional concepts of civic or political participation, would be the central theme of good citizenship that would persist throughout sitcom cycles.

Thus, while television critics bemoaned the increase of "simplistic" family sitcoms of the late 1970's and 1980's (such as *Happy Days* or *Growing Pains*), the trend seems entirely logical considering the prominence of domesticity within the previous generations of sitcoms. The relatively socially conservative programs that emerged to supplant Lear's generally liberal television shows offered different political values, but were still rooted within the same assumptions surrounding family, citizenship, and self-improvement. The blueprint of citizenship formed within the suburban sitcoms of the Cold War consensus was still clearly relevant, yet it would require adaptation to fit changing political and social needs of the 1970's and beyond. The final, concluding section of this project will focus on how the model of sitcom citizenship continues to adapt, particularly within the neoliberal politics of the following decades in which citizenship is again linked to the importance of the neighborhood.

Conclusion

The Persistence of Sitcom Citizenship in the Post-Postwar Era

In 2005, BBC Trust member David Liddiment produced a documentary entitled *Who Killed the Sitcom?* The film declared the genre was more or less dead, having lost its impact within both American and British television markets. Liddiment said the rise of reality television was a major factor, but he also noted that "the paradigm of the traditional sitcom family, which was at the core of lots of successful sitcoms, is no longer the same."[428] Liddiment's analysis of the genre is debatable; after all, numerous hit television comedies have emerged since his documentary was completed. What is harder to refute though is his claim that the *family* sitcom genre is in decline. In a 2011 rundown of successful contemporary sitcoms (including *The Big Bang Theory, How I Met Your Mother*, and *Parks and Recreation*) the *Hollywood Reporter*'s Tim Goodman lists very few family comedies: only *Modern Family* and *The Middle* come anywhere close to depicting a "nuclear family."[429] The style of domestic comedy represented by *Father Knows Best* (or even *Maude*) has seemingly been supplanted by sitcoms focused on the workplace or relationships.

By this logic, then, if the sitcom itself is weakened, the *suburban sitcom*, with its unabashedly domestic focus, is dying. However, simply surveying contemporary television is perhaps insufficient. Viewers may have trouble finding a family sitcom on the first-run programming of ABC, CBS, or NBC, but audiences are hardly bound by

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[428] Jason Deans, "Liddiment Debates Death of the Sitcom," *The Guardian*, May 9, 2005, online, accessed April 18, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/media/2005/may/09/broadcasting.channel4.
[429] Tim Goodman, "The Sitcom Isn't Dead: It's Thriving," April 8, 2011, *SFGate*.org, accessed April 18, 2014, http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/Tim-Goodman-The-sitcom-isn-t-dead-it-s-thriving-2375430.php.

such limitations anymore. During the 1990's, viewers seeking suburban sitcoms could easily discover them on nostalgia driven cable channels such as Nickelodeon (during its "Nick at Nite" programming block) or TV Land. Even today, despite expanding its broadcasting to include original programming and more contemporary shows, TV Land continues to air suburban sitcoms such as *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, *The Brady Bunch*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and *All in the Family*. For those unsatisfied with TV Land's increasingly contemporary image, the lesser known channel "Me-TV" (Memorable Entertainment Television) proudly proclaims to *only* feature "shows from the '50s through the '80s," and is likely the only cable channel to consistently air programming such as *The Donna Reed Show* and *My Three Sons*.[430]

Even these channels represent only a small way that prospective viewers of postwar suburban sitcoms can still consume these programs. The vast majority of the shows surveyed in this project are available for purchase on DVD. Many are also legally available for viewing online through such sites as Hulu or Amazon. For example, the company Shout! Factory has released the complete run of *Father Knows Best*, with four seasons of it available as streaming video on Amazon's Instant Video feature. For programs lacking full DVD releases (such as *Maude*), slightly less legal means of viewing can be accessed through a Google search. Furthermore, the Internet has allowed fans of these sitcoms to organize in ways previously difficult to do. A Facebook group titled "We Love the *Donna Reed Show*" has over 700 members and proclaims its goal is

[430] "FAQ," MeTV, accessed April 18, 2014, http://www.metvnetwork.com/faq/.

to "get all the remaining seasons…on DVD."[431] With all of these options available for fans to stay connected to their favorite shows, the postwar suburban sitcom is far from dead, even in 2014.

