

PERFECTION, WRETCHED, NORMAL, AND NOWHERE:
A REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY OF AMERICAN TELEVISION SETTINGS

BY

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ABSTRACT

Drawing inspiration from numerous place image studies in geography and other social sciences, this dissertation examines the senses of place and regional identity shaped by more than seven hundred American television series that aired from 1947 to 2007. Each state's relative share of these programs is described. The geographic themes, patterns, and images from these programs are analyzed, with an emphasis on identity in five American regions: the Mid-Atlantic, New England, the Midwest, the South, and the West. The dissertation concludes with a comparison of television's senses of place to those described in previous studies of regional identity.

For Sue

CONTENTS

List of Tables	vi
Acknowledgments	vii
1. Introduction	1
2. The Mid-Atlantic	28
3. New England	137
4. The Midwest, Part 1: The Great Lakes States	226
5. The Midwest, Part 2: The Trans-Mississippi Midwest	378
6. The South	450
7. The West	527
8. Conclusion	629
Bibliography	664

LIST OF TABLES

1. Television and Population Shares	25
2. Defining Programs and Common Traits: The Mid-Atlantic	26
3. Defining Programs and Common Traits: New England	135
4. Defining Programs and Common Traits: The Great Lakes States	223
5. Defining Programs and Common Traits: The Trans-Mississippi Midwest	376
6. Defining Programs and Common Traits: The South	447
7. Defining Programs and Common Traits: The West	524

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

As work on this dissertation was drawing to a close, a colleague of mine asked how long I'd been at it, and I responded, "My whole life, I think." It was a bit of weary sarcasm, of course, but a statement with some truth. Like most geographers, I acquired the habit of place exploration in childhood. I flipped through aging volumes of the *World Book* encyclopedia, reading about strange exotic places like Zaire, Paraguay, Czechoslovakia, and New Jersey. I traced maps out of atlases. When doing book reviews for English class, I always wrote about the settings of novels. I have been a geographer most of my life, although I was not necessarily aware of that fact until I wandered into Walter Schroeder's Geography of Missouri class my junior year at university.

I've also been fascinated by television history for some time. I grew up with the expected canon of important programs for someone of my vintage: *Cheers*, *The Cosby Show*, *Newhart*, and *M*A*S*H*. I was also familiar with some older shows, through the ubiquitous reruns of *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *Gilligan's Island*, *I Love Lucy*, and, of course, *The Andy Griffith Show*, a program that held near Biblical status in my childhood home. That said, I didn't become truly fascinated with television until the mid-1980s, when cable television's Nickelodeon channel began airing reruns of classic programs like *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *Car 54, Where Are You?*, *The Ann Sothern Show*, *The Danny Thomas Show*, *The Smothers Brothers Show*, and *The Donna Reed Show*. It was about that time that my father bought a copy of Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh's *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows*—a book that he probably never saw again, because it was always in my hands. I poured through it, reading about shows I'd already seen, about those that I knew by reputation, and about the scores of television duds

that I, or anyone else, would probably never see again. Much in the same way that some become fascinated with wine, I became fascinated with television—I was interested in the quality of the stuff, of course, but my tendency was to think that the older or rarer a program, the better.

The idea to combine these two interests—geography and television—did not occur to me for years, but I remember the precise moment when this study began to crystalize. I was living in Kansas, and was travelling to Boston for the wedding of a friend. I decided to fly to JFK Airport and drive from there, unable to resist the chance to spend a day or two in New York City. I was fascinated by New York, as I suppose a lot of people who grew up in small midwestern towns are, and my fascination had been sparked by popular culture. During one of my previous visits, I had spent the better part of a day trying to find the park bench from which Woody Allen and Diane Keaton had observed the Brooklyn Bridge in *Manhattan*—never finding it, of course, because Woody and Diane had actually been looking at the Queensboro Bridge. Most of my pop culture geography served me well though. I knew that the “A” Train was the quickest way to Sugar Hill way up in Harlem, that Tribeca was the triangle below Canal, and that the airport I’d flown into used to be called Idlewild. I knew to pronounce Houston Street as “Howston Street,” and that one never called Greenwich Village by its proper name—it was just “The Village.” I also knew about some of the other microregions of Manhattan—the Upper East Side, the Upper West Side, Midtown, Murray Hill, Chelsea, Alphabet City, the Bowery, Little Italy, Chinatown, and that the Bronx was up and the Battery down. I’d learned most of this information from novels, music, movies, and, of course, television. I doubted that native New Yorkers knew quite as much about the geography of Carthage, Missouri.

The idea of doing something with this intersection of pop culture and geography began as a passing thought while I was headed up the New England Thruway the following day. It was my

first experience driving in New York City and, although I was trying to play it cool for my passengers, I was looking for some sign that the tempest had passed. And then I saw it—the exit for New Rochelle. I saw that sign and, rightly or wrongly, felt that I was out of the fray. Why New Rochelle indicated the beginning of peaceful times I had no idea at the moment, and I thought about it through much of Connecticut. I was nearly to New London when it finally occurred to me—148 Bonnie Meadow Road, New Rochelle, New York. It was the home of Rob and Laura Petrie from *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. I had not seen that series in years, but it had been a favorite of mine as a kid, and it had, apparently, left quite an impression. *The Dick Van Dyke Show* had not been, of course, a documentary about New Rochelle, and the precise location of the Petrie household was, if anything, a footnote. I didn't know anything else about New Rochelle, and still don't, really, but it fascinated me that I had become convinced, subconsciously, that it represented a sort of sanctuary. That the grit and grandeur of Manhattan had been permanently etched into mind by mass media was not surprising. But New Rochelle was a different story.

Later, back in the Midwest, I pulled my ragged copy of Brooks and Marsh's *Directory* off the bookshelf and began flipping through it, making note of the locations of different television shows. It began to dawn on me that much of my sense of American geography was shaped by TV. Despite years of formal study about the United States, to a great degree, Minneapolis was *Mary Tyler Moore*, Vermont was *Newhart*, Boston was *Cheers*, and Cincinnati was *WKRP*. I realized that I knew far more about Mayberry, North Carolina, than I knew about Charlotte, North Carolina. Clearly, American television shows had something to say about American geography, and this study commenced as I attempted to discover exactly what that was.

STATES, REGIONS, AND SHARES OF THE TELEVISION LANDSCAPE

The first phase of this study involved an examination of relative shares of the television landscape—that is, as an attempt to discover which parts of the country had been represented most often and least often on television—and each of the following regional chapters begins with a brief discussion of the results of that survey. The results are reported by state and by region. It was tempting, of course, to divide the television landscapes of some states into two regions—to divide Kansas into midwestern and western sections, for example, or to divide Missouri between the Midwest and South—but that was difficult because so many television settings have been fictional. It is hard enough to draw a regional boundary on a map when discussing actual locations, and it is nearly impossible when discussing fictional ones.

Television Sample

I compiled my state lists of programs based on the most recent edition Brooks and Marsh's *Directory*, so this study is limited to programs discussed in that book. In the introduction to the ninth edition, the authors described their parameters:

This encyclopedia lists regular series carried on the commercial broadcast and cable networks in early evening, prime time and late night (roughly, between 6:00 P.M. and 3:00 A.M.). In addition we have included the top syndicated programs that have aired primarily in the evening hours. We cover the entire history of network TV in the United States, from its inception on a regular basis in 1944 through April 15, 2007. Our definition of a “series” is a program that ran for at least four consecutive weeks in the same time slot—or was intended to Network series are defined as those fed out by broadcast or cable networks seen simultaneously across most of the country. Broadcast networks covered are ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, CW, MyNetworkTV, ION (formerly PAX) and the dear, departed DuMont, UPN and WB Due to the flood of new series on cable in recent years we

have had to become somewhat selective in which cable series to include. Favored for inclusion are (1) series with casts, such as dramas and sitcoms, (2) series that had a reasonably long run, typically two seasons or more, and (3) series of any type with especially large audiences (Brooks and Marsh 2007: ix).

From this sample of more than 6,500 programs reviewed by Brooks and Marsh, a few were excluded from this study: most sports and news shows, lesser programs on cable networks, and those shows without a regular, recurring setting, including anthology programs such as *The Twilight Zone* and the various programs of the *Walt Disney* franchise. Also excluded from the sample were “roving” programs—shows in which the setting changed frequently, like *Route 66* and *The Fugitive*—and any program with a fictional setting that was never associated with a particular state, such as Springfield of *The Simpsons* or Mayfield of *Leave it to Beaver*. One difficult question was whether or not to include certain variety, talk, quiz, and information shows, and other programs that do not possess what could be called a conventional setting. It is debatable, for example, whether viewers of *The Jimmy Dean Show* associated that program with its Washington, D.C., origins, but it is probable that viewers associated *American Bandstand* with Philadelphia, and almost certain that audiences associated *Garroway at Large* with Chicago and *Hee Haw* with Nashville. In the end, I left this judgment to Brooks and Marsh. If they found a show’s point of origin worthy of a mention in their reviews, then it was included in the study sample. If not, the show was excluded.

Television Shares

I then began determining each state’s share of the American television landscape by assigning individual programs a value, “program years,” based on longevity. One program year

was assigned for each season, or part of a season, that a show was on the air. The total number of program years for all of the shows set in one state could then be used to calculate that state's share of the American television landscape. For example, Kansas's fourteen programs accounted for a total of fifty-eight program years. Kansas's value of fifty-eight was then divided by the total for the entire country (6,137), making Kansas's share of the entire television landscape 0.95%. In the following chapters, there will be some discussion of the ultimate fate of shows that continued after April 15, 2007, but it is important to note that statistics regarding shares of the landscape are based only on shows and episodes that aired before that date. Likewise, mentions of the total number of programs for a state or the "final" show for a state assume the same cutoff date.

Regions

My next step was to group the states into the regions that form the basis for the following chapters. Those regions were initially based on those in geographer Wilbur Zelinsky's 1980 article "North America's Vernacular Regions." Since Zelinsky's maps did not conform to state boundaries, each state was assigned to a region based on the regional affiliation of its largest metropolitan area. Some further refinements were necessary, particularly in those areas with multiple regional identities or with little regional identity. Then, some smaller regions were folded into larger ones—the Southwest and Pacific Northwest, for example, were added to the larger West region. Some areas, particularly states or pairs of states with both a large share of the television landscape and their own unique regional identity, were allowed to stand alone, such as California, New York, Florida, Texas and Oklahoma, and Alaska and Hawaii. As the size of this undertaking became apparent I decided that an exhaustive study of the entire country would not be practical, so the seven states just listed, which collectively account for nearly two-thirds of the

television landscape, have been excluded from the following chapters. What remain are five regions of the United States: The Mid-Atlantic (Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, and the District of Columbia); New England (Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine); The South (Kentucky, West Virginia, Tennessee, Arkansas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, Virginia, Mississippi, and Georgia); the West (Oregon, Nevada, Colorado, Montana, Washington, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona), and the Midwest. Because of the large volume of material detailing the television landscapes of the Midwest, that region has been divided into two sections: the Great Lakes states (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin); and the Trans-Mississippi Midwest (Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas).

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF TELEVISION

The next step in the research process was to examine existing approaches to the study of television, and to examine geography's tradition of creative interpretation. Television can be broadly dissected into three categories: production, product, and reception. *Production* includes the technical, artistic, and commercial forces and techniques that shape the television product, as well as the underlying economic, social, and political structures that influence it. *Product* (or programming) includes the actual body of work created and broadcast by production forces. *Reception* refers to the audience itself, to the audience's means of viewing, interpreting, and storing the images and ideas derived from the product, and to the economic, social, and political structures that influence audience perception and reaction. Although no standard framework exists for codifying approaches to the study of television, I determined that such studies

generally fall into one of the following categories: production studies, production interpretation, product description, reception interpretation, and audience studies.

Production Studies

A number of television studies are focused primarily on production, including a myriad of “cookbooks” (textbooks, instructional handbooks, technical manuals, etc.) dedicated to the art of photography, directing, station management, acting, writing, and the like. Numerous almanacs and yearbooks dedicated to quantitative analysis of the television industry have also been published over the past half-century. Additional general television works include a number of chronological “catch-all” studies, such as Christopher H. Sterling and John M. Kittross’s *Stay Tuned* (1990), which focuses on technical innovations, broadcast stations, broadcast networks, educational broadcasting, advertising, programming, audience research, government regulation, and the relationship between broadcasting and society. Other works focus on one particular aspect of production, such as the development of television technology. Albert Abramson’s two-volume *The History of Television* (1987, 2003) is certainly the most exhaustive treatment of television technology, covering practically every innovation from Joseph Plateau’s 1832 “Phenakistiscope” to the arrival of digital television recording in 1999 (the work is so meticulous that it dedicates twenty pages to the video tape camcorder alone). Studies dealing with specific eras or aspects of television’s historical development include Megan Mullen’s *The Rise of Cable Television Programming in the United States* (2003), and works by Ritchie (1994), Von Schilling (2003), and Sturcken (1990), which focus on television’s earliest decades. Some production studies take a biographical approach, such as those by Everson (1974) and Stashower (2002) that describe the careers of television pioneers Philo T. Farnsworth and David Sarnoff,

while others, such as the works of Murray and Godfrey (1997) and Schroeder (2002), take a geographical approach, addressing the diffusion of television into local and regional markets such as Atlanta, Los Angeles, Iowa, and Texas.

Production Interpretation

A number of studies, often through the interpretation of television programming, seek to analyze the values of the television industry that produce such programming and, in turn, to evaluate the deeper cultural structures that inform the values of the industry itself. A call for such a structuralist approach was made in David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity*, where he wrote that "Television is itself a product of late capitalism and, as such, has to be seen in the context of the promotion of a culture of consumerism" (Harvey 1989: 61). A curious example of such an approach is Soviet author N. S. Birukov's 1981 *Television in the West and its Doctrines*, which is an exploration from a socialist perspective of the relationship between capitalism and television.

Production interpretations can take on a number of perspectives and forms, such as a 1994 series of essays edited by Horace Newcomb analyzing television programming as a reflection of the producers' stances on social class, sexuality, capitalist production, art, the environment, gender, mental health, ethnicity, and religion. A similar volume edited by Janet Thumin (2002) looks specifically at 1950s television and its reflection of the era's cultural attitudes toward gender and politics. Another volume, edited by David Katzman in 1998, contains essays evaluating television's attitudes toward maternity, gender, race, childhood, and professional environments. One of the more compelling examples of production interpretation

may be found in the writings of social critic Raymond Williams, including a series of columns written from 1968 to 1972 for the British weekly magazine *The Listener*. The content of these articles is diverse, ranging from impressions of the differences between American and British television, to children's programming, to televised sports. The most common theme is a concern that television is not simply a reflection of dramatic events, but rather a dramatizer itself of state power, political representation, and economic power.

Product Description

A third category of television studies simply describes series and other programming. Many of these works are anything but simple, however, being exceptionally well-researched and well-written, and serving as an excellent source for the critical interpretation of television broadcasts. Among the more successful works in this genre are comprehensive overviews of television programming, including that by Brooks and Marsh (2007). Other resources offer overviews of particular genres, such as the western, police dramas, or the sitcom, and are exemplified by Terrace (2000; 2002) and Mitz (1983). Such works have served as a core resource for this study, as have the astonishing number of books and essays dedicated to individual shows that, though varying in quality, often contain tremendous amounts of useful detail. Examples include the works of Barabas and Barabas (1990), Fernandes and Robinson (1999), Kelly (1981), Leiby and Leiby (2001), and Rhodes (1997).

Reception Interpretation

A subtle distinction exists between the categories of television studies I have labeled *production interpretation* and *reception interpretation*. The essential difference is one of orientation. Whereas production interpretations attempt to read the subtext of television programming in order to assess the values that create it, reception interpretations take production more or less at face value and focus instead on what images and concepts from these programs might be absorbed by the viewer. In other words, reception interpretations study the perceived impact of programs on the audience.

My dissertation falls into the reception category, and has a number of works from which to draw inspiration. Hal Himmelstein's *Television Myth and the American Mind* (1994) analyzes, among other things, such programs as *Leave it to Beaver*, *Father Knows Best*, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, and *My Three Sons* as the television landscape's depiction of the ideal middle-class, white collar American suburban family. He then contrasts these programs with such later hits as *Married with Children*, *Roseanne*, and *The Simpsons* to assess television's depiction of the souring of the American Dream. He further addresses tensions between urban and rural lifestyles in *The Real McCoys*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, and similar programs. Again, the essential difference between Himmelstein's television study and those listed above is that he does not focus on the social, economic, and political forces that *created* these programs, but simply on the sort of geographic and social landscapes that were being delivered to viewers.

Works similar to Himmelstein include Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman's *Watching America* (1991), Marc's *Demographic Vistas* (1996), McCrohan's *Prime Time, Our Time* (1990),

Edgerton and Rollins's *Television Histories* (2001), and Graham's *Framing the South* (2001). Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman analyzed American television's depiction of private lives, the working world, crime and punishment, and public issues. David Marc reflected on the ways in which the lifestyles of television personalities can become integrated into the lifestyles of viewers. Donna McCrohan analyzed the ways in which changes in American society are reflected in the television landscape, and Allison Graham examined how stereotypes of the American South have been perpetuated on television as well as in film and music. Edgerton and Rollins served as editors for a collection of articles dealing with television's depiction of American history.

Audience Studies

Whereas reception interpretations are *oriented* to the audience, a fifth and final category of television studies focuses *strictly* on the audience. Examples include Virginia Nightingale's *Studying Audiences* (1996), which utilizes an ethnographic approach to determine the ways in which the television audience construct meaning from programs, and Phillip Drummond and Richard Peterson's 1986 collection of essays that focuses on topics such as the lived experience of the audience, audience perception of television fiction, subcultures within mass audiences, the child audience, the effects of television on social behavior, methodologies for studying audiences, and the political economy of television broadcasting.

By far the greatest concern of most audience research is the question of whether or not the depiction of antisocial behavior on television stimulates similar behavior within the viewing audience. One of the most detailed publications on the subject is Milgram and Shotland's

Television and Antisocial Behavior (1973), but the parade of books and articles on the subject is almost inexhaustible. Many of these works treat television as something inherently dangerous to its audience, while others take a more balanced approach. Withey and Abele's 1980 work, *Television and Social Behavior*, analyzes the viewing environment, the ways in which viewers receive and process the stimuli of television, and the manner in which viewing shapes social attitudes and behavior. The work includes essays on audience research models, the economics of television marketing, and the ways in which television influences personal decision-making, child development, and viewer perspectives on violence and race. Other works have the goal of making audience research accessible to the audience itself. A prominent example is Charren and Sandler's *Changing Channels* (1983), which was intended to help viewers "learn to live more sensibly with television, coping with its problems and enjoying its benefits" (Charren and Sandler 1983: xiii). Other works dealing directly with the psychology of audience interpretation include Gripsrud's 1999 collection, *Television and Common Knowledge*, Berman's *How Television Sees It's Audience* (1987), Barwise and Ehrenberg's *Television and Its Audience* (1988), and Sonia M. Livingstone's *Making Sense of Television* (1990).

THE PHILOSOPHY OF GEOGRAPHIC INTERPRETATION

As noted, of the different approaches to the study of television listed above, this study falls most soundly within the category of "reception interpretation." I set out to interpret entertainment television in much the same way that a literary critic might interpret a text, in order to suggest ways that television programming might shape the viewer's perception of places and regions. That is not to say that other approaches to the study of television have been ignored. Geographers, above all, should be hesitant to disintegrate any cultural form—that is, to separate

one component from the rest. This study has incorporated knowledge of the social, economic, political, and creative forces that shape television programming, and it also examines ways in which some programs have been received by the audience. Still, the major focus of this dissertation is television programming itself, and it can best be termed a “text interpretation.”

Imaginative and Artistic Geography

The interpretation of cultural “texts” such as television has a long, if not particularly extensive, tradition in American geography. This study is a form of what geographer John K. Wright called “aesthetic imagining.” In his 1946 presidential address to the Association of American Geographers (published in 1947), Wright argued that subjective interpretation in geography has been discouraged because of the mistaken belief that subjectivity is the converse of objectivity. He stated that a more acceptable definition of subjectivity is a “mental disposition to conceive of things with reference to oneself,” and that although it is possible that such a disposition could lead to error or deception, “it is entirely possible to conceive of things not only with reference to oneself but also realistically” (Wright 1947: 5). Aesthetic imagining, then, is the “desire to enjoy the process of imagining itself, and to give satisfaction to others by communicating it in written or graphic form” (Wright 1947: 6). The end result is either the creation of art itself, or the incorporation of artistry into science. Wright stated that such subjective endeavors are not only desirable in geographic study, but that they are in some cases absolutely necessary. “Geography,” he wrote, “deals in large measure with human beings, and the study of human affairs and motives has not yet reached a stage in which more than a small part of it can be developed as a precise science.” Until then, “much geographical study will have to be considerably tinged with intuitive subjectivity” (Wright 1947: 7).

Arguments for the application of interpretation, subjectivity, imagination, and artistry to geography have persisted since 1947. In 1961, Hugh C. Prince argued that geography, while demanding a respect for the truth, also required a creative imagination. “It is the province of the intellectual to observe the facts,” wrote Prince, “to reduce them to order and to discover relationships among them, but it is the imagination which gives them meaning and purpose through the exercise of judgment and insight” (Prince 1961: 231). John Fraser Hart echoed this sentiment in 1982, stating that geography “is a science, but it is also an art, because understanding the meaning of area cannot be reduced to a formal process” (Hart 1982: 2).

Probably the most gifted lobbyist for the role of artistic interpretation in geography has been Yi-Fu Tuan. Tuan does not place geography’s humanistic impulses in opposition to scientific inquiry, but rather as a contributor to it. He wrote that humanist geography’s contribution to science “lies in disclosing material of which the scientist, confined within his own conceptual framework, may not be aware,” and that the role of creative geography consists of “interpreting human experience in its ambiguity, ambivalence, and complexity” (Tuan 1976: 274-275).

As mentioned, the creative work involved in this study is best termed “text interpretation.” Shurmer-Smith has noted that it has become conventional “to extend the term ‘text’ beyond print on paper to apply to anything with a degree of permanence that communicates meaning” (Shurmer-Smith 2002: 123). Texts such as television may be interpreted in order to deduce the intentional or unintentional meaning generated by its creator, to analyze the political, social, and economic forces that shaped the creative act, or, as is the case in this study, to determine possible meanings that the viewer or reader might gather from the text. Shurmer-Smith also writes that creative texts have a way of generating their own geography

and that, regardless of their accuracy, give the viewer or the reader the ability to “imagine places we have never been to” or to “reinterpret those we know first hand” (Shurmer-Smith 2002: 130).

Hermeneutics and the “Historical Mind”

The practice of text interpretation in geography can be philosophically categorized or labeled in a number of different ways. However, the search for meaning through creative interpretation is probably best situated under the philosophical banner of hermeneutics. Originally referring to the elucidation of Biblical texts, the term now applies to a larger program of research involving the subjective search for meaning. Geographer Trevor Barnes, for example, wrote of hermeneutics:

When we try to understand a piece of writing we bring to it a whole set of presuppositions. By tacking back and forth both between our presuppositions and the text itself, as well as between the individual parts of the text and its whole, we eventually gain meaning and understanding This approach to interpretation is a creative, progressive, and open-ended process (Barnes 1994: 245).

The hermeneutics approach is so open-ended, in fact, that it often defies attempts to delineate a discrete methodology. Trevor Barnes’s colleague at the University of British Columbia, Cole Harris, addressed methodological concerns arising from the intersection of art and science in a 1978 essay entitled “The Historical Mind.” Though not an explicit methodology, Harris suggested that a “habit of mind” employed in historical studies is also capable of shaping “much of our best geographical writing,” representing “one clear approach to the writing of humanistic geography.” Harris’s essay addressed what he referred to as the “problem of interpretation” arising from the fact that different scholars may arrive at different conclusions regarding the

same subject. Harris wrote that a text “cannot be approached like an elementary chemistry experiment with its standardized procedures The records for any given study are too individual; the problems of interpretation ultimately too personal” (Harris 1978: 125).

Nevertheless, Harris argued, comprehension of the subject material will increase as isolated facts are placed in context, and as the scholar’s knowledge of the subject increases. Again, Harris has acknowledged that such pursuits are subjective, as they are subject to the scholar’s individual predispositions, idiosyncrasies, and irregularities. He wrote:

This would seem to imply that such scholarship is entirely relative, that one scholar’s interpretation is as valid as another’s because both are personal statements. Yet anyone familiar with the historical habit of mind would deny this. Some studies are superseded because they are shown to be wrong; and others because more evidence has come to light, permitting fuller interpretation In short, the historical mind does not give free reign to personal whim, and it denies emphatically that one opinion is worth as much as another. An interpretation becomes plausible only when it is fit to known facts, and scholars dismiss ideas that do not have such grounding Scholars are critical because there are too many factual errors, because an important body of evidence has been overlooked, because the interpretation does not take into account the intriguing views of X, because, finally, the interpretation has already been substantially demolished by the meticulous work of Y. The scholar depends on his own judgment to complete a study and then is exposed to the judgment of his peers. That such judgment is fallible and sometimes fickle there is no doubt, but there is hardly an alternative to it (Harris 1978: 129-132).

Like Wright, Harris argued that subjectivity is not the antithesis of objectivity. Although it is open-ended, eclectic, and lacking in a formal research design, the subjective approach possesses the same objectivity as the approach of the chemist in the sense that it strives for accuracy even when controlled experiments are impossible. Such studies are steeped in

sensitivity, creative intelligence, and personal judgment, and this personal judgment is, in turn, judged in the academic market. Harris has argued that such an approach will undoubtedly be perceived as “vague and elusive” by those conditioned in an environment emphasizing method and technique, but that for those who have worked comfortably within the framework of the “historical habit of mind, there seems little need for methodological soul searching” (Harris 1978: 134).

Interpreting Texts in Geography

Given that this study does not possess an easily defined methodological approach, it is important to note that similar geographical studies have been conducted successfully. In 1994, Stuart C. Aiken and Leo E. Zonn edited a collection of essays concerning the geography of film. Although these works are concerned more with the sociology and politics of portraying place than on the possible influence the film may have on the audience (that is, they are more concerned with production than reception), the book does provide examples of the possibilities awaiting geographers who wish to study popular media.

Similar approaches have been taken with the interpretation of painting. Gillian Rose (1993) and Denis E. Cosgrove (1998) incorporated artwork into their respective looks at gender and sociopolitical issues of landscapes. In 1976, Ronald Rees utilized landscape paintings of the Canadian prairie to interpret the artists’ perception of the settlement environment, and in 1999, Steven Hoelscher took a similar approach by interpreting Victorian-era photographs to analyze a shift in America’s perception of nature.

Interpretive geographic works also have been conducted in a variety of other media. These include Pamela Moss's 1992 analysis of urban themes in popular music, Jakle's 1977 work analyzing travel literature to reconstruct place perception of early tourists in the Ohio River valley, McManis's 1978 article concerning the role of place in British mystery fiction, and Pocock's 1979 analysis of the pejorative images of England's North contained in popular novels. More recently, Mona Domosh (1988) interpreted the works of Edith Wharton to address gender politics on the streets on nineteenth-century New York, and Dydea DeLyser (2005) analyzed the place images that shaped, and were shaped by, Helen Hunt Jackson's popular 1884 novel *Ramona*. From 1977 to 1983, Charles S. Aiken produced a series of articles detailing the geographic facts behind the fiction of William Faulkner and James Agee, and Patrick McGreevy's 1994 interpretation of Niagara Falls contained numerous literary analyses, including interpretations of poetry and film. Additional works analyzing the possibilities of interpreting literature for geographic purposes include those by Salter and Lloyd (1977), Tuan (1978), Lutwack (1984), and Kazin (1988). In particular, my study bears a resemblance to James R. Shortridge's *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* (1989), which utilizes interpretations of paintings, songs, newspaper cartoons, novels, television, and popular and academic works of nonfiction to address changing images of the region. The major difference between that study and this one is that while Shortridge interpreted a variety of media in order to examine one region, this study uses one medium to examine a variety of regions.

Although my study focuses on geographic images that might *possibly* be absorbed by the television audience, it also suggests that television programming has *likely* had an impact on the viewers' geographic perception. A good many geographers have interpreted texts with the idea of distilling the sorts of place images that might be passed on to the general audience, but only a

few have made conclusive statements as to what images actually are absorbed by that audience. In other words, although McGreevy makes a compelling case that Niagara Falls has largely been depicted as a place of death and resurrection, it is anyone's guess as to whether or not the majority of the reading or viewing public has come to the same conclusion. This issue was addressed by Shortridge in a 1991 article dealing with the concept of the "place-defining novel." Shortridge argued that, although it is extremely challenging for the geographer to sort through the vast array of experiences that help people assign meaning to particular places, it is clear that the public does hold "clear, well-defined images of the South, the Midwest, and for similar regional labels," and that popular novels "may have been a major source and crystallizing agent for these images" (Shortridge 1991: 280). Shortridge cited, among other works, the transformative power of Owen Wister's *The Virginian* for the West, Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* for Southern California, the southern novels *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Stowe), *Tobacco Road* (Caldwell), and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee), and, in particular, Sinclair Lewis's midwestern epic, *Main Street*.

It is important to stress that this study deals more in images than facts. That entertainment television contains a good many geographic exaggerations, distortions, and outright fabrications is no secret. That this situation has little bearing on the shaping of geographic perception also should be apparent. Shortridge noted that "the quality of the literary effort, the accuracy of the description, and the keenness of the insights are irrelevant issues" when considering the impact of a work on geographic perception (Shortridge 1991: 282). Speaking of the same issue with regard to television, Donna McCrohan wrote, "While not deluding ourselves that the TV image is absolutely precise, we look for ourselves on the screen, wanting to identify with what's up there" (McCrohan 1990: 4).

A GEOGRAPHY OF AMERICAN TELEVISION SETTINGS

As this study began, I was tempted to analyze preexisting studies of regional images in order to create a thematic framework for each region, with the intent of analyzing whether or not the television programs in this study conformed to themes already identified by geographers and other scholars. After vacillation on the matter, however, I decided it was better to begin with a blank slate, and I have since discovered that this was the appropriate move. Beginning a study of this kind with a sense of uncertainty conforms to the basic tenets of phenomenology and is necessary to avoid prejudice. According to Anne Buttimer, “One endeavors to peel off successive layers of a priori judgment and to transcend all preconceptions in order to arrive at a consciousness of pure essence” (Buttimer 1976: 279). John Fraser Hart also made the point well when he wrote that geographers “must learn to believe what their data tell them, instead of trying to force the facts into a mold of preconceived theory” (Hart 1982: 29).

Using Brooks and Marsh’s *Directory*, I began to sift through each of the nearly eight hundred programs that made up the television landscapes of the regions contained in this study. I was not, initially, attempting to construct any sort of thematic framework, but simply mining the descriptions of these programs for anything that might have influenced the geographic perceptions of the audience. I recorded, for example, descriptions of characters’ professions, social class, apparent levels of sophistication and intelligence, overall dispositions, and household situations. I noted if the setting was depicted as being either particularly pleasant or tumultuous, and anything else that seemed salient to a show’s sense of place. Once this task was complete, I began to reexamine these data, state by state, and then region by region, and a series of themes and key images—in terms of genre, character, setting, tone, and so on—began to emerge. Some were obvious and some were subtle. Some were expected and others a surprise.

As Cole Harris had suggested, “An initially meaningless document is understandable later on in the study They acquire meaning in a scholar’s mind once they are placed in context” (Harris 1978: 126-126).

Once this basic framework was established, I turned to the large volume of television literature to support, illustrate, refine, and, in a number of cases, redefine the themes and images I had compiled. I drew primarily from those works described above as product description or reception interpretation. Some of this material was intended primarily for a scholarly audience, some for a more general one. Because a sizable number of these are web-based, it is important to clarify my criteria for selection. Open-source web sites constructed by fans of certain television programs contain some very interesting perspectives, and although it is difficult to ignore the almost monastic devotion that some viewers have to their favorite television shows, such sources are not generally considered appropriate for an academic work. A few comments from such sites are contained in the following chapters—for example, the exasperated remarks of a fan unsuccessfully trying to find references to New Jersey on the medical drama *House*—but because no way exists to confirm the veracity of most of the information from these sites, I have largely ignored them. Most of the web-based sources used in this study are simply the electronic versions of traditional ink-and-paper outlets like the *New York Times* or *Entertainment Weekly*, or online versions of reference collections such as the *Encyclopedia of Television* from Chicago’s Museum of Broadcast Communications. A few sources are available only on the Internet, and in such cases, I have been careful to use only those generated by organizations with qualified supervisors and editors. For example, one of the most commonly referenced web sites in this study is *PopMatters*, the film and television section of which is edited by Cynthia Fuchs, the director of Film and Media Studies at George Mason University.

What follows is first and foremost a geographic study, but it is also, in part, a regional television history. Information about the individual programs' popularity, longevity, and critical acclaim is included to allow readers to ascertain which shows have likely had the greatest impact on the audience's geographic perception. Another challenge for this endeavor was to decide how much information, such as plot and character descriptions, should be left in the final product, and how much excluded. Including too much information, I knew, might obfuscate the geographic themes and images at the heart of the study, but too little information would rob the study of the very qualities that draw viewers to a particular television show. While wrestling with this decision, I happened across the following statement by baseball scholar Bill James in the preface of his *Historical Baseball Abstract*:

It is . . . peculiarly unsatisfying to read a railroad track history of baseball—this happened, and then this happened, and then this happened. . . . It is the goal of this book to create a history of baseball that would surround you, that would reach out to you and take your hand. This is done, of course, with details: hundreds and hundreds of tiny little details. . . . A linear history of baseball drops the details once those details . . . no longer serve to move the narrative forward. Thus, in an odd way, it drops the things that make baseball what it is. An academic, writing a history of baseball, often sounds very much like an academic writing about cancer research (James 2001: 6).

I came to the conclusion that boiling the television landscape down to its bare essentials would rob it of its meaning—that is, doing so would, to paraphrase James, drop the things that make television what it is. In hindsight, keeping the study rich in details also kept this study closer to its scholarly goal. When I began my research, I imagined that I would eventually arrive at a set of definitive conclusions—something resembling a set of laws of the geography of the television universe. A number of compelling themes and images have emerged, and they are detailed in the following chapters. In the end, however, concrete, all-encompassing conclusions

about the American television landscape remain elusive. The essence of the geography of television, much like that of the history of baseball, is found, as James states, in the “hundreds and hundreds of tiny little details.”

TABLE 1. TELEVISION AND POPULATION SHARES

	T.V. Share	Pop. Share		T.V. Share	Pop. Share
Mid-Atlantic	7.94%	9.20%	South	5.30%	19.06%
D. C.	3.91%	0.19%	Tennessee	2.54%	2.03%
Pennsylvania	2.07%	4.06%	Georgia	0.97%	3.10%
New Jersey	1.19%	2.81%	Virginia	0.47%	2.56%
Maryland	0.70%	1.85%	Louisiana	0.39%	1.45%
Delaware	0.13%	0.29%	N. Carolina	0.39%	3.05%
			Mississippi	0.16%	0.95%
New England	3.78%	4.56%	Arkansas	0.13%	0.93%
Massachusetts	2.17%	2.04%	Alabama	0.11%	1.53%
Connecticut	0.68%	1.14%	Kentucky	0.08%	1.39%
Maine	0.36%	0.42%	S. Carolina	0.03%	1.48%
Rhode Island	0.33%	0.34%	West Virginia	0.03%	0.59%
Vermont	0.16%	0.20%			
New Hampshire	0.08%	0.42%	West	6.37%	10.35%
			Nevada	1.65%	0.86%
Midwest	12.44%	21.48%	Arizona	1.14%	2.04%
Illinois	6.68%	4.10%	Washington	1.06%	2.15%
Ohio	1.24%	3.69%	Colorado	0.99%	1.61%
Kansas	0.95%	0.91%	New Mexico	0.46%	0.66%
Missouri	0.83%	1.91%	Oregon	0.39%	1.22%
Wisconsin	0.78%	1.82%	Wyoming	0.36%	0.18%
Michigan	0.64%	3.16%	Montana	0.21%	0.32%
Minnesota	0.51%	1.70%	Utah	0.08%	0.88%
Indiana	0.49%	2.07%	Idaho	0.03%	0.43%
Iowa	0.15%	0.97%			
The Dakotas	0.10%	0.57%			
Nebraska	0.07%	0.58%			

Source for population data: U.S. Census Bureau (2011).
<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>

TABLE 2. DEFINING PROGRAMS AND COMMON TRAITS: THE MID-ATLANTIC

State	Defining Programs	Key Program Elements	Other Common Traits
Delaware	<i>The Pretender</i>	Secretive and nefarious organization	
District of Columbia	<i>Meet the Press</i>	Political talk	Public service; music, art, and science; the noble outsider taking on a corrupt system; African-American families and professionals; crime; the absurdity of government and politics; corrupt bureaucrats and politicians
	<i>The West Wing</i>	The excitement of the White House; realistic politics; the vagaries of power	
	<i>Murphy Brown</i>	A single, independent, successful woman; “nice and sweet are out”	
	<i>The F.B.I.</i>	The methodical, professional, and unflappable G-Man; steadfast patriotism	
	<i>The X-Files</i>	Shadowy and treacherous government conspiracy; a one-man crusade	
	<i>NCIS</i>	Honest and honorable government agents	
Maryland	<i>Roc</i>	Positive black role models; challenges of life in the inner city	Mainstream America; science, art, and literature; professional women; non-traditional families
	<i>Homicide: Life on the Street</i>	Crime, violence, and poverty in the inner city	
New Jersey	<i>House</i>	Successful, brilliant but brusque medical professionals	New York City’s “backyard”; tourism and entertainment;

(New Jersey continued)	<i>The Sopranos</i>	Family; upscale suburbia; blue-collar aesthetic; seediness; violence; sex; crime; the Mafia; industrial-urban wasteland; garbage; consumerism; loss of traditional values; Italian-Americans	middle-class families; blue collar values; mean streets; working-class struggle; wholesome families; domestic bliss
Pennsylvania	<i>American Bandstand</i>	Popular music	Educational programs; nuclear families; a broad range of social classes; class conflict dysfunctional families; crime; hard-boiled Pittsburgh; struggling industrial cities and towns
	<i>thirtysomething</i>	Yuppie angst; smart, sophisticated, introspective, self-absorbed professionals	
	<i>It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia</i>	Comical sleaze; rude, self-absorbed, uncivilized yet genuine, unpretentious and likable characters	
	<i>Mr. Belvedere</i>	A pleasant suburban Pittsburgh family	
	<i>The Office</i>	Scranton as a pleasant, friendly, but unexciting, somewhat unsophisticated city with limited possibilities	

CHAPTER 2 - THE MID-ATLANTIC

The television landscape of the Mid-Atlantic—defined here as Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and the District of Columbia—has certainly been overshadowed by that of neighboring New York, but these states have by no means been ignored. Nearly two hundred programs, accounting for nearly eight percent of the television landscape, have originated from or been set in the Mid-Atlantic, with Pennsylvania, New Jersey and D.C. leading the way. New Jersey was represented early and often, with its shows accounting for about 1.2% of the television landscape, but it is perhaps most notable for the dismal performance of its programs until the 2000s. Pennsylvania has had more exposure, accounting for just over two percent of the television landscape, and it has also been represented fairly frequently. Like New Jersey, however, Pennsylvania has been home to relatively few successful programs. D.C., with its small population but heavy dose of political intrigue, has accounted for 3.9% of the television landscape—supplying nearly half of the region’s television images. Maryland has not received as much attention, with its sixteen mostly unsuccessful programs accounting for just 0.7% of the television landscape, but it has fared better than neighboring Delaware, which has a fairly weak claim to its lone program.

DELAWARE

One of the most prominent geographic features of the American television landscape is its lack of regional balance. California has been the setting for nearly seven hundred programs and New York nearly six hundred, while fifteen states have netted fewer than five. Two of

those—Idaho and Delaware—have barely avoided the dubious distinction of never serving as the setting for a television program. Idaho’s single entry, *Manhunter* (discussed in chapter seven), got the state in on a technicality, with the show’s protagonist returning only occasionally to his home in the Gem State.

Delaware’s claim to its lone entry was similarly tenuous. The 1996 science fiction drama *The Pretender* was the story of Jarod Russell, who had been adopted as a small child by The Centre, a mysterious organization located in fictional Blue Cove, Delaware. The Centre’s team of scientists had honed the already bright Jarod into a pretender—a genius who could, with the aid of a little observation and a little reading, take on the role of doctor, pilot, lawyer, cop, fireman, or any other occupation. As the series began, Jarod had escaped from Blue Cove and was off on a quest to answer questions about the Centre’s secrets and his own past. *The Pretender* was essentially a cross between *The Fugitive* and *Quantum Leap*—Jarod roamed the country, assuming new identities, helping people in need, and avoiding the agents for The Centre who were hot on his heels.

The Pretender ran for four seasons, but was never a ratings blockbuster. It did gain a loyal following in reruns, however, and cable’s TNT channel eventually produced a pair of follow-up movies in 2001. As mentioned, Delaware’s claim to the show is a little shaky. Most of the episodes took place elsewhere, and when the action shifted to Delaware, the state was often hidden behind the fortress-like walls of The Centre.

PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania has served as the setting for sixty television programs, an impressive number, but much like neighboring New Jersey, few of these programs have met with much success. Just ten of the state's programs survived more than two full years, and only eight of those were on a major network. A meager three have managed to break into the Nielsen ratings top thirty, with the state's highest-rated show being the Philadelphia-based situation comedy *Amen*, which peaked in the thirteenth position during its first year, the 1986-1987 season.

Pennsylvania did, however, break onto the television landscape early and often, with twelve programs originating from Philadelphia between 1948 and 1957. The city's network television debut came on February, 1948, with *The Nature of Things*, a program that aired in fifteen-minute segments on NBC for more than four years. Hosted by Dr. Roy K. Marshall of the Fels Planetarium, the program featured lectures and discussions concerning scientific topics such as astronomy, physics, and meteorology. Two more educational programs followed in 1953, including *What in the World*, which aired for seven months. Hosted by Dr. Froelich Rainey, the director of the University of Pennsylvania museum, this quiz show featured three panelists—two professors of anthropology from Penn and a guest panelist—who were asked to identify and discuss artifacts from the museum. Philadelphia's *Junior Press Conference*, which aired for just over a year, featured correspondents from college campus newspapers around the country interviewing politicians and other figures in the news.

Philadelphia's second network entry was the slightly less dowdy *Hollywood Screen Test*, which debuted in April 1948 and featured young talent in comedy and dramatic sketches. This show has the distinction of being the first to be seen on the ABC television network, although, at

the time, the “network” consisted of just two stations—Philadelphia and Washington. When ABC opened its New York station in August, production of *Hollywood Screen Test* shifted there, and the show aired for five more years. Although no major future stars were discovered during *Screen Test*’s brief Philly run, the city did host the television debut of the influential Trenton, New Jersey, comedian Ernie Kovacs. *Ernie in Kovacsland* was broadcast live from Philadelphia in the summer of 1951 and featured the “incredible repertoire of nutty characterizations” that would become a staple of later Kovacs television programs (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 426).

A number of cities produced children’s programming for primetime network television in the medium’s early years, but Philadelphia certainly produced the strangest example. *Kid Gloves*, as its name vaguely suggested, featured children’s boxing, with the contestants ranging in age from three to twelve. *Kid Gloves* had been a popular local show in Philadelphia, and it was broadcast live to the CBS network for six months in 1951. The considerably less violent *Once upon a Fence* featured music and stories for kids, and was broadcast live from the city on NBC for three months in 1952.

The most common format for Philadelphia’s early programming was popular music. The city’s first three musical entries were not particularly successful, the first being *Hayloft Hoedown*, which aired during the summer of 1948. Broadcast live from Town Hall, and featuring comedy, music, square-dancing, and yodeling, this “bush-league production,” at the very least, had the distinction being network television’s first country music showcase (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 593). *The Ted Steele Show*, a series of musical interludes featuring the title musician, composer, singer and orchestra leader, premiered that September and lasted for a year, while the musical interlude *Melody, Harmony, & Rhythm*, debuted in late 1949 and aired for two months.

Philadelphia's two other musical programs proved to be considerably more durable. The first featured the cheerful Paul Whiteman, whose big bands had been a force in American popular music since the 1920s. *Paul Whiteman's TV Teen Club* was a live, weekly talent show that had its roots in an antidelinquency program that Whiteman had begun in his hometown of Lambertville, New Jersey, a few years before. The program, which debuted on ABC in 1949 and aired for five years, featured young vocalists, instrumentalists, and dancers, with the winners receiving professional coaching and a shot at a return performance. One of *TV Teen Club's* more notable finds was a nine-year-old Philadelphian named Robert Ridarelli, who later became famous as teen idol Bobby Rydell.

