

All in the Family



Television in the 1970s

“Sitcom” - Defined



- “Sitcom” = Situation + Comedy
- A TV series that involves a fixed cast of characters who carry over from episode to episode and who find themselves in a one comedic circumstance after another



- *All in the Family* was a new kind of sitcom in the early 1970s.
 - It involved the same cast of characters who week after week encountered comedic situations
 - BUT it ALSO introduced social realism and controversy to sitcoms
- It was popular with audiences AND it helped to start a national conversation about poverty, racism, sexism, religious bias and politics through a half-hour comedy.

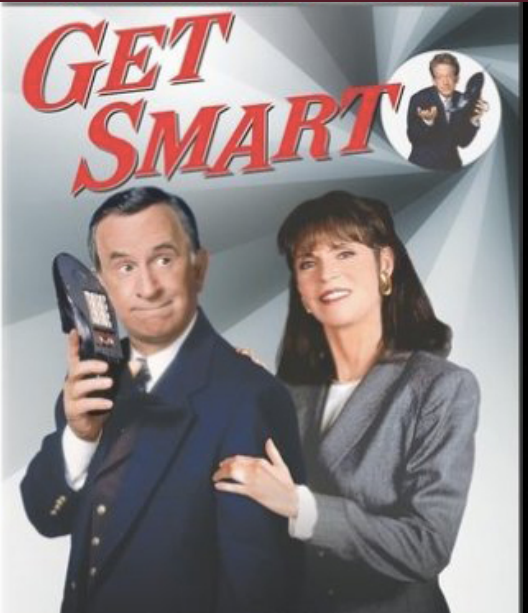
Before: *I Love Lucy*



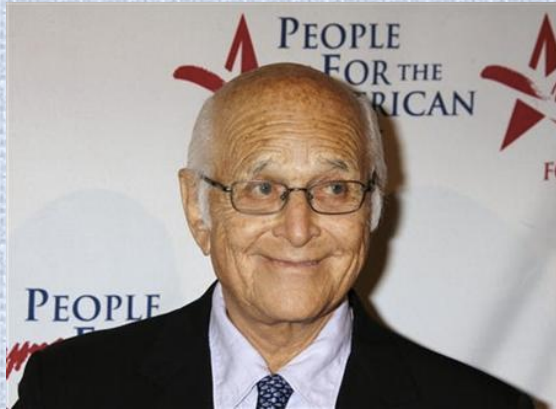
After: *All in the Family*



TV before *All in the Family* (ESCAPISM)



All in the Family's Goal



Norman Lear
(writer/producer/director)
was a proud liberal with a
clear goal for his shows

- Goal:
 - Wanted the show to be funny & popular.
 - ALSO hoped that by making the main character a bigot, American viewers would reject his beliefs.

bigot (noun)

2. One who is strongly partial to one's own group, religion, race, or politics and is intolerant of those who differ.

All in the Family's Goal: Social Realism

Addressing social issues
& family relationships

Realistic (dealing with
real world problems)

Wanted to create a sitcom that was funny but that also paid attention to major social issues like class, race, and generational conflicts.



- Lear developed two pilots for the show.
 - ABC rejected both based on negative audience tests.
 - Lear's agent sent the scripts to *CBS*, which was in the process of changing their line-up to appeal to a more wealthy, urban, younger audiences.
 - CBS's new president wanted to replace old shows like *Lassie* and *Green Acres* to appeal to a younger, more hip audience.
- CBS, although worried about Archie's character, made a 13 episode commitment and scheduled the show to air as a mid-season replacement in January 1971 debut.
 - CBS also hired extra telephone operators to take complaints from offended viewers, but very few calls came in.



Breaking Rules



- The show broke many of primetime tv's previously unbreakable rules:
 - Archie's frequent rants laced with racial and ethnic slurs
 - Gloria and Mike's obviously active sex life
 - The sounds of Archie's belches and flushing toilets were all a degree of reality previously not seen on primetime television.



Reaction to the show

- The immediate reaction from tv critics was mixed.
- Initial ratings were low but its ratings rose over the season.
 - Summer reruns of the series, along with 3 Emmys, exponentially increased viewership.
- *By the beginning of the 1971-1972 season, All in the Family was the most popular show in America.*
 - It held the No. 1 spot for 5 years
 - At the show's peak, 60% of the viewing public were watching the series (more than 50 million viewers nationwide)



Cast of Characters

(The Generation Gap on TV)

The Older Generation:



- **Archie Bunker:** *loud-mouth, Republican, loading dock worker*
- **Edith Bunker:** Archie's *sweet but stupid wife*, the moral heart of the show, often was the voice of reason & the glue that held the divided family together

The Younger Generation:



- **Gloria:** their *rebellious feminist daughter*
- **Michael Stivic:** Gloria's *scruffy, radical (Polish) husband*

Friends, Family and Others

- George Jefferson, Archie's equally opinionated black neighbor
- Lionel Jefferson, friends with Mike, never fails to get the best of Archie
- Maude Findlay, Edith's visiting cousin (from his wife's liberal family)
- One-shot guest appearance: Sammy Davis, Jr.



Sammy Davis, Jr.