Nevertheless, just because viewers can watch these shows, are they experiencing it in the same way that audiences in the 1950's and 1960's did? Do these programs maintain their potential to influence or mold good citizens? The *Donna Reed* Facebook group invites viewers to post memories of favorite episodes, share memorabilia associated with the show, and criticize current programming as not being up to par, activities which can also be found on Me-TV's Facebook site. Such relatively simple, nostalgic actions seem to bear little relation to the civic spirited behavior postwar viewers were encouraged to emulate. Fans tuning into Me-TV or throwing a DVD into their computer undoubtedly enjoy reconnecting with a television favorite. They may even believe that viewers today can continue to learn family values from programs that lack sex and violence, a common observation among online reviewers of the shows. Still, it seems unlikely that even ardent fans of the show would proffer, say, *Father Knows Best* as a model for solving neighborhood problems of racism, crime, or pollution.

I would argue, though, that the model of civic activism as defined in shows like *FKB* or other suburban sitcoms is in fact very much relevant. The shows themselves may have turned into essentially nostalgic icons of a bygone time, but their civic messages persist. The suburban sitcom model of good citizenship emphasized the concepts of entitlement, a weak government, and a strong nuclear family as the foundation of

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[431] "We Love *The Donna Reed Show*," Facebook, accessed April 18, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/pages/We-Love-The-Donna-Reed-Show/116376438431107.

activism related to such issues as charity, community safety, and the environment. While the previous chapter analyzed how this model adapted to fit the more personalized politics of the 1970's, the overall assumptions present within it were still seen even on the more "realistic" sitcoms of Norman Lear. In that same vein, this model of citizenship did not only reflect central aspects of both liberal and conservative political movements of the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's, the decades when these sitcoms were on the air. Rather, its messages, in both identical and varied forms, continued to appear in the political discourse of subsequent decades as well.

For example, George H.W. Bush famously described in 1988 "a thousand points of light," his metaphor for the "tens of thousands of ethnic, religious, social…neighborhood, regional, and other organizations, all of them varied, voluntary, and unique," all groups who served their local communities.[432] In his inaugural address in 1989, Bush went on to discuss the "new engagement in the lives of others, a new activism, hands-on and involved, that gets the job done…a patriotism that finds its expression in taking part and pitching in."[433] Bush was following the lead of his presidential predecessor, Ronald Reagan, who, as this project's introduction noted, emphasized the efforts of the individual American citizen in solving community problems. Without an engaged, active citizenry (or family), the country would become much weaker.

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[432] George H.W. Bush, "1988 Republican National Convention Acceptance Address," American Rhetoric, accessed April 18, 2014, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/georgehbush1988rnc.htm.
[433] George H.W. Bush, "Inaugural Address of George Bush," The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, 2008, accessed April 18, 2014, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/bush.asp.

More than a decade later, George W. Bush trumpeted the similar idea of "compassionate conservatism" during his successful 2000 presidential campaign. In a July 1999 speech, the younger Bush proclaimed that government "can't put hope in our hearts or a sense of purpose in our lives." He instead said that government's role was to serve "those who are serving their neighbors."[434] In his book explaining the meaning of "compassionate conservatism," Marvin Olasky fleshed out Bush's point by highlighting the example of Indianapolis Mayor Steve Goldsmith, whose goal was "enough government participation to be supportive, not enough to distort."[435] Goldsmith supported churches running neighborhood parks and after school programs. His initiatives "promoted the work of community groups that," for example, "push residents to pick up trash instead of whining about it."[436] When George W. Bush won the presidency, he stressed in his inaugural speech that "compassion is the work of a nation, not just a government…personal responsibility is valued and expected."[437] Reagan and both President Bushes, despite their different terminologies, envisioned a culture of civic participation similar to that espoused of the suburban sitcoms, a linkage alluded to but underexplored in media barbs about such politicians desiring a return to the "*Father Knows Best* family."[438]

These models of activism, though, should not simply be linked to the policies of any individual presidency. Instead, both the aforementioned political programs and

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[434] Marvin Olasky, *Compassionate Conservatism: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Can Transform America* (New York City, NY: The Free Press, 2000), 218-19.
[435] Olasky, 62.
[436] Olasky, 79.
[437] George W. Bush, "Inaugural Speech of George W. Bush: January 20, 2001," The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, 2008, accessed April 18, 2014, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/21st_century/gbush1.asp.
[438] Molly Ivins, *Molly Ivins Can't Say That, Can She?* (New York City, NY: Vintage Books, 1992), 192.

sitcom citizenship fit neatly within the overall economic and social framework of neoliberalism, which as Lisa Duggan writes, emerged in the 1970's and 1980's to promote "a leaner, meaner government (fewer social services, more 'law and order'), a state-supported but 'privatized' economy, [and] an invigorated and socially responsible civil society."[439] David Harvey describes the watchwords of neoliberalism as "individualism, private property, personal responsibility, and family values," concepts that in varying forms transcend any one politician or party.[440] Neoliberal politicians promised that "privatization and deregulation combined with competition…[would] eliminate bureaucratic red tape, increase efficiency and productivity, improve quality, and reduce costs."[441] Personal responsibility steps in to replace the role of state-run social services, with "individual success or failure…interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings." While the model of sitcom citizenship may have taken its cues from Progressive-era volunteerism and postwar liberalism, its overall messages are similar to the tenets of late-twentieth century neoliberalism.