The show's biggest future star, however, wasn't a musical act, but a young announcer who read the show's Tootsie Roll advertisements—Dick Clark. Clark was a local Philadelphia disc jockey, and he might well have remained just that had it not been for a poor choice by a man named Bob Horn. In 1952, Horn began hosting a music program on Philadelphia's WFIL-TV called *Bandstand*. It was essentially cheap weekday afternoon filler—Horn spun records while teenagers danced in something resembling a high school gymnasium—but *Bandstand* became an immediate after-school sensation. As the popularity grew, Clark was hired to handle the music so that Horn could spend more time in front of the cameras. In 1956, however, Horn was arrested for drunk driving, and promptly fired. Clark took over the hosting duties. Clark's clean-cut image and youthful looks immediately clicked with the audience, and the show became more popular than ever. Because of the boost in local ratings, not to mention the constant badgering of the ambitious Clark, ABC decided to take *Bandstand* national in August of 1957, airing it each weekday afternoon.

The new program proved so popular that it was given a shot at the primetime schedule that fall. The primetime version didn't last long, and the show returned to its weekday home after three months. *American Bandstand* moved to ABC's Saturday afternoon line-up in 1963, and production shifted to Los Angeles the following year. One of the longest-running and most popular musical stages in television history, *Bandstand* granted Philadelphia an enormous influence on the popular music scene in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and helped launch the careers of such musicians as Fabian, Frankie Avalon, and a now grown-up Bobby Rydell. According to television historian Rodney Buxton, *Bandstand's* influence extended well beyond the top forty:

From a cultural and social standpoint, the impact of *American Bandstand* should not be underrated. Even if the show diffused some of the more raucous elements of rock 'n' roll music, it helped to solidify the growing youth culture which centered around this phenomenon. But the show was important in another way as well. Once Clark took over the helm of *Bandstand* in 1956, he insisted on racially integrating the show, since much of the music was performed by black recording artists. When the show moved to the network schedule, it maintained its racially mixed image, thus providing American television broadcasting with its most visible ongoing image of ethnic diversity until the 1970s (Buxton 2010: 1).

American Bandstand remained on ABC until 1987, and in syndication or on cable until 1989. Through all of those years, the basic format changed little. Clark would play pop hits while the youthful audience danced, and guest performers would stop by to lip-synch their records. Clark chatted with the musicians and the audience, and introduced the infamous "rate-a-record" feature—"Umm, it's got a good beat. . . . I'll give it a 95" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 45).

Bandstand returned to Philadelphia, in a sense, in the 2000s with the period drama *American Dreams*, which focused, in part, on two *Bandstand* dance floor regulars. The show's

departure to California, however, left Pennsylvania off the television landscape for the remainder of the 1960s. The state returned in the 1970s, and has been an almost constant presence on the American television landscape since. Philadelphia continued to be the state's dominant locale. Of the forty-eight Pennsylvania-based programs to debut between 1970 and 2006, thirty-two have been set in the Philadelphia area, eleven in Pittsburgh, and one in Scranton. Just four programs have been located elsewhere in Pennsylvania, and all of those have had fictional settings.

Southeastern Pennsylvania's first post-*Bandstand* entry was *The Young Rebels*, which debuted in 1970. Set in Chester, Pennsylvania, in 1777, *The Young Rebels* was a sort of eighteenth-century *Mod Squad*, featuring four young spies (known as the "Yankee Doodle Society"), whose mission was to harass British troops and spy for the Americans. Jeremy, the long-haired leader, was joined by his girlfriend, Elizabeth, an exslave named Isak, and brainy Henry. The goal of the series was to get the rebellious youth culture of the time to identify with the American Revolution. "Everyone was under thirty," wrote Brooks and Marsh, "and British rule was the 'system' they sought to overturn" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,557). It was an awkward parallel, apparently, and the show was off the air after four months.

The Tony Randall Show, which debuted in 1976, represented two firsts for Pennsylvania. It was the state's first sitcom, and the first Pennsylvania program to enter the Nielsen top thirty. It concerned the professional and personal life of a middle-aged Philadelphia judge who, in typical Tony Randall fashion, was "something of a stuffed shirt" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,408). *Tony Randall* debuted in the 29th position on the Nielsen charts, but ratings fell after a move from Thursday to Saturday night, and the show was cancelled after its second season.

Philadelphia's only other successful sitcom came along a decade later. The 1986 sitcom *Amen* represented a few firsts. It was the first popular American sitcom to have a religious backdrop, the first Pennsylvania-based program to feature a predominantly black cast, and the only one of the state's entries to remain in the Nielsen top thirty for consecutive seasons until *Cold Case* repeated the feat in the 2000s. *Amen* featured Sherman Hemsley as Ernest Frye, a blustery, tyrannical deacon of Philadelphia's First Community Church. The program featured the deacon's weekly meltdowns, and his battles with the church's new minister, Reverend Gregory, who was quietly undermining Frye's iron grip on the church. *Amen* debuted in the thirteenth position on the Nielsen charts, and returned for its second season ranked fifteenth. The program's ratings began to slide in the third season, however, and it was cancelled after its fifth.

The Tony Randall Show and *Amen* were, at least in part, family sitcoms. The judge was a widower with a son and a daughter, while Deacon Frye was a widower with one daughter, the hapless, unmarried Thelma. If there is a single dominant theme among Philadelphia's sitcom entries, it has been the depiction of family life. Fifteen of Philadelphia's eighteen sitcoms have focused on families, but, for whatever reason, most of them have been unsuccessful.

A number of Philadelphia's family sitcoms have featured single parents. The sitcom *Dads* was the story of an *Odd Couple* pair of single dads. Worry-wart yuppie Rick, who had a daughter, and easygoing guy's guy Louie, who had a daughter and son, shared a house for about four months of the 1986-1987 season. Philadelphia's first televised single mom was Theresa Falco, the mother of the title character on the sitcom *Angie*, which debuted in February of 1979 and ran through October of 1980. Mr. Falco had walked out on her two decades before, forcing Theresa to raise Angie and her younger sister alone. Another single Philadelphia mother appeared on the sitcom *Brotherly Love*, which premiered in 1995 and had a sixteen-month run.

Claire Roman, a recently widowed mother of two, was struggling to keep the family business, an auto customizing shop, afloat. Enter her long-lost stepson, Joe, who arrived to collect his share of the inheritance. Joe soon realized that Claire needed help with the business and, more important, that his half-brothers needed a father figure, so, this being television, he decided to stick around and help. The title character of the short-lived sitcom *Katie Joplin*, which aired for a month in 1999, was a single mom with a teenage son who had just moved to Philadelphia from her native Knoxville, Tennessee. Still another Philadelphia sitcom featured foster parenthood: the 1987 syndicated sitcom *Bustin' Loose*, which produced twenty-six episodes. Loosely based on a 1981 film featuring Richard Pryor, the show featured Jimmie Walker as Sonny Barnes, a bragging, two-bit con artist who had been sentenced by a judge to community service—namely, helping a social worker care for the four orphans she had taken into her home.

Nuclear sitcom families arrived relatively late in Philadelphia and, like their single-parent counterparts, none of them lasted long. Of the five sitcoms to feature such households, only one lasted more than two months, and that show didn't make it a full year. The first was *Family Album*, which aired for two months in 1993. The show's lead characters were Dr. Jonathan Lerner and his wife Denise, an architect, who moved from California back to their hometown to be close to their families. Their daughter, Nikki, was not happy about the move and, given the overbearing nature of the families, that was understandable. A similarly dysfunctional Philadelphia family also appeared in 1993. *Tall Hopes* was a sunny comedy about an exceptionally bright, young black kid named Ernest who lived in the shadow of his big brother, Chester. "Chet the Jet," who was notably dumber than Ernest, was a high school basketball star and the pride and joy of his equally dumb dad, George, a Philly transit cop. The whole family

“dumped on poor short Ernest,” but, lucky for him, the show only lasted four weeks (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,356).

Two more Philadelphia nuclear families experienced short runs in 1995. *Bringing Up Jack*, which aired for one month, was the story of a sports talk show host Jack McMahon and his new bride, Ellen, who had two kids from a previous marriage. The sitcom *Minor Adjustments*, which had a sporadic eleven-month run on two networks, concerned Dr. Ron Aimes and his family, although much of the focus was on Ron’s work as a child psychologist. The sitcom *The Big House*, which aired for one month in 2004, featured a nuclear family with a twist. In a reversal of *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, *Big House* featured a spoiled, rich black kid from California who, after his dad was sent to prison for embezzlement, was forced to move in with his aunt, uncle, and cousin in inner-city Philadelphia.

Happy Family, which aired during the 2003-2004 season, was the first of two Philadelphia-based sitcoms to focus on an “empty-nest” couple, although it was not quite empty enough for dentist Peter Brennan and his frantic wife Annie, who fought desperately to salvage the wreckage of their kids’ lives. Son Todd, who was also a dentist, was engaged to be married, but was having an affair with another woman. Daughter Sara was a successful banker, but had no social skills. Their idiotic younger son, Tim, had just flunked out of junior college.

Philadelphia’s second empty nest series was *Til Death*, which premiered in 2006 to abysmal ratings. The show got a ratings boost in 2007, however, courtesy of a post-*American Idol* time slot, and managed to remain on the air for four seasons. *Til Death* focused on the Starks, a couple who had been married for twenty-four years. Eddie was a bad-tempered, sarcastic history teacher, while his wisecracking wife Joy worked for a travel agency. The grouching Starks were

contrasted with their new neighbors, Jeff and Steph, “cloyingly sweet newlyweds who were madly in love” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,394).

Family life was also a common theme of the Philadelphia area’s three reality entries. Two were filmed in West Chester and featured professional hell-raiser Bam Margera, formerly seen on MTV’s gross-out stunt show *Jackass*. *Viva la Bam* consisted of forty-three episodes which aired from 2003 to 2005. Its follow-up, *Bam’s Unholy Union*, debuted in 2007 and aired for nine weeks. The former focused primarily on Bam’s outrageous stunts, many of which involved tormenting his mother and father, while the latter chronicled the preparation for his marriage. Parents exacted their revenge for eight weeks in 2006 on the reality entry *Back on Campus*, which paired four Drexel University students with their own parents as dorm roommates.

Among Philadelphia’s television families, and in its general television population, a broad range of social classes have been represented. Characters have engaged in blue collar livelihoods—welder, stonemason, waitress, beautician, mechanic, gas station clerk, plumber, security guard—and white collar jobs—professor, physician, journalist, broadcaster, advertising executive, lawyer, and architect. In Philadelphia’s television world, the rich and powerful have occasionally crossed paths with the not-so-rich and powerful. Social mismatch comedies have been relatively common on American television, and particularly common on programs based on the east coast. One such Pennsylvania example was *Angie*, the Cinderella story of a perky waitress at the Liberty Coffee Shop. After a whirlwind courtship, she married Brad Benson, a pediatrician and member of one of Philadelphia’s wealthiest families. Their marriage, of course, horrified Brad’s stuffy family, but amused Angie’s “down-to-earth mama” Theresa (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 67). The musical sitcom *Dreams*, which lasted a month in 1984, focused on twenty-two-year-old Gino Minelli, a professional welder who moonlighted as a rock musician. Hoping

that music would offer a way out of their working class Philly neighborhood, the band recruited Lisa, the daughter of a rich and powerful United States senator, more for her money than for her talent. As mentioned, social mismatches defined the two title fathers on *Dads*. Rick was the uptight reporter, and Louie his free-wheeling, blue-collar, stonemason pal. A culture clash, of sorts, was at the heart of the sitcom *Teech*, which aired for five weeks in 1991. Teech Gibson was the music instructor, and token black employee, at upscale Winthrop Academy, a private suburban Philadelphia school. Much of the comedy revolved around the contrast between hip but down-to-earth Teech and his students, most of whom were the spoiled offspring of well-heeled yuppies. Social contrasts were also highlighted on the somber medical drama *Strong Medicine*, which aired on cable's Lifetime channel from 2000 to 2006. Set at Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Women's Health Clinic in Philadelphia, the major source of tension was found in the relationship between the clinic's two directors. Lu was the "feisty" Hispanic "product of the inner city" whose trademark was her great compassion, while Dana was the "rather icy, Harvard-educated" physician whose emphasis was "more on the disease than the person" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,321).

While social contrasts have been a theme of a number of Philadelphia-based programs, the theme of race relations has been largely absent. Although a number of Philadelphia entries have prominently featured African-American characters, including *Bustin' Loose*, *Teech*, *Tall Hopes*, *Minor Adjustments*, *Strong Medicine*, and *Hack*, none of these programs made race a key theme. As mentioned, the city's most successful black sitcom was *Amen*, but Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman noted that "overt politics and social relevance themes were largely absent" from the show (Lichter, Lichter and Rothman 1991: 9). Critic Donald Bogle went a step further,

arguing that *Amen* was a show that not only avoided topical issues, but one that, disturbingly, “harked back to a past era.”

Amen's Deacon Frye appeared as if he had been out of the country—or out of his mind—during the politically restless 1960s and the feminist 1970s. Frye was a lawyer. So you might assume that he's representative of a modern, sophisticated African American character. But as he bopped and hopped, as he shouted and threw tantrums, Frye looked as if he knew as much about the law (or had as much common sense) as Calhoun on *Amos 'n' Andy*. Together Calhoun and Frye made the idea of a seemingly educated African American male something of a slapstick joke (Bogle 2001: 313).

The only Philadelphia-based television show to take a serious look at the issue of race was *American Dreams*, which chronicled the civil rights movement as one component of a larger examination of the tumultuous 1960s. This program, which aired from 2002 to 2005, focused on an Irish-Catholic Philadelphia family headed by stern Jack Pryor and his frazzled wife Helen. Among the issues the Pryor family faced over the series' sporadic twenty-two month run was the football injury that ended son J. J.'s dreams of playing at Notre Dame, leading him to enlist in the Marine Corps and fight in Vietnam; the physical disability of son Will; the pregnancy of J. J.'s estranged girlfriend; Jack's election to the city council and later resignation over a disagreement with the city's political establishment; and the relationship between daughter Meg and her activist boyfriend, Chris, about whom she had second thoughts after he burned down a military recruiting station. The civil rights movement was examined through the relationship between Jack, who owned an appliance store, and his black employee, Henry. The exploration of Henry's status as a second-class citizen in Philadelphia was a common theme, as was the internal conflict of Henry's son, Sam, who was “torn between his white and black friends during Philadelphia racially troubled times” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 48).

Sam's inner turmoil did not mark him as unusual for a Philadelphia TV character. In fact, the defining trait for some of the city's most distinguished television residents has been what critics Tom Shales referred to as "yuppie angst." Joyce, the wealthy sister-in-law of the title character on *Angie*, had been divorced three times and was so anxious and overbearing that even her therapist hated her. The sitcom *Pursuit of Happiness*, which aired for about two months during the 1987-1988 season, featured a principled young history professor's struggle to find the meaning of life. But, of course, no program, Philadelphia-based or otherwise, plumbed the depths of yuppie angst more so than *thirtysomething*. The critically-acclaimed drama, which debuted in 1987 and ran for four years, painstakingly chronicled the anxieties of seven thirtyish, upwardly-mobile, Ivy League-educated Philadelphians. The principal characters were Michael and Elliot, two Philly ad men who had just started their own struggling agency, creating much angst. Hope, Michael's wife, was an attractive overachiever and political activist who had had a career in publishing, while Elliot's wife, Nancy, was an aging flower child and artist. Both of them had given up their career aspirations to stay at home and raise children, creating more angst. Joining the two couples were Melissa, Michael's cousin, a photographer who was a spoiled and aging "J. A. P"; Ellyn, Hope's childhood friend and stressed-out career woman; and Gary, the exuberant, nonconformist Classics professor.

The weekly anxiety attacks of *thirtysomething* were, on occasion, well-deserved. Elliot and Nancy went through a painful season-long separation. Hope had a miscarriage, and was later injured in a serious auto accident. Nancy was diagnosed with cancer. Melissa and Ellyn went through a succession of miserable relationships. Michael and Elliot's agency went belly-up. Gary impregnated a woman he had no interest in marrying. Gary didn't get tenure. Gary died. But what made *thirtysomething* so strikingly luminous for some viewers, and so excruciatingly

tedious for others, were not the gut-wrenching plot twists, but the large dose of introspection that permeated every scene. The hallmark of the show, according to critic Robert J. Thompson, was the degree to which the characters “unrelentingly examined the minutiae of everyday life” (Thompson 1996: 133). Brooks and Marsh described the show as being about “pampered people” who “worried constantly about the true meaning of their lives and marriages, pined for the youth they had left behind, and ran to see why babies were crying,” adding, “Who said yuppies have it easy?” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,383).

Some critics absolutely adored *thirtysomething*, and it was an industry favorite, winning the Peabody Award, the Humanitas Award, a Directors Guild Award, a Writers Guild Award, and thirteen Emmys, including one for Outstanding Drama Series. The *New York Times* said that the show was “as close to the level of an art form as weekly television ever gets,” and, upon the show’s cancellation, *Newsweek* pined, “the value of the Tuesday night meetings was that art, even on the small screen, reflected our lives back at us to be considered as new” (Emmanuel 2010: 1). Other critics were not quite as impressed, including Tom Shales, who wrote the following about *thirtysomething*’s anxious yuppies:

They are able to articulate, sometimes at length, every emotion and anxiety they feel. And they feel plenty. Not a thought goes unspoken in [their] house, and as a result, a certain nagging whininess sets in (Thompson 1996: 131).

Chicago Tribune critic Clifford Terry was a little more direct. “The only thing worse than living in the middle of yuppies,” wrote Terry, “is having to watch a program about them” (Thompson 1996: 131).

Still, *thirtysomething* was popular among its intended audience. It was a show made by, about, and for yuppies. It appeared on ABC which, in 1987, was languishing in third place among the networks. With *thirtysomething*, ABC was stealing from the playbook of NBC, which a few years before had discovered that, if it could not beat CBS in overall viewership, it could at least design shows that appealed to the young, urban, wealthy viewers coveted by advertisers. ABC got its cult following. Even though it never ranked higher than forty-sixth on the Nielsen charts, *thirtysomething* was one of the most popular shows among women between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four, a key demographic.

As for *thirtysomething*'s impact on Philadelphia's television landscape, it is difficult not to call it the city's defining program, at least for the twentieth century. This has less to do with the show's success than it does the miserable failure of nearly every show that preceded it. The only credible challenger is *Amen*, but that program was not as thoroughly immersed in its setting as was *thirtysomething*, and it certainly did not generate as much buzz. And if *thirtysomething* is the show that viewers most closely associate with Philadelphia, then its geographic message is in the eye of the beholder. The show left viewers thinking of Philly as the domain of smart, sophisticated, introspective professionals, or as the home of spoiled, pedantic, self-absorbed, bellyaching brats who do nothing but talk, brood, and then talk some more.

Yuppie angst did not vanish from Philadelphia's television landscape with the demise of *thirtysomething*. Another Philadelphia professional suffering a crisis of conscience flickered across American televisions during the 1990-1991 season. The title character of *Shannon's Deal* was Jack Shannon, whose life was a complete mess, both personally and professionally. After years of representing gluttonous corporate interests for a powerful Philadelphia law firm, the embittered Shannon quit to create his own firm. The considerable downgrade in salary, coupled

with his gambling addiction, had led to his divorce, but he was now free to “pursue the law on his own, more ethical terms,” at least for the seven weeks the show aired (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,225). A similarly angst-ridden attorney was the focus of the drama *Philly*, which lasted the duration of the 2001-2002 season. Kathleen Maguire was adjusting to a new law partner, her previous one having recently been shipped off to a psychiatric hospital. The new partner, Will Froman, was a sleazy womanizer who seemed to attract only the most despicable clients. Kathleen also had to deal with her scheming exhusband, an assistant district attorney who not only battled her in court, but also tried to turn their young son against her.

Even characters on Philadelphia’s sitcoms suffered from their own measure of self-induced misery. Critic Stephen Kelly argued that, given the incredible amount of angst endured by its characters, the sitcom *Happy Family* should have been called “*Miserable Dysfunctional Family*” (Kelly 2003b: 1). On *Minor Adjustments*, Dr. Ron Aimes shared an office with a pair of vexed yuppies—Bruce, a “fussy” orthodontist, and Francine a “neurotic” pediatrician—but most of the program dealt with Aimes’s work as a child psychologist, proving that, in television Philadelphia, anxiety can strike at any age (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 898).

Personal tumult had indeed become multigenerational by the 2000s, particularly on the family drama *The Days*, which ran for six anxious weeks in 2004. The title family included Jack Day, who was, like Jack Shannon of *Shannon’s Way*, a disenchanting corporate attorney. Jack’s wife, Abby, was, like Michael and Elliot from *thirtysomething*, a talented advertising executive. Cooper was their bitter older son, Nathan was their anxiety-ridden younger son, and Natalie was their overachieving daughter. Jack quit his job in the pilot episode. Unlike Shannon, Jack did not start his own, new, morally righteous practice, but rather spent the rest of the program’s short run

trying to get his old job back. Meanwhile, both Abby and Natalie found themselves suddenly, and quite inopportunistly, pregnant.

The Class, which aired during the 2006-2007 season, was a sort of next-generation take on *thirtysomething*. The characters were leading equally disastrous lives, but this being a sitcom, the take was considerably lighter. Ethan was a Philadelphia doctor who decided to throw a reunion party for his third-grade class. The class included Duncan, a successful businessman who still lived at home with his tyrannical mother; Holly, a reporter whose husband, an interior decorator, was probably gay; Kat, a gloomy photographer; Lina, Kat's sex-starved and romantically unlucky twin sister; Nicole, a trophy wife; and Richie, the suicidal loser. The season followed their calamitous lives, which included a healthy dose of troubled marriages, adultery, and "one disaster after another" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 258).

Despite its dysfunctional families, yuppie angst, and occasional class conflicts, television's version of Philadelphia in the twentieth century was, at the very least, a relatively clean and safe place, devoid of the poverty, crime, and grime that befell many of America's television cityscapes. That would change dramatically with the dawn of a new millennium. As mentioned, the 2004 sitcom *The Big House* was the story of spoiled rich kid who had been sent to live with relatives in a tough neighborhood of Philly—a neighborhood so tough, in fact, that when the kid wanted to watch *Cops*, his uncle told him he could watch it "right outside the door" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 140).

Police and legal dramas, which have added a layer of grime to otherwise shining cities all over the U. S., came to dominate Philadelphia's entries in the 2000s. The shift was signaled, albeit briefly, by *Ryan Caulfield: Year One*, which debuted late in 1999. The title character was a

handsome young rookie police officer working in an exceptionally violent part of Philadelphia known as the Badlands. A product of suburbia, Ryan had turned down a chance to go to college so that he could make a contribution to society, but “had problems dealing with the brutal reality of life and death in the inner city” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,184). So did viewers, apparently, as the show was cancelled after two episodes had aired. The social collapse of televised Philadelphia picked up again in 2001 with *Philly*, whose lawyers “seemed to attract the very dregs of humanity for clients,” including “murderers, rapists, pornographers and wife beaters” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,080).

Two more Philadelphia police dramas debuted in the 2000s, one that met with moderate success, and another that became one of Pennsylvania’s most popular entries. *Hack*, which premiered in 2002, told the story of Mike Olshansky, who had been fired from the Philadelphia police force after being caught stealing money from a crime scene. He wasn’t the only corrupt cop on the force—he was simply the one that got caught—but *Hack* knew that he had, in the words of critic Lesley Smith, “earned his place in the gutter, where he can soak in self-pity with eye drops, caffeine, and anger” (Smith 2002b: 1). Mike took a job as a cab driver, and tried to redeem himself by helping people. Stylistically, the show was modeled after (or was a rip-off of) Martin Scorsese’s influential 1976 film *Taxi Driver* and, although Mike was considerably more balanced than the film’s protagonist, the geographic mood was the same. Smith noted that *Hack* strained “mightily to recapture the menace Martin Scorsese infused into the tawdry city-at-night streets reflected so fleetingly on the cab’s glistening sides,” but the show never lived up to anything like the film’s critical reputation (Smith 2002b: 1). It did, however, contain many of the same nasty elements. During *Hack*’s two-year run, Mike cruised Philadelphia’s streets, tackling

cases involving domestic abuse, homelessness, prostitution, stalkers, murderers, illegal drugs, crooked politicians, and corrupt and murderous cops.

Philadelphia's first and, to date, only police detective drama was 2003's *Cold Case* which, as if making up for all those years when Philly lacked television cops, chronicled the effort of a detective to solve "cold" cases—crimes from years before that had never been solved. The principal character was Detective Lily Rush, the lone female detective on her precinct's homicide squad, whose angelic looks masked the fact that she could be a pit bull—"I'm just the kind of girl who pisses you off," she told a suspect in one episode (Kelly 2003c: 1). Produced by the studio that spawned the *CSI* franchise and *Without a Trace*, *Cold Case* bore the same urgent pace and splashy visual style, and while few critics found the show objectionable, it was never lauded for being groundbreaking. It was a sort of *CSI* for archivists—Lily would stumble upon a cold case, pour through boxes of old evidence, dig up past witnesses, interrogate suspects, and solve the case. The cast and crew of *Cold Case* travelled from California to Philadelphia a few times each year to do exterior scenes, but there is little indication in the critical literature that the show had an especially evocative sense of place. It is clear that the show was relatively neutral in its assessment of Philadelphia's geography. There was, of course, the message that murder was a long-standing avocation in the city, but because the cases were cold, the show lacked the urgency and the blood-stained, gritty streets and back alleys of many of its cop show counterparts. *Cold Case* must, nevertheless, be considered an important part of the Philadelphia's television landscape, if for no other reason that it was one of city's few successful entries. When *Cold Case* wrapped up its seven seasons in 2010, it was not only Philadelphia's longest-running entry, but the only one to rank in the Nielsen top twenty for four consecutive seasons.

If a Philadelphia program breaks *Cold Case*'s seven-season mark, it will likely be the FX cable network sitcom *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, which premiered in 2005 and continued to air through 2010. Perhaps the sleaziest portrayal of Philadelphia ever to hit the airwaves, *Always Sunny* was the story of four slackers in their early thirties—Mac, Charlie, Dennis, and Deandra (“Sweet Dee”)—who operated a South Philly bar called Paddy’s Irish Pub. Paddy’s almost never had any customers, so each week “The Gang” (as they were often called in the opening credits) would set off on some seemingly innocent quest to either drum up business or kill time. Because each of them was completely lacking a moral compass, these adventures would always result in disaster for both the gang and any innocent bystanders who happened to get in the way. Added in the second season was Dennis and Dee’s father, Frank, a wealthy, drunk, gun-toting divorcee, who was even more of a degenerate than his children. The content of the show is perhaps best summarized by its episode titles, which always appeared as a punch line to a brief opening scene. Examples from the show’s first three seasons included: “The Gang Gets Racist,” “Charlie Wants an Abortion,” “The Gang Finds a Dead Guy,” “Charlie Gets Molested,” “Dennis and Dee Go on Welfare,” “Mac Bangs Dennis’s Mom,” “The Gang Finds a Dumpster Baby,” “Frank Sets Sweet Dee on Fire,” “Sweet Dee is Dating a Retarded Person,” “Mac is a Serial Killer,” and “Dennis Looks Like a Registered Sex Offender.”

Because *Always Sunny* appeared on FX, and because of its “willful, even gleeful abandonment of political correctness,” as critic Tim Goodman put it, the show was never a blockbuster hit, but it did develop an intensely loyal cult following (Goodman 2006: 1). Although it is difficult to argue that it has displaced *thirtysomething*, *Cold Case*, or *Amen* as the show the majority viewers most closely identify with Philadelphia, it must be considered the city’s defining show among its young audience. The geographic message of the show was

complex. There was, of course, a fairly strong indication that Philadelphia could be a very sleazy, and even dangerous, place. In one episode, Dennis was drinking at an almost empty Paddy's, wondering why it didn't have more customers, particularly female ones:

DENNIS: I don't get it, Dee. There are tons of women in this city. Where do they go?

DEE: They're at velvet-rope clubs on Delaware Avenue.

DENNIS: Why?

DEE: Dennis, our bar is in south Philly in a scary alley. We might as well call it "Rape Bar."

Eventually the gang hit upon a successful business model—they would sell to underage customers. They stood around considering the enormous throng of drunk teenagers in Paddy's and had the following exchange:

DENNIS: We could get into a lot of trouble for this.

DEE: And we also have a social responsibility to keep teenagers from drinking.

CHARLIE: I guess.

MAC: Well, I don't know about that, though. Hold on. I mean, wait a second. Hear me out. Hear me out. It wasn't that long ago that we were in the same position as these youngsters, right? I mean, we'd get kicked out of some bar and what did we do? We would get a bunch of forties from a homeless guy and we would go sit in some park.

CHARLIE: That is true.

MAC: That is absolutely true. And what would happen? We would almost get raped and/or murdered and/or stabbed by the crack heads in Fairmount Park (Twentieth Century Fox 2007b).

The dialogue above was illustrative of the show's often seedy take on Philadelphia's geography, but it would be incorrect to characterize *Always Sunny* as a wholly negative depiction. The show did a fair amount of filming in the city, including scenes in pleasant and charming areas. The opening credits of *Always Sunny* showcased some of Philadelphia's more famous landmarks and locales, including the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, Penn's Landing, Logan Circle, Boathouse Row, and South Street. Another notable element of the title sequence was the *Always Sunny* theme song, a ludicrously lush orchestral number—"Temptation Sensation," composed by Heinz Kiessling—that was actually an old public domain production piece. Most of the show's background music, in fact, consisted of forgotten bits of easy listening music from the public domain—sprightly pops numbers that were more appropriate to a 1950s detergent commercial than to an edgy twenty-first century sitcom. The music was likely selected because it was free to use—no small matter given the show's initially miniscule budget—but it perfectly matched the tone of the show. It let the viewer know that the show was not trying to be hip or sophisticated, and that nothing on it was meant to be taken the least bit seriously. This complete lack of pretension might have been the show's defining trait, and was part of its core geographic message—that the people of Philadelphia could be rude, uncouth, or downright uncivilized, but they were also unpretentious, genuine, and, despite it all, somehow likable. Tim Goodman argued that this was central to the show's success, and the reason why it could get away with the things it did:

This is a series that's ridiculously funny, managing to be offensive on purpose and not seem like it's being offensive on purpose It's one thing to send up someone else's passionately held beliefs (political or otherwise), but it's a lot tougher to do that without an obvious and tiring snark and have it sealed with a zest that makes the characters appealing no matter what they do. . . . The Gang own a bar in Philly called Paddy's Irish Pub. That is the extent of their ambition. They like to drink. They'd like the bar to make

more money, but mostly it doesn't. They are all, cumulatively, not very good in social situations or with members of the opposite sex. They are slackers looking for pleasure of all kinds in any place, but mostly they fail, in squalor, sometimes in pain, then restart the process the next day. With beers The lack of gloss is welcome, the lack of pretentiousness even more so (Goodman 2006: 1).

Like the Philadelphia of *Always Sunny*, most American cities have, from time to time, been depicted on television as having a rough edge, but few cities on the TV landscape have been so hardboiled as Philadelphia's cross-state counterpart, Pittsburgh. The city's first entry was 1978's *Roller Girls*, a sitcom that gave viewers a behind-the-scenes look at an all-female roller derby team, the Pittsburgh Pitts. The sexy crew consisted of some common, and not-so-common, television stereotypes, including "Books," the nerdy girl; "Honey Bee," the ditzy blonde southerner; J. B., the "token black;" "Mongo," the enormous enforcer; and "Pipeline," who was, of all things, an Eskimo (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,169). Howie Devine was a snobby, washed-out announcer who had previously worked for an opera, but who was down on his luck and trying to make a quick buck. The owner and coach of the Pitts was the scheming Don Mitchell, who was trying to save the team from constantly looming economic ruin. Apparently he was not successful, as the show was cancelled after four weeks. As unpopular as *Roller Girls* was with viewers, it was even more unpopular among television critics, and Mark Dawidziak of the *Akron Beacon Journal* was probably the most succinct: "Badly acted, badly directed, badly written" (Javna 1988: 103).

Pittsburg's second entry, 1980's *Skag*, came from the opposite end of the television pool. While *Roller Girls* had been an empty-headed sitcom lambasted by critics, *Skag* was a highly realistic drama starring Academy Award winner Karl Malden. It had all the makings of a hit—

talented actors and writers, a big budget, heavy promotion by NBC, and widespread critical acclaim. “All it lacked,” wrote one critic, “was an audience” (Lichter, Litcher and Rothman 1991: 113). It lasted only slightly longer than *Roller Girls*, and it also did the reputation of Pittsburgh no favors, painting such an unyieldingly gloomy portrait of the Steel City that it made life on a failing roller derby team appear enviable.

The title character was Pete Skagska, an aging foreman at a steel mill. “It was a hard life, but the only one he knew,” wrote Brooks and Marsh, “until he almost lost it when a crippling stroke forced him to stay home and try to put his life back together” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,253). Skag had more than a few problems. The family faced economic hardship. Even worse, Skag’s father had also had a stroke, which left him speechless, feeble, and in the care of Skag’s family, which had its own issues. Skag’s second wife, Jo, who was Jewish, was struggling to adapt to life in the Serbian Orthodox Skagska family. Skag’s oldest son, David, resented having to work at the steel mill, while his money-hungry younger son was in medical school and turning his back on the family. Skag’s older daughter, Patricia, was insecure and socially awkward, and his obese fifteen-year-old daughter, Barbara, was trying to increase her popularity by sleeping around. “Skag, the stubborn traditionalist,” wrote Brooks and Marsh, “was trying to adjust to a changing world whose values he did not fully understand” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,253).

With story lines involving culture clashes, impotence, medical crises, prostitution, senility, teenage sex, and unemployment, Brooks and Marsh note that “maybe it was too depressing to see that much hard reality” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,253). Lichter, Litcher, and Rothman echoed the sentiment. “Considering the problems the scriptwriters gave him, they might as well have named him Job,” they wrote. “This realistic portrayal of a troubled

steelworker was apparently just too downbeat for viewers looking to Hollywood's fantasy factory for relief from their own problems" (Lichter, Licther and Rothman 1991: 113).

Skag was off the air after eight weeks, and passed into obscurity. It did, however, speak volumes about television's take on Pittsburgh. It was a program widely touted for its highly realistic portrayal of life in the city, and that reality proved to be just too depressing for the American television audience. Subsequent Pittsburgh-based dramas were similarly downbeat. Legal dramas, by the very nature of their content, can cast a pall over any city's television landscape, but Pittsburgh's single legal drama was especially gritty. *Equal Justice*, which ran intermittently for eleven months in 1990 and 1991, was described by Brooks and Marsh as "a sort of a downscale *L.A. Law*," chronicling the exploits of the Pittsburgh District Attorney's office, as they eagerly pursued the "slime of the city" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 425). The police drama *Sirens*, which was filmed in Pittsburgh and Montreal, aired for five months on ABC in 1993, and had a brief run in syndication the following year. It focused on three rookie female police officers, chronicling their lives and loves while they weren't shooting it out with criminals on the mean streets of Pittsburgh.

A slightly lighter, but no more successful, take on life in Pittsburgh was the blue collar sitcom *You Take the Kids*, which premiered in December of 1990 and ran for five weeks. The only Pittsburgh-based program to feature a predominantly black cast, this show focused on the Kirkland family. The father, Michael Kirkland, was a school bus driver, while his wife Nell gave piano lessons, and they lived with their four kids and Nell's mother in Pittsburgh's inner city. The only Pittsburgh-based comedy to attempt to cash in on the twentysomethings-hanging-out trend of the 1990s was *Local Heroes*, a "blue-collar ripoff of *Friends*" that lasted a month in 1996 (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 805). Unlike their counterparts in New York, however, the four

guys spent most of their time sitting around in a bar, rather than a coffee shop. These Pittsburghers were all working-class schlubs, including a pair of assembly line workers, a cab driver, and a video store clerk.

Pittsburgh's lone entry in the reality genre aired for eight weeks in 2005. The ESPN series *Bound for Glory* chronicled "the attempt to lift a discouraged, ragtag high school football team out of its doldrums with an infusion of sports star power" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 172). The team was the Montour Spartans of the Pittsburgh-area mill town, McKees Rocks, and the star power included Chicago Bears legend Dick Butkus and former Kansas City Chief Ray Crockett. The Spartans once had been state champs and the pride of McKees Rocks, but as the economic fortunes of the town had declined, so had the team, and "now nobody could remember the last time they had won a game" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 172). Despite its optimistic theme and title, even this show could not lift Pittsburgh out the television doldrums, and the team continued to lose all of its games.

Among Pittsburgh's hardscrabble entries was a sitcom with a relatively bright outlook and well-scrubbed setting that was, perhaps not surprisingly, the city's most durable entry. The suburban family comedy *Mr. Belvedere* premiered in 1985 and, although never a ratings smash, it did manage to last for five seasons. The show featured former baseball player and talk-show mainstay Bob Uecker as wisecracking sportswriter George Owens. George and his wife Marsha, an attorney, were struggling to balance career demands with the responsibility raising three rowdy kids. Along came the refined, sophisticated English butler Mr. Belvedere who, "to everyone's surprise . . . proved to be both a genius in the kitchen and an expert at solving all the little problems of growing up and getting along" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 904).

The key to the *Belvedere* recipe was the contrast between earthy George and his proper housekeeper, a manners mismatch that was repeated on two subsequent Pittsburgh-based sitcoms. *Hope & Gloria*, which premiered in 1995 and ran for a season and a half, was the story of a pair of single women who shared a Pittsburgh townhouse. Hope, who was a local television producer, was cheerful and eternally optimistic, despite the fact that her husband of ten years had just left her. Gloria, a single mom with a young son was a “brassy, cynical hairdresser who knew all too well what a no-goodski her gross, carpet-salesman ex-husband Louis was” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 634). Perky-versus-brassy was also the formula for the sitcom *Reunited*, which debuted in 1998. Joanne was a “punk-rock, tattooed, and pierced” young woman who moved in with, her uptight suburban mom, the “perpetually perky” and “cloyingly sweet” Nicki (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,149). Joanne made cynical comments and Nicki looked after her Hummel figurines while husband Gary grouched for the duration of the show’s two-month run.

Rounding out Pittsburgh’s entries was the city’s only period piece, the quirky comedy *Remember WENN*, which aired on cable’s AMC network from 1996 to 1998. Set at a local radio station in the late 1930s, *Remember WENN* portrayed Pittsburgh as a second-banana city, much in the same way that *WKRP* had characterized Cincinnati. With its low-ball sponsors, financial tribulations, dinner-theater programming, washed-up on-air talent, and loony production staff, WENN was clearly a cut-rate operation. The show is perhaps best remembered for its often bizarre plots, as when WENN’s manager was brainwashed by Nazi spies to commit murder whenever he heard the phrase “buy barley futures” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,143).

As mentioned, just five of Pennsylvania’s entries have taken place outside of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, and four of those programs have been set in fictional locales. The first was likely based on the real city of Pottsville, in the heart of eastern Pennsylvania’s coal

region. The drama *Gibbsville*, which ran for eight weeks in 1976, was based on the writings of Pottsville native John O'Hara, and told the story of John Malloy, a reporter for the *Gibbsville Courier* during the 1940s.

All of the remaining programs set in Pennsylvania's fictional towns have been sitcoms. *Gung Ho*, which was based on a hit movie of the same name, aired for four months in the 1986-1987 season. This program was set in fictional Hadleyville, which had fallen on hard times since the local auto plant closed. Enter Assan Motors of Japan, which reopened the plant, creating the inevitable culture clash between a conservative Japanese management team and the easygoing American workers. While Japanese industry helped revive fictional Hadleyville, it nearly ruined another fictional place. Japanese imports were decimating Grand, Pennsylvania's leading industry, piano manufacturing, in the soap-opera parody *Grand*, which aired for nine months in 1990. The factory's owner was the ancient Harris Weldon, who puttered around his mansion with his moronic son, Norris; his caustic butler, Desmond; and his redneck housekeeper, Janice. His niece, Carol Anne, had a conniving yuppie husband who had designs on the company. Small-town Pennsylvania was also the setting for one of Dick Van Dyke's failed attempts to return to sitcom glory. *The Van Dyke Show*, which lasted just seven weeks in 1988, cast the title character as a Broadway musical star who moved to Pennsylvania to help (and harass) his son, who ran a small regional theater.

The only Pennsylvania-based program not set in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, or a fictional town was *The Office*, which premiered in 2005 and continued to air through 2010. Based on a popular British sitcom of the same name, the show took place in and around the Scranton branch of Dunder-Mifflin, a struggling paper supply company. The show had a unique, trend-setting style: it had no audience or laugh track, and the characters often spoke directly to the camera (the

excuse being that they were subjects of an unseen documentary film crew). Although it was primarily a workplace comedy, much of the action, at least in the show's early seasons, focused on the friendship and burgeoning romance between two of the principal characters. Jim Halpert was a generally cheerful guy, with the talent to be a top salesman. He found the prospect of dedicating his life to selling paper too depressing, however, so he spent most of his time goofing off. His partner in crime for office pranks was Pam Beesly, a winsome receptionist who seemed quietly resigned to her dull lot in life. Jim had an obvious crush on Pam, but Pam was engaged, and their star-crossed romance was the primary reason why viewers made the show a minor hit.

The show's primary character, however, was Michael Scott, the branch manager of Dunder-Mifflin Scranton. For such a simpleminded man, Michael was quite complex. He was energetic and out-going, but also selfish, stubborn, and incredibly dense. On his desk was a coffee mug that proclaimed "World's Best Boss," which he had bought for himself. Michael vacillated between states of pathetic insecurity and delusions of grandeur, but he nearly always thought he was the funniest man in the room. He never was (intentionally at least) and his tendency toward poorly timed and completely insensitive jokes led to many of the excruciatingly awkward moments that became the show's trademark.

The rest of the Dunder-Mifflin sales team included Stanley Hudson, an incredibly laconic black salesman; matronly Phyllis Lapin, who rarely said a word; and Dwight Schrute, a geeky, sycophantic part-time beet farmer, who was the most frequent target of Jim's pranks, and whose devotion to the company and to Michael bordered on fascism. The accountants included chubby, mumbling Kevin Malone; self-righteous fundamentalist Christian Angela Martin; and calm Oscar Martinez, who was gay, and who was the target of many of Michael's inappropriate comments. Ditzzy, emotional Kelly Kapoor and bitter, alcoholic Meredith Palmer were customer

service representatives, and Toby Flenderson was a nebbish human resources director. Ryan Howard was an MBA student and new office temp who was trying to fly under the radar but who, unfortunately, became Michael's favorite employee. Perhaps the most memorable supporting character was Creed Bratton, a washed-up rock guitarist (played by the actual musician of the same name), whose brain had been melted by years of drug use. Creed, of course, was in charge of quality control.

If all of these characters sound vaguely familiar, that was the point. "If you walk into an office anywhere," said one viewer, "you are going to be able to identify the people on the show" (Rouvalis 2006: 1). The office set of the show was equally familiar. Located in a squat nondescript building near a railyard, the workers sat in a jumble of desks, cubicles, and mini-shaded offices. Keyboards clicked away above the hum of computer monitors and fluorescent lights, a drone interrupted by the occasional ring of a telephone and muted conversation. There was a malfunctioning copier, a gurgling water cooler, nondescript art, vending machines, and a break room refrigerator crammed full of forgotten lunch leftovers. Although a few personal touches also existed—Kevin's jar of M&Ms, Angela's cat posters, Michael's office toys, Dwight's martial arts weaponry—the overall effect was that of a numbingly authentic office. In the words of journalist Cristina Rouvalis, it was a jab at "dysfunctional office life in Anywhere, America" (Rouvalis 2006: 1).

The Office ran on Thursday nights, a tough television arena, and never did especially well in the general ratings. It did, however, develop a loyal following among the advertiser-friendly eighteen-to-forty-nine-year-old demographic. It was also generally well-received by the critics and the industry, notching thirty-six Emmy nominations and winning four, including one for Outstanding Comedy Series.