- Sammy Davis Jr. was once said to be the "greatest living entertainer in the world." He sang, danced, played instruments, acted, did stand-up--and he was known for his self-deprecating humor.
 - He once heard someone complaining about discrimination, and he said, "You got it easy. I'm a short, ugly, one-eyed, black Jew. What do you think it's like for me?" (He had converted to Judaism.)
- A short stint in the army opened his eyes to the evils of racism.
 - He was often beaten up by bigger white soldiers and given the dirtiest and most dangerous assignments by white officers simply because he was black.
- He helped break down racial barriers in show business in the 1950s and 1960s, especially in Las Vegas, where he often performed.
 - When he started there in the early 1950s, he was not allowed to stay in the hotels he played in, as they refused to take blacks as customers.
- He also stirred up controversy in the 1960s by openly dating, and ultimately marrying, blonde, blue-eyed, Swedish-born actress May Britt.
- He became famous as one of the "Rat Pack", a group of free-wheeling entertainers that included Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra.

“Those Were the Days” (theme song)

Boy the way Glen Miller played,
Songs that made the hit parade,
Guys like us we had it made,
Those were the days,
And you know where you were then,
Girls were girls and men were men,
Mister we could use a man like Herbert Hoover again,
Didn't need no welfare states
Everybody pulled his weight,
Gee our old La Salle ran great,
Those were the days...



- **Anti-hero: someone who lacks heroic qualities** (meaning they are NOT morally good, courageous, or noble. A character who blurs the line between hero and villain and are not quite one or the other.)
- What makes someone an “anti-hero”?
 - May at first look like a villain because deeds/words make him look selfish and uncaring.
 - More complex than first glance. Does bad things but has good motivations in his heart or seeks to redeem himself for his bad behavior.
 - Loveable bad guys

Archie: the Anti-Hero

- Yelled from his lazyboy about “coons” and “hebes,” “spics” and “fags.”
 - Race: “If your spics and your spades want their rightful piece of the American dream, let them get out there and work for it!”
 - Religion: “Feinstein, Feinberg – it all comes to the same thing and I know that tribe!”
 - Ethnicity: “What do you know about it, you dumb Polack?”
 - His daughter and son-in-law’s politics: “I knew we had a couple of pinkos in this house, but I didn’t know we had atheists!”
 - His wife frequently came under fire, with his repeated charge to “stifle yourself, you dingbat!”
- One of TV’s most beloved characters
 - who at the same time both charmed and alienated viewers.



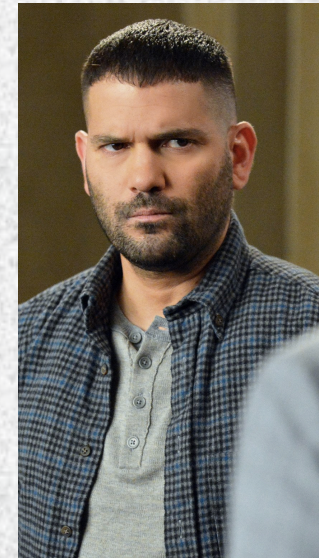
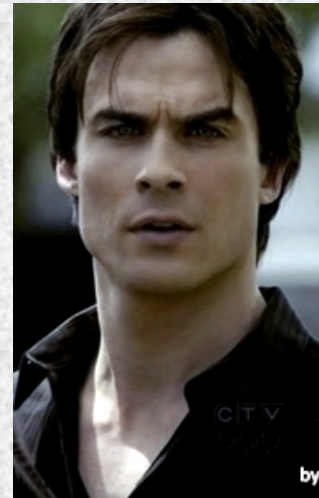
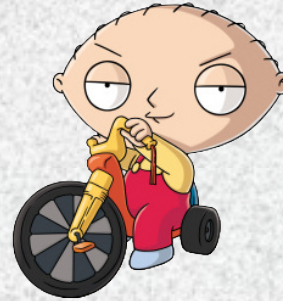


Do you think it's a good idea to give a character like Archie a platform on national television?

“The triumph of *All in the Family* wasn’t that it introduced a racist character we could shake our heads at and disdain. The triumph was that it introduced a racist character we loved. The show paved the way for complexity on scripted television. It’s when TV started to grow up.”

- Jason Katims, co-creator, *Parenthood*

TV’s Anti-Heroes



Critics

- An article in *The New York Times* argued that the show had made Archie into a flattering mirror for bigots:
 - “I don’t think you can be a black-baiter and lovable, or an anti-Semite and lovable,” a critic wrote.
 - Lear responded in his own *Times* piece saying that of course bigots could be loveable, as their families would attest.
- Civil rights advocates also were skeptical of the series.
- A 1974 study found that among teens and adults, all found the show funny but the most bigoted viewers didn’t see the show as satirical and “perhaps most disturbing, saw nothing wrong with Archie’s use of racial and ethnic slurs.”



Impact / Legacy



- Archie became an American tv icon.
- The show became the focus of a heated national debate on whether comedy was an appropriate way to speak out against prejudice and social inequality.
- Ushered in a new generation of comedic programs which focused on themes of important social significance.

Spin-offs

The Jeffersons



Maude

**ARCHIE BUNKER'S
COUSIN
IS NO DINGBAT.**

Unstifleable is the word for Maude.
She's as outspoken as her famous
relative. But all resemblance ends
there. Bea Arthur stars.

**MAUDE.
NEW SHOW, 8PM.
CBS ② ③ ⑨ 11**