The ubiquity of this model as well as its problematic aspects may be seen in the early 2000's fervor for communitarianism, as exemplified by author Robert Putnam's best-seller *Bowling Alone*. Putnam is hardly a nostalgia buff or a conservative ideologue seeking to recreate the 1950's; he admitted in his book that the postwar period was not a "'golden age,' especially for those Americans who were marginalized because of their

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[439] Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2003), 10.
[440] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York City, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 23.
[441] Harvey, 65.

race or gender or social class or sexual orientation."[442] Nevertheless, the solutions offered in *Bowling Alone*, with their emphasis on a highly specific form of communitarian activism, are strikingly similar to the solutions found within postwar suburban sitcoms.

At one point in the book, for example, Putnam explicitly proffers the work of the family and the individual citizen as the foundation for an ideal community, using the hypothetical Smith family as an example:

> Bob and Rosemary Smith, parents of six-year-old Jonathan, live in an urban community that is full of both delights and troubles…the Smiths' local elementary school is a shambles: teachers are demoralized, paint is chipping off the walls, and there is no money for extracurricular activities…The Smiths can take their son into a private school or they can stick around and try to improve the public school…Let's suppose that the Smiths want to stick around and start a Parent-Teacher Association at Jonathan's school…Let's assume the Smiths succeed in starting the PTA, and several months later it has an active membership of seventeen parents…the PTA serves to establish and enforce norms of commitment and performance on the part of school officials, teachers, and perhaps even students.[443]

Putnam's example clearly describes a political problem and behavior with a resolution rooted in civic participation. The fictional Smiths were faced with a run-down school, similar perhaps to the dangerous traffic corner in *Bewitched* or the old clubhouse on the *Donna Reed Show*.

Like their sitcom counterparts, the Smiths do not question the broader implications of their situation. They instead form a Parent-Teacher Association and work to improve "commitment and performance" from teachers and students, in the same way that George Baxter saved a park or Samantha Stephens convinced the mayor to put in a traffic signal. While the level of responsibility may be different in these examples, the

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[442] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York City, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 17.
[443] Putnam, 289-90.

onus is always on the individual, private citizens to work for their expected services. If you want to save a park, come up with a plan. If you want improved schools, start a Parent-Teacher Association. If you want a traffic light, you are not just going to have to ask for it, you are going to have to personally convince your elected official why it's important. These problems cannot be solved by the state alone; they require motivated, active citizens and their families to create and implement solutions.

In another chapter, Putnam uses the example of John Lambert and Andy Boschma, two men who met each other through a local bowling league. Boschma (a 33-year-old accountant) would surprisingly donate a kidney to the ailing Lambert (a 64-year-old retired hospital employee). Putnam notes that "in addition to their differences in profession and generation, Boschma is white and Lambert is African American. That they bowled together makes all the difference."[444] The story gently suggests that racism and prejudice can perhaps be conquered through the simple act of neighborhood participation. In many ways, it is little different than the individual kindnesses found within suburban sitcoms, in which racism can be fought by Jim Anderson inviting the Hispanic "Frank Smith" into his home or by Donna Stone taking the "Geisha Girl" Jiyo shopping.

Putnam's examples, like suburban sitcoms, are rooted in assumptions that ignore (or downplay) the potential for either state-driven or socially radical solutions. The individual citizen must solve community problems. The family, specifically a nuclear family, helps to motivate and guide such citizens. The solutions offered to the hypothetical Smiths involve either "moving to a private school" or forming an involved Parent Teacher Association, neither of which involve "more state funding" or "better

[444] Putnam, 28.

trained teachers," for example. The fact that other families at the school may be single parents with no time for the P.T.A. or who may not agree with the socio-cultural assumptions of such a group is also not an option. Like neoliberalism, compassionate conservatism, and sitcom citizenship, Putnam works from the assumption that his idealized subjects are a committed, active, relatively nuclear family. There is no place for the politicized solutions mentioned in previous chapters that threaten domesticity and which were routinely discouraged on suburban sitcoms.