Some of the show's most enthusiastic supporters came from Scranton itself. "Any other city in the county would be happy to be part of an Emmy-award winning show," said Mayor Chris Doherty, who had a Dunder-Mifflin banner placed outside of City Hall. "We feel very lucky that they would use Scranton as their mythical home base" (Rouvalis 2006: 1). The city has cashed in on the popularity, too, hosting an annual *Office* convention that was attended by more than 15,000 people in 2007. Of the hundreds of cities across America that could easily have hosted *The Office*, Scranton was selected, in part, because it is located a couple of hours from New York City, the home of fictional Dunder-Mifflin's corporate headquarters. That distance was appropriate for the frequent, but not too frequent, visits from Jan Levinson, Michael's exasperated boss and sometime love interest. According to Greg Daniels, the creator of the American version, the rest was pure coincidence. Daniels had seen a child's Valentine card that said "Made in Scranton," and decided that the city was as good a place as any for a fictional paper company. Despite the serendipitous nature of Scranton's selection, Daniels and his writers made a point of keeping *The Office* rooted in its locale. "Good fiction has specifics," said Daniels, and the show made frequent references to real Scranton-area locations, such as Lake Wallenpaupack, the Steamtown Mall, Bishop Hannan High School, and numerous local businesses (Rouvalis 2006: 1). The local Chamber of Commerce regularly shipped authentic Scranton props to California to be used on the show's set.

Maria Johnson, a British national who now serves on the faculty of the University of Scranton, called the show "deeply depressing and annihilating and very, very funny." She also noted that the British version of the show had been set in Slough, described by Johnson as the "proverbial armpit" of England. "Is America," wondered Johnson, "trying to say that it feels about Scranton the way the British feel about Slough?" (Rouvalis 2006: 1).

Generally speaking, the Scranton of *The Office* was hardly an “armpit,” but rather a pleasant and friendly, if not terribly exciting, small city. Still, it is difficult to separate the character of Scranton from the character of Michael Scott. His key traits, in the words of critic Christopher Sieving, were “an inflated sense of importance; a minimal understanding of his actual insignificance; and a willingness to shred what remains of his dignity in a colossally misguided attempt to salvage it” (Sieving 2005: 1). Another point, hammered home time and time again, was that Michael was thoroughly unsophisticated. He never attended college, knew very little about the world beyond Scranton, and lacked knowledge of even the most rudimentary elements of anything resembling high culture. He was, however, steeped in mainstream popular media, and was a slave to anything and everything that was generic and mass-produced. His favorite restaurants were Chili’s and Hooters, he ordered anything he saw advertised on an infomercial, and considered his Chrysler Sebring to be the height of cool. In a memorable moment from an episode where Michael was visiting Dunder-Mifflin’s corporate headquarters, he bragged about knowing a great little New York pizza place, and promptly bounced off into a Sbarro. That such a clueless character could find employment in an office, much less run one, does suggest something about *The Office*’s assessment of Scranton.

Greg Daniels insisted that these jokes were about Michael, not Scranton and, to be fair, Michael was never intended to be held up as Scranton’s brightest bulb. If there was a central geographic message to *The Office*, it wasn’t that Scranton was unpleasant, or that the city’s residents were backward yokels, but simply that it was a place of limited opportunity and limited excitement. In a telling moment from one episode, Michael, with forced enthusiasm, said to the camera, “Life moves a little slower in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and that’s the way we like it” (Rouvalis 2006: 1). The scene then cut to shots of Dunder-Mifflin’s employees, all of whom had

vacant, glazed expressions. The show's geographic message was most clearly delivered, however, in Scranton's relationship with New York. The Big Apple was home to the show's far more chic characters, such as Jan Levinson and the Dunder-Mifflin CEO David Wallace. In addition to providing the destination for the occasional exciting road trip for the show's bored Scrantonites, it represented opportunity for a number of the characters. Former temp Ryan went from being the timid and bullied to being cool and confident after taking a position in New York. When Pam finally decided to make something of her life, she attended art school in New York. Jim nearly took a corporate job there. "There's just an energy that New York has," he said. "Not to mention they have places that are open past eight" (Universal Studios 2007).

The Scranton-New York comparison was not entirely one-sided. When Ryan moved to the big city, he went from being a likable guy to a manipulative, drug-addled jerk. Pam hated New York, and Jim decided not to take the corporate job because he would miss Scranton (and Pam) too much. Still, *The Office* always presented New York as the big leagues and Scranton as the farm team. The limitations of Scranton were made clear in a comment by Jim in the show's second season:

Dwight was the top salesman of the year at our company. He wins a little prize money and gets honored at some convention. It is *literally* the highest possible honor that a northeastern-Pennsylvania-based, mid-sized paper company regional salesman can attain (Universal Studios 2006).

NEW JERSEY

New Jersey is something of an oddity when it comes to television geography. It falls within the northeastern Megalopolis and, as expected, has been well-represented throughout

much of its history, racking up an impressive thirty-seven entries. So, New Jersey is not notable for a lack of programs. But it is notable for a lack of certain kinds of programs. The “relevance” sitcoms of the 1970s, the “filthy rich” soap operas of the 1980s, the “friends hanging out” sitcoms of the 1990s, and the reality shows of the 2000s were all nearly absent from the state. Other durable genres—workplace comedies, family dramas, medical dramas, legal dramas, thrillers, and supernatural and science fiction programs—have also been poorly represented in the state.

A second peculiarity about New Jersey’s television landscape is the remarkably poor performance of most of its entries. One possible explanation hinges on the state’s lack of a single large metropolitan focal point. The state is situated, for lack of a better term, in the backyards of Philadelphia and New York. Still, if this were the case, then it is unlikely that so many attempts would have been made to place shows in the state. The explanation becomes more suspect when the track record of New Jersey programs are compared to those of Connecticut, a state also wedged between two large metropolitan areas—New York and Boston. Connecticut has been the setting for sixteen programs, a meager number when compared to New Jersey, but six of those shows lasted at least three years, and four made it into the top thirty on the Nielsen charts. Of New Jersey’s thirty-seven entries, only three have lasted at least three seasons, and of those, one was a fifteen-minute bowling program and another was available only on a subscription-based cable network. Just one New Jersey-based show has ever cracked the Nielsen top thirty, and that did not occur until 2004. Although it appears that television producers are more than willing to set programs in New Jersey, viewers, for whatever reason, have not been particularly enthusiastic about the state.

New Jersey's first seven entries originated locally. The first was *Big Top*, which debuted in 1950 and ran for six months. Featuring live circus acts broadcast from the Camden, New Jersey, Convention Hall, the show was most notable for the fact that future *Tonight Show* sidekick Ed McMahon appeared regularly as one of the circus clowns. *Music at the Meadowbrook* emanated from the Meadowbrook Night Club in Cedar Grove, which had been an important stage for radio broadcasts of big band music in the 1930s. The club came to network television with a series of live musical performances for eight months in 1953, and again for four months in 1956.

New Jersey's next four entries were all summer replacement programs—shows that aired while the regular network schedule was on hiatus. *The Strawhatters*, which ran during the summers of 1953 and 1954, was, in essence, an advertisement for the Palisades Amusement Park, located across the Hudson River from Manhattan. It was a low-budget affair, showcasing the park's attractions, including a talent show, diving exhibitions, and musical acts from the park's ballroom. *On the Boardwalk with Paul Whiteman* was an amateur talent show broadcast live from Atlantic City's Steel Pier during the summer of 1954. *Let's See*, which aired for seven weeks in 1955, was a cross between the parlor game "twenty questions" and a travel advertisement. Filmed at Convention Hall in Atlantic City, contestants were asked a series of questions by a panel, who attempted to deduce which of the city's attractions the contestant had visited. The show was, not surprisingly, sponsored by the Atlantic City Chamber of Commerce.

New Jersey's next entry was *Cowtown Rodeo*, which aired during the summers of 1957 and 1958, and featured rodeo performers competing for cash prizes at Cowtown Ranch in Woodstown. *Make That Spare* was telecast live from Paramus. As its titled suggested, the show featured two bowlers who had a chance to win cash prizes by making a difficult spare. The victor

was invited to return for the next broadcast, with the show's biggest winner accumulating a grand total of \$38,000. *Make That Spare* ran from 1960 to 1964, and was New Jersey's last entry for nearly a decade.

New Jersey's first scripted entries appeared in 1973, coincidentally the same year that the state's music icon, Bruce Springsteen, released his debut album, *Greeting from Asbury Park, N.J.* Those whose images of New Jersey have been shaped by listening to Springsteen records might fully expect to find New Jersey's television entries dominated by working-class families and blue-collar sensibilities. A number of New Jersey's television entries have, indeed, possessed Springsteen-esque flavor. The first was *Joe and Sons*, a sitcom that aired for four months during the 1975-1976 season. It was the story of Joe Vitale, an Italian-American widower raising two teen sons in an apartment in Hoboken, while holding down a job at the Hoboken Sheet and Tube Company. *Dream Street*, one of New Jersey's few family dramas, was filmed on location in Hoboken, and aired for two months in 1989. The show was produced by the same team that created *thirtysomething*, and possessed the same sort of insight and realism that had made *thirtysomething* a hit. *Dream Street*'s working-class residents apparently did not have the same drawing power as Philadelphia anxious yuppies, however, with one critic noting that viewers would have trouble relating to these characters, "unless they happened to live in Hoboken and be connected to the Mob" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 391). *Bless This House*, a sitcom featuring the infamously vulgar comedian Andrew Dice Clay, aired for four months during the 1995-1996 season. Clay played Burt Clayton, who lived with his wife and two children in a dilapidated apartment building in Trenton. Bad-mannered Burt worked at the post office, while his sharp-tongued wife Alice worked in the parts department of a car dealership.

Such bleak settings are not unique to New Jersey, of course, but some of the state's programs had a particularly dreary message, recalling the sentiments of the Springsteen song "The River," which asked, "Is a dream a lie if it don't come true, or is it something worse?" Such a musing seems an unlikely candidate for the premise of a television comedy, but it is applicable to two of New Jersey's entries. The sitcom *My Wildest Dreams*, which aired for five weeks in 1995, was the story of Lisa McGinnis, who lived in suburban New Jersey with her husband Jack, a struggling sporting goods salesman, and their two young children. Lisa created radio commercials at the Mound of Sound recording studio, and had had dreams of becoming a rock star, but was starting to "deal with the unfortunate realities of life: she was unlikely to get that big break" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 948). *That's Life*, which premiered in 2000 and aired for a year and a half, was equally bleak. It was the story of thirty-two-year-old Lydia DeLucca, who was trying to improve her lot by enrolling at Montville State University. Brooks and Marsh described the reactions of her friends and family as remarkably unsupportive:

Nobody understood. Her toll collector father, Frank, and nagging mom Dolly just wanted her to get married and have babies. Her fiancé, Lou, complained about Lydia going to college so she broke their engagement, causing Dolly to fret that she was destined to become a lonely old maid. Lydia's kid brother Paulie, a somewhat goofy local cop who liked to needle her, thought she was screwing up her life. Her two best friends, Jackie, who ran a hair salon, and Candy, a former Miss New Jersey . . . also didn't understand why she wanted to get a degree and were upset she spent so much time studying (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1375).

Critic Tracy McLoone argued that *That's Life* not only featured unpleasant New Jersey stereotypes, but dated ones at that:

Lydia and her best friends . . . play up the Jersey Girl aspects of their characters: they all live in Brookfield, where they went to

grade school; they wear lots of makeup and tight clothes; they have loud mouths and hearts of gold. You do not have to listen too closely to catch the strains of Springsteen here: back in the day, men drove fast cars and played guitars; women were pretty, gullible, and a little bit sassy Problem: *That's Life* takes place in the current millennium (McLoone 2010: 1).

While such programs have characterized New Jersey life as a series of dreary working-class struggles, others have gone a step farther, portraying the state as downright seedy. New Jersey's first scripted entry, *Toma*, aired during the 1973-1974 season, and was based on the actual life of Detective David Toma of the Newark Police Department. Like many television detectives, Toma was a rebel and a loner, but his intelligence and talent for disguise made him an invaluable undercover agent against organized crime syndicates. *Toma* was followed, briefly, by the detective series *Big Shamus*, *Little Shamus*, which aired for two weeks in 1979. The lead character was seasoned private eye Arnie Sutter, who served as the house detective at Atlantic City's seedy Ansonia Hotel. The city's legalization of gambling had saved the Ansonia, but forced Sutter to deal with a surge in con artists, hookers, and thieves. The lighter side of seediness was on display in *No Soap, Radio*, a surreal sitcom set at the Atlantic City's squalid Pelican Hotel. Perhaps best described as "the *Twilight Zone* of comedies," it never caught on with viewers, and was cancelled after five weeks in 1982 (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 994). The crime drama *Wiseguy* debuted in 1987, and spent part of its first season in New Jersey. The lead character was Vinnie Terranova, a federal agent, who was working undercover to try to bring down a dangerous Atlantic City crime boss. *The Street* was a nightly, syndicated drama that was in production for four months in 1988. Filmed on location in Newark, the program followed the professional and personal lives of a group of patrolman. Shot in a cinéma vérité style, the show

“exuded a gritty reality . . . used very frank language . . . and showed its officers to have real prejudices and short-comings” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1316).

One of the few New Jersey professional dramas not to focus on detectives or criminals was also the state’s first entry to feature an African-American lead. *Matt Waters*, which aired for one month in 1996, was filmed on location in Bayonne. The title character was a career Navy man who had returned to teach science at the high school he had attended a quarter-century before. The school had certainly changed, and, in the words of one critic, the “armed security guards and metal detectors were a constant reminder of how tough things had become” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 868). A strict disciplinarian, Matt took a tough-love approach to teaching, at one point fulfilling every teacher’s fantasy by hanging a disruptive student out a classroom window by his ankles. The show painted a grim picture of New Jersey life, examining such topics as gang violence, murder, child abuse, poverty, and illiteracy.

Not all New Jersey-based programs have sent out such bleak signals. Many of the state’s television residents, in fact, have had far more in common with Ozzie Nelson than Bruce Springsteen. Hope Edelman, who grew up just across the state line in southern New York, described the difference between the New Jersey of the popular imagination and the New Jersey that was reality for many of the area’s residents:

Though we liked to imagine ourselves as the kind of characters that peopled Springsteen’s songs—he was, after all, writing about us—the fit was never quite right. We had pretty much the same anxieties, but the socioeconomics were all wrong. He sang of working-class kids stuck in dead end towns who grabbed their girlfriends by the wrists, leapt into their rebuilt ‘69 Chevys and peeled out of town in search of their futures. Our hometown was an upper-middle-class suburb where a college education was more an expectation than an exercise in free will. Most of us would grow

up to become just what our parents had planned, and to do just as they had done. *Doctor, lawyer, C.P.A.* (Edelman 1995: 138).

Even the New Jersey programs focused on working class struggle with a hard-bitten cynicism featured measured amounts of domestic bliss. For example, the hard-nosed cop from *Toma* had his cheery side. “Toma was also a devoted family man, never too busy to spend quality time with his wife Patty and kids Jimmy and Donna,” wrote television historian David Martindale. “It made for quite a contrast: From the seedy high-crime urban streets to the good-natured Toma household” (Martindale 1991: 486). A number of New Jersey’s television programs have, in fact, possessed a pervasive, almost stifling, sense of happiness and middle-class wholesomeness. The sitcom *We’ll Get By*, which aired for three months in the spring of 1975, was the story of George Platt, a lawyer living in the suburbs with his wife and three teenage children. Here, life in Jersey was, according to Brooks and Marsh, “one of love and understanding” (Brooks 2007: 1,497). The good vibes kept coming with the 1982 sitcom *One of the Boys*, which was so colossally wholesome that it was almost anachronistic. Retiree Oliver Nugent, played by Mickey Rooney, was a sprightly and playful sixty-six-year-old who got invited by his grandson, Adam, to share a room with him at college. In addition to dispensing plenty of good advice, Oliver, along with fellow sexagenarian pal, Bernard, delighted the kids by putting on shows for them at the local soda shop. In addition to Rooney, *One of the Boys* featured future television and film stars Dana Carvey, Nathan Lane, and Meg Ryan, but none of them were able to save the show from itself, and it was cancelled after seven months.

The sitcom *Live-In*, a thinly veiled rip-off of *Mr. Belvedere*, premiered in 1989 and aired for three months. Ed Matthews operated a sporting-goods store in suburban New Jersey, while wife Sara was a buyer for a local department store. Wholesome hilarity ensued when they hired

Lisa, a beautiful young Australian, to serve as nanny to their three kids. *Hudson Street*, which aired during the 1995-1996 season, was a heartwarming comedy that featured Tony Danza as Tony Canetti, a conservative Hoboken police detective, who had just divorced Lucy, his childhood sweetheart. Tony had won custody of Mickey, his loving son, but was still on good terms with Lucy, who, despite it all, “still liked the big lug” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 644). Tony’s new love interest was Melanie, a liberal, headstrong, career-driven reporter. Although they didn’t always see eye to eye, his wit and cheery nature eventually won her over. *Like Family*, which aired during the 2003-2004 season, was a warm family sitcom with an ethnic twist. Maddie, who was white, and Tanya, who was black, were lifelong friends. Maddie was a career-driven single Manhattan mom who wanted a family for her cheerful young son, Keith. Her best pal Tanya, a married lawyer who had taken leave to raise her two kids, suggested they all live together at her home in the New Jersey suburbs. The good, clean fun—or, relatively clean, the show being on FOX—continued with *Quintuplets*, which debuted in 2004 and aired for eight months. Bob Chase lived in suburban Nutley and sold office cubicles for a living. At home were wife Carol and their fifteen-year-old fraternal quintuplets who, of course, had radically different personalities. Despite the scheduling nightmares and inevitable conflicts, “they were always there to support one another” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,126).

The almost preposterous wholesomeness of so many New Jersey sitcom entries was the subject of some parody, most directly in *Hi Honey, I’m Home*, which aired for six weeks in 1991. It featured a wholesome but completely vacuous 1950s suburban New Jersey sitcom family. The appropriately-named Nielsen family consisted of the incurably cheerful wife, Honey, her straight-laced and well-groomed husband, Lloyd, and their two super-obedient kids, Babs and Chucky. The catch was that the Niensens lived in the 1990s, making it necessary for their

friends and neighbors to constantly educate them in vagaries of contemporary life. Another unusual, almost surreal, take on suburban life in New Jersey was *The Adventures of Pete & Pete*, which was set in fictional Wellsville, and filmed on location in Leonia. *Pete & Pete* began in 1990 as a series of short vignettes on the Nickelodeon cable network. The spots were popular enough that they were expanded into a half-hour format, thirty-nine of which aired from 1993 to 1996. The principal Pete was energetic “Little Pete” Wrigley, a boy who seemed to be the only person to notice how strange life in his sleepy suburban town really was. To begin, his older brother was also named Pete, for reasons that were never quite clear. His parents were Don, a lawn-obsessed eccentric, and Joyce, who could use the metal plate in her head to pick up radio signals. Living next door was Artie, a wacky inventor who wore red tights and may or may not have been a superhero. And so on.

While New Jersey’s television residents have displayed varying levels of social prestige and income, most have been average-to-modest in both categories. It is notable that the few New Jersey television characters who have possessed both great wealth and social prestige have generally served as comic foils—those who need to be knocked down a peg or two. One example of this formula was found in *Stand by Your Man*, a sitcom that aired for four months during the summer of 1992. Spoiled, naïve, trophy wife Rochelle Dunphy had thought that her husband, Roger, was a successful businessman, but came to find that he had made his fortune by robbing banks. Lorraine was Rochelle’s wise-cracking, down-to-earth sister, who worked at a discount store called the Bargain Circus. Lorraine’s husband, Artie, had been Roger’s accomplice, and both men were caught and shipped off to prison in the pilot, prompting Lorraine to sell her trailer and move into Rochelle’s swanky Franklin Heights estate. The foil here was next-door neighbor Adrienne, a “horny, status-conscious matron who made constant references to the jailbirds and

the deterioration of the neighborhood” (Brooks 2007: 1,290). *Kelly Kelly*, a sitcom set in Philadelphia’s Jersey suburbs, aired for two months in 1998. The title character here was also the snobbish comic foil, a high-strung, career-driven Ivy League English professor. She had just married Doug Kelly, a laid-back, blue-collar fireman. Doug was a widower with four kids, “all of whom considered Kelly snooty and not what they were looking for in a new mother” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 732). The clash of class was also a prominent theme in the sitcom *Method & Red*, which aired for three months in 2004. The setting was Nottingham Estates, a very wealthy, and very white, gated community in the New Jersey suburbs. The title characters were Method Man and Redman, a pair of very successful black rappers, who had just moved into the neighborhood. Along for the ride was Method’s down-to-earth mother, Dorothea, a toll booth operator on the New Jersey Turnpike. Although Dorothea tried to keep them in line, the guys’ raucous parties and boisterous behavior did not sit well with most people in the community. The conceited antagonist here was next-door neighbor Nancy Blaford, who did everything she could to get them evicted.

Like many other states, the New Jersey television landscape of the twentieth century featured its fair share of families, criminals, and cops, but, as mentioned, it was most notable for what it lacked. Most other states with a fairly large number of entries have featured at least a few programs that follow the “single yuppie” formula—those where single, youngish, white collar professionals work, date, or just hang out—with *Friends*, *Seinfeld*, *Ally McBeal*, and *Will & Grace* among the more prominent examples. Prior to 2001, this formula was almost completely absent among New Jersey’s television entries, the only exception being *Down the Shore*, which aired during the 1992-1993 season. It had all of the fundamental elements of the single yuppie formula. It featured three twenty-something men and three twenty-something women, among

them a software developer, a garment district salesman, a junior high social studies teacher, an employee of an advertising agency, and a graphic artist. This show did not entirely buck the New Jersey trend, however. All of them lived in New York, and came together in New Jersey only because they shared a rental house on Belmar Beach.

Also notable was the lack of noncrime professional dramas with the short-lived *Matt Waters* serving as the only example in the twentieth century. Another New Jersey drama that did not focus on cops and criminals finally arrived in 2001 with *The Education of Max Bickford*, which aired for one season. It was the story of a grumpy history professor at Chadwick, a small women's college. A widower and recovering alcoholic with two children, Max was sorting out his personal life, but his professional life was still a mess. His best friend, Steve, an anthropology professor, had just returned from a sabbatical, during which he underwent a sex-change operation, forcing Max to reevaluate his rather conservative views on sexual identity. Further complicating matters was Andrea, Max's ex-lover and former student, who had been recently hired for a job that Max had coveted, making her Max's boss. Even worse, Andrea studied popular culture (a field Max despised), having the audacity to include references to Bruce Springsteen in her scholarly work. *The Education of Max Bickford* did not portray the college's student population—a good many of whom were, presumably, from New Jersey—in a particularly positive way. Critic Elena Razlogova described the students as “rude, silly, or dishonest rich brats who demand high grades they didn't earn, download term papers from the internet, and suck up to professors for letters of recommendation” (Razlogova 2010: 1).

Max Bickford received generally positive reviews, but never amassed much of an audience, and was cancelled after one season. It did, however, mark the beginning a trend toward more diverse genres among New Jersey's television entries. The 2000s witnessed the emergence

of the state's first reality program, its first conventional workplace comedy, and its first supernatural drama. The Garden State's lone reality entry, 2005's *Run's House*, premiered in 2005 and aired for eleven weeks, fitting in nicely with the wholesome New Jersey family shows that preceded it. The title house belonged to Joseph Simmons, better known as DJ Run, founder of the trailblazing hip-hop group Run-DMC. Run, an ordained minister, was happily married, and the proud father of five. The good-natured show chronicled day-to-day life of the Simmons family at their home in Saddle River. New Jersey's first crack at a workplace comedy genre was the 2006 sitcom *Teachers*, set at suburban Filmore High. Most of the action took place in the teachers' lounge, with romantic interests, professional conflicts, and pranks providing subject matter for most of the stories. *Point Pleasant*, which debuted in 2005, took place in a serene little town on the Jersey Shore. It focused on shy young Christina Nickson's search for her missing mother, a Point Pleasant native who had vanished after Christina's birth. The real issue, however, was Christina's estranged father, who happened to be Satan. The battle for Christina's soul was on, with the expected havoc being visited upon the town's residents. None of these shows were especially successful. *Point Pleasant* lasted thirteen weeks, *Run's House* eleven, and *Teachers* just six. If nothing else, at least *Point Pleasant* gave one critic a chance to crack a joke about the Jersey Shore being "the perfect setting for a show about the End of Times" (Devine 2005: 1).

After wandering for years in the ratings wilderness, television's New Jersey finally struck gold in 2003 with the state's first medical drama, *House M.D.*, which was set at Princeton-Plainsboro Hospital. It was the story of ill-tempered Dr. Gregory House, who, despite a decidedly poor bedside manner, was an absolute genius at diagnosing medical conditions that baffled other doctors. While House was not especially popular with patients, he was a hit with audiences. The show checked in at twenty-eighth in the Nielsen ratings, making it the first New

Jersey-based program ever to break the top thirty, and was soon a perennial top ten show. It continued to air in 2010, making it the longest-running network program in the state's history, and New Jersey's first network program since *Make That Spare* to last at least three years.

On the surface, *House*, with its splashy visuals, pulsing music, and crackling dialogue, didn't look much different from many other medical dramas. But where other programs of the genre were often a labyrinth of plots and characters showcasing nonstop action, *House's* approach was surprisingly minimalistic. Critic Roger Holland described the course of a typical episode:

Typically, a guest star will be admitted with a mystery ailment. Dr. Greg House and his team will sit around in a conference room attempting both to solve the mystery and cure the patient. House will be gloriously insulting and witty at the expense of everybody else in the cast. The team's early efforts will come increasingly close to killing the patient. And then in the end, the patient will (usually) be saved. Stir in a little bit of hospital politics and a touch of the cut-and-thrust of interpersonal relationships, and there you have it (Holland 2005: 1).

Terse, grumpy, and addicted to prescription pain killers, House more closely resembled television's fraternity of hard-boiled detectives than its earnest and noble doctors, and the show itself had the feel of detective drama, eschewing the tendency of most medical dramas to “showcase the broad scope of the doctor's skills, nobility, or even dedication to a mission” (Fuchs 2004a). This was a mystery series, the doctors were the detectives, and the patients were the scene of the crime. If the show was not intended to be a sort of medical whodunit, then House's apartment number, 221B,—as in 221B Baker Street, London, the residence of Sherlock Holmes—was quite a coincidence.

The problem with *House*, from a geographer's perspective, is that, with the exception of the actors' American accents, (including the one affected by the show's English star, Hugh Laurie) *House* might very well have taken place on Baker Street in London. With the exception of a few exteriors from the Trenton and Princeton area that were seen in the show's opening credits and the occasional establishing shot, it was an interior show. The action was nearly always cloistered inside Princeton-Plainsboro Hospital, and *House* offered little in the way of geographic subtext. Unlike *ER*, where the unending stream of trauma cases suggested much about what was happening on the grim streets of Chicago, the emphasis on *House* was on mysterious ailments which, of course, could occur anywhere. More important, passing references to the show's setting, aside from the name of the hospital, were few and far between. On an open-source web site dedicated to the show, a fan had devoted a blog to its New Jersey references, and the entry from March 7th, 2007, began with a somewhat exasperated comment:

I apologize to anyone who has looked here for information regarding Princeton/New Jersey locations on *House*. But it isn't really my fault . . . There are very few references to the good old Garden State (*House M.D. - On Location 2007: 1*).

The next blog entry, dated April 12th, contained a single reference—a character was seen dialing a number that started with 609, a southern New Jersey area code. So, despite the program's longevity and ratings, both of which have exceeded every other New Jersey-based program by a wide margin, it is probably not appropriate to label *House* as the definitive New Jersey show, given its vague relationship with its setting. Even if *House* had been a little more explicitly geographic, it is doubtful that it would be the single show that American viewers most closely identify with that state. That distinction belongs to a crime drama that, for better or worse, was more thoroughly intertwined with its geography than any show in recent memory.

The Sopranos premiered in 1999, and quickly became one of the most influential and critically acclaimed programs on television. Despite the fact that it appeared on HBO, a premium cable outlet available in only a third of American television households, *The Sopranos* often drew more viewers than its network competition, and took home an incredible twenty-one Emmy awards during its six-season run. *The Sopranos* represented, in a sense, a culmination of themes that had existed in many prior New Jersey-based programs, containing all the ingredients of a typical New Jersey show. It featured a nuclear family—the concerned father, the loyal mother, the embittered daughter, the impressionable son—living together in an upscale suburban neighborhood. It certainly possessed a Springsteen-esque blue collar aesthetic, and it featured plenty of seediness. *The Sopranos* was, alternately, darkly funny, deeply introspective, and incredibly violent.

The primary character was Tony Soprano, who lived with his wife, Carmela, daughter Meadow, and son A. J. in North Caldwell. “A big, grinning bear of a man,” wrote Brooks and Marsh, “he was by turn genial, a worried father—and a murderous thug” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,274). As the series began, the mafia boss of Northern New Jersey, Jackie Aprile, was dying, and the capos decided that Tony, whose father had once been boss, should take over. Tony ran his empire from a strip joint that he owned, the Bada Bing Club, and his most frequently seen soldiers were Paulie “Walnuts” Gualtieri, Silvio Dante, Salvatore “Big Pussy” Bonpensiero, and Christopher Moltisanti, Tony’s ambitious but reckless young nephew. It was a family business, and business could be messy. Tony’s Uncle Junior, angry at being passed over as boss, conspired, unsuccessfully, with Tony’s vindictive, half-crazy mother, Livia, to have Tony whacked. Tony’s unstable sister, Janice, just back from Seattle, also conspired against him. Over the course of the series, loyal soldiers became stool pigeons, the F.B.I. turned up the heat,

Tony warred with the New York mob, and a fairly large portion of the cast was killed. All of these headaches, coupled with his rebellious kids, despondent wife, and uncontrolled appetite for other women, drove Tony to see a psychologist. Many of the episodes were framed by his sessions with Dr. Jennifer Melfi, who was both horrified and captivated by having a murderous mob boss as a patient.

With its plots driven by sex, crime, deception, and violence, and its cast populated by jump-suited mobsters lounging about strip clubs, dispensing such bon mots as, “There’s an old Italian saying: you fuck up once, you lose two teeth,” *The Sopranos*’s depiction of New Jersey was, and almost had to be, somewhat negative (West 2005: 3). But even if *The Sopranos* had been about opera singers, the landscape of New Jersey, as depicted on the show, was hardly consonant with a place called The Garden State. Right from the opening titles, *The Sopranos*’s New Jersey was, in the words of *Newark Star-Ledger* columnist Mark Di Ionna, “an ugly, industrial, tree-barren urban wasteland” (Di Ionna 2007a: 1). Those credits began with a cigar-smoking Tony driving out of the Lincoln Tunnel and up to the toll booths of the New Jersey Turnpike. As the Manhattan skyline retreated in the side mirrors of Tony’s Cadillac, viewers were introduced to the New Jersey landscape. Tony cruised past the Newark airport, a shuttered factory, a tank farm, an oil refinery, and a railyard, and all of these vistas were interspersed with quick shots of bridges, semi-trucks, low-flying passenger jets, power lines, smoke stacks, water towers, and concrete-encased lanes of highway. Only at the very end of the titles were viewers introduced to a bit of green—the pleasant, shaded road that led up to Tony’s minimansion.

There was also the garbage. One of Tony’s front businesses was a waste management company, something of a dark joke, because garbage was everywhere on *The Sopranos*—on the streets, on the sidewalks, in vacant lots, and under bridges where clandestine meetings took

place. Dumps, in fact, seemed to loom in the background of every exterior shot. The depiction of New Jersey on the show was so dreary that critic Dana Polan argued that the ubiquitous refuse was actually one of the landscape's more attractive features:

A scene in season one has Tony practicing his golf swing at a range right next to a garbage dump; it's apt that a shot of him against a gigantic mass of refuse displays the mountain of plastic bottles and other garbage items as shimmering with an intensity of (artificial) colors, as if the world of waste were the most vibrant and visually sublime thing in the otherwise gray environment of strip-mall New Jersey (Polan 2009: 137).

As indicated by Polan, *The Sopranos* not only showcased the literal trash of the New Jersey landscape, but the figurative trash as well. New Jersey was one long traffic-congested freeway, framed on either side by the detritus of a thoughtless and hedonistic consumer culture—gas stations, fast-food joints, strip malls, and parking lots—and the characters on the show seem perfectly at home in this prefabricated landscape. Many of the men on the show were, in the words of Mark Di Ionna, “violent, stupid, uncouth, loud-mouthed slobs” (Di Ionna 2007b: 1). Some of the female characters displayed a much greater level of sophistication, but others did not, particularly Adriana La Cerva, Christopher's fiancée, who Polan described as the embodiment of “kitsch vulgar taste.” She had big hair, loud make-up, and a love for ostentatious clothes and jewelry. “Her vulgar, overdone look is matched to a voice that signifies ethnic New Jersey lower-classness,” wrote Polan, “and serves as one further sign of Adriana's fundamental lack of sophistication, her fundamental low taste” (Polan 2009: 138).

For Di Ionna, one of the central geographic themes of *The Sopranos* was the idea that New Jersey was a place where “consumerism and pop culture have crushed traditional values.”

(Di Ionna 2007a: 1). Polan agreed, writing that “the New Jersey of *The Sopranos* takes place after the fall.”

At best there are furtive glimpses of a few last outposts of venerable and old-fashioned ancestry, like the stone church that Tony’s grandparents designed and that he proudly visits with each of his children at different moments of the series The church is one last holdout in a neighborhood that has been taken over by crack and that now is in disarray and dilapidation. Whatever glory the church perhaps once had as a mark of craftsmanship and pride-in-work is at risk of fading the context of an urbanism in ruins (Polan 2009: 139).

Polan also noted that, while Tony marveled at glories of the past, he also profited from its ruin. Shortly after lamenting the ultimate fate of the old church, he sold a building that housed one of the area’s last authentic Italian poultry shops so that a Jamba Juice could “move in and continue its branding and standardization of life” (Polan 2009: 139).

Among the many objectionable depictions of New Jersey supplied by *The Sopranos*, the one that drew the greatest amount of criticism was an unrelentingly negative stereotyping of Italian-Americans. Ethnic-awareness groups picketed filming locations, the City of New York refused to allow a *Sopranos*-themed float in its Columbus Day parade, and officials in New Jersey’s Essex County denied a filming permit on public property because, according to Mark Di Ionna, the show “constantly fell back on, rather than challenged, stereotypes, as TV almost always does.”

Let us count the ways: Italian men mostly as angry, semi-educated, gabagool-shoveling slobs Italian wives as either fat or slender naggers, or beaten-down abuse victims, all happy to be bought off by cars, jewelry or Italianate living room sets. Italian Rutgers students as cowardly bullies and drunken frat boys They have solidified the image of Italian-Americans as goons. Over-

emotional, anti-intellectual, hot-headed, stupid goons (Di Ionno 2007a: 1).

Not everyone was displeased, however, as evidenced by the numerous newspaper reports from New York and New Jersey where residents, particularly working-class Italian-Americans, said they dreamed about being on the show. That desire was manifested in July of 2000, when an open casting call for the show in Harrison, New Jersey, drew 14,000 people, most of them Italian-American. According to Dana Polan, the participants made clear that they “viewed the show as a lark, not a consequential defamation of Italian American identity (Polan 2009: 118). Critic Lesley Smith was particularly impressed by some of the show’s primary female characters, writing that they played “against every cliché deployed in celluloid representations of Italian-American women” (Smith 2002a: 1). Although none of them were without their faults, the leading women of *The Sopranos* were, as Smith suggested, certainly not the brainless, shrieking mob molls of so many gangster films. Meadow Soprano was a sensitive, inquisitive straight-A student, and Dr. Melfi was intelligent, insightful and dignified. Most important, Carmela Soprano was always the level-headed counterpart to the unfaithful, waffling Tony. She was sensible, inquisitive and, at least by the standards of other *Sopranos* characters, exceedingly normal.

Some of the show’s critics admitted that *The Sopranos*, when at its best, explored the real issues faced by third- and fourth-generation Italian-Americans. Even Mark Di Ionno, obviously one of the show’s most strident opponents, admitted this. He was impressed, in particular, by a scene set at a backyard cookout that explored the social delicacies encountered by an ethnic group that is slowly joining the ranks of the upper class:

Tony was clumsily trying to blend in with a WASP stockbroker and a doctor, who was also of Italian descent but more refined and softer than Tony. It was a great, nuanced scene. The WASP broker was oblivious to the way he was dismissing Tony. The doctor was at once trying to protect Tony and be a goomba, but not enough to alienate the WASP. And Tony was trying to be civil in the face of being looked down on, keeping a smoldering lid on his desire (and ability) to stuff the guy in the trunk of a car (Di Ionna 2007a: 1).

Whether or not *The Sopranos*'s depiction of New Jersey in general, and its Italian-American population in particular, was realistic or unrealistic, fair or unfair, it clearly was the state's defining television program. It is also clear that New Jersey had an odd relationship with the show. A national poll conducted in 2001 by New Jersey's Fairleigh Dickinson University found that, as many of the show's critics suspected, viewers who watched *The Sopranos* were more likely to view the state as "rife with corruption, crime and pollution" than viewers who did not. The surprising thing about the poll and, for New Jerseyans, probably the most troubling result, was that viewers who had actually visited New Jersey had a much more critical view of the state than those who had not. According to FDU political science professor Bruce Larson, "It's not clear if the more negative view of New Jersey among *Sopranos* viewers around the country results from watching the show, or whether the show just reinforces pre-existing opinions." The poll also suggested that the state's residents, rather than rejecting *The Sopranos*, were actually more enthusiastic about the show than those outside of the state. Just eleven percent of all national viewers said they watched the show on a regular basis, compared to twenty-five percent of the viewers in New Jersey itself (Reid 2007: 1). Still, many state residents worried about the impact the show had on the New Jersey's reputation. In a 2001 interview, Mike Villani, a twenty-one-year-old college student from Bloomfield, echoed these concerns and suggested much about the perceived power of television to shape the viewer's perception:

“People in Iowa or Oklahoma, they don’t know what real Italians are like. This is what they see. This is all they know. It makes us look like a bunch of guidos” (Di Ionna 2007b: 1).

MARYLAND

The powers behind television have demonstrated a little more respect for Maryland than they have for Delaware, but not much more, particularly when the state’s television history is compared to the rest of the Mid-Atlantic. While the District of Columbia has served as the setting for eighty-five programs, Pennsylvania for sixty, and New Jersey for thirty-seven, Maryland has been home to a relatively meager sixteen programs. Like New Jersey, Maryland’s programs have had trouble catching on, but unlike New Jersey, which would eventually have its television landscape salvaged by the likes of *The Sopranos* and *House*, no TV savior has emerged for Maryland. Only one of the state’s programs—*Homicide: Life on the Street*—ever managed to crack the Nielsen top thirty, and that only happened once, during the 1993-1994 season, when *Homicide* aired for a grand total of four weeks.

The only two Maryland-based programs to be set outside of Baltimore appeared in the 2000s. The first was 2001’s *The Lone Gunmen*, which told the behind-the-scenes story of a Takoma Park-based underground magazine that specialized in conspiracy theories. The men behind the magazine were John Byers, Melvin Frohike, and Ringo Langly, who had for seven years served as a source of insider information for Fox Mulder on *The X-Files*. This spin-off played for laughs more often than its moody predecessor, never managed to catch on with that show’s loyal fan base, and was cancelled after five low-rated months. In what can only be described as a beautifully contemptuous move by the show’s producers, Byers, Frohike, and

Langly returned for one more episode of *The X-Files* in 2002, and were promptly killed off.

Maryland's only other program set outside of Baltimore was *Joan of Arcadia*, which premiered in 2003 and lasted for two seasons. When the series began, Joan Girardi and her family had just moved to Arcadia, Maryland, after her father, Will, had taken a job as local police chief. The Girardi family included mom Helen, an artist and teacher; Luke, Joan's nerdy little brother; and Kevin, Joan's older brother, a former star athlete who had been paralyzed in a drunk-driving accident. Joan's anxieties were those typical of many sixteen-year-old girls. She was an underachiever, she and her new friends at Arcadia High were not particularly popular, and her boyfriend was pressuring her to have sex. Less typical was the fact that God regularly appeared to Joan. Though in various forms—as a little boy, a teenager, an old lady—He always came for the same reason. Someone was in trouble, and it was up to Joan to help them out.

Joan of Arcadia was a mixture of familiar formulas. It was part teen drama, with Joan and her friends dealing with school culture, romantic entanglements, and other coming-of-age pressures. It was part family drama, dealing with Kevin's anger, Luke's isolation, and Helen's ennui. And it was part cop drama, with the brutality of Will's job driving the plots of several episodes. More than anything else, however, it was the story of Joan's relationship with God. She was not required to fulfill any of God's requests, although she nearly always did, and many of the stories revolved around questions of free will, good versus evil, the meaning of life, and, not surprisingly, Joan's occasional questioning of her own sanity.

As for the show's geography, the people of Arcadia were neither sophisticates nor bumpkins. In fact, the town was about as close to a "typical" American place as has ever appeared on television. This move might have been intentional. Keeping the backdrop and

characters close to the norm provided a counterbalance to the show's rather fantastic premise. God, in fact, told Joan that she was selected precisely because she was so typical. "Like other teenage girls," wrote critic Jennifer D. Wesley, "she's concerned with clothes, boys, and her annoying family. She is neither pious nor atheist, just average" (Wesley 2003b: 1). Critic Lee Siegel found this to be integral to the show's believability. "With its sensitive, unglamorous, modest-looking adolescents," wrote Siegel, "who are smart, worldly, and hip yet also vulnerable, and self-conscious and conscientious about everything, from friendship to sex, *Joan of Arcadia* is the anti-*O.C.*, Fox's 'teen' drama, whose teens seem more like middle-age Hollywood producers and agents disguised as teens" (Siegel 2007: 118).

There is some question regarding Arcadia's specific location. In his review, Siegel stated that Arcadia "could be anywhere in the United States," but it was identified on the program as being in Maryland (Siegel 2007: 116). There is a real town called Arcadia in the state, but its modest size is out of synch with the mid-sized city that appears on the show. *Joan of Arcadia* was filmed in Los Angeles, but the establishing shots of Arcadia were filmed on location in Wilmington, Delaware. Divine intervention, it appears, was necessary to get the First State a little screen time.

All fourteen of the state's remaining programs originated from or were set in Baltimore. The first program to originate from Maryland was *The Johns Hopkins Science Review*, which featured faculty from that Baltimore university conducting scientific presentations and discussions. The program enjoyed a relatively long run, lasting from December of 1948 to September of 1954, but did so to a very sparse audience. The *Science Review* was used by CBS and, later, DuMont as ratings cannon fodder against far more popular programs such as *Arthur Godfrey*, *Break the Bank*, *Dragnet*, and *Milton Berle*. Baltimore's second entry, *Key to the Ages*,

had a similar format to the *Science Review*, featuring discussions on art and literature from the city's Enoch Pratt Free Library and Walters Art Gallery. It also served a purpose similar to that of its Johns Hopkins counterpart, running on ABC's Sunday night schedule during the spring of 1955 opposite Ed Sullivan.

After the demise of these two early shows, Maryland's television landscape plunged into darkness for more than two decades, and when it reemerged, not many people noticed. The 1978 sitcom *In the Beginning* was the second of actor McLean Stevenson's four failed attempts at post-*M*A*S*H* success. This time around, Stevenson played Father Daniel M. Cleary, a priest working a store-front mission in inner-city Baltimore. The show focused on the stuffy Cleary's strained relationship with an optimistic, street-smart nun named Sister Agnes, and on his general disdain for the surrounding squalid neighborhood. Viewers were as unwilling as Father Cleary to spend time there, and the show was off the air in five weeks.

Maryland reappeared in 1986, and would serve as the setting for eight more sitcoms over the next two decades. Of those, four had relatively short runs, including *The Ellyn Burstyn Show*, which debuted in 1986 and aired for just under a year; *Flesh 'n' Blood*, which aired for two months in 1991; *Life's Work*, which debuted in 1996 and aired for nine months; and *Family Rules*, which lasted just six weeks in 1999. Given their short runs and low ratings, it is unlikely that any of these programs made much of an impression on the television audience, but if they did, the viewers would have come away with the sense of Baltimore as a city populated primarily by upwardly mobile women, nontraditional families, and basketball coaches. The main character of *The Ellyn Burstyn Show* was a best-selling author and college professor sharing a Baltimore brownstone with her mother, divorced daughter, and grandson. *Flesh 'n' Blood* was an updated, East Coast take on *The Beverly Hillbillies*, featuring an aggressive, overachieving Baltimore

district attorney playing host to her country-fried kin. *Life's Work* told the story of Lisa Hunter, another aggressive, overachieving state's attorney. Lisa had worked her way through law school, but still found time to marry Kevin, a basketball coach, with whom she had two children. *Family Rules* was the story of a different basketball coach, Nate Harrison, a widower who was raising four daughters in suburban Baltimore.

Along with these four duds were four other Baltimore-based sitcoms that managed relatively long runs, though without large audiences. Shows that exhibit this paradoxical combination of traits are, as often as not, focused on the lives of African-Americans, and that was the case with these four Baltimore programs. There had been, of course, a number of hit black sitcoms in the 1970s and 1980s, such *Good Times*, *The Jeffersons*, *Sanford & Son*, and, most notably, *The Cosby Show*, but until the 1990s, the American television landscape had remained, for the most part, a largely white world. Then, in the early 1990s the upstart FOX network began to air a significant number of programs featuring predominantly black casts.

During its first few years, FOX executives were desperate to shake loose whatever viewers they could from the entrenched Big Three networks, and struck upon the idea of developing programs likely to appeal to the generally underserved African-American audience. The strategy worked, with shows like *In Living Color* and *Martin* becoming some of the network's more successful early entries. As the FOX audience expanded, however, the number of programs with African-American lead characters declined. That niche was, not coincidentally, soon filled by two other upstart networks, with the WB network broadcasting shows like *The Steve Harvey Show*, *The Jamie Foxx Show* and *Sister, Sister*, and UPN airing *Moesha*, *Malcolm & Eddie*, and *The Hughleys*.

FOX's *True Colors* and *Roc*, along with UPN's *One on One* and *Cuts*, were Baltimore-based byproducts of this niche strategy. Each featured predominantly black casts and experienced relatively long runs. *True Colors*, which debuted in 1990 and aired for two years, was the story of Ron Freeman, a dentist, and his new wife, Ellen Davis, an elementary school teacher. Ron had been a widower with two boys. True to sitcom form, his older son, Terry, was uptight and conservative while the younger Lester was a happy-go-lucky smartass. Ellen was a divorcee who brought along a serious-minded daughter, Katie, and her mother, Sara, who was not too thrilled with her new son-in-law. The novelty of the show was that Ron was black and Ellen was white, and FOX promoted the show by distancing it from the story of another blended family, declaring, "It ain't *The Brady Bunch*," which was true, of course (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,428). The very premise of *True Colors* was, indeed, groundbreaking, being that it was one of the very few American television programs to focus on an interracial marriage, but, for the most part, it was a standard-issue family sitcom. Its fellow FOX entry, 1991's *Roc*, proved to be far more game when it came to tackling serious issues.

The title character of *Roc* was Roc Emerson, a black garbage collector who lived in an inner-city Baltimore neighborhood with wife, Eleanor, who was a nightshift nurse at a local hospital. The Emerson household also included Roc's brother, Joey, an unemployed musician with a gambling problem, and their father, Andrew, who "distrusted white people and attributed nearly everything of consequence to blacks" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,163). Many episodes of *Roc* involved typical sitcom fare, including stories of Roc and Eleanor's love life, their desire to have a baby, their respective travails at work, Andrew's grouching, and the blowback from freeloading Joey's misadventures. *Roc* ended its three-year run in 1994, and critics admired the show for its ambition. Roc was played by Charles Dutton, a reformed exconvict who was

determined to showcase positive black role models on his television program. Roc was certainly that. As the series progressed, Roc obtained his GED, managed to buy his apartment building and some adjoining row houses, and emerged as a community leader, at one point running for city council. Further distinguishing *Roc* was its frequent examination of weighty social issues such as labor strife, juvenile delinquency, health care, same-sex and interracial relationships, interracial relationships, sexual harassment, racial profiling, the AIDS epidemic, and even the sexual abuse of children. *Roc* took a similarly hard look at life in inner-city Baltimore. Roc, Eleanor, and Andrew were all social activists, and their community needed them, as it was rife with unemployment, homelessness, street gangs, drugs dealers, drug addicts, and gun violence.

UPN's first Baltimore entry, *One on One*, began its five year run in 2001. It focused on ladies' man Mark "Flex" Washington, a former basketball star (no word on who coached him) who was working as a sportscaster at a local television station. His life was turned upside down when his exwife took a job in Nova Scotia, leaving Flex with full custody of his teenage daughter, Breanna. Also seen were Duane, Flex's womanizing best friend, and Arnaz, an aspiring rapper and Breanna's occasional boyfriend. Like *Roc*, *One on One* touched on serious issues like teen sex, alcoholism, HIV, child abuse, and racism, but it was, for the most part, a relatively standard middle-class family sitcom. One recurring plot on the show involved Flex taking over his father's barbershop and eventually selling it to a white businessman named Jack Sherwood. That story line evolved into a spin-off. On *Cuts*, Flex's younger brother, Kevin, left a lucrative career in California as a hairdresser to the stars to return home to Baltimore as shop manager. The primary conflict was between Kevin and Jack's daughter, Tiffany, who comanaged the shop, and who wanted to expand it to include a hair salon for women. Ultimately, *Cuts* could not maintain *One on One*'s momentum, and was off the air after a year and a half.

From the storefront mission of *In the Beginning* to the battles against urban decay on *Roc*, Baltimore's comedies gave the city's television landscape a bit of an edge, and that sense was reinforced in a big way by the city's three remaining entries. The first of Baltimore's two dramas, *Men*, was essentially an angry, testosterone-driven version of *thirtysomething*. The title referred to four Baltimore professionals—a surgeon, a lawyer, a reporter, and a cop—all old friends who met for a weekly poker game to commiserate about life. Viewers were not interested, and the show folded after a five week run in 1989.

Maryland's lone reality entry, 2000's *Hopkins 24/7*, provided an incredibly gritty, behind-the-scenes look at the staff and patients of Baltimore's Johns Hopkins Hospital. The drama was as intense, the decisions as heart-breaking, and the doctors as heroic as those on any fictional drama. The hospital's trauma chief, after working long shifts treating the victims of gang and drug wars on Baltimore's streets, spent his free time offering counseling to the city's at-risk youth. Other doctors endured the pressures of a morbidity and mortality session, while a frazzled intern worked over 100 hours each week to prove himself worthy of a position on the hospital's surgical staff. The parents of a teenage girl who had been diagnosed with cancer did battle with a heartless HMO, while another couple faced the gut-wrenching decision of whether or not to authorize risky surgery for their four-year-old daughter. All of this was too much for viewers, apparently, and the show did not return after its initial six-week run.

The grim reality seen on *Hopkins 24/7* might have expected by audiences since the city's longest-running entry, the police drama *Homicide: Life on the Street*, had, for seven years previously, been providing viewers one of the most visceral, realistic, and gritty looks at urban America ever to appear on television. It was the story of a squad of homicide detectives working out of a precinct in Baltimore's inner city. Headed by the glowering Lieutenant Al Giardello, the

hard-nosed team included the philosophical Steve Crosetti, level-headed Meldrick Lewis, frumpy Stanley Bolander, cynical John Munch, wisecracking Beau Felton, and tough Kay Howard, the only female on the squad. The undeniable superstar of the team was Detective Frank Pembleton, an intense, driven cop with a reputation as being the master of the interrogation room, which was known in the station house as “The Box.” Pembleton had a deserved reputation as a loner, and he was not pleased when Tim Bayliss, a somewhat spacey rookie detective, was made his new partner.

Homicide was based on the David Simon book about real-life Baltimore detectives, *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets*, and it possessed a remarkable air of both geographic and technical authenticity. The show was created by Oscar-winning director and Baltimore native Barry Levinson, and was filmed entirely on location. The detectives of *Homicide*, unlike the slick, sports-car-driving mannequins who populated many other TV detective shows, were unremarkable looking individuals in dowdy clothes who cruised the mean streets of Baltimore in their fleet of standard-issue Chevy Cavaliers. The attention to realistic detail was so intense that it led to a truly bizarre event during an outdoor shoot for one episode. It seems that an actual criminal, wanted by the Baltimore police, stumbled across the set-up for a scene, and promptly surrendered to actors Richard Belzer and Clark Johnson, believing that they were actual Baltimore detectives. A number of other cop shows have claimed to be authentic, but few could claim to be quite that authentic.

Critic Cynthia Fuchs believed that *Homicide* was a creative success because it ran contrary to “stereotypes of criminals, victims, and cops,” and, without a doubt, it looked very unlike every other cop show on television (Fuchs 2004a: 1). Although some of its murder mysteries unraveled in the conventional connect-the-dots fashion, just as often both the cops and

the viewers knew precisely who the killer was from the beginning of the episode. The dramatic tension was not the question of whodunit, but the question of whether or not the cops could pin enough evidence on the culprit. In other episodes, neither the cops nor the viewers ever found out who the murderer was, and, in a few cases, a suspect was pressured into a confession, leaving a nagging doubt about their actual guilt.

Homicide also differed from the conventional cop show in that there was not much glitzy action. Barry Levinson recalled that, because of this departure from the standard formula, NBC could not figure out how to market the show. “This isn’t a mystery, there isn’t any action really,” recalled Levinson. “We arrive after the person is dead. So there’s no car chases” (Fuchs 2004a: 1). What the show did have was a unique visual intensity, complex characters, and stormy verbal confrontations. In one episode, for example, Pembleton and Bayliss were interrogating a suspect in the murder of an eleven-year-old girl. Nearly the entire episode took place inside the Box, with Pembleton working his magic, grilling away at the subject, but for once he was unable to get what he wanted. Even though both Frank and Tim were entirely convinced the man was guilty, he went free. There was no tearful confession, surprising twist, last-minute discovery, or dramatic shootout. The likely killer walked, and even though that particular case would run along for several episodes, it was never closed.

Despite its uncertainty about how to package the show, NBC evidently had high hopes for *Homicide*. The network rolled it out on January 31, 1993, just after its telecast of Super Bowl XXVII. This football game, which is nearly always the most-watched single telecast of any television season, provided *Homicide* with an enormous boost—to the tune of 43 million viewers—despite the fact that the Dallas Cowboys plastered the Buffalo Bills by thirty-five points. Unfortunately for *Homicide*, ABC’s Wednesday night anchor, *Home Improvement*, was

beating NBC's *Seinfeld* just about as soundly that season, and when NBC decided to move *Seinfeld* to Thursday nights, *Homicide* had the unfortunate task of taking its place. *Home Improvement* proceeded to thrash *Homicide* so badly that NBC ordered a meager four episodes for the following fall, and slated it to be a midseason replacement. NBC, still holding out some hope for the show, had *Homicide* step in for the departing *L.A. Law* in January of 1994. It was in a plum spot behind *Seinfeld*, which had rocketed to third place in the ratings following its move to Thursday nights, and the popular *Cheers* spinoff, *Frasier*, which ranked seventh that season. Despite such a strong lead-in, *Homicide*'s short run was good only for twenty-fourth place. In an almost unprecedented display of clemency, NBC renewed the show once again, but relegated it to the wasteland of Friday night. It was there, ironically, that star-crossed *Homicide* finally found its niche. It would never again put up anything like its post-Super Bowl or even post-*Frasier* ratings, but the drama was always the darling of television critics, and it developed a modest but intensely loyal following. *Homicide* stayed alive for another five years, making it Maryland's longest-running television entry.

Homicide had a unique relationship with Baltimore. There was some grouching about the disruptions that production caused, particularly in the crowded Fell's Point neighborhood, where exasperated residents began placing bumper stickers on their cars that read, snidely, "Homicide: Life Without Parking" (Hoffman 1998: 31). Still, the city's residents seemed to embrace the show as their own, as indicated by the television ratings for *Homicide* in the Baltimore market, which were considerably higher than the rest of the country. *Homicide* showcased some of the city's trademark places, including the burial site of Edgar Allen Poe, the Pimlico Race Course, Camden Yards, and Fort McHenry, as well as some of its lesser known landmarks, like St. Stanislaus Church, The National Aquarium, The B&O Railroad Museum, and The Bromo-

Seltzer Tower.

Homicide was hardly a travelogue, however, with all areas of the city serving as a backdrop, from the affluent North Side, to the working-class Pigtown neighborhood of South Baltimore, to crime-ridden West Baltimore. It showcased the city's trademark row houses and side alleys, and ventured into local watering holes, strip clubs, and porn shops. *Homicide* did take a few liberties. In the premiere episode, guest star Robin Williams played a tourist who took his wife and two young children to a baseball game at Camden Yards. After the game, they accidentally wandered into a bad neighborhood, and Williams's wife was gunned down during a mugging. The mugging scene was shot in an area that was, in reality, far away from the Yards. "That was the one episode that caused us some concern," recalled Gil Stotler, the communications director for the Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association. "We got several phone calls from people wondering if Camden Yards was safe" (Hoffman 1998: 39).

Such misgivings about how Baltimore was portrayed on *Homicide* must have been frequent, since the show, for the most part, depicted it as a city populated by unsavory characters. Critic Tod Hoffman noted that there were essentially two types of criminals in *Homicide*, "the slouching furtive-looking West-side street-corner dealers" and the "extravagantly tattooed, snaggle-toothed South Baltimore hillbillies" (Hoffman 1998: 30). Some of the murders depicted on *Homicide* were spectacular, as when a sniper was terrorizing the city, or when a killer was driving up and down I-95, randomly shooting victims. Others were darkly comical, as when a visiting New Yorker killed his buddy at Camden Yards because the friend had mistakenly purchased tickets for an Orioles-A's game instead of an Orioles-Yankees game. Still other murders were just plain bizarre, such as an episode where a funeral parlor director was caught sitting down for a romantic dinner with a female corpse.

For the most part, the murders investigated on *Homicide* were realistic and disturbingly familiar. The detectives unearthed the bodies of several young boys in a remote section of Druid Hill Park. They investigated the rape and murder of a twelve-year-old girl. They discovered that a string of motiveless murders were being committed by a group of kids, for the “fun” of it. In fact, the motives of the killers and their blasé attitude about killing were often just as disturbing as the crimes themselves. On one episode, a fourteen-year-old boy named Ronnie confessed to murder, but because he mistakenly shot the wrong kid, Ronnie believed that he hadn’t committed a real crime. “Car accidents kill innocent people all the time,” he told a detective. “How is this any different?” (Fuchs 2004b: 1). On another episode, Frank Pembleton failed to get a confession out of an accused cop-killer, and the killer smugly told Frank he failed because he was black. “It’s not your fault,” he said to Frank in the Box, “Blacks have slightly smaller brains than white people The truth is the truth, you know it when you hear it” (Fuchs 2004b: 1). In another case, Bayliss was horrified by the reaction of a father after being informed that his son had been beaten to death by skinheads outside a gay bar. “Queers are sick, perverted animals,” said the father. “If what you say is true, it’s better he’s dead” (Fuchs 2004c: 1).

While such depictions of Baltimore and its residents were hardly charitable, the grim nature of *Homicide* had to be expected. James Yoshimura, a writer for the show, recalled that the network occasionally asked that they feature more “life-affirming” stories, to which he replied, “The first word in the title is ‘homicide,’ and it kind of goes downhill from there.” (Fuchs 2004d: 1). For Tod Hoffman, the show’s refusal to whitewash its setting was absolutely integral to its success, as was the decision to film the show there in the first place:

There is nothing about Baltimore you’d confuse with Los Angeles glamour or New York sophistication. Both of these cities are excessively familiar—even to those who have never been there—

for being overused as sets. Indeed, Baltimore is a city refreshingly without pretension, a city whose local flavor overwhelms chain-brand conformity. A city with its own particular cadence, a sort of Southern drawl revved up to a Northern tempo The city—with its distinctive neighborhoods . . . its mean ghettos—is a pivotal character in *Homicide*: this is a very self-consciously Baltimore show. It captures the city's charm and misery to establish a distinctive sense of place (Hoffman 1998: 30).

It is certainly unlikely that Levinson set out to paint a derogatory portrait of Baltimore. He is clearly fond of the city, as evidenced by the often affectionate depictions of the city in the numerous theatrical films he has set there, but he seems to have few illusions about the city's geographic character. "It's an ordinary workaday city," said Levinson. "Baltimore is representative of urban struggle" (Hoffman 1998: 30). It appears that Levinson came neither to praise Baltimore nor to bury it. He and the show's writers were simply trying to create something that was realistic, as suggested by Levinson's directive when the show was being launched: "Let's be rough and let the roughness show" (Fuchs 2004a: 1).

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

DuMont was the first network to feature nightly newscasts, and they originated from the network's Washington, D.C., studios beginning in 1947. New York, however, has long been the epicenter of the Big Three networks' nightly news programs, but they did run a few information and panel programs in primetime, some of them originating from Washington. NBC's first prime-time entry from Washington was a success, to say the least. The public affairs program *Meet the Press* has aired on NBC's Sunday morning schedule for more than six decades, making it the longest-running show in the history of television. This venerable program also ran intermittently in various primetime slots between 1947 and 1965, and featured, then as now, a

prominent political official being grilled by a reporter. NBC's other primetime news entries from Washington included *Story of the Week*, an interview and commentary program that aired in 1948, and *Meet Your Congress*, a political debate featuring two Democratic and two Republican congressmen, which aired for four months in 1949. *American Forum of the Air*, a political debate produced before a live audience began on NBC radio in 1928. It aired on the network's primetime television schedule for eight months in 1950, and during the summers of 1951 and 1952. It continued on Sunday afternoons until 1957.

CBS's Washington-based counterpart to *Meet the Press* is *Face the Nation*, which has aired on Sunday mornings since 1954. The show also ran in primetime during the 1960-1961 season. Other CBS primetime news entries from Washington included *Capitol Cloak Room*, a live political discussion simulcast on the network's television and radio stations during the 1948-1949 season, and *The Big Question*, a live political discussion that aired for two months in 1951. *The American Week*, which offered commentary and interviews concerning news from the previous week, aired in primetime on CBS during the summer of 1954.

DuMont's primetime entries included *Georgetown University Forum*, a televised faculty discussion of current events, technology, and society, and *Keep Posted*, a public affairs program where citizens questioned a public official. Each aired for just over two years, beginning in 1951. DuMont revived NBC's *Meet Your Congress* for the duration of the 1953-1954 season, and it aired *Washington Exclusive*, a discussion program featuring six former senators, for four months the same year.

Six primetime network programs showcasing art, music, and science have also emanated from Washington, most during television's early years, and all of them on NBC. The quiz

program *The Eyes Have It* aired for four months during the 1948-1949 season, while the musical programs *Capital Capers* and *U. S. Marine Band* were broadcast from Washington in the summer of 1949. *Heritage*, which aired live from the National Gallery of Art late in the summer of 1951, featured classical music performances, discussions of paintings on exhibit, and interviews with music composers and conductors. A considerably less austere atmosphere came to the nation's capital with *The Jimmy Dean Show*, a no-frills country music program that was broadcast from Washington during the summer of 1957. NBC's final Washington-based summer series, *Smithsonian*, aired in 1967, featuring museum exhibits and scientific documentaries.

Since the late 1950s, fictional programs have dominated Washington's television landscape, with many of them, as might be expected, focusing on the city's chief industry. The depictions of the capital's corridors of power have been relatively balanced. Eleven programs have been set in the White House, while another eleven have focused on Congress. The judicial branch has received the least attention, with just two programs chronicling the inner workings of the Supreme Court.

Perhaps the most common thread running through Washington's political dramas and comedies has been the "Mr. Smith" factor. The 1939 Frank Capra film *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, which featured James Stewart as a political neophyte battling corruption, was remarkably popular, earning eleven Oscar nominations and charting as the fifth-highest grossing film in a year that featured such films as *Gone with the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz*. The film's popularity, and its understandably appealing theme, likely inspired numerous programs that have, at least in part, paralleled the *Mr. Smith* story. Television has sent a dozen Mr. Smiths to Washington, but, unlike the movie, none proved to be a success.

The first program in the Mr. Smith genre was actually called *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Although ostensibly a remake of the movie, the 1962 sitcom version of the story was closer in spirit to *The Beverly Hillbillies* than it was to the Capra film. It featured Fess Parker as the unassuming, small-town freshman senator who used “the homilies of Middle America to cope with urban, political Washington” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 908). Senator Smith’s family was along for the ride, including his wise, guitar-picking Uncle Cooter, but viewers did not find the Smiths nearly as interesting as the Clampetts, and the show was cancelled after one season. A slightly more somber reincarnation of Mr. Smith appeared in the form of *The Senator* in 1970. Hayes Stowe was an idealistic, relentlessly virtuous, and socially and environmentally conscious junior senator who constantly found himself at odds with both Washington’s corrupt old-guard politicians and the powerful forces of big business. While the viewing public might have liked to see a politician of such high ideals in Congress, they didn’t want him on their television screens, and *The Senator* was cancelled after one season.

All of television’s subsequent legislative Mr. Smith programs, whether dramas or comedies, followed a fairly standard blueprint. The protagonist was a Washington outsider who came to power by unusual means, bucked the corrupt system, and was quickly yanked off the air by the network. The 1978 sitcom *Grandpa Goes to Washington* featured Joe Kelley, a Volkswagen-driving, drum-playing, sixty-six-year-old retired political science professor who was unexpectedly elected to the Senate after scandal brought down the two leading candidates. As usual, Joe was the only honest man in the Congressional den of thieves, but viewers voted him off the air after five months. The 1989 drama *Top of the Hill* featured the young and idealistic Thomas Bell, who was selected to fill the seat vacated by his ailing father, a long-time representative from northern California. As an idealistic, maverick ex-surfer, Tom “found it

impossible to toe the party line when his heart told him it was wrong” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,411). *Top of the Hill* lasted twelve weeks, as did the 1995 *Designing Women* spin-off *Women of the House*. This sitcom featured a bit of twist on the Mr. Smith formula. The protagonist was a woman, and not quite as achingly noble as her Smithian counterparts, but the maverick spirit of the genre was still evident. Suzanne Sugarbaker, the narcissistic and ostentatious former Atlanta interior decorator, was appointed to fill her deceased husband’s seat in Congress. In Washington, Suzanne “did what she wanted to do, said whatever came to mind, and was oblivious to Washington protocol” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,534).

Mr. Smith returned to Washington in 2003 as *Mister Sterling*. William Sterling, Jr., the son a former California governor, was selected to fill one of the state’s vacant Senate seats. As usual, Sterling was filled with idealistic pluck, spending his time as a teacher at a prison before being called to Washington. As usual, Washington was filled with power-mad, haughty, corrupt and out-of-touch scumbags and, as usual, Sterling set out to change the system. As Brooks and Marsh described it, “Lobbyists pursued him, reporters ambushed him and the Senate power brokers were livid, but . . . he outsmarted them at almost every turn” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 909). *Mister Sterling* lasted just ten weeks—eight weeks longer than the sitcom *Charlie Lawrence*, which also appeared in 2003. A former television star, Charlie Lawrence had just been elected to Congress, representing his home state of New Mexico. What happy-go-lucky Charlie lacked in experience, he made up for in high ideals. And so on.

Mr. Smith went to the U. S. Supreme Court twice in 2002. *The Court* told the story of newly minted justice Kate Nolan, who had been the governor of a midwestern state before her appointment. The rest of the Court consisted of four intractable liberals and four narrow-minded conservatives, allowing idealistic Kate to serve as the voice of reason. *First Monday* featured Joe

Novelli, who had also recently been appointed to a Supreme Court that was similarly divided between liberals and conservatives, forcing Joe to agonize over his swing vote. *The Court* was pulled after three weeks, while *First Monday* managed to survive for five months.

The only instance where a Smithian character managed to rise to the presidency was *Commander in Chief*, which premiered in the fall of 2005. Mackenzie Allen was a former college professor and congresswoman when she was selected as the running mate of Teddy Roosevelt Bridges, largely because the conservative Bridges wanted to court the female vote. Bridges won, but no one took Mackenzie seriously—that is, until Bridges died of a brain tumor. The political establishment urged her to step down, but she refused, declaring herself an independent and becoming the first female president of the United States. President Allen was, of course, sickeningly noble, and while her virtues eventually won the respect of her peers, it failed to hold an audience. After a good deal of initial interest in this highly touted series, ratings plummeted, and the show lasted less than five months.

While few of the entries in the Mr. Smith genre have possessed plausible protagonists or situations, no show tested the limits of the genre quite like 1983's *Mr. Smith*. Described by one critic as “the most talked about but least viewed series” of the season, it was the story of an orangutan named Cha Cha who, after swallowing an entire bottle of an experimental concoction, gained the ability to speak (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 908). More important, his I.Q. was now 256, so, clad in a suit and eyeglasses, he was shipped off to Washington to serve a special consultant to the federal government. Despite such an enticing premise, *Mr. Smith* lasted only two months, as did 1992's animated series, *Capitol Critters*. The lead critter was Max, a field mouse from Nebraska who moved to Washington to live with his cousin Berkeley, a radical hippie who lived with the roaches and rats beneath the White House. The series wove political

commentary with *Tom & Jerry* style shenanigans. True to the genre, the establishment was represented by the presidential pets who, this time around, were literally fat cats.

The only television program in the Mr. Smith vein to last more than a year was *The Farmer's Daughter*, a sitcom that aired for three seasons beginning in 1963. Its success was perhaps aided by the fact that the title character was not a politician. The title referred to Katy Holstrum, an attractive Minnesota farm girl who went to work as a nanny for Congressman Glen Morely, a widower with two young sons. Although much of the show revolved around little domestic mishaps and the budding romance between Glen and Katy, it possessed a distinctly Smithian flavor, with the naïve yet intelligent Katy disarming Glen's officious Washington colleagues with her simple midwestern charm.

Just as viewers have been generally unimpressed with stories of the noble and idealistic outsider confronting the cesspool of corruption and incompetence that is television Washington, so have they dismissed programs that dispensed with idealism and nobility altogether to focus strictly on the cesspool. Such was the case with the 1985 sitcom *Hail to the Chief*, the first television show to feature a female chief executive. The premise sounds noble, but the atmosphere was pure sleaze, leading critic Tom Shales to suggest that "after watching it, one may feel the compulsion to disinfect the television set with Lysol" (Lichter, Lichter and Rothman 1991: 88). Not much Lysol was needed, as *Hail to the Chief* was cancelled after four months. The administrations of two real-life presidents were also chronicled in situation comedies, and the ratings and level of respect for the office were about the same. The first was *The Secret Diary of Desmond Pfeiffer*, the title diarist being a gambling addict who had fled from England to escape his debts. He landed in Washington and managed to get a job as a butler in the Lincoln White House. The show portrayed Lincoln as a moron, Ulysses Grant as a stumbling

drunk, and Mary Todd as a mean-spirited slut. Critics were horrified, activist groups protested the jokes about slavery, but it didn't matter much. *Desmond Pfeiffer* was off the air after four weeks. The 2001 sitcom *That's My Bush* fared only slightly better, lasting two months, but did have the distinction of being the first television show based on the life of a sitting president—George W. Bush. The atmosphere was not as licentious as on *Desmond Pfeiffer*, and it was as much a spoof of brainless 1980s sitcoms as it was political commentary. Bush was cast as the typical sitcom dad—a man with good intentions who constantly found himself in a jam—but the ultimate message was fairly clear—the man just wasn't that bright.

A fictional Democratic senator received a similar treatment in the 1992 sitcom *The Powers That Be*. The protagonist, William Powers, was no Mr. Smith. A career politician, Powers was charismatic and handsome, but also a clueless idiot and willing party drone. Most of the stories revolved around the attempts of his calculating family and staff to salvage his fading popularity, but they couldn't save the show, which was cancelled after a sporadic six-month run. The 1995 political drama *The Monroes* was even less successful. The story of a Kennedy-like clan of politicians, it had the allure of “power, sex, politics, and ruthless people,” but lasted just one month (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 717). A lighter, but not much more affectionate, look at Washington came with *D. C. Follies*, a syndicated comedy set in the title bar, which was located near the White House. Fred Willard played the bartender, and was the only bona fide human regular on the series. His clientele, with one weekly guest star as the exception, were all puppets who represented various celebrities, usually Washington politicians. Seventy-two episodes of the satirical series were produced from 1987 to 1989.

Given the poor track record of both the Mr. Smith and politico-bashing genres, at least a few television producers must have drawn the conclusion that politics were the problem. Some

programs attempted to utilize the allure of the Washington political environment while dispensing with overtly political themes. One was the 1987 sitcom *Mr. President*, in which the business of politics was secondary to the adjustments that the president's wife and two children were forced to make once they moved into the executive mansion. The show's main attraction was George C. Scott, who played President Sam Tresch, and who bluntly admitted in an interview that he was only doing the series for the money. Once the novelty of seeing General Patton in a sitcom wore off, the show's ratings faded, and it was cancelled after six months. Having failed in the legislative comedy *Women of the House*, Delta Burke tried the executive branch in the sitcom *DAG*, which aired during the 2000-2001 season. She played the president's "bothersome wife," with most of the stories focusing on her stormy relationship with Jerome Daggett, a Secret Service agent who had recently been assigned to protect her (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 314). The last comedy, to date, to be set in the executive mansion was *Cory in the House*, which premiered in 2007 and lasted about a year. The title character was Cory Baxter, a "happy, chubby, black kid" who moved to the White House after his dad was hired as the president's chef (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 286). The show was decidedly non-political, relying instead on the same brand of sunny slapstick comedy as *That's So Raven*, the show where the character of Cory had originated.

Congressional staffers were the focus of *Hearts Afire*, a sitcom that was set in Washington during the 1992-1993 season. The program was something of a D. C. spin on *The Odd Couple*, focusing on the developing relationship between John Hartman, the assistant to a conservative southern senator, and George Ann Lahti, a liberal reporter who had been hired as the senator's press secretary. George Ann didn't have a place to live, so John invited her to stay at his home with his two sons, and the sparks flew. The show fared well in the Nielsen ratings,

checking in at number twenty during its first season, but Washington's first taste of sitcom success was short-lived. The setting of *Hearts Afire* shifted to the South at the beginning of its second season.

On balance, programs that have focused on Washington politics and politicians have failed, some spectacularly. Viewers, it appears, are not interested in politicians who are either preposterously righteous or alarmingly lurid; nor are they interested in Washington-based programs that eschew politics altogether. It is notable that the only true hit in the Washington political genre managed to borrow elements from all of these formulas, while not completely adhering to any of them. That was the drama *The West Wing*, which premiered in 1999 and ran for seven seasons. It was the story of the inner-workings of the administration of President Josiah "Jed" Bartlett, a liberal Democrat and former governor of New Hampshire. There were some Mr. Smith elements to *The West Wing*. Bartlett was a highly principled outsider who found himself constantly at odds with the pigheaded Washington establishment, as was evident in the following line from the President: "I want to call senators. Start with our friends; when we're done with those two, we'll go on to the other ninety-eight" (West and Bergund 2005: 63).

His staff was a similar mix of pragmatism and idealism. Among them was Leo McGarry, Bartlett's grizzled but incredibly wise Chief of Staff; Josh Lyman, Leo's spirited deputy; C. J. Cregg, the whip-smart and sharp-tongued press secretary; the quietly philosophical communications director Toby Ziegler; and Sam Seaborn, Toby's erudite assistant. The dramatic climax of many episodes involved an impassioned homily from Bartlett, as in the following fiery admission of guilt:

I was wrong. I was, I was just . . . wrong. No one in government takes responsibility for anything anymore, we fuster, we obfuscate,

we rationalize. “Everybody does it,” that’s what we say. So we come to occupy a moral safe house where everyone’s to blame, so no one’s guilty. I’m to blame. I was wrong (West and Bergund 2005: 63).

What set *The West Wing* apart from the legion of Mr. Smith entries, however, was the fact that Bartlett and his staff were, indeed, often wrong. Bartlett was a political animal, willing, as often as not, to sacrifice his principles in the name of expediency. For much of the series he hid his serious health problem, multiple sclerosis, from the public. He loved his wife Abby, but the two had frequent, heated disagreements. He was also often seen impatiently barking at the members of his staff, who had more than a few flaws of their own. Leo was a recovering alcoholic, Josh had a terrible temper, C. J. seemed overwhelmed at times, and Toby could be impractical and stubborn, as could Sam. The entire staff had disastrous personal lives, which were partially responsible for the scandals that constantly haunted the administration.

Another element of *The West Wing* that set it apart from Washington’s political program also-rans was the realistic (or, at least, seemingly realistic) depiction of the White House as the scene of barely controlled chaos, exemplified by the show’s trademark “walk and talk” scenes, in which the characters zipped down claustrophobic corridors exchanging rapid-fire dialogue about the crisis *du jour*. Balancing this intoxicating sound and fury were scenes that were touchingly mundane, as in one episode where a pair of sleep-deprived staffers, after hours of heated political warfare, reasserted their humanity by agreeing to share the last package of cheese crackers from the vending machine.

Whatever the reason for its popularity, *The West Wing* was definitely a critical and popular hit. It won a remarkable twenty-five Emmy awards, including four straight for

Outstanding Drama Series. The show ranked in the Nielsen top thirty for all but its final year, peaking in the eighth position during its third season.

The television programs that have followed the lives of Washington's journalists display patterns similar to those that have chronicled its politicians. Some programs have lionized the Fourth Estate, while others have lampooned it and, like D. C.'s political comedies and dramas, most have been failures, with one major exception. The first was the sitcom *All's Fair*, which aired during the 1976-1977 season. This show chronicled the romantic and political fireworks between middle-aged, ultraconservative Washington columnist Richard Barrington and his spunky, ultraliberal young girlfriend Charley Drake, a photojournalist. On the 1986 drama *Bridges to Cross*, Tracy Bridges and Peter Cross (get it?) were the top reporters for *World/Week* magazine in D. C. The show focused on the pressures of turning out a major weekly magazine, with a fair amount of romantic sparring thrown in for good measure. *Bridges to Cross* lasted just eight weeks, which was twice as long as the run of the 1990 newspaper drama *Capital News*. Steamy romance was, for the most part, dropped on this series, which focused on the city's National and Metro desks. National "stalked the corridors of power, uncovering scandal and abuse" while Metro "explored the seamy underside of Washington" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 218).

Television turned an eye on itself for the three other shows about the Washington media establishment. The sitcom *Lateline*, which aired for five months in 1998, featured comedian and writer Al Franken as Al Freundlich, the chief correspondent on a *Nightline*-like show. While Al considered himself to be the "the torch of journalistic integrity," the shrewd, driven, and occasionally sadistic *Lateline* crew all knew that Al was, in reality, a fatuous and vain moron (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 768). The show suggested what *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* might

have looked like if it had focused on Ted Baxter instead of Mary Richards. Oddly enough, the cancellation of *Lateline* propelled Franken into a political career that culminated in his election as a U. S. Senator from Ted Baxter's own Minnesota. The 2003 sitcom *Wanda at Large* was another assault on a Washington news television. Wanda was a down-on-her-luck stand-up comic who was hired to liven up a dowdy political roundtable program called *The Beltway Gang*. Her frank opinions and brash attitude drove up the ratings, but horrified her stuffy coworkers. While *The Beltway Gang* prospered, *Wanda at Large* did not, and the show was cancelled after six months.

The only truly successful program to tell the story of a D. C. journalist was *Murphy Brown*, which began its ten-year run in 1988. Murphy was a legendarily tough journalist for the CBS newsmagazine *F. Y. I.*, which originated from Washington. Working along with Murphy were Jim Dial, an unbelievably uptight anchorman, and his cohost, a peppy former Miss America, Corky Sherwood. Frank Fontana was a fellow reporter, and Miles Silverberg was the anxiety-ridden producer, whose boyishness was a constant target of Murphy's barbs. "I just can't help thinking," she told him in one episode, "about the fact that while I was getting maced at the Democratic Convention in 1968, you were wondering if you'd ever meet Adam West" (Prince 2010: 1).

As might be expected, there were numerous satirical references to the Washington political establishment and current events, exemplified by the fate of Phil, the bartender at the news team's favorite watering hole, who was periodically spirited into protective custody by the CIA because he knew too much about Washington's power brokers. References to the national media were also plentiful. *Murphy Brown* featured guest appearances by some of the giants of television news, including Walter Cronkite, Larry King, Paula Zahn, Connie Chung, and Linda

Ellerbe. Ultimately, however, the show was about the trials and tribulations of a modern, independent woman, creating obvious parallels between Murphy and the female protagonists of *One Day at a Time*, *Roseanne*, *Alice*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and *Maude*. In many ways, however, Murphy was unlike any character that had ever been the focus of a sitcom. Unlike Alice Hyatt, Roseanne Connor, Maude Findlay, and Ann Romano of *One Day at a Time*, Murphy was not married and, initially, did not have any children. Unlike Roseanne and Alice, she was certainly not working class. Unlike Ann Romano and Mary Richards, she was not struggling to make it to the top. She was *at* the top.

Acerbity was the most memorable element of Murphy Brown's personality. Alice Hyatt, Ann Romano, and Mary Richards had been strong women, but they were ultimately kind, gentle, and vulnerable—three words that were not in Murphy's vocabulary. In that way, she was closer in spirit to Roseanne and Maude, but for different reasons. Roseanne's bitterness appeared to stem from the constant struggle to make ends meet. Maude Findlay did not have money woes, but she was on her fourth marriage, this time to an alcoholic. Whereas life had made Roseanne and Maude tough, Murphy Brown's toughness had made her life. Murphy Brown has been described as a reflection of her times—the ultimate '90s woman—but she was also a product of geography. It is notable that the only other regular female character on the show in its early years was Corky, and she had coasted into her job by virtue of charm and looks. The D. C. of *Murphy Brown* was largely depicted as a men's club, and a central theme of the program was that Murphy had broken into that club with a sledgehammer personality.

Murphy worked nonstop and, until a stay at the Betty Ford Clinic, was a chain-smoking alcoholic. At the office, she was obstinate, cynical, and bossy. Most of her coworkers were afraid of her, and she was hell on subordinates—a running gag on the show was that she had a new

secretary nearly every episode, totaling ninety-three by the end of the series. She was even tougher on her interviewees. She had been banned from the White House by both the Bush and Clinton administrations and, in one memorable episode, Murphy continued to grill a corrupt judge after he stopped answering her questions, not realizing that he had died in the middle of the interview. In short, Murphy Brown was no Mary Richards. “Nice and sweet are out,” said series creator Diane English. “TV’s new women aren’t trying to please other people Not being afraid of what people think is in (Lichter, Lichter and Rothman 1991: 78).

It’s not that Murphy was cruel—sitcoms generally don’t last long if their protagonists are. Despite her confrontational nature, she had deep friendships with some of her coworkers. Murphy’s good nature was, appropriately, most often on display when she was away from the office. She had warm relationships with Phil the bartender, who treated Murphy as a sort of surrogate daughter, and with Eldin Bernecky. Eldin had been hired to paint the walls of her house in the first season. He was a muralist at heart, however, and so took six years to finish the job. Eldin was on the job day and night, and Murphy treated him with the sort of warmth, courtesy, and patience that her many secretaries could have only dreamed of.

One of the most memorable moments in the show’s history came in 1992, when Murphy gave birth to her son Avery. Avery’s father had offered to marry Murphy, but she declined, deciding to raise the child on her own. That decision set off an almost surreal conflict between Washington’s most famous fictional comic character and its most famous nonfictional comic character. In a speech concerning the deterioration of American family values, Vice President Dan Quayle singled out *Murphy Brown*, stating, “It doesn’t help matters when prime-time TV has Murphy Brown, a character who supposedly epitomizes today’s intelligent, highly paid professional woman, mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone and calling it

just another lifestyle choice” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 933). Murphy responded on the show by saying “Perhaps it’s time for the vice president to recognize that whether by choice or circumstances, families come in all shapes and sizes” (Golden 1996: 85). Some members of the American public sided with Brown and others with Quayle, but they certainly kept Murphy on the job longer. The show ran for ten seasons, ranking in the Nielsen top thirty seven times. It was in the top ten for four of those years, peaking in the third position during the 1991-1992 season.

While Washington’s television landscape has been dominated by journalists like Murphy Brown and public servants like Jed Bartlett, a few programs have chronicled life outside of the world of politics, government, and the media. One of the earliest was *Temperatures Rising*, a sitcom set at (fictional) Capital General Hospital. It was the story of the hospital’s “no-nonsense” chief, Dr. Vincente Campanelli, and his “all-nonsense” staff of doctors and nurses (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,365). The program was seen sporadically from 1972 to 1974, undergoing two major overhauls to the cast and scenario, but none of the versions drew many viewers. The 1975 sitcom *Karen* was the story of smart, young Karen Angelo, with the action alternating between her work with an anticorruption advocacy group called Open America, and her personal life in and around a Georgetown apartment. *Karen* lasted just five months, or slightly longer than *Ball Four*, a locker room comedy about the fictional Washington Americans, a major league baseball team. The show featured former big league hurler Jim Bouton, and it was based on his best-selling expose of the same name. *Ball Four* struck out after five weeks in 1976. The period comedy *Goodtime Girls*, about three young women sharing an apartment during the housing shortage of World War II, aired intermittently for four months in 1980. The sitcom *I’m a Big Girl Now* was the story of a dentist and his daughter, both of whom had just gotten divorced.

They decided to live together, at least for the duration of the 1980-1981 season. *FM*, a workplace comedy set at a D. C.-area public radio station, aired during the 1989-1990 season.

The first nonpolitical program to emanate from Washington was *Elder Michaux*, a religious program featuring the sermons of Church of God pastor Lightfoot Solomon Michaux and the enthusiastic gospel music of his Happy-Am-I Choir. Michaux had been a fixture on Washington radio for years, and his revivals were seen over DuMont's national network from October of 1948 to January of 1949, making it one of the first examples of black programming on television. The American television landscape has long been criticized for its dearth of African-American characters. Such an absence is particularly objectionable in a place like Washington, since African-Americans represent more than half of the District's residents.

Programs with black leads or predominantly black casts were essentially absent from Washington during the medium's first few decades, but the number of such programs increased steadily after the mid-1970s. While this was lauded as a welcome change, concern existed (as with programs set throughout the country) about just how African-Americans were portrayed. In Washington's political and journalistic comedies, African-Americans have generally been depicted in a positive manner, and have, in fact, often been the only reasonable characters in a sea of absurdity. A black Secretary of State was featured on the comedy *Hail to the Chief*, and he was the only competent member of the president's cabinet. The title Secret Service agent of *DAG* was black, and while he was "all business," the First Lady he was assigned to protect was "bossy" and "bothersome" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 314). Even the black protagonist of the much-maligned *Secret Diary of Desmond Pfeiffer* was characterized as being "the only person in the White House with any taste" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,211). The political sitcoms *Wanda*

at Large and *Cory in the House* also had African-American protagonists, and they were portrayed in a generally favorable manner.

As for black characters on shows set outside of the political and media establishments, one of the first was found on *Temperatures Rising*. At first glance, Cleavon Little's Dr. Jerry Noland was a mixed bag in terms of image. He was, of course, a doctor but also a "free-swinging product of the ghetto and the hospital's chief bookie" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,365). An exploration of the literature, however, reveals few opinions about Dr. Noland. He is not cited as being either a positive or negative representation of African-Americans, setting a trend for many Washington-based sitcoms with predominantly black casts. There is little indication that anyone found these programs to be especially ground-breaking in their portrayal of African-Americans or especially objectionable, an oddly apolitical pattern for shows set in the nation's capital.

The first Washington sitcom to feature a predominantly black cast was *That's My Mama*, which premiered in 1974 and aired for a year and a half. The protagonist was Clifton Curtis, who took over management of the family's barber shop after his father's death. Action alternated between the shop and Clifton's home in a middle-class neighborhood. The title referred to Eloise, Clifton's hefty mother, who wanted him to give up his cherished bachelorhood and settle down. Like all of the other black D. C. sitcoms that would follow, *That's My Mama* was not considered either groundbreaking or slanderous. A 1974 article in *Jet* magazine indicated that *That's My Mama* drew both positive and negative reactions, but intimated that the general view was that it was just another sitcom:

Certain television critics have attempted to write off *That's My Mama* as a stereotype or with psychological arguments about the show's effect on Black audiences. The public, however, has embraced the series as a funny slice of life involving Black people

in believable situations. Other critics have found the show a welcomed addition to the usual television fare. So far, Blacks have not publicly objected to the show as “just another stereotype.” (*Jet* 1974: 60-61).

In the same article, Theresa Merritt, who played the title mama, echoed this assessment, acknowledging that the show was never intended to redefine racial discourse in America, but also saying that she believed “a great deal of good will come from *That’s My Mama*. We’re coming in just like real humans We’ve got arguments. We don’t lead perfect lives. And we’re not necessarily poor, don’t speak bad English and aren’t uneducated” (*Jet* 1974: 61).