In fact, Putnam suggests that if citizens do not fit this particular model, problems become much more difficult to solve:

> Citizens in civic communities expect better government, and (in part through their own efforts) they get it…police close more cases when citizens monitor neighborhood comings and goings. Child welfare departments do a better job of 'family preservation' when neighbors and relatives provide social support to troubled parents. Public schools teach better when parents volunteer in classrooms and ensure that kids do their homework. When community involvement is lacking, the burdens on government employees—bureaucrats, social workers, teachers, and so forth—are that much greater and success that much more elusive.[445]

Even more so than the example of the Smiths, this passage reflects the centrality of private, family-based initiative to the communitarian solutions proposed by Putnam. In this case, it is not just important for groups like the neighborhood watch or the P.T.A. to exist, but that such groups are necessary for effective service. The work of parents volunteering at schools or neighbors providing for each other improves and implicitly replaces the insufficient work of government. If you or your neighbors do not perform these duties or fail to do so effectively (or do not have the means, ability, or familial connections to do so), success for all proves "that much more elusive." The central

[445] Putnam, 346.

message of every sitcom analyzed in this project, from *Ozzie and Harriet* to *Maude*, continues to be seen in Putnam's analysis: without the "good citizen" and thus, implicitly, the "good family," the quality of life in the community dramatically decreases. The civic participation of individual citizens and their families is still very much needed.

Despite upheavals within the television industry, then, sitcom citizenship lives on. The civic solutions outlined by communitarians like Robert Putnam or neoliberal politicians such as the Bushes could effectively be found within the scripts of episodes of *Father Knows Best*. As president, Barack Obama, despite his criticism of Ronald Reagan's simplistic faith in the individual, has also emphasized the tenets of sitcom citizenship: personal action, rooted in community involvement and the family. In 2009, he established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, proclaiming that "the change that Americans are looking for will not come from government alone. There is a force for good greater than government. It is an expression of faith, this yearning to give back."[446] Obama's White House also established a "Fatherhood Pledge," promoting a "commitment to family and community" and recognizing that "when dads aren't around, young people are more likely to drop out of school [and] use drugs."[447] In this case, the work of a strong family, not necessarily government programs, ensured a healthier community. Obama and his Republican predecessors and foes may regard the role of the state differently, yet each viewed (and

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[446] "Obama Announces White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships," Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, February 5, 2009, accessed April 18, 2014, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/ObamaAnnouncesWhiteHouseOfficeofFaith-basedandNeighborhoodPartnerships.

[447] "The President's Fatherhood Pledge," National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed April 18, 2014, http://fatherhood.gov/pledge.

view) individual responsibility, civic participation, and the family as driving forces behind the solving of the nation's problems.

Robert Putnam, like George W. Bush or Barack Obama or doubtless the majority of Americans, has little to say about the postwar suburban sitcom. When illustrating the decline of kinship connections and civic participation, Putnam references *I Love Lucy* and *All in the Family*, not *Father Knows Best* or *Donna Reed*. Perhaps these writers or thinkers realize that for modern audiences, the postwar suburban sitcoms explored in this project seem distant and outdated, shows that can be joked about or enjoyed by traditionalists on DVD and fringe cable channels. They, like viewers watching *Donna Reed* on Me-TV, may be unlikely to think of these shows as offering any sort of blueprint for civic solutions. However, there is no need for any of them to explicitly make that connection: it was made years ago by different policymakers, thinkers, and television audiences.

In this sense, the model of citizenship defined and promoted within the postwar suburban sitcom has transcended the genre itself. Americans today may view the title character of *Father Knows Best*, Jim Anderson, as a symbol for traditional family values, not idealized citizenship. As opposed to postwar audiences, they may see little connection between this television father and the problems facing their own communities. Nevertheless, they, like Jim Anderson and his sitcom brethren, remain called upon to be active participants in their neighborhoods, taking on more and more individual responsibilities in the name of family and civic duty. Like Jim, these contemporary citizens are called upon to aid their neighbors, clean up their neighborhoods, and improve

schools. Furthermore, they are assumed to be a part of a family that serves as both their motivating influence and a support network that will aid them (and limit them) in all of these activities. The individual American citizen (and family) remains in the discourse of conservatives and liberals alike as the foundation of community strength. Americans may no longer find *Father Knows Best* relevant, but they continue to carry the burden of civic responsibility created by it and other suburban sitcoms. Both in the postwar period and now, the "good citizen" is still the "sitcom citizen."