The second Washington-based sitcom to feature a predominantly black cast was *227*, which premiered in 1985 and was D. C.’s most successful sitcom until the arrival of *Murphy Brown* four years later. *227* ranked in the Nielsen top thirty during the first three seasons of its five-year run, peaking in the fourteenth position during the 1986-1987 season. The show chronicled family life in a black neighborhood, where best friends Mary and Rose were often seen chatting on the front steps of their apartment building at 227 Lexington. The building’s other residents included Sandra, the flirty bombshell; Brenda, Mary’s fourteen-year-old daughter; Calvin, Brenda’s boyfriend; Lester, Mary’s agreeable husband; and Pearl, Calvin’s grouchy and meddling grandmother. Like *That’s My Mama*, *227* was neither ambitious nor objectionable in its characterization of African-American life, as noted by critic Donald Bogle:

The series’ view of women—who spent a lot of time gossiping on the stoop—was a clichéd one. Yet Black audiences liked the various scrapes and shenanigans that Mary and friends experienced; they were sometimes reminiscent of those of Lucy and Ethel In fact, *227* itself looked like something out of the 1950s. Its main appeal was that here were African Americans living together in an urban setting, one not seriously fraught with

any social problems, and managing to enjoy life and each other (Bogle 2001: 310).

A third Washington-based sitcom with a predominantly black cast and sunny outlook was 1997's *Smart Guy*, which was the story of a ten-year-old genius named T. J. Henderson. T. J. had been skipped ahead to the tenth grade, and was struggling to fit in at Piedmont High School, where his older brother and sister were not wild about having him as a classmate. *Smart Guy* was never a ratings smash, but did well enough to remain on the fledgling WB network for more than two years. NBC's inappropriately named sitcom *Built to Last* premiered the same year, but lasted just three weeks. It was the story of Royale Watkins (played by the comedian of the same name), who gave up a career in the computer industry to take over the family construction business.

Although *Built to Last* didn't, it did reinforce a long-standing trend in D. C.-based African-American sitcoms. Whereas four of television's most iconic black sitcoms—*The Cosby Show*, *The Jeffersons*, *Sanford & Son*, and *Good Times*—focused on high and low ends of the socioeconomic spectrum (a doctor, a successful businessman, a junkman, and an often-unemployed journeyman), the adult male figures on D. C.'s black sitcoms have always been squarely in the middle. Clifton Curtis of *That's My Mama* ran a barber shop, while, in an odd coincidence, Lester on *227*, Royale on *Built to Last*, and Floyd, the father of the Henderson family on *Smart Guy*, were all construction contractors. These programs did not depict African-Americans as being either comfortably rich or uncomfortably poor, and that is appropriate to D. C.'s traditionally noncommittal approach to black sitcoms.

The first Washington-based dramas to feature black lead characters were *Snoops* and *A Man Called Hawk*. Both were detective yarns that premiered in 1989, both lasted for about one

year, and both featured deliberate attempts to provide sophisticated and urbane representations of Washington's African-American community. The title character of *A Man Called Hawk* was the tall, scowling, black man first seen as Spenser's mysterious street contact on Boston's *Spenser: for Hire*. In 1989, he returned to his hometown of Washington to offer help to those in need. Powerful and intimidating, Hawk cruised around D. C. in his sleek BMW and carried a silver .357 Magnum tucked away in his expensive suits. He was a man of impeccable style and taste, not some meat-headed gumshoe. He was a knowledgeable gastronome, a talented jazz pianist, and an aficionado of fine literature. Critic Donald Bogle called Hawk "one of television's most interesting symbols of Black masculinity," and, although Bogle lamented the fact that such masculinity was often connected with violence, he lauded the show for its surprising attention to African-American culture:

Hawk's one close friend is Old Man, a lofty philosophical soul whom Hawk skips off to see for advice or solace. In one wholly unexpected sequence, Gunn began reciting Langston Hughes's poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." As his recitation becomes all the more rhythmic and fluid, you assume the sequence will cut away to something else. But Gunn delivers the poem in its entirety, an astonishingly powerful and moving television moment. Throughout the run of the series, the writers juggled the demands of the basic format with those of a more personal, African American cultural point of view. On one episode alone, the characters spoke of Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Sterling Brown (Bogle 2007: 307-308).

Snoops featured the husband and wife team of Chance and Micki Dennis. They were not professional crime fighters—Chance was a criminology professor at Georgetown and Micki the State Department's Deputy Chief of Protocol—but they certainly had the knack for stumbling into, and solving, various crimes. In a 1989 interview, Tim Reid, who played Chance, described

the *Odd Couple*-style relationship between the husband and wife, and revealed that they were hardly what could be considered pejorative black stereotypes:

The two are very different, like country mouse-city mouse She's well-educated, has travelled the world. I'm a guy from a Black college who just happened to get his act together. He's from a poor family but moved up and succeeded (*Jet* 1989: 58).

As for *Snoops*'s depiction of its Washington setting, Reid said that "We deal a lot with what's going on Washington," but acknowledge that the show was "not going to do a lot of dark stories."

You will not see drugs on our show. There will not be any Black people in handcuffs and shower caps. Most of the villains in our show will be the upscale people America loves to hate (*Jet* 1989: 59).

Making sure that the criminals on *Snoops* were rich and politically powerful, rather than members of the general community, was not an unusual move for a Washington-based program. Despite the fact that Washington has a relatively high poverty rate and one of the country's highest murder rates, the mean streets of D. C. have not been particularly mean on the majority of programs set in the city. Exceptions exist, of course. One was the newspaper drama *Capital News*, which portrayed Washington as "America's murder and drug capital," and another was *Szyszyk*, a sitcom that aired for three months during the 1977-1978 season (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 218). The title referred to Nick Szyszyk, a retired U. S. Marine who had taken a job as supervisor at a community center on the city's northeast side. *Szyszyk* depicted Washington as a city of troubled youths and decaying neighborhoods underserved by a bloated and ineffective municipal government. A similarly grim picture of the nation's capital was found in the legal

drama *The Lyon's Den*, which aired for one month in 2003. It focused on Jack Turner, a talented young lawyer who walked away from a life of power and luxury to provide legal help to the legions of impoverished and powerless citizens of D. C.

One of the most troubling portraits of D. C. came in the police drama *The District*, which premiered in 2000. It was the story of Jack Mannion, who had just been appointed as police chief of Washington, and who led a crusade to reshape the ineffective force and reduce the “obscenely high crime rate in the nation’s capital” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 356). Along the way he had to deal with stubborn cops, political corruption, and muckraking reporters in a city torn apart by violence, organized crime, riots, police brutality, prostitution, and drugs. Whether it was the downbeat premise, or the show’s position on CBS’s lightly-viewed Saturday night schedule, *The District* put up mediocre numbers, but still managed to stay on the air for four seasons.

As if Washington did not have enough to contend with, it was also plagued by criminals from two centuries in the future on *Time Trax*, a low-budget, syndicated science-fiction program that produced sixty-six episodes over a two-year period beginning in 1992. It seems an evil scientist in the 2100s was transporting criminals back in time to 1990s Washington so that they could avoid capture. A heroic cop was then sent to track them down and transport them back to the future, using a “device that looked like a garage door remote control” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,396).

In general, however, private investigators and local police, whether from the present or the future, have been overshadowed on Washington’s television landscape by agents of the federal government’s numerous intelligence and investigative agencies. The city’s first scripted dramatic series dealt with such agents. *Pentagon U. S. A.*, which aired for two months during the

summer of 1953, was an anthology series adapted from the U. S. Army's criminal files. The only regular character was the Colonel, portrayed by actor Addison Richards, who would debrief investigators at the beginning of each episode from his office in the Pentagon.

The federal agent genre returned in the mid-1960s, and has been a fairly constant feature of Washington's television landscape ever since. Many of them were not unlike police procedural programs set in other American cities, but the broad jurisdiction of these agents did offer a wider range of stories and settings than is generally possible with a "local" cop show. Perhaps the most interesting thing about such shows is that they often provide, in retrospect, a sense of the nation's social and political sentiments at the time they aired. That said, the message from one show often contradicted that of another, particularly in two programs—*The F. B. I.* and *Get Smart*—which debuted the same week in 1965.

The F. B. I. featured Efrem Zimbalist, Jr. as Inspector Louis Erskine, the television prototype for the unflappable G-Man. Erskine's quarry would vary from week to week, but whether it was a bank robber, a kidnapper, an extortionist, a mob boss, a counterfeiter, a communist spy, or an antigovernment radical, he always tracked them down. Emotionless, methodical, and ultraprofessional, Erskine's trademark was that he had no trademarks, save a furrowed brow, a nondescript blue business suit, and a shiny, late-model sedan. The Ford Motor Company was the sponsor of the series—each year Zimbalist was sent to Washington to be filmed rolling out of the Bureau garage in the company's latest model—but it is arguable that the true patron and chief beneficiary of *The F. B. I.* was the F. B. I. itself. Critic David Martindale wrote that that the show was "as steadfastly patriotic a bit of flag waving as had ever appeared on television," adding that J. Edgar Hoover and the Bureau "couldn't have paid for better PR" (Martindale 1991: 154).

The show's creator, Quinn Martin, nearly decided not to go through with the show. ABC was seeking approval and cooperation from the Bureau and Martin balked, not only fearing creative limitations, but also because he saw himself and the F. B. I. as being "in two different political and philosophical camps" (Cooper 2010: 1). After a meeting with the network and Bureau representative, including Hoover himself, Martin decided to proceed. He later acknowledged that Hoover and the F. B. I. were never a real hindrance, and that they actually provided useful procedural notes. According to Larry Hein, an F. B. I. agent who served as an advisor on the show, the only thing the Bureau insisted upon was that there was "absolutely no unnecessary violence" (Golden 1996: 78).

Such unvarnished patriotism might seem a little incongruous for a show that ran during the political and social turmoil of the late 1960s, but it was not at all out of place on the television landscape. In 1969, for example, *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In* was the highest-rated show on television, and in many ways it captured the rebellious and iconoclastic spirit of the time. The top ten that year, however, was rounded out by the likes of *Gunsmoke*, *Bonanza*, *Mayberry R. F. D.*, *Family Affair*, *Here's Lucy*, *The Red Skelton Hour*, *Marcus Welby, M. D.*, *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color*, and *The Doris Day Show*. Such shows could hardly be considered subversive, and they suggest a good deal about the appetite of the viewing audience at the time. In other words, there may have been revolution in the air, but, for the most part, it was not televised.

The F. B. I. gave viewers what they wanted, and they responded by making it one of the longest-running and most popular of the Washington-based shows. It was ranked in the Nielsen top thirty for all but the first and last of its nine seasons, peaking in the tenth spot during 1970-1971 season. *The F. B. I.*'s counterpart, *Get Smart*, offered a decidedly different take on the

federal agent genre, and was, for a while, actually more popular. This time around the G-Man was Maxwell Smart, Agent 86 for a top secret federal agency called CONTROL. Played to deadpan perfection by Don Adams (who won three Emmy awards for the show), Max was, in his own mind, every bit the secret agent that James Bond could ever hope to be. In reality, he screwed up nearly every assignment he was given, and was always being bailed out by his far more competent partner, the beautiful Agent 99. Thaddeus (the “Chief”) was Max’s exasperated boss at CONTROL, which was tasked with battling the shadowy, evil, vaguely Soviet organization known as KAOS.

At its heart, *Get Smart* was a parody of the James Bond films and the countless other slick spy thrillers that filled both the big and small screens in the 1960s. Created by comic legends Mel Brooks and Buck Henry, the show was a sublime mix of ludicrous plots and characters. In one episode, the world was threatened by murderous bananas, and in another Max had to escape from a KAOS concentration camp that was located in New Jersey. Like James Bond, Max had a nifty array of superspy gadgets, all of which were as ingenious as they were pointless—the most famous being Max’s shoe phone. Max’s adversaries were clearly spoofs of Bond villains, the most frequently seen being the leader of KAOS, Mr. Big, and his right-hand man, Siegfried, who was KAOS’s Vice President of Public Relations and Terror. In addition to the always reliable 99, Max got help from other CONTROL agents, such as Hymie, the star-crossed spy android; Fang, CONTROL’s asthmatic spy dog; and Agent 13, who was always showing up in the most unusual place, like a mailbox. Max’s catchphrases became the stuff of pop culture legend—“Sorry about that, Chief”; “Would you believe. . . ?”; “Missed it by that much;” and “The old _____ trick,” as in “The old Professor Peter Peckinpah all-purpose

antipersonnel Peckinpah pocket pistol under the toupee trick. That's the third time I've fallen for it this month!" (Layman 2008: 1).

All of this added up to what critic Will Layman called "the most powerfully hilarious sitcom of the '60s" (Layman 2008: 1). Although the show certainly offered an antidote to the unabashedly boosterish spirit of shows like *The F. B. I.*, *Get Smart* was never highly politicized. Still, the show was, by nature, somewhat rebellious, offering a mocking take on the U. S. government that was rare for the time. That Max, an elite federal agent, was a complete boob was only part of the show's subversive message. *Get Smart* was filled with thinly veiled jabs at the government's security apparatus. One of the most memorable was the "cone of silence," an unwieldy contraption that allowed Max and the Chief to converse without being overheard. The problem was that they couldn't hear one another, either—a subtle, but not too subtle, crack at the inherently dubious nature of the Cold War intelligence game. Perhaps the most overt political gag on the show was a jab at the simplistic message of shows like *The F. B. I.* and, for that matter, many politicians of the time—that viewers had only two options: CONTROL or KAOS.

Get Smart was, initially, one of the more popular comedies on television, ranking twelfth on the Nielsen charts in its first season. The show dropped to twenty-second the next year, and then met its slow demise in the face of withering competition from such hits as *My Three Sons* and *The Lawrence Welk Show*. In 1969, *Get Smart* moved from NBC to CBS, where it spent its fifth and final season. *Get Smart* proved to be quite successful in rerun syndication and developed a devoted following, ultimately spawning two theatrical films. The latest, which had a new cast, was released in 2008.

Washington's next televised federal agent was Glenn Gregory of *The Delphi Bureau*. The title organization was a secret government group tasked with gathering intelligence and defending national security. It was so secretive, in fact, that the hero's lone contact was Sybil Van Loween, a mysterious D. C. socialite, who met with Gregory at the Delphi Bureau's headquarters, which was, memorably, a rolling limousine. Despite the intriguing premise, *The Delphi Bureau* didn't last long, possibly because it suffered from tragically poor timing. It ran during the 1972-1973 season, when a pair of reporters from *The Washington Post* were almost certainly sapping the viewing public's appetite for government spooks. Correlation does not always indicate causation, but it is notable that, in the decade following the Watergate scandal, programs focusing on politicians and government agents virtually disappeared from the airwaves.

When the government operative formula returned to television in the mid-1980s, the two entries indicated that the viewing public, at least in the minds of television producers, were not ready for programs that possessed particularly dark or complex themes. The first was 1983's *Scarecrow and Mrs. King*, which possessed many of the usual elements of the spy genre. The title "Scarecrow" was Lee Stetson, a handsome operative for a top-secret government outfit known simply as "The Agency." While being pursued by Russian operatives in the first episode, Scarecrow was forced to enlist the support of an innocent bystander, a divorced suburban mom named Amanda King. She was so effective that Scarecrow recruited her to work full-time for the Agency. "Chasing foreign spies was certainly more exciting than vacuuming and PTA meetings," wrote Brooks and Marsh, "and Amanda warmed to the challenge of her double life" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,200). *Scarecrow and Mrs. King* was light on both violence and serious political issues, but heavy on comedy and romance, and viewers made it a minor hit. The

program ranked in the Nielsen top thirty during each of its first three seasons. In the fall of 1986, when the show moved from Mondays to Fridays, ratings fell, and the show was dropped the next year. Washington's other 1980s spy entry was *The New Adventures of Beans Baxter*, a teenage spin on *Scarecrow and Mrs. King*, with a dash of *Get Smart* thrown in for good measure. The title protagonist was a normal suburban teenager who attended Upper Georgetown High School in the D. C. suburbs. As it turned out, his mild-mannered father was a spy, and when he was kidnapped by the treacherous Underground Government Liberation Intergroup (U. G. L. I.), Beans was recruited to serve as courier for his father's secret employer, a shady government organization known as "The Network." Like its counterpart, *Beans Baxter* was played largely for light thrills and laughs, but it was not met with the same reception, and lasted just nine months in 1987.

In 1989, fifteen years after Lewis Erskine closed his last case, the Bureau returned to the airwaves with *Mancuso, FBI*. The title character was a grizzled Bureau veteran who had first been introduced to viewers the year before in the mini-series *Favorite Son*. Nick Mancuso certainly presented a different side of the Bureau than had Inspector Erskine. On *The F. B. I.*, the agency had been a well-oiled machine, and there was absolutely no hint of dissent or a lack of cooperation within the ranks. Mancuso, on the other hand, was a loner in an agency dominated by politically motivated superiors, who regarded the hero as a "lonely misanthrope with no respect for authority" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 848). More significantly, Agent Mancuso's quarry was very different from that of Inspector Erskine. He was not hunting common crooks, mafia bosses, bomb-throwing radicals or foreign agents with Slavic accents, but murderers and corrupt officials within the government itself. It is notable that *Mancuso* premiered a few weeks before Berliners began taking sledgehammers to their infamous wall, and the show was an early

indication that, in the post-Cold War 1990s, the threat was not going to come from Moscow, but from Washington. *Mancuso* did not last beyond the 1989-1990 season, but the theme of an ostracized F. B. I. agent fighting a one-man crusade against corruption and conspiracy would be revived with much greater success a few years later.

When *The X-Files* premiered in 1993, the odds of a long and successful run were not in its favor. It was a dark and low-key thriller, shot in Canada on a shoestring budget and with a no-name cast. It also occupied the worst time slot on a lowly network, initially airing on FOX's Friday night schedule. To the doubtless surprise of programmers, *The X-Files* developed a fanatical cult following. With a move to Sunday nights, the show prospered, peaking in the nineteenth spot on the Nielsen charts during its fifth season. While that hardly qualifies it as a blockbuster by conventional network standards, it was a bonanza for FOX. It was just the second of the network's programs to rank in the top thirty, and the first to do so for three straight years. *The X-Files* ultimately ran for nine seasons, and spawned two theatrical films, two television spin-offs, and a legion of imitators.

Played in a pitch-perfect monotone by series stars David Duchovny and Gillian Welch, F. B. I. agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully possessed the same icy, business-suited Bureau professionalism that had characterized Lewis Erskine of *The F. B. I.* Like Erskine, they had few interests outside of work, dedicating their lives to the tireless pursuit of justice. What made the show different was the quarry. *The X-Files* was part *F. B. I.*, but it contained liberal doses of the supernatural and science-fiction elements that had conferred cult status on *The Outer Limits*, *The Twilight Zone*, and *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*.

As the show began, Special Agent Fox Mulder was a once-promising criminal psychologist who had become a pariah at the Bureau due to his obsession with unsolved cases called “X-Files”—those that defied logical explanation. Dubbed “Spooky” by his colleagues, Mulder had been relegated to a cramped office in the bowels of Bureau headquarters and, adding insult to injury, was given, against his wishes, a new partner. That was Special Agent Dana Scully, a scientist and medical doctor who had been assigned to be a rational watchdog to the apparently irrational Mulder. Scully’s skepticism was challenged early and often. Mulder and Scully found themselves confronting all manner of bizarre adversaries, among them aliens, werewolves, vampires, ghosts, demons, mutants, serial killers with psychic powers, and a large, humanoid tapeworm that lived in the sewers beneath Newark, New Jersey. Like Lewis Erskine, Mulder and Scully were up to the challenge, but in the end, physical evidence of these otherworldly encounters always managed to slip away.

Another significant difference between *The F. B. I.* and *The X-Files* was its view of government. Woven among the encounters with supernatural phenomena (dubbed “monster of the week” episodes by fans), was a continuing story arc detailing a shadowy and treacherous conspiracy that involved highly placed government officials, many of whom worked at the Bureau. Unlike the external perils encountered on *The F. B. I.*, the deadliest threats on *The X-Files* were internal, a theme that was never present in Cold War federal dramas, and something that certainly would have not met with the approval of J. Edgar Hoover. The story was that powerful and clandestine government agents had been covering up evidence of extraterrestrial activity on earth, and that they were complicit in an alien attempt to colonize the earth and breed a race of human-alien hybrids. A pair of government informers, one named Mr. X and the other Deep Throat, brought this conspiracy to the attention of Mulder, but both men met untimely

deaths. Mulder's chief adversary was the sinister and mysterious Cigarette Smoking Man, who seemed to be at the heart of the conspiracy, and who had been involved in everything from the Kennedy and King assassinations to the cover-up of the Roswell U. F. O. incident.

The X-Files's more overt political messages were summarized in its catchphrases, which mixed a sort of call to action—"I want to believe" and "the truth is out there"—with a large dose of wariness regarding the government—"trust no one" and "deny everything." That one of Mulder's informants was named Deep Throat reveals the obvious roll that Watergate played in the show's somewhat paranoid political atmosphere. In fact, Chris Carter, the show's creator, called that scandal "the most transformative event of my youth," and research by FOX confirmed that Carter was not alone in his mistrust of the government (Lowry 1995: 12). When focus groups were asked to rate the plausibility of the show's depiction of government, few questioned the notion that government was conspiring to conceal important information from the public. "The thing that was amazing to me in that test marketing," said Carter, "was that, to a man, everyone believed that the government was conspiring." Carter also admitted that he was amused when the conservative Media Research Center accused *The X-Files* of having a deliberately liberal bias, stating that the show "proffered conspiracy theories alleging outrageous government atrocities." Carter shrugged off these complaints, pointing to the show's slogan—"Trust No One"—which he believed to be inherently conservative. "It's really more libertarian," said Carter. "Don't trust anyone. That summarized my political views in a nutshell" (Lowry 1995: 27).

Whatever the show's politics, the intoxicatingly shadowy world of government intrigue was almost certainly at the root of the show's popularity, as indicated by critics Jon E. Lewis and Penny Stempel:

The X-Files' ultimate "turn on" factor was its ability to articulate late twentieth century fears and phobias. With its quasi-documentary feel. . .it appeared to inform Us about the secret things that They, the government, wanted kept hidden. The end scene from the pilot lingered over the entire series: an unwholesome government official placing evidence of an alien visitation in a box, next to thousands of such evidence boxes, in a secure basement room in the Pentagon" (Lewis and Stempel 1996: 52).

The *X-Files* spin-off *Millennium*, which was originally set in Seattle, split time between D. C. and Virginia for three seasons beginning in 1996, and also featured an F. B. I. agent investigating a shadowy group bent on world domination. *The X-Files* itself ended in 2002, after a pair of seasons in which the series' two leads reduced the size of their roles—a move that, in turn, reduced the size of the audience. Had the show lasted deeper into the decade, it would have represented an anomaly among shows of its genre. Just as the end of the Cold War appeared to have precipitated programs in which the antagonists were part of the Washington power structure, the terrorist attacks of 2001 appeared to have had a profound impact on the characteristics of television's federal agents. The conflicted, ostracized, and occasionally fallible characters in the vein of Mancuso, Mulder, and Scully were gone, replaced by federal agents with sometimes superhuman capabilities working for a once-again righteous government. The Bureau drama *Sue Thomas, F. B. Eye*, which debuted in 2002 and ran for two seasons, was based on a true story. The title character was a "spunky deaf girl from the Midwest" whose remarkable knack for reading lips made her a valuable member of an F. B. I. surveillance team (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,327). The title character of the spy thriller *Jake 2.0* didn't need to read lips, for he had super hearing in addition to incredible vision, speed, and strength. Jake Foley had been a lowly computer technician for the National Security Agency when he found himself the accidental subject of a top-secret government project that gave him his unique powers. He put

them to good work, thwarting terrorist threats to the nation for four months during the 2003-2004 season. Similarly uncanny powers were showcased on the F. B. I. drama *1-800-Missing*, the story of a clairvoyant Bureau agent. The show arrived from Indiana in 2004 and continued in Washington for two more seasons, with its title shortened to *Missing* (viewers had been dialing the number, which connected them to the Montana Livestock Crimestoppers). The title character of the 2005 crime drama *Bones* had no supernatural powers, but she did possess some remarkable talents. Temperance “Bones” Brennan was a forensic anthropologist for the Jeffersonian Institute of D. C.’s Natural History Museum, and she moonlighted as a mystery novelist. Her third job was as a consultant to the F.B.I, for whom she analyzed the remains of murder victims to determine their identity and cause of death. While never a ratings blockbuster, *Bones* has been good enough to remain on the air for at least five seasons, and continued to air through 2010.

The decade’s most popular entry of the federal agent genre was *Navy NCIS* (later shortened to *NCIS*), which premiered in 2003 and continued to be produced in 2010 after seven high-rated seasons. The title organization was the D. C.-based Naval Criminal Investigative Service, headed by hard-driving Special Agent Jethro Gibbs. Bearing no small resemblance to crime-solving teams of *Pentagon*, *U. S. A.*, *The F. B. I.*, and those from a litany of other procedurals, the *NCIS* squad was charged with investigating crimes involving Marine and Navy personnel. Cases involved crimes of passion and profit, including blackmail, illegal drug and arms smuggling, racketeering, espionage, and, more often than not, murder. The *NCIS* team was not without its flaws, crimes were sometimes committed by members of the military, and the show occasionally examined the squabbling among the various federal investigative agencies, but it fit in with the spirit of the decade, generally presenting the government and its agents as

honest and honorable—there was no Cigarette Smoking Man here. *NCIS* also exuded a post-9/11 *zeitgeist* by frequently using Islamic terrorists as antagonists. The pilot of the series, in fact, involved a terrorist plot to assassinate President Bush while he was aboard Air Force One. For critic Marco Lanzagorta, the show's handling of the plot revealed a troubling trend in the media's reflection of the United States' war on terror:

Even though *Navy NCIS* deals with current “hot” issues, their many complexities are ignored, obscured or trivialized. Thus, the villain of the episode is a faceless Al-Qaeda terrorist who appears on screen for less than a minute. Like most other U. S. media, the show can't acknowledge the ideological, political, and religious reasons that prompt Al-Qaeda attacks, as twisted as these reasons may be. Even though Osama bin Laden is still at large, the popular demonization of Al-Qaeda that *Navy NCIS* takes for granted illustrates the success of the U. S. media war against terrorism (Lanzagorta 2003: 1).

The thriller *E-Ring*, which aired for five months of the 2005-2006 season, took a far more strident view of Islamist militants. Named for the outermost section of the Pentagon, the show focused on military experts who specialized in counterterrorist activities. Their leader was the grizzled old Colonel Eli McNulty, played with off-kilter bravado by Dennis Hopper, who was known to unleash such philosophical musing as “When these knuckleheads bring Allah into the picture, body bags are sure to follow” (Fuchs 2006: 1). Unlike *NCIS*, *E-Ring*'s antagonists were not faceless terrorists, but provided with often intricate backstories. The effect was not to bring a more nuanced picture to the war on terror, however, but to provoke a simmering sense of injustice in the viewer. One such target, named Mustaffeh, was believed to be plotting to attack the London Underground. He was described by one of the *E-Ring* team as a “British citizen, second-generation rich kid with an Eton education who got radicalized and signed up for

finishing school in one of Bin Laden's training camps” (Fuchs 2006: 1). Critic Cynthia Fuchs described a similar situation from the show’s second episode:

The second episode has the team target a villain associated with Bin Laden (plus, the colonel observes, “He assisted the Chechens in that preschool blood bath in Russia”) . . . McNulty complains that Tariq got his degree at MIT: “We educate ‘em here and they take big dumps on us over there,” and Tariq pops up in frame every time the folks in the States mention his name, in fast-cut shady shots, wearing beard and turban, and tap-tapping on his laptop (Fuchs 2005b: 1).

Essentially a four-month commercial for neoconservative politics, *E-Ring* not only targeted foreign terrorists, but also took aim at another traditional neo-con foe—the government bureaucrat. Bureaucrats and political appointees were nearly always portrayed as being either ineffectual cowards or snooty country-club fat cats who cared more about political gamesmanship than the security of America. “If only the Pentagon was run by soldiers, and not those snivelly civilians,” wrote Fuchs. “This is the simple premise of the even simpler *E-Ring*” (Fuchs 2005b: 1).

CONCLUSION

It is highly unlikely that many Americans automatically connect Delaware to *The Pretender*, and even those who do were not given much geographic information by the show, since so much of the action took place out of state. So, Delaware has largely been left in the dark by television, as has much of Maryland. *Joan of Arcadia* gave viewers a look at a typical American teen living in a typical American city, but, as noted by critic Lee Siegel, the show could have taken place anywhere in America, and, with the exception of the summary written by

Brooks and Marsh, the show's Maryland setting was not mentioned in any of the critical literature. It is almost certain, then, that most viewers would identify Maryland with the shows set in Baltimore. Although the city's early programs were not especially successful, they presented Baltimore as a mixture of successful professional women and nontraditional families. Baltimore's two defining programs, however, projected a much seedier image of the city. *Roc*, while providing viewers with a somewhat rare television glimpse of a loving, responsible, blue-collar, socially conscious black couple, also indicated that Baltimore was characterized by racial strife, crime, and urban decay. The situation was even grimmer on *Homicide*. In addition to the expected murders, there were constant reminders that the city, as indicated by the show's producer, was representative of urban struggle.

New Jersey's television landscape, while substantially fuller than that of Maryland, has not been much different. Like Baltimore, New Jersey hosted a number of shows in television's early years, although they were not quite as heady. Early television New Jersey was essentially depicted a playground for New York City and Philadelphia—the home of amusement parks, rodeos, bowling alleys, big band music, and tourist traps. After a long absence, the state returned to the television landscape in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, with a large number of largely unsuccessful programs. On these shows, the state was an unusual mix of wholesome themes and crushed dreams; upper-middle class families and working class struggle; domestic bliss and very mean streets. Most notable during this period was a lack of programs chronicling the work lives of successful urban professionals. This trend was reversed in the 2000s with the smash medical drama *House*, but that show was, for the most part, isolated from its setting, leaving *The Sopranos* as the state's defining program. This critically acclaimed crime drama essentially reinforced pre-existing television images of the state, with its emphasis on both family life in an

upscale suburb and crime and violence on the seedy streets of northern New Jersey. *The Sopranos* was thoroughly immersed in its setting, and depicted the state as a garbage-strewn, postindustrial wasteland where traditional values were discarded in favor of shallow consumerism.

Pennsylvania's television history has largely been the story of Philadelphia and, like its Mid-Atlantic counterparts, the city began its television life with a series of home-grown programs. Some of these were erudite educational shows, but the most influential was *American Bandstand*, which placed Philadelphia at the center of the teen pop music world from the late 1950s to the early 1960s. Philadelphia returned to the television landscape in the 1970s and has been an almost constant presence since. Like the shows set in New Jersey during this period, Philadelphia's entries have examined a broad range of social classes and show family life to be both blissful and dysfunctional. Unlike New Jersey, however, Philadelphia had more than its fair share of yuppies, with their anxious lives examined most memorably on *thirtysomething*. Families of the 1980s and 1990s yielded to a far seedier Philadelphia in the 2000s, most notably on the comedy *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*. The setting for that show was comically sleazy, as were its rude, self-absorbed, and uncouth protagonists, but the show was, as its name suggests, positive in its portrayal of Philadelphia, presenting it as a place where people were genuine, unpretentious, and ultimately likable.

Pittsburgh has not received as much television exposure as its cross-state counterpart, and that might be a good thing for the city, given the tendency of its programs to focus on crime, economic hardship, and family dysfunction. For many viewers, however, such images were balanced by the pleasant suburban surroundings of the cheerful family sitcom *Mr. Belvedere*, which was the city's most popular entry. With the exception of a few fictional struggling factory

towns, the only other Pennsylvania city to receive television exposure was Scranton, which served as the backdrop for the workplace comedy *The Office*. The geographic messages of the show were mixed, with depictions of Scranton as pleasant and friendly, but also unexciting and somewhat unsophisticated.

Washington, D. C., began its television life with a series of music, art, and science programs that originated from the city, plus, of course, a substantial number of discussion programs dedicated to news, politics, and public service, most notably *Meet the Press* and *Face the Nation*, two of television's longest-running programs. Like the rest of the region, Washington's television landscape eventually expanded to include a number of shows dealing with workaday life in the city, and some of the more memorable examined the lives of African-American families and professionals. That said, the most prominent D.C.-based shows were those that dealt with the personalities and organizations of the federal government. The archetypal G-Man—capable, low-key, steadfast, methodical, and unflappable—was Louis Erskine of the long-running drama *The F. B. I.*, and his fundamental character traits could be found in nearly every subsequent TV federal agent, including those on the popular programs *The X-Files* and *NCIS*. In retrospect, one of the more interesting elements of such programs was their tendency to serve as a barometer of the political *zeitgeist* of their respectable eras—from the steadfast patriotism of the 1950s and 1960s, to the apolitical nature of such shows after Watergate, to the conspiratorial tone of the post-Cold War era, to the restored esteem of federal agents in the post-9/11 era. Interestingly, such crime and spy thrillers have generally had a more substantive political sense about them than their electoral counterparts. The most common trait linking shows that chronicled Washington politicians were poor ratings and short lifespans, probably because such shows tended to characterize the political process as an over-simplified

battle between the forces of good and evil. The only truly successful program from the political genre—the White House drama *The West Wing*—was the one show that examined the complexities and contradictions of political life. Despite a heavy dose of stirring speeches and breathless excitement, *The West Wing* characterized political life as a daily grind of infighting, backbiting, and more than a few mistakes, lies, scandals, compromises, and broken promises.

The few political programs that attempted to shatter Washington's glass ceiling, such as *Commander in Chief*, *Women of the House*, *The Court*, and *Hail to the Chief*, were all short-lived. That said, probably the most memorable character from D. C. was the title journalist of *Murphy Brown*, who decisively demonstrated that a woman could survive and thrive in cutthroat Washington, even when pitted against the sitting vice president of the United States. *Murphy Brown* was also among the first programs to confirm that viewers were not necessarily interested in Washington characters who were wholly virtuous and irreversibly gracious. With each pink-slipped secretary, the character demonstrated that, in Washington, at least, nice and sweet were out of style.

TABLE 3. DEFINING PROGRAMS AND COMMON TRAITS: NEW ENGLAND

State	Defining Programs	Key Program Elements	Other Common Traits
Connecticut	<i>Bewitched</i>	Upper-middle class suburbia; family life; the role of women in the suburbs	Pleasant, quiet, serene, sometimes dull suburbs; quaint small towns; loving families; the upper-middle class; New York City suburbs; WASPs; Italian-American families; African-American families; traditional values
	<i>Who's the Boss?</i>	Idyllic suburbs; escape from New York; professional woman; family life	
	<i>Gilmore Girls</i>	A quaint small town populated by charming eccentrics; the limitations of a small town; class "warfare"	
Maine	<i>Murder, She Wrote</i>	A picturesque small town populated by friendly people, and with an alarming murder rate	Quaint small towns; murder; the supernatural
Massachusetts	<i>St. Elsewhere</i>	Brilliant, dedicated, but troubled doctors working in a decaying, crime-ridden neighborhood	Sensitive, erudite, and intelligent professionals; crowded, troubled inner-city schools; wealth and privilege; African-Americans; class warfare; Irish-American stereotypes; taverns
	<i>Ally McBeal</i>	Successful, neurotic, self-absorbed young attorneys	
	<i>The Practice</i>	Brilliant attorneys defending the dregs of society	
	<i>Dawson's Creek</i>	Idyllic small town; intelligent teenagers; teen angst	
	<i>Cheers</i>	The interaction of the sophisticated and pompous with the earthy and crude; witty banter; inviting atmosphere	
	<i>Wings</i>	Witty banter; sedate charm	

New Hampshire	<i>Falcon Beach</i>	Picturesque resort town; townie vs. tourist	Small towns; despair
Rhode Island	<i>Providence</i>	Charming urban environment; a loving family; genuine people and old-fashioned values	Off-beat professionals; family life; blue-collar aesthetic
	<i>Family Guy</i>	Nuclear family; banality of the suburbs; bizarre events and behavior; Anytown, U.S.A.; blue-collar vs. blue-blood; unusual mix of deliberately offensive material and old-fashioned values; the “New England loudmouth”	
Vermont	<i>Newhart</i>	Attractive, sedate, charming small town; refugees from New York; eccentric, traditional, and unsophisticated locals	

CHAPTER 3 - NEW ENGLAND

New England's share of the television landscape is relatively small—just 3.78%—but that is not entirely surprising, given the region's relatively small population. Four of the six states in New England—Maine, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Vermont—have a collective population of approximately 4.3 million, or roughly equal to that of Kentucky. These four states have charted a combined fifteen entries that have accounted for about 0.9% of the television landscape. New Hampshire's three entries have all been failures, while the television landscapes of Vermont, Rhode Island, and Maine have each been rescued by one long-running program. Connecticut alone has been home to fifteen programs, many of which have been successful, and has accounted for a relatively respectable 0.7% of the television landscape. The television story of New England, however, has primarily been that of Massachusetts, with the state accounting for more than sixty percent of the region's entries and about 2.2% of the American television landscape.

CONNECTICUT

As noted in the previous chapter in a comparison with New Jersey, many of Connecticut's programs were quite durable. Six of the state's fifteen programs lasted at least three seasons, four reached the five-season mark, and two were on the air for eight years. A quick glance at Connecticut's television landscape reveals the likely reason for the longevity of these shows. If many viewers are drawn to programs that offer an escape into a world of loving families and pleasant environs—and the success of *The Cosby Show*, *The Andy Griffith Show*,

Home Improvement, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, and *Happy Days* certainly suggests they are—then Connecticut is prime television real estate. Nine of the state’s programs have been family sitcoms, and another three have been family dramas. Just three of Connecticut’s programs have lacked a family focus, and none of them lasted more than four months. While all of these families have had their own unique problems—most shows don’t last long without a little bit of conflict—the central geographic message of these programs is that Connecticut is a land of quiet, leafy suburbs and ridiculously quaint small towns where the people, when it’s all said and done, truly love one another.

Given Connecticut’s strong television connection to family, it is only appropriate that the state’s first entry featured the First Family of American television. *I Love Lucy* was, for the most part, Lucy’s show. Most of laughs resulted from Lucy Ricardo’s many, many screwball misadventures—Lucy getting plastered while appearing in a commercial for the highly alcoholic health tonic, Vitameatavegamin; Lucy being pinned to the wall of her kitchen by a giant loaf of bread pouring out of the oven; Lucy getting into a brawl while stomping grapes in Italy; or Lucy doing battle with the conveyor belt at a candy factory. For the most part, husband Ricky Ricardo was the perpetual straight man. He usually didn’t get into the act until he discovered, often with wide-eyed disbelief and a fevered rant in Spanish, what Lucy was up to. Lucy Ricardo became, and deservedly so, one of television’s most iconic and beloved television characters. In many ways, however, it is Ricky who best captured the *zeitgeist* of the 1950s, whose character most closely approximated the American dream of the mid-twentieth century. He was an immigrant who had worked hard to get what he had. He made enough money to support his wife and, eventually, their young son. The harder Ricky Ricardo worked, the better life got, and by 1957, in *I Love Lucy*’s sixth season and final season, he had landed his own television show and

opened a night spot, the Ricky Ricardo Babaloo Club. With the money pouring in, and at Lucy's behest, Ricky decided it was time to move to the country. It seems only appropriate that the most iconic American sitcom of the 1950s, a decade so closely identified with the evolution of modern suburbia, began with a young couple in an apartment on 68th Street in Manhattan, and ended with a nuclear family living in a charming home in Westport, Connecticut.

Once in Westport, Lucy did all the things one might expect of 1950s suburban housewife. She joined a country club, the Westport Historical Society, and the PTA. She built a barbecue pit, entered a flower show, dealt with competitive neighbors, and occasionally pined for a night out in the city. Lucy also did things that only she, and possibly E. B. White, would do, such as ordering five hundred baby chicks to start a chicken farm in her back yard. *I Love Lucy* ended its long and successful original run in the spring of 1957, and episodes from the last season were rerun on CBS in the summer of 1960 under the title *Lucy in Connecticut*, leaving viewers to assume that the Ricardos lived out the balance of their days safely in the suburbs.

In 1962, five years after the departure of *I Love Lucy*, Lucille Ball returned to the Connecticut television landscape with *The Lucy Show*. This time around she was Lucy Carmichael, who lived in a pleasant suburban home with her daughter, son, her friend Vivian, and Vivian's son. The show revolved around their home life in (fictional) Danfield, Connecticut, and around Lucy's work life at the Danfield First National Bank. The show was an important milestone in the evolution of the American television landscape. Lucy was a widow and Vivian was divorced, making them two of the earliest single mothers to appear on the small screen. That said, the tone of the show could hardly be confused with that of later single-mom-coms like *One Day at a Time*. It was primarily an excuse for Lucille Ball and Vivian Vance to play out the same kinds of madcap catastrophes that had made the pair popular on *I Love Lucy*. More importantly,

unlike later single television women such as Mary Richards and Ann Romano, Lucy and Vivian were not looking to establish themselves as career women, and did not have any interest whatsoever in staying single. According to Brooks and Marsh, “both women were desperately looking to snag new husbands,” and Lucy took her job not out of economic necessity, but rather “in an effort to keep busy and meet eligible men” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 822). While the characters Lucy and Vivian often had trouble wooing men, the actresses Lucy and Vivian had no trouble wooing audiences. *The Lucy Show* was in the Nielsen top ten during each of its three years in Connecticut. The setting for the show shifted to California in the fall of 1965, and would air for an additional nine years.

Another Connecticut sitcom accompanied *The Lucy Show* in the fall of 1962, and it followed a similar formula. *The New Loretta Young Show* featured the title actress as Christine Massey, a widowed single mother living in suburban (and fictional) Ellendale, Connecticut, with her seven children, who ranged in age from six to eighteen. The show focused on the typical growing pains of Christine’s children, and on her work as a freelance magazine writer. Like Lucy and Vivian, Christine was not content with staying single, and much of the show chronicled her romance with a publishing magnate, who she married at the conclusion of the program’s first and only season.

In the fall of 1964, seven years after the Ricardos left Manhattan, another of television’s most enduringly popular married couples moved to Westport. Darrin Stevens worked at the New York advertising firm of McMann and Tate, and commuted home each evening to his charming home and beautiful blonde wife, Samantha. Over time, they had a daughter, Tabitha, and a son, Adam. Darrin did his best to put up with Samantha’s intrusive family, including her domineering mother, Endora, and her raffish Uncle Arthur, while Samantha put up with a nosy next-door

neighbor, Gladys Kravitz. The Stevens family of *Bewitched* appeared to be a typical upper-middle-class family living in a typical upper-middle-class suburb. The twist, of course, was that Samantha was a witch—with a trademark wiggle of the nose, Samantha could accomplish all sorts of astounding feats—something that Darrin did not discover until after their wedding. While Samantha’s family, particularly Endora, was horrified that she had married a mortal, Darrin was equally horrified that he had married a witch, and he made Samantha promise never to use her magical powers. She agreed, and did not, most of the time.

Bewitched was an instant success, ranking as the second most popular show, and most popular comedy, of the 1964-1965 season. It ranked seventh in the Nielsens during its second and third seasons, and eleventh during its fourth and fifth seasons. The success of the show was largely attributable to its skilled cast and creative team, who collectively garnered twenty-two Emmy nominations, but its popularity might also have been a result of the show’s subtextual message. At the risk of reading too much into a show where a witch occasionally turned her son-in-law into a goat, it is reasonable to suggest that Samantha’s domestic quandary may have resonated with viewers in a country that was undergoing profound cultural changes. Like many American women of her era, Samantha was an intelligent, talented woman cloistered away in the suburbs while her husband worked in the city. She was, quite literally, full of magic, but was not permitted by her husband to use that power. It is not much of a stretch to read *Bewitched* as a statement about feminism, although critics differ on what exactly that statement was. Critic John Javna described Samantha Stevens as a housebound wife “trying to expand her limited role, to the consternation” of a husband who constantly spouted “chauvinistic nonsense about a ‘wife’s place.”” Javna did not see Samantha as a feminist hero, however, noting that she never did “something *really* strange, like getting a job,” and believed that it maintained its broad audience

because viewers “didn’t find that fairy-tale situation threatening at all.” Critic Marc Gunter appeared to agree:

What were the light fantasy shows really about? Is it possible that programs like *Bewitched* and *I Dream of Jeanie* were really reaction to the early feminists? After all, they gave us a comforting, traditional world into which both men and women could escape, as opposed to the frightening prospect that men and women would have to reinvent their roles.

Critic Diane Albert, while not seeing Elizabeth Montgomery’s Samantha Stevens as a revolutionary television character, felt that she was, at least, a step in the right direction:

Elizabeth Montgomery exudes so much warmth that I can’t help but like her no matter what she’s doing. And every woman can identify with the idea of being able to just twitch her nose and having the house magically cleaned up in seconds. Also, the relationship between Sam and Darrin was about as adult as they got in family shows of that era. Darrin was often presented as a buffoon, but you always felt that there was a balance—an equality—to their relationship. Samantha was probably one of the most positive female role models on ‘60s TV (Javna 1988: 60-61).