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Appendix

This is a list of shows and episodes analyzed for this project. For each show, I have included a list of the main characters and a brief sketch of the relationships they have with each other. The episodes listed are those cited in this project and are listed chronologically.

The Addams Family
ABC, September 1964-April 1966 (64 episodes).
Characters: Gomez and Morticia Addams (husband/wife), Fester (uncle), Wednesday (daughter), Pugsley (son), Lurch (butler), Grandmama (Gomez's mother).
Episodes Cited: 2x9 "Morticia, the Sculptress" (1965)
Additional Episodes Reviewed: 1x4 "Gomez the Politician" (1964), 1x21 "The Addams Family in Court" (1965), 1x30 "Progress and the Addams Family" (1965), 2x5 "Gomez, the People's Choice" (1965), 2x8 "Morticia, the Writer" (1965).

The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet
ABC, October 1952-March 1966 (425 episodes).
Characters: Ozzie and Harriet Nelson (husband/wife), David (son), Ricky (son), June (David's eventual wife), Kris (Ricky's eventual wife)
Episodes Cited: 1x21 "The Traffic Signal" (1953), 5x19 "The Duenna" (1957), 6x21 "Old Band Pavilion" (1958)
Additional Episodes Reviewed: 1x4 "The Fall Guy" (1952), 1x18 "Rover Boys" (1953), 1x35 "The Play's the Thing" (1953), 5x12 "Ozzie's Busy Christmas" (1956), 6x3 "Treasurer's Report" (1957), 8x31 "No News for Harriet" (1960), 13x16 "The Petition" (1965), 14x15 "Kris, the Little Helper" (1966)

All in the Family
CBS, January 1971-April 1979 (208 episodes).
Characters: Archie and Edith Bunker (husband/wife), Gloria (daughter), Mike (Gloria's husband), Stephanie (grandniece), The Jeffersons (neighbors)
Episodes Cited: 1x5 "Judging Books by Covers" (1971), 2x6 "The Election Story" (1971), 2x8 "The Blockbuster" (1971), 3x1 "Archie and the Editorial" (1972), 3x5 "Lionel Steps Out" (1972), 3x20 "Archie is Branded" (1973), 3x23 "Gloria, the Victim" (1973), 6x4 "Archie, the Hero" (1975), 6x24 "Edith's Night Out" (1976), 7x19 "Stretch Cunningham, Goodbye" (1977), 8x3 "Cousin Liz" (1977), 8x4 and 8x5 "Edith's 50th Birthday, Parts I and II" (1977), 8x10 and 8x11 "Archie and the KKK" (1977), 9x20 "Stephanie's Conversion" (1979)
Additional Episodes Reviewed: 1x2 "Writing the President" (1971), 1x8 "Lionel Moves Into the Neighborhood" (1971), 1x11 "Gloria Discovers Women's Lib" (1971), 1x13 "The First and the Last Supper" (1971), 2x3 "Archie and the Lock Up" (1971), 2x21 "Sammy's Visit" (1972), 2x24 "Maude" (1972), 3x4 "Gloria and the Riddle" (1972), 3x11 "Mike's Appendix" (1972), 3x13 "Archie and the Bowling Team" (1972), 3x24 "The Battle of the Month" (1973), 4x1 "We're Having a Heat Wave" (1973), 4x8 "The

Games Bunkers Play" (1973), 4x20 "Lionel's Engagement" (1974), 5x3 "The Bunkers and Inflation: Part 3, Edith the Job Hunter" (1974), 5x4 "The Bunkers and Inflation: Part 4, Archie's Raise" (1974), 5x12 "George and Archie Make a Deal" (1974), 5x14 "Mike's Friend" (1974), 5x18 "All's Fair" (1975), 5x19 "Amelia's Divorce" (1975), 6x7 "Mike Faces Life" (1975, 6x8 "Edith Breaks Out" (1975), 6x12 "Archie's Civil Rights" (1975), 6x14 "Birth of the Baby, Part 1" (1975), 6x19 "Mike's Move" (1976), 7x22 "Archie the Liberal" (1977), 9x22 "The Family Next Door" (1979)