Ratings for *Bewitched* began to slide as the show aged, but it managed to remain on the air until 1972, and its eight-season Connecticut run was matched only by *Who’s the Boss?*, which debuted in 1984. The twelve-season gap between these two shows were Connecticut’s leanest television years, in which only one show appeared. That was *The Montefuscos*, which continued the state’s run of family-based sitcoms in 1975. The lead characters were middle-aged Tony Montefusco and his wife Rose, who had their four grown children and four grandchildren over for dinner every Sunday. The stories told around the table served as the focal point of the series. *The Montefuscos* was cancelled after only seven weeks, unable to survive the stiff

competition of *The Waltons* and *Barney Miller*, and its only notable contribution to Connecticut's television landscape was the fact that it introduced working-class, Italian-American culture into what had otherwise been a primarily WASPish state.

That cultural contrast was a key element of *Who's the Boss*, which was the story of macho Italian-American Tony Micelli, a "Brooklyn mug" who took a job as a domestic in an upscale Connecticut suburb for Angela Bower, the sophisticated and successful president of an advertising agency (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,516). Career-oriented Angela was a divorcee with a young son named Jonathan and a saucy mother named Mona, who offered Angela frequent, unsolicited advice. Widower Tony, a former second baseman for the St. Louis Cardinals, had taken the job mainly to get his teenage daughter, Samantha, out of tumultuous and crowded New York City. The image of Connecticut as an idyllic sanctuary from the noise of the city was never clearer than on *Who's the Boss*, and Connecticut never looked better. The show's opening credits, which rolled to a song called "Brand New Life," featured Tony's beat-up old van pulling out of an industrial New York landscape, driving into a stunning, picture-postcard, autumnal New England landscape, and then up to Angela's beautiful colonial revival home, which came complete with a white picket fence.

Who's the Boss was a bright, cheerful sitcom, focused on culture clashes, gender role reversal, comical misunderstandings, growing pains, and the slow, almost tortuous evolution of Angela and Tony's romantic relationship. In addition to its portrayal of Connecticut as a haven from the city, a central geographic message of *Who's the Boss* was that the state's people were somewhat staid and tradition-bound. In other words, the show characterized Connecticut as a domain of WASPish squares, a trait identified by critic Nikki Tranter:

Who's the Boss? is all about stereotypes. But rather than challenge them, it uses them, and rather than injecting freshness into the family sitcom, it falls flat. We're supposed to delight in the role reversal of Brooklyn tough guy Tony Micelli working as a housekeeper for the rich ad exec Angela Bower, seeing it as a step toward equal opportunity. But we're also expected to chuckle at Angela's inadequate parenting due to her busy lifestyle and Tony's dunderheaded antics that usually stem from his ethnicity or his maleness Nary a single episode . . . passes without at least one gag about the apparent wrongness of Tony's place in Angela's home. "This is my housekeeper, Tony Micelli," Angela says again and again, to employees, friends, nosy neighbors, and even her ex-husband, eliciting predictable scoffs and sexist remarks. Apparently the idea of a male housekeeper is just too ludicrous for anyone in suburban Connecticut to comprehend (Tranter 2004: 1).

As mentioned, *Who's the Boss* ran for eight seasons, and proved to be quite popular. The show spent six years in the Nielsen top twenty, including four years in the top ten, capping a remarkable run for Connecticut-based programs. Between 1957 and 1990, the state hosted just seven sitcoms, but they managed to spend eleven collective seasons in the Nielsen top ten. A few duds were mixed in, particularly shows that strayed from the bright and sunny, family-friendly Connecticut formula. The first was *The Mike O'Malley Show*, which featured an immature 30-year-old paramedic and hockey enthusiast who lived in New Haven with his roommate, Weasel. It ran for just two weeks in 1999. Only slightly more successful were *Style and Substance*, a short-lived 1998 sitcom about a domineering and self-absorbed lifestyle guru named Chelsea Stevens, and Connecticut's lone reality/competition entry, 2005's *Wickedly Perfect*, which featured contestants who desperately wanted to become domineering and self-absorbed lifestyle gurus. These shows were, of course, thinly veiled jabs at real-life Connecticut media mogul Martha Stewart, but neither could hold a candle to the real thing, and both left the air after three months.

Two programs that stuck with established Connecticut formulas also had brief runs, including 1989's *Free Spirit*, which lasted for four months, and 1992's *Scorch*, which burned out after three weeks. Like a number of Connecticut characters before them, the dads on these shows were single parents and white-collar professionals. Thomas Harper of *Free Spirit* was a divorced lawyer with three kids, while Brian Stevens of *Scorch* was a widowed weather man with one daughter. Brian Stevens should not be confused with Darrin Stevens, but the premise of these shows might well be confused with *Bewitched*. On *Scorch*, the Stevens family's quiet suburban life was turned upside down when the title dragon moved in with them. Meanwhile, over on *Free Spirit*, the Harpers' quiet suburban life was turned upside down when they hired a pretty young housekeeper who turned out to be, yes, a witch.

Beginning in 2001, the suburban Connecticut family comedy formula was successfully resurrected for four seasons by *My Wife and Kids*, the first Connecticut program to feature a predominantly black cast. Set in yet another immaculate, colonial-revival home behind a white picket fence, *My Wife and Kids* featured comic Damon Wayans as Michael Kyle, the successful owner of a trucking company in Stamford. Michael spent most of his time as a stay-at-home dad with his three children, while his wife, Jay, pursued a career as a stock broker, restaurateur, and student.

Although it was not nearly as tame as *Who's the Boss* or *Bewitched*, perhaps no show suggested more about the soothing power of Connecticut's carefree television landscape than *My Wife and Kids*. Viewers who remembered Damon Wayans from the groundbreaking sketch comedy show *In Loving Color* must have been more than a little surprised by just how relaxed and cheery Michael Kyle was. Wayans had been the edgiest star of a pretty edgy show, seen playing a homeless man with his own home improvement show called *This Ol' Box*, selling

stolen goods on the Homeboy Shopping Network, or, most famously, playing Homey the Clown. Homey was an angry ex-con, working as a children's clown, who refused to perform any tricks ("Homey don't play that!"), and whose performances usually devolved into a bitter rant about The Man. Michael Kyle occasionally showed flashes of nastiness, berating his wife about her weight gain, or asking his son, "Have you given any thought to what you're gonna be when you graduate— besides 28 years old?" (Fretts 2002: 1). The show also occasionally tackled some serious themes, but its outlook was, generally, as sunny as any of Connecticut's previous entries. Critic Julie Salamon wrote that Wayans was "playing it safe, working in the confines of a family comedy—a surprisingly old-fashioned family comedy." Salamon added, "That doesn't mean *My Wife and Kids* isn't likable—it is. It's just familiar" (Salamon 2001: 1). Critic Bruce Fretts was less enthusiastic about the series, and noted its anachronistically sweet nature:

The series recycles ancient sitcom plots, updating them with smuttier jokes. Overprotective dad Michael tries to keep Claire from dating, explaining of one potential beau, "He's a sperm bomb, and I don't want my daughter anywhere near when he detonates." Not to worry; by episode's end, Claire's reassuring her father that "even after I'm married, I'll always be your little girl." Didn't Princess make that same promise to her dad on *Father Knows Best*? (Fretts 2002: 1).

The central geographic message of *My Wife and Kids* was that life in the leafy Connecticut suburb was almost entirely pleasant, but also a little dull. The banality of life in Stamford was not lost on Michael Kyle, who referred to it as "the city that always sleeps" (Salamon 2001: 1). In one episode, Michael kidded his son for thinking the world of gangster rap applied to him, reminding him that he was "from the mean streets of Stamford, Connecticut" (Fretts 2002: 1).

Even Connecticut's three dramas have left the state's reputation relatively unscarred. There have been no grisly medical dramas, no seedy cop shows, and no sex-drenched soap operas to sully Connecticut's quiet and serene television landscape. Of course, there has to be some tumult to make a watchable dramatic series, and no show was more tumultuous than *The Book of Daniel*, which premiered in 2006. Like nearly every other show set in the state, it was the story of a family, but it was a remarkably screwed-up family, particularly by Connecticut standards. The title character was an Episcopal priest named Daniel Webster. He was good at his job, and was an essentially good man, but his life was an absolute mess. He was addicted to Vicodin, his mother was suffering from Alzheimer's, someone was embezzling church funds, his martini-swilling wife continued to grieve over their son's death to leukemia, his other son was a gay Republican, and his daughter was dealing marijuana. NBC canned the show after three weeks, partly in response to angry protests from Christian groups and the resulting dismay of advertisers and network affiliates, but mainly in response to rock-bottom ratings.

Two earlier Connecticut-based dramas had been less tumultuous, less controversial, and far more successful. *Judging Amy* premiered in 1999 and ran for five seasons, ranking in the Nielsen top twenty-five during its first three years. Amy Gray was a high-powered New York attorney who, having gone through a nasty divorce, moved back to her hometown of Hartford. She and her young daughter, Lauren, moved in with Amy's single mom, Maxine, a social worker, and her brother, Vincent, an aspiring author and part-time dog groomer. As one might expect from a Connecticut-based show, *Judging Amy* dealt extensively with the relationships among these four characters and other members of their family. On the professional front, Amy was appointed to the bench where she dealt with (what else?) family law. As would be the case on *The Book of Daniel*, life in *Judging Amy*'s Connecticut was not entirely tranquil. The show's

star-crossed suburbanites had to deal with a number troubling events and developments, including unwanted pregnancy, alcoholism, drug addiction and trafficking, homelessness, domestic violence, divorces, custody battles, miscarriages, heart attacks, shootings, stabbings, and even an explosion in Amy's courtroom. Despite all this, *Judging Amy* maintained a subdued, almost soothing, tone, particularly when compared to other dramas of its era, such as the violent *Sopranos* or the hectic *West Wing*. Critic Michael Abernethy wrote a positive review of the show, but admitted that it was far from edgy, tellingly comparing it to the least edgy of all television shows:

Issues raised in Judge Gray's court are explored for their dramatic elements, not for their broader implications. Even in Amy's personal life, social commentary is to be avoided. Amy's attraction to Bruce, an African-American, could raise questions regarding the status of interracial relationships in the 21st century, but the show presents the relationship as one between two nice people Some critics have faulted the show for its lack of perspective on moral issues, while viewers have flocked to the show, much in the same way they flocked to *Little House on the Prairie* (Abernethy 2010b: 1).

Another long-running Connecticut drama, *Gilmore Girls*, premiered in 2000. The title girls were mom Lorelai and daughter Rory, who lived in Stars Hollow, Connecticut, a village that was "even more quaint than its name suggests" (Bornemann 2005a: 1). Rebellious Lorelai had become pregnant when she was just sixteen, much to the horror of her aristocratic Hartford parents: Richard, a stuffy insurance company executive, and Emily, a status-conscious, passive-aggressive socialite. Partly to stake out her own independence, and partly to save Rory from the same icy childhood she had suffered through, Lorelai fled to Stars Hollow when Rory was a baby, taking a job as a maid at the appropriately named Independence Inn.

As the show began, Rory was now sixteen and, in many ways, the two Gilmore girls were a mother-daughter odd couple. Lorelai had worked her way up to manager of the inn (as the series progressed, she eventually opened her own), and she was perfectly content with her lot in life. Lorelai was gregarious and cheerful, but underneath, somewhat insecure. Rory, on the other hand, was remarkably ambitious for her age. A stellar student, bookish Rory had made up her mind to attend Harvard when she was just six years old. Unlike her mother, Rory was reserved, and even a little timid, but she possessed a quiet confidence. Despite these differences, the two had an intense connection, and the rapport between the two more closely resembled a pair of best friends than that of parent and child. In the words of critic Ken Tucker, it was a connection defined by “an intense mutual understanding of love, loneliness, meals and secrets shared, jokes and pop-cultural references understood” (Tucker: 99-100). This unique relationship, coupled with the show’s intelligent, rapid-fire dialogue, made it a surprise hit for the WB network, even if its position on that now-defunct outlet guaranteed that it would never break any records on the Nielsen charts. It was a critical darling, with an audience that was both intensely loyal and demographically appealing, and it remained on the air for six seasons.

At its heart, *Gilmore Girls* was an examination of age-old questions about family, romance, and friendships, but it was also a show deeply rooted in its geography. To begin, the setting was not simply a back wall before which the action played out, but an integral part of the program’s unique feel. As had been the case with the denizens of Mayberry of *The Andy Griffith Show*, the people of Stars Hollow served as a sort of extended family to the main characters. It was a town where, for better and for worse, everyone knew everyone else, and where every last resident was charmingly quirky. Among the recurring characters were Babette, a gossipy exflower child and the Gilmores’ neighbor; Kirk, the town’s oblivious oddball, who seemed to

have a new job in every episode; Michel, a stylish, stuffy and often quite rude concierge at Lorelai's inn; Miss Patty, a melodramatic middle-aged dance instructor who, apparently, had had quite a past; Sookie, Lorelai's effervescent, scatterbrained best friend and the chef at the inn; and Taylor, Stars Hollow's self-absorbed, self-serving, and self-appointed leader, who organized the village's never-ending string of festivals and historical reenactments.

Despite this heavy dose of eccentricity, *Gilmore Girls*'s depiction of a little New England village was almost entirely positive. Reinforcing this message was the contrast between life in Stars Hollow and that in Hartford. In the pilot episode, Rory was accepted into Hartford's exclusive Chilton prep school. Lorelai, wanting the best for her daughter, but unable to afford Chilton's hefty price tag, went to her parents for the money. Richard and Emily agreed, but with a catch. They would pay the tuition, but Lorelai had to start bringing Rory, who they barely knew, to dinners at the Gilmore mansion every Friday night. At these dinners, predictably, sparks between Lorelai and Emily flew. Emily was constantly reminding Lorelai that she had been a tremendous disappointment, and Lorelai responded by recounting bitter memories of a suffocating blue-blood childhood. This was, of course, classic mother-daughter conflict, but it was also a statement about geography. Lorelai had embraced life in Stars Hollow, which balanced limited prestige and possibilities with endearing, friendly, and carefree charms. Emily represented life in upper-class Hartford, embodying its wealth, power and sophistication, but also its musty self-importance. *Gilmore Girls* made no bones about which side of the argument it came down on, with the show almost always giving Lorelai the last word. "These people live in a universe where they feel entitled to get what they want when they want it and they don't care who's in their way," said Lorelai. "I hate that world. Vapid. Selfish" (Bornemann 2005a: 1).

The battle between earthy Stars Hollow and genteel Hartford was also manifested in a battle between a pair of Lorelai's potential suitors. One was Luke, the gruff owner of the diner where the cooking-averse Gilmore girls took most of their meals. Despite an obvious affection, the friendship between Luke and Lorelai remained platonic through the show's first few seasons, much to the chagrin of the show's viewers. The other was Chris, Rory's father, who had reentered the lives of the Gilmores after a long absence. The difference between the two was substantial. Chris, the charming scion of a wealthy Hartford family, had drifted from one failed business venture to the next before striking it rich through a sizable inheritance. Luke, on the other hand, was all small-town. Perpetually clad in a ball cap and flannel shirt, the curmudgeonly but hard-working Luke lived in a spartan apartment above his diner, which, itself, had been retrofitted from a hardware store once owned by his father. When the two became rivals for Lorelai's affections, Rory was torn, but finally told Chris he needed to stay away. Emily, on the other hand, had different ideas. While obviously not completely enamored with Chris, she found his "good breeding" and "impeccable family" preferable to that of Luke. Emily urged Chris to win Lorelai away, and her condemnation of Luke was, by extension, a condemnation of Stars Hollow:

He's uneducated, he's not a proper stepfather for Rory, and he's completely unsuitable for Lorelai. My daughter's stubborn, but she's capable of greatness. And watching her settle down with a man who could hold her back from that is unacceptable. You at least won't hold her back (Bornemann 2005a: 1).

When Luke and Chris finally came to loggerheads, Luke, in true working-class fashion, argued that he deserves Lorelai because he had served for years as Rory's surrogate father while Chris was nowhere to be found. "Where the hell were you," asked Luke "when she got the chicken pox

and would only eat mashed potatoes for a week?” Chris’s response smacked of upper-class entitlement. “Lorelai and I belong together,” he said. “Everyone knows it. I know it. Emily knows it” (Bornemann 2005a: 1).

If Luke and Lorelai represented salt-of-the-earth Stars Hollow, and Richard, Emily and Chris represented haughty Hartford, then Rory was the character trapped between the two worlds. In many ways, the entire show was about the battle for Rory’s soul. At sixteen, she was still searching for her identity, and Lorelai made it a mission to protect her daughter from the “gauzy trappings” of Richard and Emily’s world. Lorelai bristled when Rory, under the sway of Richard, abandoned her childhood dream of Harvard for a go at her grandfather’s alma mater, Yale. To make matters worse, she eventually moved in with her grandparents. For critic Samantha Bornemann, this was one of *Gilmore Girls*’s central questions—“Were sixteen years of humble but happy living enough to inoculate her against the breezy swagger of the entitled rich?” (Bornemann 2005a: 1).

As the show began, Rory’s heart was with Stars Hollow and all it represented. The show reiterated, time and time again, that Rory’s affection for her hometown was tied, inexorably, to an affection for her mother, but it also made clear that the entire town had its own maternalistic relationship with Rory. This relationship, along with Rory’s emerging geographic dilemma, was made clear in a 2003 episode. Rory was preparing to head to Yale, and she and Lorelai wanted to engage in all of their favorite mother-daughter and Stars Hollow activities before she left. As Rory was passing by the window of Taylor’s soon-to-open sweet shop, she was shocked to see a poster with her picture on it, announcing that she would be present at the grand opening to serve as the “Ice Cream Queen.” She confronted Taylor, who told her that she needn’t worry, as he had already rented the cape and crown. Rory explained that she was busy, and said that she would

have to pass. A surprised Taylor explained that he thought she would be happy to participate, citing her past participation record as the pilgrim girl on Thanksgiving, a leprechaun on St. Patrick's Day, ticket-booth operator on Groundhog Day, head of the manger procession at Christmas, and Esther at the Purim Carnival, but Rory said that she was sorry:

TAYLOR: Oh, don't be. It's my own fault. I should have figured that once you got into Yale everything would be different.

RORY: That's not fair.

TAYLOR: No, I understand. You're no longer our little Stars Hollow Rory Gilmore. You belong to the Ivy League right now. It's time to cut those small-town ties and go off and do something important like go to drama school or have one of those high-class naked parties with that Bush girl.

Toward the end of the episode, Rory encountered Taylor again, as he explained to a crowd of distraught children that the Ice Cream Queen was too busy for them. At that point, an exasperated Rory seized the microphone from him:

RORY: Okay, that's it. I humiliate myself at least six times a year for this town, and just because I'm going to Yale, that's not going to stop. Now the reason I am not the Ice Cream Queen is because Taylor never asked me. I didn't know about it, and that's why I was busy. Now I love this town, I will be back in that ridiculous pilgrim outfit at Thanksgiving, so everybody just get off my back.

The confrontation bothered Rory, as revealed in a later conversation with her mother:

RORY: That Taylor thing is still bugging me.

LORELAI: Me, too. I can't believe you didn't call me in to see the fight.

RORY: Maybe I am different. Maybe I do have an attitude.

LORELAI: I think you do.

RORY: I mean, I've always had time for the town in the past, and now suddenly I don't? Am I changing? I don't want to change. I don't want to be the antitown girl (Warner Home Video, 2009).

Despite her desire not to be the antitown girl, Rory was certainly torn. Bornemann's description of her childhood as "humble but happy" said it all. A life in Stars Hollow could provide happiness, but it also carried with it a degree of meekness clearly at odds with Rory's ambition. Just as Rory's sparring family members represented her geographic dilemma, so did her two closest friends, Lane and Paris. Lane was Rory's Stars Hollow friend. The daughter of extremely strict Korean Seventh Day Adventists, she was forced to hide her love for all things secular from her conservative parents, often quite literally—she kept a collection of rock albums hidden beneath a loose floorboard in her room. Lane married shortly after high school, and almost immediately found herself pregnant with twins. Rory met Paris at Chilton, and later they were roommates at Yale. Paris was wealthy, intelligent, and extraordinarily ambitious, but unlike the cheerful, loyal, and kind Lane, she was neurotic and rude, often more of a competitor to Rory than a real friend. Both girls represented the promises and trappings of their respective worlds. Paris was destined for greatness, to be sure, but she was almost certainly doomed to a life of sadness. Lane was intent on happiness, but her horizons were limited. This geographic symbolism also extended to Rory's boyfriends. Dean was the Stars Hollow guy, a loveable, kind, puppyish kid, but who lacked sophistication and, when compared to Rory, intelligence. His chief rival for Rory's affections was Jess, Luke's juvenile delinquent nephew from New York City. Unlike Dean, Jess was withdrawn, sullen and, often, downright mean, but he was also bright with

excellent taste in literature and music. Once again, the geographic message was clear—small-town Dean would probably make Rory happier, but big-city Jess would challenge her intellect.

In the last episode, which aired in 2007, Rory had graduated with a degree in journalism, and she had decided to leave Stars Hollow. In a remarkable show of prescience on the part of the show's writers, she had gotten a job covering the presidential campaign of little-known U. S. Senator Barack Obama. That she chose the allure of the wider world to the comfort of Stars Hollow was a profound geographic message about the limitations of small towns. With that exception, however, *Gilmore Girls* left the reputation of New England villages unscathed. In fact, according to a 2001 interview with the show's creator, Amy Sherman-Palladino, the program was intended, from the outset, to be a glorification of small Connecticut towns. A California native, Sherman-Palladino had come up with the concept for *Gilmore Girls* while on vacation. She had stopped, by chance, at the Mayflower Inn in Washington Depot, Connecticut, and was so enamored with the place that she worked out many of the show's details, including dialogue that ended up in the pilot episode, right on the spot.

We're driving by, and people are slowing down saying, "Excuse me, where is the pumpkin patch?" And everything is green and people are out, and they're talking. And we went to a diner and everyone knew each other and someone got up and they walked behind the [counter] and they got their own coffee because the waitress was busy, and I'm, like, "Is this out of central casting? Who staged this thing for me?" And the inn was so beautiful. And everything looked like it was covered in sugar. It was just like one of those eggs that you stare in at Easter. If I can make people feel *this* much of what I felt walking around this fairy town, I thought that would be wonderful . . . It was beautiful, it was magical, and it was feeling of warmth and small-town camaraderie. . . There was a longing for that in my own life, and I thought—that's something that I would really love to put out there (Pierce 2001: 1).

MASSACHUSETTS

The television landscapes of Massachusetts has been thematically balanced, made of nearly equal parts drama and comedy, and the demographics of its settings have not been entirely unrealistic—about two-thirds of the Massachusetts’s population lives in the Greater Boston area, which has been the setting for roughly four-fifths of the state’s programs. Twenty-four of Massachusetts’s forty-seven entries have been dramas, and six of those, including the state’s first entry, were from the detective genre. *I Led Three Lives* was an espionage thriller that ran in syndication, with 117 episodes produced between 1953 and 1956. The show was loosely based on the exploits of real-life Bostonian Henry A. Philbrick, who, as viewers were informed in each episode’s opening narration, “for nine frightening years did lead three lives—average citizen, member of the Communist Party, and counterspy for the FBI” (Britton 2004: 23). Philbrick, an advertising executive, had inadvertently discovered that a local organization to which he belonged included members who were communists. When he took this information to the F. B. I., they recruited him to become a counterspy, infiltrating the communist party and reporting their activities to the bureau. The show had an intoxicating air of intrigue, with Philbrick forced to hide his communist affiliation from both his colleagues and his family, including his wife, Eva, until she herself became an agent. The more dangerous task, of course, was hiding his bureau affiliation from the communists. When Philbrick wasn’t disrupting nefarious communist plots, he was saving innocent Americans from the toxin of Marxism, as in one episode where a naïve teenage girl was “cleansed of her Communist infection” (Lichter, Lichter and Rothman 1991: 208). The show, whose scripts were approved by the F. B. I.,

certainly made no bones about its political views, or its vilification of communism. In one episode, Henry Philbrick's mother-in-law stumbled across evidence that he and Eva were communists, but her fear "was assuaged when she saw the children saying their bedtime prayers" (Britton 2004: 24). Brooks and Marsh described *I Led Three Lives* as "perhaps the most explicit political propaganda ever found in a popular dramatic series on American television."

In this show, Communist spies really were behind every bush, and anyone with liberal political views was suspect The Communist schemes included sabotage of vital industries, stealing government secrets, dope-smuggling (to poison the nation's youth), and spreading the party line through infiltration of organizations such as labor unions, university faculties, and even churches Any indication of left-wing views could cause a raised eyebrow, and the whispered comment, "Maybe he is . . . a Communist" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 651).

I Led Three Lives was popular in its initial run, and was successful in re-runs well into the 1960s. It is perhaps best remembered now as a McCarthy-era footnote, or for the later revelation that one of the show's most obsessive fans was a young man from Texas named Lee Harvey Oswald. Nothing like it ever appeared again on Boston's television landscape, but the demeanor of its primary character was not an anomaly when it came to the city's television crime fighters. Philbrick, the sophisticated, pipe-smoking Boston ad-man, was never characterized as a right-wing thug, but rather, in the words of historian David E. Kaiser, "as an intelligent and rather moderate man, who protests the bureau's persecution of well-meaning citizens innocently drawn into one front group or another" (Kaiser 2008: 171). Philbrick's intelligence, sensitivity, erudition, and savoir faire made him something of an archetypal Boston sleuth.

Unlike the hard-boiled, tough-talking, shoot-first-and-ask-questions-later sleuths that populated other cities around the country, Boston's investigators have tended to offer something

for clients who “wanted a little class with their private detecting” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1283). The city’s second detective drama, and its third overall entry, was *Banacek*, which ran for two seasons beginning in 1972. One of the show’s gimmicks was an ethnic twist—Thomas Banacek was Polish-American. He was constantly spouting Polish proverbs as he tracked down his quarry, and the show received a special commendation from the Polish-American Congress for providing such a positive role model. What really made Banacek different from other TV private eyes, however, was the quarry itself. He earned his living by tracking down valuable stolen property—usually prized works of art—and he never chased down anything cheap. The ultracool Banacek collected commissions from insurance companies when he inevitably recovered the goods, and those checks were hefty enough to provide him with a home in the exclusive Beacon Hill neighborhood, a chauffeured limousine, and a closet full of expensive suits. His principal contact was not a street-tough ex-con, as was the case for many other private eyes, but snobby Felix Mulholland, who ran an upscale antique book shop. Although he was not above giving the bad guy an occasional sock in the jaw, Banacek was defined more by his good taste in food, art, and women.

The title private eye of *Spenser: For Hire*, which premiered in 1985 and was filmed on location in Boston, was certainly tough enough. He was not only a former cop, but an exboxer as well, and a typical episode of *Spenser* contained far more violence than had been common on *Banacek*. That said, Spenser brought the same highbrow sensibilities to his sleuthing as had his 1970s Boston counterpart. A lover of poetry—Wordsworth, in particular—and a gourmet chef, Spenser could be heard, between car chases and shootouts, “dispensing pretentious quotes from the classics” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,283). His street contact, an intimidating black man named Hawk, was similarly cultured. With a love of good music and literature, and a penchant

for fancy cars and expensive clothes, Hawk provided Spenser with both useful information and the ability to physically dismantle any adversary.

Not only was Spenser one of television's most literate private eyes, he was also one of its most sensitive. Critic John J. O'Connor wrote that "one curious problem with the series so far is that Spenser is a touch too nice," but he also noted that the show's thoughtful nature allowed it to go places where most other detective dramas dared not venture. O'Connor cited one particular episode where Spenser gunned down a thug on the streets of Boston:

Spenser learns from Hawk that the dead man had two young children, both of whom seem delighted that they will never have to see their father again. Taking the youngsters under his wing temporarily, Spenser begins to notice that [his own girlfriend] Susan is looking troubled and distant. Finally guessing that she's pregnant, he urges her to have the baby, but she is reluctant to give a child life with a father who is constantly on the edge of violence and uncertainty. Watching Spenser winning the affections of the dead man's children, Susan, exasperated by his sense of justice and obligation, asks, "Are you ever going to realize you can't take on the world?" Sure, he says, "when I grow up." Susan is charmed but not convinced. In the final scene, she is in a hospital bed, obviously having had an abortion. A disappointed Spenser confides: "Susan and I had gone to war but still, unyielding, loved each other. Guess that's the only road to peace" (O'Connor 1986: 1).

Whether or not such somber introspection was typical of a Boston resident, much less of a private detective, the show was very popular there. It was rescued from cancellation after its second season by a grass-roots campaign in the city and, reportedly, because of a personal plea to ABC from Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis. Unfortunately, *Spenser* proved to be about as popular with the rest of the country as Dukakis was, and the show was cancelled after its third year.

At about the same time, Boston got its third private eye in the title character of *The Law and Harry McGraw*, a spinoff of *Murder, She Wrote*. Harry was a bit gruffer than Spenser or Banacek—he was more likely to be found slouched over the bar at Gilhooley’s than cooking up a gourmet meal or examining fine art. Cranky, absent-minded, and disheveled, Harry was, nevertheless, a “bright guy with good analytical skills” who always managed to crack the case (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 770). Viewers preferred their Boston P. I.s to be a little more refined, however, and *Harry McGraw* was cancelled five months into the 1987-1988 season. Greater Boston got its next sleuth when *The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo*, a youth-oriented cable series about an amateur teenage detective, moved from Florida to Massachusetts for its final season in 1999. Just as she had in the Sunshine State, the bright and ever-inquisitive Shelby made herself an honorary member of the local police department and set about solving the mysteries that baffled her grown-up colleagues. The most notable change in the show was the I. Q. of her main contact on the force—whereas Detective Himeline in Florida had been rather slow-witted, Detective Delaney was, in the tradition of Boston’s other television detectives, very sharp.

Boston’s most successful crime drama was *Crossing Jordan*, which premiered in 2001. It was the first Boston detective show to rank in the Nielsen top thirty, which it did for three of its six seasons. It was the story of Jordan Cavanaugh, an attractive young medical examiner whose doggedness and intractability had cost her a job in Los Angeles. She moved back to her hometown of Boston, and her old job, where she always proved capable of both irritating her coworkers and solving complex murder mysteries. *Crossing Jordan* was a good program, if not an especially unique one, leading critic Gillian Flynn to quip that the show “has always had the comforting vibe of an Applebee’s: The menu’s solid; the staff is competent; and the end result, while never dazzling, certainly does the job” (Flynn 2004: 1). While Jordan Cavanaugh may

have lacked the grandiloquent affectations of some of her Boston counterparts, she was similarly brilliant, and she was far more introspective than most other television crime fighters.

One of the peculiar features of Boston's television landscape is that it lacks any representative of the button-down, square-jawed, straight-arrow breed of cop exemplified by the likes of Joe Friday, Eliot Ness, and Steve McGarrett. For that matter, it has lacked anything resembling a straightforward police procedural. Although a few characters on Boston-based programs have been police officers, no shows focused on regular street cops executing their daily duties. This has left the televised streets of Boston relatively free of the crime and grime that characterized, for example, the New York of *Law & Order*, the Chicago of *The Untouchables*, the Baltimore of *Homicide*, or the Los Angeles of *Dagnet*.

Oddly enough, perhaps the grittiest portrayal of life in Boston was not found in one of its detective dramas, but in the first of the city's three medical dramas. *St. Elsewhere*, which made its debut in 1982, was the story of the staff and patients at Boston's St. Eligius, a run-down teaching hospital in a decaying neighborhood. The title of the show said it all. "St. Elsewhere" was an actual bit of medical industry jargon, used when a hospital's staff couldn't remember where a referral had come from. On this show, the term implied that St. Eligius was a dumping ground for patients who were too desperate or too poor to be treated at any of the city's more modern, expensive, and prestigious hospitals.

St. Elsewhere immediately became a critical darling for its unflinching portrayal of the realities of modern medicine. The show was, in the words of critic John J. O'Connor, "valiantly trying to bring a dash of freshness to a formula that has long been on the verge of total exhaustion" (O'Connor 1982: 1). The cases detailed on the show were often controversial, and

nearly always depressing. A woman discovered that her unborn child would have Down's syndrome, while another discovered that her mentally handicapped daughter was pregnant, and they both agonized over the decision to have an abortion. A young couple employed every possible technique to become pregnant, to no avail, while, at the same time, a man and his children watched, hopelessly, as their wife and mother succumbed to a brain tumor. *St.*

Elsewhere, as described by television historian Robert J. Thompson, was frank, and even casual, in its depiction of medical issues that had long been considered too graphic, risqué, or shocking for American television:

Various patients suffered from prostate cancer, hemorrhoids, hernias, infertility, impotence, premature ejaculation, an inability to urinate, and an inability to defecate. Doctors performed mastectomies, hysterectomies, vasectomies, sex change operations, colostomies, foreskin reconstructions, and once they even had to treat a colleague whose penis was stuck in his zipper (Thompson 1996: 80-81).

St. Elsewhere was not only willing to push the anatomical boundaries of television, but its social, cultural and political boundaries as well. A recurring theme of the show was how “politics and poverty could get in the way of patient care”—patients dealt with astronomical medical bills, doctors dealt with the huge, profit-hungry corporation that owned the hospital, and everyone waded through the “bureaucratic nonsense” that pervades modern health care (Murray 2007a: 1). But perhaps the greatest departure taken by *St. Elsewhere*, when compared to previous medical dramas, was its pervasive sense of hopelessness. As noted by Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman, doctors on other medical shows rarely lost a patient, and were “usually hip, attractive, brilliant medical practitioners who could cure any illness and still find time to engage in affairs of the heart and other avocational pursuits” (Lichter, Lichter and Rothman 1991: 189). This was rarely

the case on *St. Elsewhere*. Robert J. Thompson agreed, writing that “while earlier medical dramas like *Dr. Kildare*, *Ben Casey*, and *Marcus Welby, M. D.* featured godlike doctors healing grateful patients, the staff of Boston’s St. Eligius Hospital exhibited a variety of personal problems and their patients often failed to recover” (Thompson 2010: 1). *St. Elsewhere*’s executive producer, Bruce Paltrow, was a little more direct. “If you checked into St. Eligius, you died,” he stated in an interview. “If you were healthy and you accidentally got checked in, we killed you” (Golden 1996: 8). Critic Jeff Alexander echoed these assessments:

Man, was that show a downer. Ever get the idea that hospitals are gleaming cathedrals of science and healing and hot doctors? The medical hellhole called St. Eligius will straighten you out on that a lot faster than it could straighten out your tib-fib fracture. An hour of watching *St. Elsewhere* is an hour in a place with not enough funds, too many deaths, and a staff of doctors who actually look like doctors as opposed to models From *St. Elsewhere*, we learned the reassuring lesson that doctors were just as miserable and emotionally fucked up as the rest of us; they just know longer words and have worse handwriting (Alexander 2008: 118).

Perhaps the greatest cause for hope among St. Eligius’s fictional doctors was the fact that *St. Elsewhere*’s writers were more than willing to put them out of their misery—during its six year run, *St. Elsewhere* dispensed with no fewer than five principal characters. The show’s resident heartthrob, Dr. Robert Caldwell, was the first major character on a network series to die of AIDS; Dr. Wendy Armstrong committed suicide; Dr. Peter White was discovered to be a rapist, and was shot and killed by another principal character, nurse Shelly Daniels, who was then sent to prison; Dr. Elliot Axelrod survived cardiac bypass surgery, but died when he disconnected himself from his life-support system; Dr. Daniel Auschlander, the brilliant liver specialist, discovered he was suffering from liver cancer, and eventually died of a stroke. For those on St. Eligius’s staff who were not relieved by the sweet embrace of death, life was no

walk in the park. Dr. Cathy Martin was a nymphomaniac, obsessed with having sex in the hospital's morgue. Dr. Donald Westphall's wife died, forcing him to raise his teenage daughter and young autistic son alone. Dr. Jack Morrison worked himself to exhaustion, neglecting the needs of his pregnant wife, who eventually died in an auto accident. Later, Morrison and a young female resident were working in a prison's hospital ward, where the prisoners beat and savagely raped both of them. Several of the doctors were divorced, one suffered from bulimia, and nurse Helen Rosenthal was forced to undergo a mastectomy. The doctors who were not having misery thrust upon them were busy thrusting it on others—Dr. Ben Samuels was a brilliant surgeon, but an “indefatigable womanizer,” while Dr. Mark Craig was the “chronic complainer, the snob who yearns for the good old days when serious care was monopolized by the rich and administered by eminently clubbable fellows” (O'Connor 1982: 1).

The geographic message sent by *St. Elsewhere* was decidedly mixed. Despite their own troubles and the incredibly high mortality rate of their patients, the doctors of St. Eligius were portrayed, with a few exceptions, as being incredibly brilliant, dedicated, and caring—character traits that are not at all uncommon to Boston's television landscape. That said, *St. Elsewhere's* overall sense of place was grim. Doctors were mugged in the emergency room, drug addicts raided the pharmacy, and mentally ill patients slipped away, unnoticed, into the city streets. Whatever the merits of the staff, St. Eligius was, in the end, “still part of its surrounding neighborhood,” with its patients ranging “from junkie children infected by dirty syringes to bag people and other such types living on society's fringes” (O'Connor 1982: 1).

What probably kept such unceasingly grim material on the air for so many years was the fact that it mixed in a substantial amount of extremely dark comedy. A conversation about a risky surgical procedure, for example, would blend in with an exchange of a favorite recipe, and

all the while the hospital public address system crackled with an endless stream of comic non sequiturs. For a number of historians and critics, the show's most memorable moment was "network TV's first full moon shot," in which Dr. Westphall dropped his pants in front of his supervisor, and then abruptly resigned from the hospital (Thompson 1996: 80). For critic Jeff Alexander, the show's "most memorable single image is probably that of Dr. Craig head-butting Dr. Ehrlich over a surgical patient's cracked chest" (Alexander 2008: 118). In one episode, the hospital's most hated patient, the cranky Mrs. Hufnagel, died when a hospital bed folded up on her, and in another, Dr. Craig's mother-in-law dropped dead of a heart attack when a severed head was mistakenly mailed to her. Mary Tyler Moore's MTM Enterprises, which produced the show, always featured an orange kitten mewling at the end of its programs' closing credits. After the final episode of *St. Elsewhere*, the kitten was shown slumped on its side, hooked up to life support. It flat-lined as the credits faded to black.

St. Elsewhere spent most of its six years on Wednesday nights opposite ABC's popular soap opera *Hotel* and, as a result, never ranked higher than 49th on the Nielsen charts. Still, it did very well in the young, wealthy, urban demographics that advertisers coveted. It was also an industry favorite, ultimately raking in sixty-three Emmy nominations and thirteen wins.

Boston's two subsequent medical dramas were not nearly as successful. The medical soap opera *Hothouse*, which concerned a family of doctors who ran a psychiatric hospital, aired for just two months in the summer of 1988. *Gideon's Crossing*, which was set in a large Boston teaching hospital, did slightly better, lasting the entire 2000-2001 season. It was the story of Dr. Ben Gideon, the hospital's passionate and extremely gifted chief of surgery, and was perhaps most notable for being the first Boston-based drama to feature an African-American lead.

Gideon's Crossing was otherwise unremarkable, a show in which "most of the stories were

heavy-handed dramas filled with serious speeches about the meaning of life” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 534).

As mentioned, Boston has been home to a few television private eyes, a medical examiner, and communist hunter Henry Philbrick, but it has never hosted a conventional police procedural. And although the medical drama *St. Elsewhere* was Boston’s most critically acclaimed dramatic entry, it was neither the city’s longest-running drama, nor its most popular. The genre that has defined Boston’s dramatic landscape, particularly in recent years, has been the legal drama.

The city’s first law show, and first network program, was 1970’s *The Young Lawyers*, which stood in stark contrast to the syndicated entry *I Led Three Lives*. It was a justice-system spin on *The Mod Squad* and, had the title attorneys been around in the 1950s, they were the very sort of people that Philbrick might have found suspect. They included Aaron Silverman, the idealistic, shaggy-haired leader; Chris Blake, the WASP with a heart of gold; and Pat Walters, the “well-educated but street-wise black chick” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,557). With the help of courtroom veteran David Barrett, the three hip young attorneys ran a neighborhood law office that provided pro-bono legal help to poor, inner-city clients, taking on slum lords, scam artists, and brutal and corrupt cops. A thematically similar legal drama, *Against the Law*, premiered two decades later. It was the story of Simon MacHeath, a brilliant and principled, if somewhat irascible and unconventional, lawyer who had left a prestigious Boston firm to start his own practice, catering to the powerless and underprivileged. While such idealism might be commendable in real life, it apparently did not make for very compelling television, and both *The Young Lawyers* and *Against the Law* lasted just one season. An attempt to dispense with idealism altogether was made in 1995’s *The Great Defender*, which featured Lou Frischetti, an

energetic street lawyer who had made his fame with a series of tasteless television commercials. In the pilot, he was recruited to work at a high-dollar Beacon Hill law office, much to the chagrin of the firm's stuffy attorneys. It didn't matter much, as a second episode never aired.

After these three false starts, three more Boston legal dramas hit the air, all produced by *L. A. Law* veteran David E. Kelley, and all experiencing relatively long and successful runs. The first was 1997's *Ally McBeal*, which contained equal doses of legal drama, postmodern comedy, and soap opera. It was the story of the professional and romantic entanglements at Boston's ultrahip Cage/Fish & Associates law firm. The protagonist was Ally McBeal, a waifish, highly caffeinated young lawyer who wore infamously short skirts and who quickly emerged as one of the most popular, and controversial, television characters in recent history. In a 2000 article for the United Kingdom's *Independent* newspaper, Jonathan Ames travelled to Boston in search of the "real Ally McBeal," and summarized the show's characterization of the city's lawyers:

Fans of the cult US sitcom *Ally McBeal* will reckon they know a thing or two about legal practice in Boston. They will be confident that most of the women lawyers in the city are painfully thin neurotics who appear before judges in micro mini-skirts and tight, low-cut tops. They will also be certain that the male lawyers are kitted out in sharp suits and are either laconically lascivious or endearingly idiosyncratic. They will be convinced that the prosecution never wins, that communal lavatories are the order of the day at law firm offices, as is an almost free-love atmosphere. Indeed, the *Ally McBeal* aficionado would tell you that so randy are the Boston lawyers that frequently their affections are targeted beyond their own circle and towards esteemed members of the judicial bench Any programme that involves dancing babies, face bras, whistling noses and impromptu chorus lines is, of course, a huge fantasy. For their part, Boston lawyers seem at best bemused by *Ally McBeal*, and at worst harbour outright hostility towards it. As one local community advice lawyer says: "The whole programme irritates me, from the shortness of the skirts to the length of time the lawyers have for daydreaming (Ames 2000: 1).

As Ames indicates, much of *Ally McBeal* revolved around Ally's star-crossed love life. Billy Thomas was Ally's exboyfriend, who she had followed to Harvard Law School even though she didn't initially have much interest in the law. Billy had left Harvard to attend law school in Michigan, where he'd met and married fellow law student Georgia. Now all three of them were working at Cage/Fish, and that, of course, caused a good deal of personal and professional friction. The firm was led by John Cage, a self-confident and self-absorbed maverick, and Richard Fish, a shy, enigmatic, but brilliant attorney known for both his unconventional courtroom methods and strange tastes in women.

One of the show's quirky trademarks were the fantasy sequences, in which Ally's emotions were manifested on screen for the viewers. When Ally found a man attractive, her face would morph into that of a panting dog, or her computer-generated tongue would sail across the room and lick his face. When she was sad, Barry Manilow followed her around singing sad songs. And, most, famously, when Ally's biological clock was ticking, a computer-generated baby followed her around, dancing to the song "Hooked on a Feeling." Such odd touches, coupled with the show's eccentric characters and sharp dialogue, made the show a critical favorite and the "hot topic around the water cooler" in 1997 (Abernethy 2010a: 1).

The most enthusiastic supporters of *Ally McBeal* were viewers who, to the doubtless delight of FOX and its advertisers, most closely resembled the protagonist—young, single, independent, college-educated, professional women. As Brooks and Marsh put it, *Ally McBeal* "struck a chord with many young working women who could relate to the emotional and professional struggles of the impulsive young lawyer" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 38). *Ally McBeal* also struck a chord with some feminist activists and scholars, and not an entirely pleasant one, as indicated by Ginia Bellafante's response to the show:

The point, of course, is that there are no obvious leaders of the women's movement anymore, and the most popular woman on TV—hardly an uninfluential medium by the way—is Ally McBeal I think feminism worked long and hard to erase stereotypes of women as neurotic incompetents unconcerned with matters of public life. Ally McBeal, in my humble opinion, is helping undo that work.