Bewitched
ABC, September 1964-March 1972 (254 episodes).
Characters: Darrin and Samantha Stephens (husband/wife), Endora (Samantha's mother), Tabitha (daughter), Adam (son), Larry Tate (Darrin's boss)
Episodes Cited: 1x4 "It Shouldn't Happen to a Dog" (1964), 1x6 "Little Pitchers Have Big Fears" (1964), 1x7 "The Witches Are Out" (1964), 1x8 "Witch or Wife?" (1964), 1x23 "Red Light, Green Light" (1965), 1x34 "Remember the Main" (1965), 2x30 and 2x31 "Follow That Witch, Parts I and II" (1966), 4x1 "Long Live the Queen" (1967), 5x9 "Samantha Fights City Hall" (1968), 6x7 "To Trick or Treat or Not to Trick or Treat" (1969), 7x13 "Sisters at Heart" (1970)
Additional Episodes Reviewed: 1x5 "Help, Help, Don't Save Me" (1964), 1x35 "Eat at Mario's" (1965), 3x21 "The Trial and Error of Aunt Clara" (1967), 5x3 "Samantha on the Keyboard" (1968), 5x24 "The Battle of Burning Oak" (1969), 5x25 "Samantha's Power Failure" (1969), 5x26 "Samantha Twitches for UNICEF" (1969), 6x21 "What Makes Darrin Run?" (1970), 8x8 "TV or Not TV" (1971)

The Brady Bunch
ABC, September 1969-March 1974 (117 episodes).
Characters: Mike and Carol Brady (husband/wife), Greg (son), Peter (son), Bobby (son), Marcia (daughter), Jan (daughter), Cindy (daughter), Alice (housekeeper)
Episodes Cited: 2x19 "The Liberation of Marcia Brady" (1971), 2x22 "Double Parked" (1971)
Additional Episodes Reviewed: 1x6 "A Clubhouse is Not a Home" (1969), 1x24 "The Grass is Always Greener" (1970), 2x14 "Where's There Smoke" (1971), 2x18 "Our Son, the Man" (1971), 2x24 "Tell It Like It Is" (1971), 3x23 "The Fender Benders" (1972), 4x4 "Today, I Am a Freshman" (1972), 5x14 "Kelly's Kids" (1974), 5x15 "The Driver's Seat" (1974)

Dennis the Menace
CBS, October 1959-July 1963 (146 episodes).
Characters: Henry and Alice Mitchell (husband/wife), Dennis (son), George Wilson (neighbor), Martha (George's wife), John Wilson (George's brother), Eloise (John's wife)
Episodes Cited: 1x30 "Dennis by Proxy" (1960), 2x15 "Dennis, the Campaign Manager" (1961), 2x28 "Woodman, Spare That Tree" (1961), 4x1 "The Chinese Girl" (1962)

Additional Episodes Reviewed: 2x43 “The Raffle Ticket” (1960), 3x3 “Keep Off the Grass” (1961), 4x3 “Dennis and the Circular Circumstances” (1962), 4x4 “The Little Judge” (1962), 4x6 “Dennis in Gypsyland” (1962), 4x20 “Dennis Goes to Washington” (1963), 4x29 “The Three F’s” (1963)

The Dick Van Dyke Show
CBS, October 1961-June 1966 (158 episodes).
Characters: Rob and Laura Petrie (husband/wife), Richie (son), Buddy Sorrell and Sally Rogers (Rob’s co-workers), Jerry and Millie Helper (neighbors)
Episodes Cited: 1x4 “Washington vs. the Bunny” (1961), 1x8 “To Tell or Not To Tell” (1961), 3x22 “My Part-Time Wife” (1964), 4x4 “The Vigilante Ripped My Sports Coat” (1964), 5x16 “I Do Not Choose to Run” (1966), 5x17 “The Making of a Councilman” (1966)
Additional Episodes Reviewed: 1x11 “Forty-Four Tickets” (1961), 1x28 “The Bad Old Days” (1962), 4x28 “A Show of Hands” (1965)

The Donna Reed Show
ABC, September 1958-March 1966 (275 episodes).
Characters: Alex and Donna Stone (husband/wife), Jeff (son), Mary (daughter), Trisha (adopted daughter)
Episodes Cited: 1x3 “The Hike” (1958), 1x6 “The Foundling” (1958), 1x7 “Three Part Mother” (1958), 1x10 “A Guest in the House” (1958), 1x13 “The Busy Body” (1958), 1x25 “The Ideal Wife” (1959), 2x19 “Just a Housewife” (1960), 2x22 “A Place to Go” (1960), 2x31 “The Career Woman” (1960), 3x4 “The Love Letter” (1960), 3x9 “Never Marry a Doctor” (1960), 3x14 “Someone is Watching” (1960), 3x16 “Character Building” (1961), 3x22 “The Geisha Girl” (1961), 3x34 “The Good Guys and the Bad Guys” (1961), 4x12 “Alex, the Professor” (1961), 5x8 “Rebel With a Cause” (1962), 5x17 “A Woman’s Place” (1963), 5x23 “Pioneer Woman” (1963), 8x17 “My Son, the Councilman” (1966)
Additional Episodes Reviewed: All episodes from seasons 1 to 5 (1958-1963)