In a joint interview with Bellafante, psychologist and feminist activist Phyllis Chesler agreed that the fundamental problem with *Ally McBeal* was her obsession with all the wrong things, and her lack of interest in matters important to women:

Remember who controls the media—it is a sexist man, who likes his women young and stupid, and adoring him I would say that if Monica Lewinsky goes to law school and continues to behave in the same fashion, she will turn into Ally McBeal—obsessed with men and sex and love and short skirts, and not with children being beaten to death in their own homes and not with women losing child support. These are not Ally McBeal's fantasy concerns (Bellafante and Chesler 1998: 1).

Whatever impact *Ally McBeal* had on the feminist movement, Bellafante and Chesler were certainly correct about one thing—the single greatest concern of the lawyers on the show was not society's ills, but themselves. This is not to say that the characters were wholly unlikable, but they were certainly self-absorbed. Their cases ranged from quirky to touching. They represented a man who was fired from his job because he thought he was Santa Claus and they took up the case of a boy with leukemia who wanted to sue God. But the usual purpose of each case was not to explore a pressing social issue, but to allow the characters to delve a little deeper into their own lives. Critic Margo Jefferson described *Ally McBeal* as a romantic comedy in which “the woman in question is having an ongoing, quite intense romance with herself” (Jefferson 1998: 1).

The show did sometimes smack of hedonistic hubris. Unlike many other legal dramas, where the weary protagonist, having fought a long and hard battle, would head home to an almost nonexistent personal life, nearly every episode of *Ally McBeal* ended with the characters drinking expensive cocktails and dancing at a posh nightclub. The show was an unabashed celebration of wealth and privilege. In one telling moment, John Cage, who was representing a wealthy woman accused of murdering her husband, spoke to television reporters. “Marie Hanson is a rich woman,” he said. “If she wanted her husband dead, she would have hired someone” (James 1998: 1). If there was a central geographic message of the show, it was that Boston was a city filled with young, attractive, successful, privileged, and quirky professionals who were thoroughly obsessed with their own well-being.

Ally McBeal remained on the air for five seasons, peaking at twenty-third in the Nielsen ratings during the 1998-1999 season. That was something of a feat for the show, as it was one of only two programs that the then-lowly FOX network placed in the top thirty that year. The second entry from David E. Kelley’s Boston law universe was even more successful. *The Practice* premiered in March of 1997 and aired for six more seasons, placing in the Nielsen top ten for two of those years. There were two significant contrasts between the shows. First, *The Practice* was pure legal drama, with the principal characters’ private lives almost never shown and rarely even referenced. The more distinct contrast, however, was in the nature of the two firms. That difference was made clear on a crossover episode, in which John Cage contracted Bobby Donnell and his team to assist in the defense of an axe murderer. “What an awful place,” said Cage, strolling into Donnell’s law offices. “Are they themselves criminals?” (James 1998: 1).

The shift from the swank, yuppie-chic, corporate law offices of Cage/Fish to the low-rent,

wrong-side-of-the-tracks atmosphere at Donnell and Associates would, under normal television circumstances, suggest that Bobby Donnell and the team of lawyers from *The Practice* were idealistic, social-justice-seeking paladins in the tradition of *The Young Lawyers*. That was not the case. Although the firm occasionally did the noble thing—defending the wrongfully accused, proving justifiable cause for a crime of passion, or taking on heartless tobacco or pharmaceutical companies—they were usually defending the dregs of society. They did it well, too, using every ruthless tactic in the book. Among their reprehensible clients was a man who knew the whereabouts of a kidnapped seven-year-old girl, but who would not divulge the information until he got a cushy sentence; a man accused of raping and murdering his teenage stepdaughter; a man accused of the brutal beating of a security guard during a riot; a young boy who murdered his mother for no apparent reason; and a man accused of raping, murdering, and dismembering nuns and stuffing their remains in a closet. As the judge in the last-named case put it, “You people fight for murderers better than anybody” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1100). As mentioned, sometimes these clients were almost certainly guilty, but much of the time, the lawyers and the viewers simply did not know.

In the last season of *The Practice*, Donnell and Associates hired a new lawyer named Alan Shore, an icy, arrogant, amoral shark who had been fired from his previous firm for embezzlement. A few weeks after *The Practice* was shuttered in 2004, Shore reappeared as the primary character on the final installment of David E. Kelley’s Boston legal trilogy—the succinctly named *Boston Legal*. Shore was now working for Crane, Poole, and Schmidt, a posh firm headed by Denny Crane, a formidable veteran attorney played with scenery-chewing aplomb by William Shatner. Crane was even more self-important than Shore, and possibly the only character in television history whose catchphrase was his own name—“*Denny Crane!*”

(Brooks and Marsh 2007: 170). Denny was a character “whose behavior oscillates so virulently between brilliant and bizarre that his colleagues doubt his sanity,” and many of *Boston Legal*’s subplots involved speculations about the source of his bizarre behavior, with Mad Cow Disease as one possible explanation (Smith 2004: 1).

Although *Boston Legal* occasionally tackled serious issues like censorship, police brutality, corporate corruption, and even ethnic cleansing in Sudan, it was best known for its bizarre cases—a man fought for the right to be cryogenically frozen while he is still alive; a woman sued her ex-fiancé for leaving her at the altar; a department store Santa sued when he was fired for being a transvestite; an African-American child actress sued when she was turned down for the title role in *Annie*. Many episodes ended with Alan and Denny sharing a celebratory cigar and snifter of brandy in Denny’s penthouse office, spouting off-kilter observations about the meaning of life.

Boston Legal premiered to relatively strong ratings, ranking twenty-fourth on the Nielsen charts in its first year, thanks in large part to a strong lead-in from ABC’s popular soap opera, *Desperate Housewives*. Its time slot was changed after its first season, however, and ratings suffered, but the show managed to remain on the air for four seasons. Despite the almost cartoonish egocentricity of Denny Crane and Alan Shore, of the three Kelley-produced Boston law programs, *Boston Legal* may have had the most overtly political message. It was said by the *New York Times* to be analogous to “liberal talk radio.”

In almost every episode, the hero, Alan Shore, shakes off his sardonic detachment and delivers a long, uninterrupted rant about the Iraq war, the credit card industry or the Roman Catholic Church Shore remains icy and cutting, but he has shed much of his wickedness to champion causes. In a recent episode he represented a young woman suing the United States military for

the death of her brother in Iraq, lashing out at the administration and a complacent, indifferent public. (“At least with Vietnam we all watched and got angry.”) He lost the case but won over the judge, who agreed with Shore’s assessment that the war was a “disaster.” Shore has morphed from someone who was despicable even in his finer moments to a conventional prime-time hero (Stanley 2006: 1).

That said, others did not find *Boston Legal*’s basic outlook and, by extension, its characterization of Boston’s lawyers, to be fundamentally different from the self-absorption of *Ally McBeal* or the moral ambiguity of *The Practice*. Critic Lesley Smith wrote that *Boston Legal* “unrepentantly endorses and exploits traditional assumptions about lawyers: white privilege, boys are for business, girls are for sex, greed is good.”

The excesses go beyond the politically incorrect. *Boston Legal* openly celebrates the privileges capitalism offers to a tiny minority, visible in their gleeful Olympian amorality in public, private, and professional life. By repackaging the morality of Enron, Halliburton, and widespread mutual fund mismanagement as frivolous eccentricity, the show valorizes the super-rich behaving super badly and getting away with it, over and over again. Moreover, the tenor here is quite different from earlier “rich folk behaving badly” shows which made unlikely heroes out of J. R. Ewing and Alexis Carrington. Those characters directed their venom at each other, or fellow competitors for family and business wealth. In *Boston Legal*, the venom sprays downwards, at everyone who is not “like us.” Clients (blatantly less privileged, women, African Americans, and Latinos) are merely the means to money and fame, or better, notoriety. Those involved in the show describe it as “light” and “funny,” as if it were just a frothy entertainment. And several reviewers celebrate its “loopiness,” “fruitiness,” and “La-La Land” wackiness. Nothing, however, can hide the fact that, despite its idiosyncrasies, *Boston Legal* is all too accurate in its portrayal of our cultural moment, in which the gaps between richer and poorer grow ever larger and social and political empathy grows ever more anemic (Smith 2004a: 1).

In the middle of unleashing a tide of Boston lawyers who were either self-centered or

self-destructive, or both, David E. Kelley produced *Boston Public*, which debuted in 2000 and aired for three and a half years. The show demonstrated that grim surroundings and uncharitable characterizations were not strictly the domain of Boston's doctors and lawyers. Set at a crowded, sprawling, urban high school, *Boston Public* at least had a respectable protagonist. Steven Harper was the understanding, devoted, yet tough principal at Winslow High. Working for Steven were a handful of aching idealistic teachers, including Ronnie, a lawyer who had left a lucrative career in corporate law to become an English teacher, but most of the faculty were a mess. Harry, the geology teacher, referred to his classroom as "the dungeon," and packed a gun at work. Harvey was the aging, jingoistic history teacher, whose thinly veiled racism did not sit well with Steven, who was black. Marla was a special education teacher on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Milton was an English teacher who was having an affair with Lisa, a student at Winslow who had been teaching her own English class for months (the original teacher had stopped coming to work). Charlie was an investment banker who had been convicted of fraud, and he was teaching math at Winslow as part of his sentence.

A quick overview of the student body reveals why so many of these educators were on edge. Students stabbed one teacher and stalked two others. One student handcuffed his abusive mother and locked her in the basement of their house, while Steven's own daughter, Brooke, started attending Winslow after she was kicked out of private school.

While *Boston Public* occasionally addressed very real issues facing American public schools—violence, overcrowding, drastic budget cuts, and poor performance on standardized exams—the show spent precious little time in the actual classroom. For critic Jessica Harbour, that was *Boston Public*'s undoing:

It probably seemed like a good idea to decide to stage an hour-long drama from the teachers' point of view, to show what it's like to work in a job simultaneously thankless and important. The problem is, this idea has resulted in *Boston Public*, which does high school teachers no service at all Instead of seeing the teachers actually teaching the students, we watch them fighting with students in the hallways, holding whispered conferences with them in out-of-the-way areas, or kissing them in classrooms (after everyone else has left) Their interactions are rarely about grades and almost never about actual academic topics. Usually they consist of the student making disdainful statements and the teacher issuing threats. *Boston Public's* actions speak louder than its words: in this show, the students act, and the teachers react, with fear, hostility, and scorn (Harbour 2010: 1).

Although Boston's professional dramas haven't exactly been ringing endorsements of life in the city, they have been the most successful of Massachusetts's dramatic entries. Of the state's nine remaining dramas, just one lasted at least two seasons, and none cracked the Nielsen top thirty. Boston has been the setting for just two family dramas, and that genre got off to an inauspicious start with *Beacon Hill*, a lavishly produced period soap opera. Set in Boston in the early 1920s, and almost certainly inspired by *Upstairs, Downstairs*, a similar soap that had been a smash hit in Britain, *Beacon Hill* was the story of the wealthy, powerful, Irish-American Lassiter family and their household staff. Despite its big cast, equally large production budget, steady stream of family turmoil, and enormous doses of alcohol and sex, the show proved to one of the biggest flops of the 1975-1976 television season, ranking third-to-last in the Nielsen ratings. Called "a fiasco on every level" by one critic, and an example of "commercial television once again refusing to trust the intelligence of its audience" by another, *Beacon Hill* was pulled off the schedule by CBS after only thirteen episodes had aired (Andrews and Dunning 1980: 9).

The network had apparently forgotten its lesson by 1998, when it aired *To Have and to Hold*. This time around the large, tumultuous Irish-American family was the McGrails. They

were not as socially prominent as the Lassiters, but the levels of sex, alcohol, and critical acclaim were about the same. Sean McGrail, a detective for the Boston police, had just married Annie, an outspoken public defender. At odds professionally, the two did a fair amount of arguing, but the sex was great. As Sean's father, Robert, philosophically put it, "There's nothing so wonderful as being with a woman you want to ravish one moment and strangle the next" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,398). One obvious problem with the show was its tendency to stereotype Boston's Irish-American population, as noted by critic Mike Flaherty:

In the pilot . . . Sean McGrail is shown stumbling home drunk from his bachelor party with two of his brothers, who are also—you guessed it—cops and—right again!—drunk, and live a few doors down (they're provincial, too, these Irish). Seconds later, gunshots sound after a spat between the old Irish couple across the street overheats. Why, you ask? Because they were drunk. In fact, as we soon learn, they're always drunk (Flaherty 1998: 1).

Whether it was offensive or just bad to TV, *To Have and to Hold*, like *Beacon Hill*, lasted just thirteen weeks.

Despite all of their flaws—egocentrism, arrogance, and occasional depravity—the characters presented in Massachusetts-based dramas have, at the very least, rarely been characterized as slow-witted or unsophisticated. The tendency of the state's dramas to feature characters with above-average IQs was exemplified in a pair of teen dramas, *James at 15* and *Dawson's Creek*. Both shows featured young people whose lives were, as might be expected, filled with turmoil, but who possessed a level of intelligence, introspection, and sophistication that far exceeded that of the often monosyllabic, hormone-driven brutes who regularly populated other teen soaps. *James at 15*, which debuted in 1977, was the story of James Hunter, an exceptionally bright and creative young man who had moved from Oregon to Boston after his

father accepted a position at a nearby college. The show dealt with some weighty and often taboo topics—cancer, alcoholism, venereal disease, and premarital sex, to name a few—but thoughtful James got through with the help of his new friend, Marlene, a “plain but very intelligent girl who always took the intellectual point of view” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 691). In the tradition of Hawk on *Spenser: for Hire* and Pat on *The Young Lawyers*, James also had a cool, street-wise black pal named Sly, “who always had a little sage advice, or ‘Slychology,’ when James needed it” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 691). *James at 15* may have been ahead of its time, causing quite a stir when James lost his virginity to a foreign-exchange student (on his birthday, apparently, as the show was then retitled *James at 16*), but the likely cause of the show’s demise was not controversy, but competition. It was placed on Thursday nights opposite *Barney Miller* and *Hawaii 5-0*, both popular programs, and was not renewed after its first season.

Dawson’s Creek, which premiered in 1998, was certainly not ahead of its time, but part of an avalanche of teen soaps inspired by the success of *Beverly Hills, 90210*. The show represented a pair of firsts for Massachusetts—the first drama to be set in a small town, and the first successful one not focused on the legal or medical professions. In many ways, the show was not much different from the melodrama of *90210*. Set in a sleepy little Cape Cod town, *Dawson’s Creek* was the story of four high school sophomores—Dawson, Joey, Pacey, and Jen. Dawson was the show’s moody protagonist, who dreamed of a life as a filmmaker; Joey was the pretty, tomboyish, lovelorn girl next door; Pacey was Dawson’s sidekick, a nice guy but a perpetual screw-up; Jen was the blonde temptress from New York whose promiscuous past had landed her on the Cape with her Bible-thumping grandmother. The plot lines were not revolutionary by soap standards. Joey lived with her sister Bessie, a single mom, because their mom was dead and their dad was in prison on a drug charge. Pacey had an affair with his English

teacher, who had to flee the town in disgrace. Jen got drunk with Abby, Capeside High's resident "manipulative bitch," who fell off a bridge and drowned in the title creek (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 334). Dawson's mother had an affair, and his parents eventually divorced. Dawson brooded.

Dawson's Creek quickly became the most popular program on the fledgling WB network and, although it was never close to the Nielsen top thirty, it was a big hit with its target audience of teenagers. What made *Dawson's Creek* different from the typical disaster-of-the-week soap opera was its frequent attention to the mundane details of teenage life, and the remarkable, or, as some critics argued, irritating amount of time the protagonist spent being sullen and introspective. As critic Rachel Highland put it, "the protagonists attend dances, football games, and graduation, and they get together, break up, make up, talk, talk, and *talk* about it" (Hyland 2010: 1). Like the sensitive teens of *James at 15*, the high school sophomores of *Dawson's Creek* were incredibly intelligent and responsible for their age. "The most interesting thing about this small-town soap opera is that the adults act more like teenagers than the kids," wrote critics Beverly West and Jason Bergund. "The parents in *Dawson's Creek* are forever fouling things up, leaving it to their freakishly perceptive and emotionally mobile kids to clean up the mess" (West and Bergund 2005: 90). Critic Joyce Millman found the teens' relentless acuity to be a little wearying:

All four of them talk in glib, show-offy flourishes of annoying screenwriterese: "Fasten your seat belts, it's going to be a bumpy life" ; "I was sexualized way too young" ; "Is monogamy such a Jurassic notion?" (Millman 1998: 2).

Critic Jeff Alexander, on the other hand, was simply relieved that he never had to live up to the

standards set by the *Dawson's* four:

I'm actually glad *Creek* didn't start until I was well out of high school. If I had seen it before starting ninth grade, I would have completely stressed myself out thinking that once I graduated junior high, I would be expected to start talking in long, complete sentences about my feelings. How these kids could spout off like they were in an advanced stage of therapy is completely beyond me (Alexander 2008: 16-17).

Just as Dawson, Joey, Pacey, and Jen set an impossibly high standard of emotional maturity for New England's small-town teenagers, the fictional town of Capeside was setting an impossibly high standard of charm for New England's small towns. It was ridiculously picturesque. Quaint shops, cafes, and the charming old Rialto Theater lined the streets downtown. The waterfront featured strings of lights and park benches, while out at the Icehouse restaurant, tourists and townies munched on seafood and burgers as sailboats glided by on the sparkling water. Seen in the opening credits was the beach and, of course, the title creek itself, lined with marsh grass and bathed in sunlight. A typical episode involved Joey rowing across the creek to Dawson's waterfront home.

In reality, it was not Dawson's Creek, but Hewlett's Creek, located near Wilmington, North Carolina. *Dawson's Creek* was filmed at Screen Gems Studios in Wilmington and at other locations along the Cape Fear Coast. The show was created by Kevin Williamson, a native of Oriental, North Carolina, just up the coast from Wilmington, and he reportedly based the character of Dawson on himself. The fact that the show was created by a North Carolinian, based on his childhood, and actually filmed in the state, begs the question of why the show was not actually set there. Unfortunately, no existing literature addresses this matter. It is possible that network executives, or even Williamson himself, felt that the show's formula—the charm of its

setting, the sophistication of its young characters, or even the sexually charged atmosphere—did not fit with common perceptions of small-town North Carolina. That is, of course, pure speculation.

Dawson's Creek concluded in a manner not uncommon to small-town programs, whether set in New England or not. In the final season, Dawson went off to L. A. to attend film school, while Joey, Jen, and Pacey enrolled at colleges in Boston. The final episode took viewers five years into the future, when the now grown-up leads returned to Capeside for a wedding. Dawson had become a successful Hollywood producer (developing an autobiographical teen melodrama called *The Creek*), and the girls both lived in New York, where Joey was a book editor and Jen managed an art gallery. Only slacker Pacey remained behind, managing a local restaurant, but even he eventually decided to head to the Big Apple. An underlying geographic message of *Dawson's Creek* had always been that Capeside, for all its charm, placed limits on the ambitions of the bright young characters, and the show's conclusion reminded viewers that true success for an ambitious small town kid was always to be found beyond the horizon.

Just two other Massachusetts dramas have been set outside of Boston, and both, in their own ways, turned the *Dawson's Creek* formula inside out. For those who preferred their dramas a little less heated, there was 1998's *Little Men*, a period drama based loosely on the novel by Louisa May Alcott. Set at a private boarding school in rural Massachusetts of the 1870s, *Little Men* was the story of headmistress Jo and her young, mostly male students. Episodes revolved around timeless coming-of-age stories, but all were done in the squeaky-clean manor typical of the PAX network, where the show aired for a year and a half. *October Road*, which premiered in 2007, was *Dawson's Creek* in reverse, featuring a successful writer named Nick Garrett who had returned to his little hometown of Knight's Ridge. His best-selling novel had been an unflattering

account of life in the small town, and the locals were not terribly pleased to have him back. There were the usual eccentric characters and plenty of torrid affairs, but not many viewers, and *October Road* lasted less than a year.

Rounding out Massachusetts's dramatic entries was a pair of Boston-based supernatural dramas, neither of which was especially successful. The first was *All Souls*, the story of Dr. Mitchell Grace, a first-year resident at the title hospital, which was haunted by evil spirits, demons, and the ghosts of departed patients. It was followed by *Miracles*, an ecclesiastical spin on *The X-Files* in which young seminarian Paul Callan investigated, with the help of a creepy retired Harvard professor named Alva, all manner of strange activity, including demonic possessions, hauntings, and clairvoyants. *All Souls* lasted for five months in 2001, *Miracles* just two in 2003.

A pair of unscripted television programs originated from Boston in the 1990s. The first was a weekly talk show, *Clapprood Live*, which premiered in 1994 and aired on cable's Lifetime network for nine months. Hosted by former Massachusetts state legislator Marjorie Clapprood, the show featured discussions of current events with a focus on women's issues. Three years later, MTV's pioneering reality show *The Real World* left sunny Miami Beach for the ice and snow of Boston in its sixth season.

Massachusetts has been the setting for twenty-one situation comedies, but just five of them lasted more than a year, and only four entered the Nielsen top thirty. The state's first comedy, *Paul Sand in Friends and Lovers*, arrived to a warm critical reception and came equipped with favorable production pedigree. The show was a product of Mary Tyler Moore's MTM Enterprises, which produced Moore's landmark program, Bob Newhart's two hit sitcoms,

and many more popular and critically acclaimed series of the 1970s and 1980s, including *Rhoda*, *Lou Grant*, *WKRP in Cincinnati*, *Hill Street Blues*, *Remington Steele*, and, as mentioned, Boston's own *St. Elsewhere*. Like the stars of a few other MTM sitcoms, Paul Sand was a veteran of the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and *Friends and Lovers* was a kindred spirit of that program. Sand played Robert Dreyfuss, a young bass violinist for the Boston Symphony Orchestra whose affably shy demeanor had won him lots of friends, but few lovers. That was a problem, since he fell in love with nearly every pretty girl he met. *Boston Globe* critic Ed Siegel remembered that "the show was funny, but it also had a gentle sensibility and literate writing that made it a standout" (Javna 1988: 96). *Friends and Lovers* was ranked twenty-fifth on the Nielsen charts during the 1974-1975 season, but was still considered a substantial flop because of the company it kept. It was broadcast on CBS's Saturday night line-up after *All in the Family*, which ranked first on the Nielsen charts, and *Mary Tyler Moore*, which ranked eleventh. About a third of the households that watched Archie Bunker did not stay tuned for Robert Dreyfuss, and *Friends and Lovers* was canned after three months.

In the most bizarre example of copycat programming since CBS and ABC rolled out *The Munsters* and *The Addams Family* during the same week in 1964, CBS and NBC unveiled *Highcliffe Manor* and *Struck by Lightning* in 1979. *Highcliffe Manor* was the story Helen Blacke, who had inherited the title manor—a huge gothic mansion on an island just off the Massachusetts coast—when her husband was killed in a laboratory explosion. Along with the manor came a cast of horror-tale archetypes—a mad scientist and his Frankenstein monster, for example—who immediately began to plot against her. On *Struck by Lightning*, Ted Stein was a young science teacher who had just inherited the rundown Bridgewater Inn in rural Massachusetts, which came with its own caretaker, a big, menacing character named Frank. Ted

soon found out that he was the great-great-grandson of the original Dr. Frankenstein, and that Frank was the original, 231-year-old Frankenstein monster. *Struck by Lightning* and *Highcliffe Manor* were both gone in less than a month.

When Massachusetts's fourth sitcom debuted in the early 1980s, it looked as if it was going to be even most disastrous than the first three. Set in, of all places, a bar, *Cheers* had all the makings of a flop. The show came on the heels of an era dominated by sitcoms like *All in the Family*, *Maude*, *M*A*S*H*, and *One Day at a Time*, which had become hits by being politically salient and socially relevant. *Cheers*, for the most part, was politically incorrect, but it went out of its way to avoid social commentary, as noted by television historian J. B. Bird:

The main character was a womanizer . . . and the collegial atmosphere centered around drinking. Though several of the characters were working-class, the show completely avoided social issues. And *Cheers* never preached to its audience on any subjects whatsoever. Even the poignant moments of personal drama that quieted the set from time to time were quickly counter-balanced by sardonic one-liners before any serious message could take hold (Bird 2010: 1).

Just as *Cheers* was not part of the "relevance" school of television, it was also not part of the wildly successful "fantasy" school of sitcoms exemplified by *Happy Days*, *Sanford and Son*, *Laverne & Shirley*, and *Three's Company*, which got their laughs from outrageous situations and cartoonish characters. If anything, *Cheers* seemed to be a crusty relic of a bygone era, mining its laughs from the kind of verbal sparring popularized in 1930s screwball comedies featuring the likes of Claudette Colbert, Cary Grant, Carole Lombard, William Powell, and Myrna Loy. About the only hope for *Cheers* was the fact that it was created by the talented trio of James Burrows, Les Charles, and Glen Charles, all veterans of highly regarded shows from MTM Enterprises.

When *Cheers* debuted on a Thursday night in September 1982, it bombed. In the words of television historian Rick Mitz, “People didn’t like it. People didn’t get it. And—worse—people didn’t watch it” (Mitz 1988: 341). This first broadcast came in seventy-seventh place in the Nielsen ratings—dead last—and the show’s ratings continued to be dismal for the rest of the season. But, in what would turn out to be an extraordinarily fortunate act of clemency, NBC renewed the show for a second year. *Cheers* might have been saved by the Emmys—it received five awards for its rookie season, including the Emmy for Outstanding Comedy Series.

The likely reason for the survival of *Cheers* was the fact that it aired on a weak NBC Thursday night line-up. During its second season, *Cheers*’s lead-ins were *Gimme a Break*, *Mama’s Family*, and *We Got it Made*, shows that not only brought in few viewers, but which also attracted viewers who were unlikely to stay tuned for the literate bon mots of *Cheers*. The show’s ratings inched up, slightly, and it was renewed for a third year, but the lead-in situation did not appear to have improved much in the fall of 1984. It now followed *Family Ties*, another third-year show that had never ranked in the top thirty, and a new program about a black family that was considered so unpromising that it had been rejected by ABC not once, but twice. That show, of course, turned out to be *The Cosby Show*, an enormous surprise hit. *Cheers* finished its third season in twelfth place, and the trio of *Cosby*, *Family Ties*, and *Cheers* transformed NBC’s Thursday night slate into television’s hottest real estate.

The premise of *Cheers* was remarkably simple and, for its time, refreshingly gimmick-free. The protagonist was Sam Malone, a charming ladies’ man. A former relief pitcher for the Boston Red Sox, Sam had won a battle with alcoholism and was now the proprietor of the title bar. Sam’s employees included Carla Tortelli, an acerbic, diminutive waitress and single mother of eight; and Ernie Pantusso, called “Coach,” a fatherly ex-ball player who was as kind and

gentle as he was forgetful and naïve. Diane Chambers, a third employee, was a haughty Boston University graduate student who had stopped in for a drink in the pilot episode. When her professor fiancé eventually abandoned her for his ex-wife, Diane was forced to take the only job that her years of studying poetry had left her qualified for—a waitress at Cheers. Two recurring patrons of the bar were central characters, too. Norm Peterson was an overweight, sarcastic, but friendly accountant who spent most of his spare time at Cheers, avoiding his often-mentioned but never-seen wife, Vera. Cliff Clavin was a mailman with a thick Boston accent who had little practical knowledge, but, having spent years reading magazines while delivering the mail, had become a treasure trove of useless facts that he freely dispensed in the bar. One example—“due to the shape of the North American elk’s esophagus, even if it could speak, it could not pronounce the word *lasagna*” (Golden 1996: 5).

A few changes to the cast occurred over the years. After Coach’s death, Sam hired Woody Boyd, a spectacularly naïve Indiana farm boy whose greatest ambition in life was to tend bar in the city. After a heated on-again, off-again relationship with Sam, Diane dated Frasier Crane, a pompous psychiatrist who was capable of solving everyone’s problems but his own. Eventually, Diane left to pursue a career as a writer, and Sam sold the bar to a huge corporation, which sent the smart, ambitious, neurotic, and perpetually unlucky Rebecca Howe to manage the place. Sam eventually got the bar back, forcing Rebecca to change her aspirations from climbing the corporate ladder to marrying rich, and the chief target of her affections was a pompous, manipulative British billionaire named Robin Colcord. Frasier married Dr. Lillith Sternin, an icy psychiatrist who rivaled him in arrogance, while Woody pursued Kelly Gaines, a good-natured, old-money heiress who rivaled him in stupidity. Despite these plot developments and cast changes, the spirit of *Cheers* changed little over the years. The series rarely ventured outside the

comfortable, oak-paneled bar room and the plots were always secondary to the verbal warfare that took place among the bar's staff and patrons.

Few shows have had as big an impact on their state's television landscape as was the case of *Cheers* with Massachusetts. In the thirty-four seasons between the dawn of network television in 1948 and the premiere of *Cheers* in 1982, only seven shows were set in Boston, and just one network entry, *Banacek*, lasted more than a single year. In the twenty-five years following the premiere of *Cheers*, thirty-one programs were set in Boston, with ten of them lasting more than two seasons. The city has been the setting for at least five programs in each of five different seasons since 1982, and *Cheers* seems to have created for Boston shows a sort of brand identity that few other American television cities have achieved. The city itself has become a distinct selling point, featuring programs with titles like *Goodnight, Beantown*, *Boston Common*, *Boston Public*, and *Boston Legal*. Of course, it is difficult to determine whether this "Cheers effect" is coincidental correlation or direct causation, but there is no denying the show's popularity. *Cheers* climbed to the fifth position on the Nielsen charts during the 1985-1986 season, and would remain in the Nielsen top five for six more years, ranking in the top spot during the 1990-1991 season. It also garnered an almost unprecedented amount of praise from critics and the industry, collecting twenty-six Emmy awards out of a record 111 nominations.

As mentioned, *Cheers* had a stylistic connection to film comedies of the 1930s and 1940s, and it had a thematic one as well. Screwball classics such as *It Happened One Night*, *My Man Godfrey*, *The Lady Eve*, and *The Philadelphia Story* centered on the comic mishaps and verbal sparring that occurred when the conceited and refined collided with the earthy and unsophisticated. *Cheers* characterized Boston as a city that was not exclusively blue blood or blue collar, but as a place where people of different levels of income, education, and

sophistication interact. The following exchange is classic:

DIANE: Last night I was up until two in the morning finishing Kierkegaard.

SAM: I hope he thanked you. (Javna 1988: 108).

A unique attribute of *Cheers* was that the show was not a relentless attack on one end of the sociocultural spectrum or the other. When the haughty characters—Diane, Frasier, Robin, and Lillith—were not being verbally ripped to shreds by Carla and Sam, they were having their conceit and posturing exposed, usually inadvertently, by Coach or Woody. At the same time, Diane, Frasier, Robin, and Lillith openly mocked the crudeness of the bar's less educated and less refined denizens. Woody, the simple farm boy and Kelly, the wealthy socialite, were equally naïve. One of the most common themes of the show was, for lack of a better term, a “you-are-who-you-are” message, with characters inevitably coming to ruin whenever they tried to move out of their particular corner of the cultural universe. Cliff's attempts to appear sophisticated, Frasier's attempts to be one of the guys, and Rebecca's attempts to claw her way into the upper class always ended disastrously. The character who seemed most resigned to, if not especially happy with, his lot in life, was the character in the middle of *Cheers* sociocultural spectrum—a man not coincidentally named “Norm.” This everyman was a witty, suit-wearing, white-collar professional, but he also swilled beer for hours at a time and had become legendary for his gastronomical prowess at his favorite restaurant, the Hungry Heifer. He was not especially sophisticated or especially unrefined. He was just an average guy. It is notable that Norm, the cultural center of the *Cheers* universe, was the only bar patron to appear on every episode of the series.

The blue-blood versus blue-collar motif that characterized *Cheers* has actually been a common theme across Boston's television landscape. Major Charles Emerson Winchester, the haughty, aristocratic Boston surgeon on *M*A*S*H* served much the same purpose on that program as Diane and Frasier did on *Cheers*—a foil for characters like Hawkeye and Trapper John, who were more down-to-earth. The urbane private eye on *Banacek* was contrasted with his blue-collar mug of a chauffeur, Jay Murray, while the similarly classy private eyes of *Spenser: for Hire* were contrasted with Sgt. Frank Belson, Spenser's slovenly contact with the Boston police. On *Crossing Jordan*, the sophisticated title medical examiner often sought advice from her dad, a retired cop with a broad, Down East accent who ran a bar called Pogue Mahone, an Irish Gaelic term meaning “kiss my ass.” The central theme of the short-lived drama *Beacon Hill* was the contrast between a wealthy family and their servants, and class conflict was a constant on *St. Elsewhere*, including one episode where “the wealthy, snobbish parents of an ill child . . . insisted that she be transferred to a fancier hospital” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,188).

The class wars and culture clashes of *Cheers* were most evident in the relationship between Sam and Diane. Diane was the foil for most of the barbs that floated around the tavern, and with good reason. Critic Stephen Tropiano applauded actress Shelly Long for making the character of Diane likable, since there are “so many reasons not to like the self-righteous, judgmental, snobby Diane, particularly when she starts tossing around literary references and French phrases.” Tropiano added that audiences still liked Diane “because she's vulnerable, has a good heart, and tries to hold her own when up against her tart-tongued co-worker, Carla Using names like ‘Pencil Neck,’ Carla enjoys taunting Diana and then watching her slowly unravel” (Tropiano 2003a: 1). Truly, the only leverage that Diane held in the bar was over Sam, who, for reasons that he did not fully understand, was smitten by her. She roasted him as often as

the others roasted her. “Let’s go to the back room,” Diane told him one episode. “It’s empty and quiet and dimly lit, like your mind” (Javna 1988: 108). Another typical exchange:

DIANE: Sam, that is the stupidest thing I ever heard.

SAM: I thought you weren’t going to call me stupid now that we’re being intimate.

DIANE: No, I said I wasn’t going to call you stupid *while* we were being intimate (Javna 1988: 109).

As mentioned, most of the *Cheers* verbal battles took place indoors, with the show rarely venturing to any of Boston’s famous locales or landmarks. Still, few shows are as thoroughly fused with their setting as *Cheers*. The actual bar shown in the opening credits of the show was Boston’s Bull & Finch Pub, and that establishment’s owner gained the rights to market *Cheers* merchandise. By the time of the program’s final broadcast, he had sold 175,000 *Cheers* hats, 450,000 sweatshirts, 675,000 glassware items, and 2,000,000 T-shirts. Not only that, the Bull & Finch Pub ranked as Boston’s second most popular tourist attraction, trailing only the U.S.S. *Constitution* (Golden 1996: 6). Beyond providing a tidy financial windfall for a pub owner, *Cheers* left an indelibly positive mark on the television landscape of Boston. Unlike the “relevance” and “fantasy” sitcoms that preceded it, the characters on *Cheers* were both likable and relatable. It cast the city as a place where people were witty, sophisticated, and earthy at the same time, and where the atmosphere was welcoming. It was a place, as the show’s famously mawkish theme song suggested, where everyone knows your name.

A dozen Boston-based sitcoms followed *Cheers*, but nine of those shows ended in less than one year, and just one broke into the Nielsen top thirty. Nearly every major American city has, at one time or another, served as backdrop for a sitcom set at a local television or radio

station, and Boston is no exception. The spring of 1983 brought *Goodnight, Beantown*, a comedy about the expectedly whacky news staff at station WYN-TV. The twist was that the coanchors of the evening news, Matt Cassidy and Jenny Barnes, who had a highly adversarial relationship at work, were secret lovers. *Goodnight, Beantown* returned in the fall of 1984, but was not renewed after its first full season. Boston's only other office comedy was the short-lived *Blue Skies*. Set in the offices of a mail-order outdoor-goods firm, the show lasted just seven weeks in 1994.

Given that so much of Boston's dramatic landscape has been dominated by lawyers and doctors, it is odd that so few comedies have had an office setting. Stranger still is the fact that Boston, with its real-life reputation as a hotspot for young, well-educated professionals, was almost a nonfactor in the avalanche of yuppies-hanging-out sitcoms in the 1990s and 2000s. For more than a decade, the network schedules were crowded with young professional "Friends" in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, but Boston's only entry in the genre was the memorably titled *Two Guys, a Girl, and a Pizza Place*, which debuted in the spring of 1998. The two guys were Berg and Pete, graduate students who shared an apartment and worked as delivery boys at Beacon Street Pizza. The girl was "sexy and successful Sharon, who lived upstairs and made big bucks selling chemicals" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,443). The show was never a big hit in the ratings, likely because ABC moved the show to a new night seven different times, but it did manage to remain on the air for two and a half years, making it the longest-running of Boston's post-*Cheers* sitcoms.

A sitcom genre that has been given slightly more play on Boston's television landscape is the traditional family sitcom. The most conventional entry featured Bob Saget, who had had a long, successful run with the family-friendly Friday night entry, *Full House*, which was about a goofy, likable widowed sportscaster raising three daughters in San Francisco with the help of his

brother-in-law and another buddy. *Raising Dad*, another Friday night sitcom that aired for the duration of the 2001-2002 season, featured Saget as goofy, likable widowed English teacher raising two daughters in Boston with the help of his father who, in a not-so-novel move for a Boston sitcom, was a former player for the Red Sox named Sam. *Raising Dad* was followed in 2002 by *Do Over*, set in the Boston suburbs. In the pilot, viewers were introduced to Joel Larsen, an unhappy thirty-four-year-old whose parents and sister were nearly as screwed up as he was. Then, his girlfriend accidentally zapped his head with a pair of defibrillator paddles, and Joel was transported back to 1981, when he was fourteen years old. Armed with knowledge of the future, Joel set out to change his fate and that of his friends and family, but only for about four months.

A few of Boston's family sitcoms focused on Irish-Americans, and, like their dramatic Boston counterparts, did not go out of their way to shatter Irish stereotypes. *The Cavanaughs*, which premiered in 1986, was the story of crusty old Francis "Pop" Cavanaugh and his family. His son, Chuck, who managed a construction firm, was a widower with four kids. His son, Chuck, Jr., was a glad-handing priest; daughter Mary Margaret was quiet and shy, while youthful twins Kevin and John were even more insufferable than Junior. Pop's daughter, the free-wheeling Kit, was a retired showgirl who had gone through several husbands. She was now back in Boston to help her brother with his family. There was a good deal of grumbling, most of it from Pop, who was "as Irish as a shillelagh, and about as blunt" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 227). CBS tried to make *The Cavanaughs* work three different times from 1986 to 1989, but none of these attempts were successful, and the show aired a total of just twenty-six episodes.

The sitcom *Lenny* was a little more earnest, but no more successful, and lasted just four months in 1990. It was the story of Lenny Callahan, a cheerful, blue-collar guy who worked two

jobs—at the municipal electric company by day and as a hotel doorman by night—to support his wife and three children. Most of the episodes revolved around Lenny’s philosophical ramblings as he tried to build a better life for his family.

Also trying to better her life was Sue Murphy, the protagonist of 1998’s *Costello*, which starred comedian Sue Costello. Sue worked alongside her mother as a waitress at a South Boston bar, the Bull and Dog (not to be confused with the Bull and Finch). To the shock of her father, who was a carpenter; her sexist brother, who had made a career out of being unemployed; and the other mean-spirited, beer-guzzling losers at the bar, Sue had done the unthinkable. She had decided to go to college. Critics crucified the series for its crudeness, but the real problem with show was, in the words of Brooks and Marsh “its one-dimensional stereotyping of Boston’s working-class Irish” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 288). Critic Mike Flaherty who, as mentioned above, took umbrage with the portrayal of Irish-Americans on the Boston drama *To Have and to Hold*, was equally displeased with *Costello*:

Costello’s lead is a woman anxious to shake off her oppressive past and find herself. The setting for this journey of discovery? A South Boston bar, of course. The tough-talking barmaid, Sue Murphy (Sue Costello), who’s as irritating as nails dragged along the Blarney stone, endures a clientele of beer-bellied shlubs and catty wenches whom she dispatches with scabrous gibes—“bitch” and “suckbag” being two of her favorite epithets. (This is not one of those Beantown watering holes where everybody knows your name.) As for her family: Mom’s a sexless, tea-stained pill; Dad a blustering blowhard. In the pilot, Sue dumbfounds both of them by breaking up with her boyfriend after he lands a job at the transit authority, which would’ve kept the couple in potatoes for the rest of their days. In *Costello*’s cartoonish world, this is upward mobility (Flaherty 1998: 1).

Four of Boston’s post-*Cheers* sitcoms made use of one of Boston’s most durable

television themes—the culture clash. *It Had to Be You* was the story of Laura Scofield, a wealthy and respected Boston publisher who, against all odds, fell in love with Mitch Quinn, a carpenter she had hired. Playing the “surprisingly literate blue-collar carpenter” was Robert Urich who, in a previous television life, had played the surprisingly literate private detective on Boston’s *Spenser: for Hire* (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 674). *It Had to Be You* could not replicate the success of *Spenser*, much less that of *Cheers*, and lasted just five weeks in 1993. In the pilot episode of *Boston Common*, which debuted in the spring of 1996, Wyleen Pritchett had just moved from her small Virginia hometown to start a new life as a freshman at Boston’s Randolph Harrington College. To her horror, her big brother Bo, who had driven her up, decided to stay, taking a job as handyman at the student union and moving into her cramped apartment. It seems that Bo had rather abruptly fallen in love with Joy, an effervescent graduate student who was studying southern culture and who, unfortunately for Bo, was in love with a high-minded and self-absorbed professor named Jack Reed. The culture war was on. Bo began to win Joy over with his backwoods charm, and he actually proved to be “smarter than most of the oddballs who populated Harrington” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 170). *Boston Common* was an instant success, ranking eighth on the Nielsen charts after its abbreviated first season. When it returned in the fall, however, the show was moved from Thursday to Sunday nights where it met a quiet demise at the end its first full season.

Perhaps the quintessential post-*Cheers* Boston sitcom was *It’s All Relative*, which combined a culture-clash theme with a new romance, bickering families, an Irish pub, and tired stereotypes. Liz was a bright, cheerful, WASPish Harvard student who had been raised by a gay couple. Her dads were Simon, a sophisticated yet sensible school teacher, and Phillip, a wealthy, fluttery, flamboyant art gallery owner. Liz had fallen in love with Bobby O’Neil, a blue-collar,

sports-loving guy's guy who tended bar at O'Neil's Pub. The pub was owned by Bobby's dad, Mace, a loud, meat-and-potatoes Irish Catholic. The culture war was on, at least for the duration of the 2003-2004 season.

The theme of class warfare continued, in a fashion, with the slapstick kidcom *The Suite Life of Zack & Cody*, which premiered in 2005 on cable's Nickelodeon network. Carey Martin was a singer who had landed a job as headliner in the lounge at Boston's swanky Hotel Tipton. Along with the gig came a posh suite on the twenty-third floor and full use of the hotel's amenities for herself and twin sons Zack and Cody. For two seasons, these two incredibly high-strung and precocious boys terrorized the hotel's stuffy staff. Their favorite targets were Marion Moseby, the persnickety manager, and London Tipton (not to be confused with Paris Hilton), the wealthy, conceited daughter of the owner.

Four Massachusetts sitcoms from the 1990s were set in locations outside of Boston. The first was *Wings*, the state's second-most-successful sitcom, which bore a strong resemblance to its legendary predecessor. Created by a trio of *Cheers* writers, *Wings* was actually part of the *Cheers* universe, featuring crossover appearances by Norm, Cliff, Frasier, Lillith, and Rebecca. *Wings* also featured the same basic premise, with a single setting serving as the backdrop for most of the action, and a gang of friends and coworkers trading good-natured barbs with one another. Instead of a bar, the setting was the small waiting room of the Nantucket airport. The primary characters were Joe Hackett, a straight-laced pilot and operator of a one-plane airline called Sandpiper Air, and his wisecracking, blasé brother, Brian, who was also a pilot. Other characters included Helen, who ran the lunch counter and dreamed of being a professional cellist; Roy, the antagonistic, Oliver Hardy-esque owner of Aeromass, a rival air service; Faye, the motherly yet still saucy exstewardess who ran Sandpiper's ticket counter; Antonio, the

philosophical and naïve Italian cab driver; and Lowell, the likable but incredibly strange maintenance man. As was the case with *Cheers*, the plots were generally secondary to the witty banter.