Father Knows Best
CBS (first season), then NBC, October 1954-May 1960 (203 episodes).
Characters: Jim and Margaret Anderson (husband/wife), Bud (son), Betty (daughter), Kathy (daughter)
Episodes Cited: 1x2 “Lesson in Citizenship” (1954), 1x11 “Margaret Goes Dancing” (1954), 1x26 “Close Decision” (1955), 2x3 “Lessons in Civics” (1955), 2x26 “The Persistent Guest” (1956), 2x30 “Betty, Girl Engineer” (1956), 3x17 “Margaret Hires a Gardener” (1957), 3x19 “Brief Holiday” (1957), 3x27 “Safety First” (1957), 4x5 “Sentenced to Happiness” (1957), 4x16 “Father’s Biography” (1958), 4x19 “Margaret’s Other Family” (1958), 4x24 “Betty’s Crusade” (1958), 4x28 “A Medal for Margaret” (1958), 4x33 “Betty Finds a Cause” (1958), 5x5 “Frank’s Family Tree” (1958), 5x9 “Betty, the Pioneer Woman” (1958), 5x10 “Fair Exchange” (1958), 5x17 “The Good Samaritan” (1959), 5x20 “Hard Luck Leo” (1959), 5x28 “An Extraordinary Woman”

(1959), 6x3 “The Gardener’s Big Day” (1959), 6x12 “Good Joke on Mom” (1959), 6x15 “Bud Hides Behind a Skirt” (1960). Unaired: “24 Hours in Tyrantland” (1959).
Additional Episodes Reviewed: All episodes of the show (1954-1960)

Gilmore Girls
The WB (first six seasons), then the CW, October 2000-May 2007 (153 episodes).
Characters: Lorelai Gilmore (protagonist), Rory (daughter). There were many more supporting characters, but these are the ones referenced in this project.
Episodes Cited: 1x14 “That Damn Donna Reed” (2001).

Good Times
CBS, February 1974-August 1979 (133 episodes).
Characters: James and Florida Evans (husband/wife), J.J. (son), Michael (son), Thelma (son), Willona (neighbor).
Episodes Cited: 1x12 “The Checkup” (1974), 2x1 “Florida Flips” (1974), 2x19 “The Dinner Party” (1975), 3x9 “The Politicians” (1975), 3x11 “Florida’s Protest” (1975)
Additional Episodes Reviewed: 1x3 “Getting Up the Rent” (1974), 1x9 “The Visitor” (1974), 1x10 and 1x11 “The Gang: Part 1 and 2” (1974), 3x2 “The Family Gun” (1975), 3x20 “The Investigation” (1976)

Hazel
NBC (first four seasons), then CBS, September 1961-April 1966 (154 episodes).
Characters: George and Dorothy Baxter (husband/wife), Hazel (maid), Harold (son), Harvey Griffin (George’s client), Steve and Barbara Baxter (George’s brother and wife), Susie (their daughter)
Episodes Cited: 1x1 “Hazel and the Playground” (1961), 1x27 “Three Little Cubs” (1962), 1x29 “Hazel Quits” (1962), 2x8 “Mr. B on the Bench” (1962), 2x21 “Hazel and the Stockholder’s Meeting” (1963), 2x22 “Hazel’s Day Off” (1963), 2x28 “Hazel Sounds Her ‘A’” (1963), 3x30 “Campaign Manager” (1964)
Additional Episodes Reviewed: 1x4 “A Matter of Principle” (1964), 1x28 “Bringing Out the Johnsons” (1962), 2x6 “A Four-Bit Word to Chew On” (1962), 2x15 “Top Secret” (1963), 2x26 “The Hazel Walk” (1963), 3x7 “Hazel Scores a Touchdown” (1963), 3x9 “The Baby Came C.O.D.” (1963), 3x13 “The Retiring Milkman” (1963), 3x24 “The Countess” (1964), 4x2 “Luncheon with the Governor” (1964), 4x5 “The Flagpole” (1964), 4x11 “A Lesson in Diplomacy” (1964), 4x20 “Bonnie Boy” (1965), 4x23 “Hazel’s Day in Court” (1965), 5x5 “The Holdout” (1965)

Julia
NBC, September 1968-March 1971 (86 episodes).
Characters: Julia Baker (protagonist), Corey (son), Morton Chegley (Julia’s boss), Marie Waggedorn (neighbor), Earl (her son)
Episodes Cited: 1x10 “Paint Your Waggedorn” (1968), 1x18 “Dancer in the Dark” (1969), 3x17 “The Gender Trap” (1971)

Additional Episodes Reviewed: 1x1 “Mama’s Man” (1968), 1x7 “Am I, Pardon the Expression, Blacklisted?” (1968), 1x14 “I’m Dreaming of a Black Christmas” (1968), 1x20 “Sticks and Stones Can Break My Pizza” (1969), 2x19 “Charity Begins With Chegley” (1970), 3x10 “Smoke Scream” (1970)

Leave It to Beaver
CBS (first season), then ABC, October 1957-June 1963 (234 episodes).
Characters: Ward and June Cleaver (husband/wife), Wally (son), Theodore, a.k.a. “The Beaver” (son), Eddie Haskell (Wally’s friend)
Episodes Cited: 2x25 “Beaver and Gilbert” (1959), 4x2 “Beaver’s House Guest” (1960), 4x12 “Beaver and Kenneth” (1960), 5x26 “Lumpy’s Car Trouble” (1962), 6x3 “Wally’s License” (1962)

Maude
CBS, September 1972-April 1978 (141 episodes).
Characters: Walter and Maude Findlay (husband/wife), Carol (Maude’s daughter), Phillip (Carol’s son), Arthur and Vivian Harmon (neighbors), Florida (maid), Mrs. Naugatuck (maid)
Episodes Cited: 1x3 “Maude Meets Florida” (1972), 1x5 “Maude and the Radical” (1972), 1x9 and 1x10 “Maude’s Dilemma, Parts I and II” (1972), 1x12 “The Grass Story” (1972), 2x16 “Maude’s Guest” (1974), 4x1 “The Split” (1975), 4x2 “Consenting Adults” (1975), 4x3 “Rumpus in the Rumpus Room” (1975), 4x4 “Maude’s Big Decision” (1975), 4x5 “The Election” (1975), 4x14 “The Christmas Party” (1975), 4x23 “Carol’s Promotion” (1976), 6x5 “Walter’s Temptation” (1977), 6x9 “The Gay Bar” (1977)
Additional Episodes Reviewed: 1x14 “The Convention” (1973), 1x18 “Florida’s Problem” (1973), 1x21 “The Perfect Marriage” (1973), 2x7 “Maude Takes a Job” (1973), 2x21 “The Tax Audit” (1974), 3x11 “Maude the Boss” (1974), 3x12 “Maude’s New Friend” (1974), 3x18 “The Emergence of Vivian” (1975), 4x19 “Tuckahoe Bicentennial” (1976), 5x19 “Feminine Fulfillment” (1977), 6x17 “Vivian’s Decision” (1978), 6x23 “Maude’s Big Move: Part II” (1978), 6x24 “Maude’s Big Move: Part III” (1978)

My Three Sons
ABC (first five seasons), then CBS, September 1960-August 1972 (380 episodes).
Characters: Steve Douglas (father), Bub (uncle), Charley (Bub’s brother), Mike (son), Robbie (son), Chip (son), Ernie (adopted son), Sally Ann (Mike’s wife), Katie (Robbie’s wife), Polly (Chip’s wife), Barbara (eventually Steve’s wife), Dodie (Barbara’s daughter)
Episodes Cited: 3x1 “Weekend in Tokyo” (1962), 6x18 “Robbie and the Slave Girl” (1966)
Additional Episodes Reviewed: 6x12 “The Hong Kong Story” (1965), 9x19 “Honorable Expectant Grandfather” (1969), 9x23 “Ernie’s Pen Pal” (1969), 12x10 “Katie’s Career” (1971)

Nanny and the Professor
ABC, January 1970-December 1971 (54 episodes).

Characters: Harold Everett (the professor), Phoebe Figalilly (the nanny), Hal (son), Butch (son), Prudence (daughter)
Episodes Cited: 1x10 "I Think That I Shall Never See a Tree" (1970), 2x8 "The Masculine-Feminine Mystique" (1970), 2x23 "Kid Stuff" (1971)

The Patty Duke Show
ABC, September 1963-April 1966 (104 episodes).
Characters: Martin and Natalie Lane (husband/wife), Patty (daughter), Cathy (her identical cousin), Ross (son), Richard (Patty's boyfriend)
Episodes Cited: 2x7 "Patty, the People's Voice" (1964)
Additional Episodes Reviewed: 2x24 "Patty, the Organizer" (1964), 2x9 "Patty and the Peace Corps" (1964), 2x24 "It Takes a Heap of Livin' (1965), 2x31 "Cathy, the Rebel" (1965)