Wings premiered in 1990 and ran for seven seasons. While it never put up *Cheers*-like numbers, it did make it into the Nielsen top thirty for four years, peaking in the eighteenth position during 1993-1994 season. Because the show's creators were trying to distance it, both geographically and stylistically, from *Cheers*, the original intention was to set *Wings* in the Pacific Northwest. The producers scoured that region for a suitable location, but did not find one with the ambiance they were looking for. They eventually settled on Nantucket "because it offered the right amount of sedate charm" (Golden 1996: 30). That is, in essence, the show's central geographic message—sedate charm is what the producers were going for, and coastal Massachusetts provided this in spades, as noted by critic Stephen Snart:

The setting is the standard workplace-cum-social gathering (the show comes from the creators of *Cheers* after all) but the airport locale and the small island setting lend just a hint of variation (in spite of their blatant artificiality). The social function of an airport intrinsically offers the prospect of adventure and the transitional shots of Nantucket exteriors lend the show a small-town sense of geniality. Further to that effect is the bouncy, Franz Schubert-inspired score by Bruce Miller that plays over the blissful closing credits that depict an airplane in flight against a majestic sunset (Snart 2009: 1).

Another pair of sitcoms set outside of Boston brought the same sort of good-natured characters and quaint backdrops. *Something Wilder*, which debuted in 1994, featured Gene Wilder as Gene Bergman. Gene ran a small ad agency, Berkshire Hills Advertising, in rural Stockbridge, where he lived with his wife and young twin boys. There were the usual trials

brought about by cranky coworkers and loony family members, but the atmosphere was gentle and good-natured, as indicated by the theme song, “You Brought a New Kind of Love to Me.” The atmosphere of 1997’s *George & Leo* was not quite so good-natured, but there was plenty of quaintness. George Stoody was a quiet and philosophical New Englander, living his ideal life—running a small bookstore in picturesque Martha’s Vineyard. The peace and quiet was shattered when Leo, George’s son’s father-in-law, a two-bit shyster from Las Vegas, moved into the spare room over the store. Like *Something Wilder*, *George & Leo* lasted a full season, but was not renewed for a second.

Two other sitcoms offered a considerably less quaint look at Massachusetts. *Thanks*, which lasted just five weeks in 1999, was a goofy period comedy about life in the Plymouth colony, featuring generally awful jokes about witch hunts, puritanical Pilgrims, and horny grandmothers. *Townies*, which aired for three months in 1996, was the story of three young friends who were all waitresses at a restaurant in Gloucester. They worked, hung out, and flirted with guys, but their unifying ambition was to get out of Gloucester, to which the show was not particularly kind. One character said of her hometown, “the economy sucks, there’s nothing to do, and everything I own smells like fish” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,416).

RHODE ISLAND

Compared to its two neighbors, Rhode Island’s television life got off to a late start, and it began with a pair of forgettable sitcoms. The first, *Doctor, Doctor*, made its debut on CBS in 1989. It was the story of Mike Stratford, a young man who shared a group practice with three other physicians in Providence. The show was, in part, a workplace comedy, contrasting the

idealistic and eccentric Mike with his more straight-laced and money-driven colleagues, but the show got off to a slow start, and the producers began to tinker with its format. During the show's run, Mike gave writing a try, penning a novel called *Panacea*. He also hosted his own morning television show, *Wake Up, Providence*. In 1990, a romantic element was introduced in the person of Leona Linowitz, and a family sitcom element was added via Leona's young daughter, Emily. The show also took a stab at social commentary with the introduction of Mike's brother, Professor Richard Stratford, who was gay, and their dad, Dr. Harold Stratford, a grumpy traditionalist who did not approve of Mike's antics or Richard's sexuality. Added to the show's fragmented personality was sporadic scheduling. Although more than two years passed between *Doctor, Doctor*'s first telecast and its last, CBS put the show on hiatus three times, with one break lasting for five months. The network tried the show on four different nights of the week, but none of them brought many viewers, and the show was finally cancelled after thirty-nine episodes.

Rhode Island's second sitcom, *Maybe It's Me*, focused on fifteen-year-old Molly Stage. Molly had recently shed her glasses, braces, and a lot of weight, and was adjusting to a new, more popular self-image. Molly lived in (fictional) Wickettstown with her typically loony sitcom family, including dad Jerry, a nutty optometrist who coached the local girls' soccer team; her oblivious mom, Mary; her brothers Grant and Rick, one a troublemaker and the other an aspiring Christian rock star; her oddball grandmother and grouchy grandfather; and her twin sisters Mindy and Cindy, who no one could tell apart. *Maybe It's Me* debuted in 2001 to ratings that were meager even by the WB network's standards, and it was cancelled after nine months.

The impression of Rhode Island created by these programs, for those who bothered to watch, was that of a state populated by well-meaning, if a little offbeat, white-collar

professionals and their families. This pattern was also present in the state's lone dramatic entry, *Providence*, which debuted in January of 1999. As the series began, Sydney Hansen, a successful plastic surgeon to the stars, was flying from Los Angeles to her hometown of Providence for her sister's wedding. Sydney's family included Lynda, her salty, chain-smoking mom; Jim, her kind, sensitive veterinarian dad; Joanie, her high-strung, self-absorbed, and quite pregnant sister; and Robbie, her unrepentant loser of a brother. On the day of Joanie's wedding, Lynda died suddenly and Joanie's fiancé left her at the altar. A shattered Jim asked Sydney to stay in Providence, but she returned to California, only to find her boyfriend in the shower with another man. Figuring this to be a sign, Sydney returned to Providence and moved in with Joanie, Robbie and Jim in the old family home. Stories on *Providence* alternated between family drama, Sydney's incredibly complicated love life, and her work as the new resident physician at St. Clare's, a health clinic for poor families in an old converted church. The show's gimmick was that Lynda, the departed mother, continued to appear to Sydney, offering her a steady stream of unsolicited advice.

For the most part, critics were not especially kind to *Providence*, with *New York Times* critic Caryn James figuring that “when a show sounds this cockamamie and is meant to be a drama, you know it's in trouble” (James 1999: 1). Critic Ken Tucker, not known to mince words, referred to the show as “chicken soup for the soulless,” adding that it excreted “oily snail's trails of sentimentality and despair” (Tucker 1999: 1). Nevertheless, the show did find an audience, at least for a while. *Providence* ranked in the Nielsen top thirty twice, peaking in the twenty-second spot during the first of its four years on the air. Critic David Grove acknowledged that the show was hackneyed, but suggested that its “total break from reality” was precisely what made it popular. “The Hansens are the way we wish our own families could be,” wrote Grove. “Nothing bad ever happens to the Hansens that can't be solved by the end of the hour” (Grove 2010: 1).

Aside from occasionally grim details of Sydney's work at the free clinic and a season-ending cliffhanger in which Jim was shot by a group of drug-dealing thugs, the show provided a highly idealized version of the city of Providence. It was a safe, pasteurized place of quaint parks, leafy streets, rivers and bridges, giving the city an almost Venice-like quality, as noted by Grove:

With exteriors shot on location, the city looks like paradise: it's charming and warm, without a hint of menace The camera glides over the buildings and streets, and we feel an almost overpowering pull to want to visit this place. These images, like the show itself, are surely not reality, but they mirror the unbelievable life of the Hansen family (Grove 2010: 1).

That *Providence's* images of Providence might be unrealistic, or at least incomplete, is not surprising, given the show's dreamlike quality, and the fact that the city was probably chosen for its name and not any of its actual qualities. From a geographic standpoint, *Providence* could have just as easily been *Hartford* or even *Milwaukee*, but the names of those cities did not provide the show's writers with a trite play on words that became an integral theme of the show, as noted by Caryn James:

Providence is loaded with uplifting messages about divine guidance and wishful thinking about the comforts of home At the start of the second episode, Syd trots out an ancient cliché, reading a Webster's dictionary definition. The first meaning of Providence is the capital of Rhode Island; the second, she finds, is "divine direction." And so . . . Syd returns permanently to what she calls "Providence, my hometown and God's will" (James 1999: 1).

If the show had any other significant geographic message about Providence, it was, quite simply that it was not Los Angeles, which was treated on the show as a modern-day Gomorrah.

Nobly, Sydney swears off her lucrative practice in cosmetic surgery, clearly the devil's trade, and takes up saving the lives of the poor. Some critics found *Providence's* syrupy treatment of its setting to be a bit grating, and both Tucker and James singled out Syd's first homecoming romance as a prime example of the show's saccharine tendencies. An old high school classmate of Syd's, Kyle was now a "none-too-bright" limo driver who caused Sydney to gush, "He's something I never encountered in L. A., a real man" (James 1999: 1). Tucker, in particular, found the relationship to be wholly unbelievable:

If ever there was a guy who had loser written across his driver's cap, it's . . . Kyle, yet Syd and the cameras take him in as if he were a Roman god . . . Syd giggle[s] and squirm[s] when Kyle asks her to split a sandwich with him, straight from his gen-u-ine brown lunch sack. Honestly, you'd think these people lived in Podunk. Correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't Providence a fairly worldly metropolis? Populating it with aw-shucks guys like Kyle and a puppy-tickling vet who makes house calls . . . bespeaks a certain amount of TV-industry condescension (Tucker 1999: 1).

Whatever its virtues, *Providence* remains the only Rhode Island-based show to date to break into the Nielsen top thirty, but it is not the state's longest-running entry, falling well short of both *Ghost Hunters*, which debuted in 2004, and *Family Guy*, which premiered in 1999. Both programs continued to air through 2010, and owe their longevity to extraordinarily devoted, if not extremely large, fan bases. *Ghost Hunters* began as a relatively crude documentary/reality series that followed the exploits of The Atlantic Paranormal Society, headquartered in Warwick, Rhode Island. The lead investigators, Jason Hawes and Grant Wilson, travelled around the Northeast, and later around the country, employing high-tech equipment to investigate supposedly haunted locations. Hawes and Grant were both professional plumbers—episodes often opened with the two taking on leaky pipes before they took on supernatural phenomena—

and the first TAPS headquarters was a construction trailer parked in Hawes's front yard. These images, coupled with the show's shoestring budget and largely working-class support crew, created an atmosphere that had been largely absent from previous Rhode Island entries. *Ghost Hunters* was also a surprise hit, drawing about three million viewers each week, making it something of a jackpot for its television home, cable's SciFi Channel.

Rhode Island's longest running entry was the animated comedy *Family Guy*, which was far more surreal than anything Hawes and Wilson ever encountered in their investigations. It was the story of the Griffin family, headed by portly dad, Peter, and his level-headed wife, Lois. Their kids included sixteen-year-old Meg, thirteen-year-old Chris, and one-year-old Stewie. Brian was the family dog. They lived in fictional Quahog, Rhode Island, a suburb of Providence, the skyline of which could be seen in establishing shots of the Griffins' quaint Cape Cod-style home. Peter was a safety inspector at a toy factory, and Lois was a stay-at-home mom who taught piano lessons. The Griffins' next-door neighbors included Glen Quagmire, an airline pilot, and Joe Swanson, a paraplegic cop. Joe's wife was the perpetually pregnant Bonnie, and Kevin their teenage son. Cleveland Brown, an African-American deli owner, lived across Spooner Street with his wife, Loretta, and his son, Cleveland, Jr. Taken at face value, the lives of the Griffin family and their neighbors were as ordinary as any that had ever been portrayed on television. The theme song was a splashy, big-band number sung by Peter and Lois, who sat at a piano in their living room in the manner of *All in the Family* and sang:

It seems today that all you see
Is violence in movies and sex on TV,
But where are those good old-fashioned values
On which we used to rely?
Lucky there's a family guy! (20th Century Fox: 2003).

The living room “set” then gave way to a large, splashy variety-show stage, where the Griffins sang and danced as the opening credits rolled. All of this suggested to the viewer that *Family Guy* was a throwback to an era of television wholesomeness—something along the lines of *The Donna Reed Show*, *Happy Days* or even *Donny and Marie*. What the viewer got, however, was one of the most anarchic, controversial and, to some, deliberately offensive programs ever to air on television.

Peter, the heart and soul of the show, was fat, stupid, and obnoxious. Completely lacking any sense of self-censorship, Peter’s tactless acts constantly horrified Lois, but behind her calm façade was a kleptomaniac with a penchant for binge drinking and bouts of rough sex. Chris, a fat, dumb kid who was clearly destined to be just like his father, owed his existence to a broken condom. Meg was slightly more intelligent, but she was a painfully shy wallflower who was unpopular at school. Like Chris, her birth was the result of a faulty contraceptive, and Peter thought so little of her that he once sold her to the town pharmacist to settle an outstanding debt. Brian, the talking family dog, was far more cultured and intelligent than his master. He had attended Brown University, was a fan of sophisticated jazz, collected rare first editions, and when not dishing out scathing bon mots, could be found sipping a dry martini and thumbing through the *Utne Reader*. Stewie, the football-headed infant, slept in a crib with his teddy bear, Rupert, and still wore a diaper, but was also a diabolical megalomaniac who spoke in a clipped Rex Harrison accent. A sort of thumb-sucking Bond villain with a closet full of futuristic super weapons, Stewie had plans for world domination. His consuming passion, however, was to murder Lois, who he despised. The neighbors were similarly dysfunctional. Joe was prone to fits of rage, Cleveland so emotionless as to almost be catatonic, and Quagmire a relentless sex fiend,

who once bought a Winnebago for a cross-country, “bang-a-chick-in-every-state” road trip (Sawyer 2005: 1).

The *Family Guy* formula relied on sight-gags, one-liners, a fair amount of gross-out humor and frequent, and often incredibly obscure, cultural references that ran the gambit from Longfellow through arcane Hollywood musicals to *Charles in Charge* and *The Thundercats*. But the show’s seemingly banal setting was also central to its humor. Familiar plots and the all-American sitcom set-up—mom, dad, the three kids, the family dog, and the whacky neighbors—were used as a sort of straight man to offset the bizarre antics of the characters. On one episode, for example, Peter and Lois learned that a drug problem was sweeping through Meg’s school. As they prepared for bed that evening, they had a very serious conversation about what they could do to clean up the school and keep Meg off drugs. That dialogue was played straight, and the plot was one not at all unfamiliar to viewers of family sitcoms, but the difference was that, as Peter and Lois had their solemn bedtime conversation, they were donning intricate S&M gear.

This gag was actually a relatively mild one by *Family Guy* standards. The show often strayed into gray areas of what is permissible on television, finding humor in such generally hands-off topics as child abuse, physical and mental disabilities, death, rape, and even the Holocaust. The show was not afraid to tackle the subject of race, particularly in broadcasts from Quahog’s Channel 5 News, where anchors Tom Tucker and Diane Simmons referred to the reports from the Al Roker-like weatherman Ollie Williams as the Black-U-Weather Forecast, and where Asian reporter Tricia Takanawa was always introduced as just that—“Asian Reporter Tricia Takanawa” (Booker 2006: 85). Many of the show’s off-color moments resulted from Peter’s lack of tact, as when he revealed a grim diagnosis to an AIDS patient with a colorful musical number from a barbershop quartet. *Family Guy* also rewrote the rules about sexual

taboos. Brian the dog lusted after Lois, made out with Meg, drunkenly hit on women at bars, and once brought home a prostitute. A recurring character on the show was Herbert, an elderly pedophile who was constantly trying to lure Chris into his house with the promise of popsicles, and a running gag was Stewie's confusion about his sexuality, including a full-blown musical number set on the deck of a ship that employed a not-too-subtle pun on the word "seamen."

Critic Jennifer D. Wesley wrote that "enjoying *Family Guy* is akin to laughing at a nasty joke in church: it may be screamingly funny, but you're pretty sure you're going to Hell for thinking so" (Wesley 2003a: 1). A number of viewers were willing to throw spiritual caution to the wind, apparently, as *Family Guy* quickly developed a rabid following, and it was this small but intensely loyal group that managed to bring the show back from the dead on two different occasions. FOX, it appears, saw the show's potential but was never quite sure what to do with it, airing it in nine different time slots during its initial run. The network cancelled *Family Guy* after its first full season. They revived it after a barrage of angry letters from fans, but cancelled it "for good" after another year. *Family Guy* refused to die, however, with reruns of the show drawing big audiences on cable's Cartoon Network and DVD collections becoming best-sellers. In an unprecedented move, FOX brought the show back in 2005. The first new episode, almost predictably, began with Peter Griffin listing off the scores of duds that FOX had aired and cancelled during the show's three-year absence.

Family Guy has been a bulwark of the network's Sunday night line-up ever since its 2005 revival, and it continues its manic mixture of broad comedy and cutting social satire. In many ways, the purpose of *Family Guy*'s Quahog, Rhode Island, has not been much different from that of the little Colorado town of *South Park* or *The Simpsons*'s Springfield—a sort of Anytown used as a vehicle for skewering all manner of American culture—but the show did contain some

distinctive regional flavor. Meg attended James Woods Regional High School, and Chris was a student at Buddy Cianci Junior High. The former was named for the actor, a Rhode Island native, while the latter was named for the longtime mayor of Providence who did four years in a federal prison on conspiracy charges. One episode reflected New England's uneasy relationship with New York, when the Griffins and Swansons were enjoying a day at the lake. Brian noticed, to his horror, that a leaf on a tree had begun to change color, and Quahog was instantly infested with "leafers"—loud, obnoxious New Yorkers who had come to enjoy the fall foliage. The most frequent regional reference, however, was to Rhode Island's maritime culture. Quahog takes its name from the hard-shell clam that is, in fact, Rhode Island's official state shellfish, and the fictional Quahog hosts an annual clam festival, itself a spoof of Wickford, Rhode Island's annual International Quahog Festival. After Peter lost his job at the toy factory, he worked as a fisherman, and he and the gang were often seen swilling Pawtucket Patriot beer at a bar called the Drunken Clam. There they would receive frequent ominous warnings from Seamus, a grizzled old sea dog who sported an eye patch and four wooden pegs in place of his arms and legs.

Of course, it would take a particularly guileless viewer to mistake *Family Guy* for a realistic look at anything, much less for an authentic look at modern New England culture. It did, however, have a few fundamental themes that were consistent with the broader television landscape of southern New England. Like a number of entries from Massachusetts, *Family Guy* drew much of its humor from the frequent clashes between working-class and upper-class cultures, the gag here being that the family dog and infant were the most sophisticated characters on the show. In a manner perfectly, and probably deliberately, suited to his Rex Harrison accent, Stewie, in particular, often found himself in the same position as Henry Higgins in *My Fair*

Lady, disgusted by the low-brow antics of the more stereotypically blue-collar members of the family. The same juxtaposition was featured in Peter's relationship with his in-laws, the wealthy Carter and Barbara Pewterschmidt, who lived in a spectacular mansion in Newport and whose pals included the likes of Ted Turner, Bill Gates, and Michael Eisner. Peter had met wife Lois while working as a towel boy at her country club, and the Pewterschmidts had never forgiven their daughter for marrying so far below her class. Another connection between *Family Guy* and a number of other New England entries is the fact that, as the show's theme song suggested, it did celebrate good old-fashioned values. As noted by critic Jennifer D. Wesley, although *Family Guy* "often obliterates the boundaries of good taste, it also espouses faith in the American Family, however mutated" (Wesley 2003a: 1). For all their faults, the Griffins were an intact, loving, nuclear family in a world of broken, dysfunctional television homes. They attended church, had a warm relationship with their neighbors, and were active in the Quahog community. Despite the barrage of often patently offensive material, nearly every episode ended with one of the characters, usually a previously oblivious Peter, delivering a little homily on the importance of family. In that sense, and despite a profound difference in tone, *Family Guy* was delivering a message not entirely different from that delivered by programs like *Providence*.

If nothing else, *Family Guy* brought to the small screen a character that its creator considered to be, for better or worse, a classic New England archetype. *Family Guy* was the brainchild of Seth MacFarlane, who also provided the voices for Peter, Brian, Stewie, and a number of other characters. MacFarlane began developing the characters while a student at the Rhode Island School of Design. It was there that MacFarlane discovered the voice for Peter Griffin, as he noted in a 2010 interview:

The character is every . . . big, fat loudmouth New England guy that I grew up with. And . . . the voice itself came from a security guard where I went to college. And he had just this . . . impossibly thick, loud, boisterous Rhode Island accent. And it just always made me laugh whenever he opened his mouth. There was no self-editing mechanism, but just the biggest hearted guy that you ever would want to meet. That's the essence of Peter. He's got a big heart (CNN 2010: 5).

NEW HAMPSHIRE

In television's version of New England, the pavement ends just a few miles north of Boston. Of the ten programs set in northern New England, just one has been set in an actual city, and that one city—Lewiston, Maine—was hardly depicted as being a teeming metropolis. Northern New England's remaining nine programs have all been set in fictional small towns, and the characterization of these towns is relatively uniform. The townspeople vary depending on the nature of the program, but are usually depicted as being just a bit off-center, ranging from cheerfully eccentric, to tortured and brooding, to downright insane. With few exceptions, the landscapes of these little towns are appropriately charming—the word “quaint” appears with far greater frequency in the descriptions of northern New England settings than in those of any other region—but often this quaintness masks a horde of dark secrets. If there is a unifying sense of place in these programs, it is that there is not much for people to do in these little towns other than have an affair or murder someone.

Such a slow pace of life is not always conducive to great TV, of course, which may explain the relatively sparse television landscape of northern New England. There have been a pair of major hits based in the area, however, and the first set the gold standard for the primetime soap opera. Based on a best-selling 1956 novel and popular 1957 film, *Peyton Place* was a smash

hit right out of the box, debuting in ninth place in the Nielsen ratings in 1964. At the height of its popularity, the show was airing three times per week, with a remarkable 514 episodes produced during its five-year run.

Peyton Place also set the standard for television's small New England town. On the surface, the title community was a museum-quality portrait of quaintness. Surrounding the serene village green were the offices the town newspaper, *The Clarion*, the Peyton courthouse, a bookstore, the Shoreline Garage, Peyton Pharmacy, and a chandlery. Not far away was Ada Jack's Tavern, offering libations to the town's fishermen as they came in from the docks. But, of course, life was not what it seemed, as noted by television historian Stephen Tropiano, who wrote that "everyone who lives in or is just passing through Peyton is battling a personal demon, guarding a family secret, or engaging in some form of criminal activity (Tropiano 2000: 123). On each episode, viewers learned of another round of affairs, murders, disappearances, or other forms of skullduggery.

Strangely, viewers never learned the specific location of Peyton Place, or even what state it was located in, only that it had a coastal location and was situated about ninety miles from Boston. The 1957 movie was filmed on location in Camden, Maine, and the television show was shot in Hollywood. What is certain is that *Peyton Place* was dreamt up by author Grace Metalious, and when she wrote the novel she was living in Gilmanton, New Hampshire, a little town about fifty miles inland, near the southern shore of Lake Winnepesaukee. A heavy drinker, Metalious died of a liver disease at age thirty-nine, just a few months before the television version of her novel debuted. No love was lost in Gilmanton, where most residents were resentful of the novelist's fictionalized version of their small town, but, in a way, Metalious has had the last laugh. Whether for dramatic or comic effect, it is Metalious's version of the New

England small town that has persisted on television. “To a tourist,” she said, “these towns look as peaceful as a postcard. But if you go beneath that picture, it’s like turning over a rock with your foot—all kinds of strange things crawl out” (Golden 1996: 27).

Just three programs have been set in New Hampshire, and none of them were especially successful. The state’s first entry, the situation comedy *Willy*, was a bit ahead of its time, featuring a smart, single female attorney as its protagonist. When it premiered in the fall of 1954, Willa Dodger was a recent law-school graduate who had opened a practice in her hometown of Renfrew, New Hampshire. Renfrew, quaint as it was, was also among the sleepier New England television towns, and since there weren’t many cases to be found in the tiny village, *Willy* relocated to New York in the middle of the show’s first and only season.

After *Willy*’s departure, New Hampshire, save for the guilt-by-association of *Peyton Place*, disappeared from the television landscape for nearly half a century. *The Brotherhood of Poland, New Hampshire*, which premiered in 2003, might have made people in the Granite State wish it had remained that way. Filmed in part in Plymouth, New Hampshire, *The Brotherhood* referred to three middle-aged brothers, Hank, Garrett, and Waylon Shaw, who had spent their entire lives in the small title town. They had been star athletes in high school, but their adult lives were a mess. Hank, the police chief, had a violent temper, and was in therapy with his wife because of his sexual dysfunction. Garrett, the mayor, had had an affair, and was now being blackmailed by his mistress. The only nice Shaw brother was Waylon, but he was unemployed, not very bright, and constantly being duped by get-rich-quick schemes. Also seen were the Shaw brothers’ wives and children: sullen, angry characters who didn’t brighten the picture any.

As mentioned, a few New England programs have followed the formula of examining the dark secrets behind the charming façade of the region's small towns, but in Poland, New Hampshire, there was no façade. It was created by David E. Kelley, the man behind a quartet of Boston-based dramas about self-absorbed professionals. While Kelley did not always paint an endearing portrait of Boston, he seemed to have it in for small-town New Hampshire, as noted by critic James Oliphant:

Small towns of America have enough on their plate. Do they really need David Kelley piling on? The answer, of course, lies in the prolific producer's latest offering: Kelley seems to feel the urge. The setting of his new family drama, *The Brotherhood of Poland, NH*, is, by all accounts, the most miserable small town in the most miserable state in the United States. Kelley, the show's creator, grew up in a small New England town and (you don't need your state college psych degree for this one) must have hated it. What else explains this ensemble piece that tastes as sour as poorly pressed apple cider? *Brotherhood* comes off as Kelley's equivalent to the millionaire who travels all the way to his high school reunion just to tell everyone to go screw themselves. If the residents of Poland weren't fictional, they might want to consider a defamation action (Oliphant 2003: 1).

With David E. Kelley channeling his inner Grace Metalious, the series was intensely gloomy from the outset. Hank's wife Dottie summarized the feelings of the entire town in the first episode when she said "I'm going dead inside" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 188). The show apparently also left viewers similarly sedated, and it was cancelled in less than a month.

New Hampshire's third and, to date, final show premiered in 2006. The relatively standard teen soap opera *Falcon Beach* was set in a small New Hampshire resort town and featured plenty of skin, sun, and romantic entanglements. The primary geographic theme was the rich, spoiled summer kids versus the poorer townies, who rented the boats, ran the arcades, and

dealt the drugs. Produced for Canadian television, *Falcon Beach*'s twenty-six episodes were released in syndication in the United States. Programs for Canadian consumption were set in Manitoba, with most of the rich kids coming from Toronto. The same actors also filmed an American version, set in New Hampshire, with references to Boston.

VERMONT

Vermont waited until the 1980s for its first entry, when it would serve as setting for one of the more popular sitcoms of that decade. Low-key comedian Bob Newhart, who had struck gold in the 1970s playing a harried Chicago psychiatrist on *The Bob Newhart Show*, returned in 1982 with *Newhart*. This time around he played Dick Loudon, an advertising man and successful writer of home-improvement books. Fed up with the hectic pace of New York City, Dick, along with his wife Joanna, decided to leave the rat race behind and buy the Stratford Inn in rural Vermont. This inn, which had been built in 1774, was in need of some work, but it was the town's local kooks who supplied Dick with most of his grief. Coming with the property was the incredibly stoic George Utley, whose family had been caretakers of the Stratford for two centuries. Kirk Devane was a compulsive liar who owned the café next door, and Leslie Vanderkellen was a wealthy student at nearby Dartmouth who had taken a job as a part-time maid at the inn to see how ordinary people lived. Kirk departed Vermont after he married a professional clown, and Leslie left to study in Europe. She was replaced by her cousin, the completely self-centered Stephanie, who came to the inn after she walked out on her marriage and was cut off by her wealthy father. A few years into the program, Dick began hosting a local television talk show, *Vermont Today*, which was produced by a vain yuppie named Michael Harris, who eventually started dating Stephanie.

Despite the change of setting, *Newhart* essentially picked up where *Bob Newhart* had left off. Dick Loudon was a reincarnation of Dr. Bob Hartley, the only sane man in the world, who is morally supported by a sensible and loving wife. Hartley's patients were replaced by guests at the inn and, eventually, by the nutty guests on *Vermont Today*. The humor still revolved around Newhart's impossibly staid persona, as exemplified by the titles of the "how-to" books Dick had authored, which included *Building Your Own Patio Cover*, *How to Make Your Dream Bathroom*, *Care of Your Low-Maintenance Lawn Sprinkler*, and *How to Grout Your Bathtub*. Like its predecessor, *Newhart* developed a loyal fan base, who tuned in each week to see Newhart's patented slow burn as his orderly world descended into chaos.

Although the Wayburn Inn in Middlebury served as the stand-in for exterior shots of the Stratford, the name of the fictional town in which the show took place was never actually mentioned. Since Leslie was a student at Dartmouth, it is probably safe to assume that the Stratford was just across the Connecticut River from Hanover, New Hampshire, near Norwich. The show's more general geographic message was a bit mixed. On one hand, the show practically served as a commercial for the Vermont Department of Tourism, particularly in its opening credits. As a pleasant Henry Mancini theme bounced along in the background, viewers were introduced to a Vermont of lush woodlands, secluded lakes, and country lanes that wound past whitewashed churches, charming, well-groomed barns and homes, and, of course, that beautiful old inn. Much like that of its protagonist, the aura of Vermont was nearly always friendly and sedate.

On the other hand, one of the central themes of the show was that country living is not all it's cracked up to be, making the show, in the words of one critic, a "sort of a sophisticated version of *Green Acres*" (Javna 1988: 112). Very early on, Dick finds himself at odds with the

“stubborn, simple townfolk, who refer to him as ‘the writer guy,’” while Joanna discovers that her “interests in literature and the arts make her a little lonely among her practical rural neighbors” (Javna 1988: 112-113). *Newhart* fully embraced the television maxim—exemplified earlier on *The Andy Griffith Show* and later on shows like *Northern Exposure* and *Picket Fences*—that the personalities and customs of people in little, out-of-the-way places were often just plain strange. On one episode, Dick derided the locals for believing in the Great White Buck, which, according to local lore, would bring good luck to the town. Dick changed his mind when he saw the fabled creature for himself, right before running over it with his car. To reverse the resulting stream of misfortunes, Dick was forced to “don antlers in front of the town and perform a wood nymph dance” (Tropiano 2000: 92). On another episode, Dick’s guest on *Vermont Today* was a man who claimed to have the world’s smallest horse. In classic *Newhart* fashion, enraged callers lit up the phone lines, claiming to have an even smaller horse, and eventually besieged the station with their animals, one of which was a dachshund wearing a saddle.

Even Dick’s beloved Stratford was not quite as idyllic as he had imagined. In one episode he discovered a stack of letters revealing that the Stratford had been a brothel during the Revolutionary War (known as the “Best Little Inn in New England”). On another he found out that the three hundred-year-old corpse of Mrs. Sarah Newton was buried in the inn’s basement. She had been deposited there after being hanged as a witch and being refused burial in the town cemetery, a fact that horrified Dick, but which the locals accepted as a matter of course. To solve the problem, Dick phoned for the services of a local business called “Anything for a Buck,” which was run by a group of brothers named Larry, Darryl, and Darryl. The three unkempt, tuque-wearing, flannel-clad backwoodsmen would become the show’s most popular recurring characters, and were always introduced with the same catchphrase, “Hi, I’m Larry, this is my

brother Darryl, and this is my other brother Darryl” (Ring 2010: 1). In the tradition of the Darling brothers from *The Andy Griffith Show*, neither Darryl ever said a word, and served as a constant reminder to viewers that Vermont, despite the presence of sophisticated outsiders like the Loudons and the Vanderkellen cousins, had more than its fair share of hillbillies.

In the end, *Newhart* proved to be even more popular than *The Bob Newhart Show*. It debuted at number twelve in the Nielsen ratings, and continued to rank in the top thirty for the first six of its eight seasons. When it finally left the air in 1990, it did so in appropriately eccentric fashion. Everyone in the town—except the Loudons—had sold their property to a group of Japanese investors, who converted it into a country club, but five years later, they all returned, intent on moving into the Stratford. As Dick was vehemently protesting the idea, he was struck in the head with golf ball, and when he awoke, he was in the Chicago bedroom of Dr. Bob Hartley of *The Bob Newhart Show*. He turned to his wife, Emily, and said, “You won’t believe the dream I just had” (Ring 2010: 1).

After that memorable finale, Vermont virtually disappeared from the television landscape, returning only briefly with the 2006 science-fiction drama, *Three Moons Over Milford*. In the pilot, the moon broke into three pieces, causing the people of Milford to fear that the end of the world was near. Residents, though perhaps not as kooky as those of the little town near the Stratford, were indeed peculiar. The show focused on Laura, whose husband had abandoned her, leaving her to raise a Wiccan daughter and a computer-geek son on her own. Mack was the town’s lawyer and plumber, and Michelle was a scheming real estate agent who started buying up as much property as possible on the off chance that the Earth would not be destroyed. Looming on the outskirts of Milford was the mysterious Snyder Corporation, which

had been conducting experiments that might have caused the moon's disintegration. *Milford* was unable to distill the *Newhart* magic, and was cancelled after eight weeks.

MAINE

Maine's five television programs present a remarkable uniformity. As mentioned, only one was set in an actual Maine city—Lewiston—while the other four occupied fictional villages. Life in Maine is almost universally depicted as charming, quaint, idyllic—and deadly. Two programs have focused on the subject of murder—containing, in fact, that word in their titles—while the other three have centered on darkly supernatural themes. The juxtaposition of charming locales with sinister occurrences is, of course, nothing new. The murders in an ornate island mansion in *And Then There Were None*, the bloodsucking vampires prowling the serene hills of Transylvania in *Dracula*, the demonic, glowing-eyed children in the seemingly quaint *Village of Damned*, and the piles of dead teenagers who attended the wrong summer camp in countless slasher films all serve as precedent for Maine's television entries. So, if the high casualty rate of Maine's television landscape seems, at first glance, unenviable, it is important to note that a perception of the state as lovely and serene is necessary before the blood can begin to flow.

Maine's first entry, *Murder, She Wrote*, was also by far its most durable, premiering in 1984 and enjoying a run of nearly twelve years. Set in the picturesque coastal village of Cabot Cove, the program concerned a middle-aged widow named Jessica Fletcher. A chess enthusiast, PTA volunteer, and retired English teacher, Jessica had attained midlife success as a mystery novelist. Each week, Jessica would stumble upon a real-life mystery, most often a murder, which

she would spend the rest of the episode solving. In the fall of 1991, Jessica got a job teaching criminology in New York, spending her weeks in Manhattan and her weekends in Cabot Cove.

Murder, She Wrote, which was always most popular among older audiences, never generated the critical buzz of some of its contemporaries, such as *Cheers*, *The Cosby Show*, *Seinfeld*, or *Northern Exposure*, but it was, by the measure of longevity and overall ratings, more popular than each of those shows. The program was the third highest-rated show of the 1985-1986 season, was ranked in the Nielsen top ten in seven seasons, and in the top fifteen an additional three. Although it only received one Emmy award, it was nominated a remarkable forty-one times. It also had the distinction of being the longest-running drama to feature a middle-aged woman as its protagonist, and one of the longest-running television dramas set in a contemporary small town.

Angela Lansbury's Jessica Fletcher, as one might expect from a long-running drama, was an entirely likable character. Despite the wealth and fame that her novels had given her, Jessica still lived in the same pleasant old home she had shared with her departed husband, Frank, and many of the episodes ended with her having a friendly conversation with one of the neighbors. Cabot Cove was fictional, with the town of Mendocino, California, serving as a stand-in for exterior shots, but a televised New England village was never more picturesque:

Matronly Jessica frequently bicycled across town, boiled lobsters, planned fishing trips on a friend's trawler, or dropped in at the beauty parlor. She wore conservative pantsuits and spoke with an occasional New England influence. Her signature was her ancient manual typewriter, and the opening credits showed her tapping merrily away on one of her mystery novels (Riggs 2010: 1).

The charming backdrop almost certainly was one of the reasons large audiences tuned in week after week for more than a decade, but it also created a conundrum for the show's writers. All television programs run this risk of becoming formulaic, but the odds of that happening to a murder mystery are even greater, given that the fundamental plot is the same every week. In her sketch of *Murder, She Wrote's* basic template, television historian Karen E. Riggs recorded that episodes nearly always began with a group of people all having a grudge against a bully:

An innocent person, often a friend or relative of Jessica's, publicly threatens or criticizes the bully. The audience sees the bully murdered, but the killer's identity is hidden. The authorities accuse Jessica's ally, based on circumstantial evidence. Jessica notices—and the camera lingers on—details that seem inconsequential but later prove central to the solution. She investigates, uncovering various means, motives, and opportunities and eliminating suspects. A few minutes before the program ends, she suddenly realizes the last piece of the puzzle and announces that she knows who the killer is Almost always, the killer confesses, and Jessica presents the person to the police Jessica always happens to be on the scene when a murder has just taken place and makes time in her schedule to solve the crime. She usually happens upon the body herself. The police never get it right. Her friend is almost always innocent. Jessica is always present when crucial evidence comes to light (Riggs 2010: 1).

A particular problem for *Murder, She Wrote* was the fact that Jessica Fletcher was an amateur sleuth. It was not at all unbelievable that the detectives on *Columbo* or *Hawaii 5-0* should stumble across a murder each week. That was their job, after all. But, in the words of critic Robert J. Thompson, "Watching Jessica Fletcher solve a crime in any given episode makes perfect sense; thinking back on how many murders she's coincidentally stumbled upon doesn't" (Thompson 1996: 173). Even more preposterous was the notion that so many murders (more than fifty) could happen in such a small town. Jessica's friends and family were sometimes among the dead and, far more often, among the accused, with her poor nephew Grady being

hauled off to jail on several occasions (he was always innocent, of course). During the show's early years, this problem was addressed by having Jessica travel frequently and stumble across murders while on vacation. By 1991, even that became a somewhat worn plot device, and Ms. Fletcher began spending far more time in New York City. That move coincided with Angela Lansbury taking the reigns as executive producer, a move made, she said, because "the New York locale just allows us to introduce a far wider ethnic diversity than Maine" (Golden 1996: 304). Jessica's new job as a criminology professor also provided a more believable explanation for her involvement in unsolved cases.

Maine's other small-town murder mystery, 2001's *Murder in Small Town X*, solved the plausibility issue by lasting just seven weeks. This series was filmed in quaint Eastport, Maine (fictionalized as the village of "Sunrise" in this series), with locals serving as extras in this reality show with a homicidal twist. Contestants acted as detectives trying to solve the murder of Nate Flint and his daughter, Abby. The killer had also kidnapped Flint's wife, later killing her and dumping her body in the bay. In each episode, a contestant was given an envelope containing the names of two spooky locations, one of which they had to choose to investigate. At one, the contestant would find an important clue while at the other the killer would be waiting to "eliminate" the contestant.

Maine's three other spine-tingling entries solved the plausibility issue by making the sinister activity a bit implausible to begin with. In 1991, NBC briefly revived *Dark Shadows*, a cult classic that had run on daytime television in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Set on a spooky old estate in coastal Collinsport, the show began when a 200-year-old vampire, Barnabas Collins, escaped the family crypt and began feasting on the locals. Action alternated between the present day and 1790, with the dark history of the aristocratic Collins family serving as the story focus.

The Dead Zone, based on a novel of the same name by Stephen King, began its five year run on cable's USA network in 2002. The main character, Johnny Smith, who lived in the small town of Cleaves Mills, had been involved in a car accident that left him in a six-year coma. Upon awakening, he discovered he had the ability to see into the lives of those he touched, often with disturbing results. At one point, while shaking the hand of a ruthless and corrupt politician, Johnny was greeted with the image that this man would eventually bring about Apocalypse. Stephen King's works also inspired 2004's *Kingdom Hospital*, but it was not quite as durable as the first King effort, lasting less than four months. Set in the spooky Kingdom Hospital in Lewiston, the series focused on Peter Rickman, a hit-and-run victim who could communicate with the spirits—some good, some evil—that roamed the hospital's halls. The trouble, it appeared, stemmed from the fact that the hospital had been built on the site of a nineteenth-century mill fire that had killed several children. Adding to the fray was a bizarre hospital staff, including strange surgeon Dr. Hook, who lived in the hospital basement and occasionally performed séances.

CONCLUSION

Whether it was the quaint village abandoned by the protagonist of *Willy*, the miserable little burg of *The Brotherhood of Poland, NH*, or the tumultuous resort town of *Falcon Beach*, the television landscape of New Hampshire has almost certainly been forgotten by all but the most ardent TV trivia buffs. That said, the town of Gilmanton, New Hampshire, has had a spectacular impact on the television landscape by way of its evil twin, *Peyton Place*. The quaint little village that harbored a Pandora's Box of dark secrets has been replicated many times across the television landscape, particularly in New England. Whether it was the murderous streak of

Maine's quaint Cabot Cove on *Murder, She Wrote*, or the staid kookiness of the charming little Vermont village on *Newhart*, the television landscape of northern New England has had the effect of a beautiful picture postcard with a cryptic and/or threatening message scribbled on the back.

Southern New England has had more of an urban tilt, particularly Rhode Island, where nearly all programs have been set in or near Providence, and the dominant trait of these shows has been a working-class aesthetic and a focus on family life. On *Providence*, the title city exuded grace and charm, and served as a sort of "Anytown, U.S.A.," where familial love, genuine, earthy characters, and traditional values were par for the course. Fictional Quahog of *Family Guy* played a similar role, but often for very different reasons. This show was a long parade of bizarre characters and plots, and the material was often deliberately crude, with the banality of its suburban setting serving as a sort of straight man for the offbeat comedy. Still, the viewer was always left with the impression that family love and "good old fashioned values" were, in the end, alive and well in Rhode Island.

Family Guy also frequently examined class "warfare"—pitting the sophisticated and pompous against the earthy and crude—and that has been a relatively common theme on southern New England's programs. It was prominently featured on Connecticut's *Gilmore Girls* and *Who's the Boss?*, with the former contrasting the aristocrats of Hartford with the earthy villagers of fictional Stars Hollow, and the latter contrasting Italian-American Tony with WASP Angela. As can be expected from all television programs, there were bits of tension and conflict here and there on Connecticut's television landscape, from the tumult of the courtroom on *Judging Amy*, to the subtextual battle of the sexes on *Bewitched*, to the limitations of small town

life on *Gilmore Girls*, but the central geographic message of the state's television images was that it was a collection of almost absurdly idyllic suburbs and villages.

Massachusetts's defining program, *Cheers*, set the gold standard for class warfare shows, and that theme could be found in a good many of the state's other programs—both those that predated *Cheers* and, probably not coincidentally, in many that followed it. Sociocultural differences permeated *Cheers*, manifested most distinctly in the unlikely romance between Sam and Diane. Despite these differences and the show's trademark barrage of scathing remarks and rejoinders, the fact remained that the staff and patrons of *Cheers* seemed to enjoy one another's company, leaving the viewer with the impression that Boston was an inviting and egalitarian city, where the people were terribly witty, and where the erudite and the earthy downed beers side by side. Outstate Massachusetts was similarly pleasant and inviting on the television screen—a trait most clearly demonstrated in the charming seaside village of Capeside on *Dawson's Creek* and in the genial, *Cheers*-like atmosphere of Nantucket's *Wings*. Boston itself, like many television cities, sent out some mixed signals. The darker side of the city was most evident on *St. Elsewhere*, where death seemed to be the preferred form of egress from the decaying neighborhood that surrounded the title hospital. The most convoluted messages about Boston were found on David E. Kelley's quartet of programs—*Ally McBeal*, *Boston Legal*, *Boston Public*, and *The Practice*. The latter two, in particular, showcased some of the dregs of Boston society, but the mixed signals were sent primarily by the shows' regular characters. Each program showcased successful professionals who were intelligent and, more often than not, devoted to their careers, but these same characters could also be described as self-absorbed, lacking in integrity, and wreaking of an undeserved sense of privilege. Among these diverse images, however, was the overarching message that Massachusetts's residents—from the witty

barflies of *Cheers* and the highly skilled courtroom sharks of David E. Kelley's legal dramas, to the brilliant staff of *St. Elsewhere* and the remarkably astute teens of *James at 15* and *Dawson's Creek*—were far more intelligent than the average TV character.

TABLE 4. DEFINING PROGRAMS AND COMMON TRAITS: THE GREAT LAKES STATES

State	Defining Programs	Key Program Elements	Other Common Traits
Illinois	<i>Garroway at Large</i>	Casual, charming personality; informal and quirky atmosphere; innovative production	Mixture of high art and the practical—erudite quiz shows and cattle drives, symphonies and polkas; crime, poverty, and violence; law and order; unemotional, stodgy, gruff, crime fighters; working class neighborhoods; gloomy outlook; political corruption; gritty inner city; pleasant middle-class suburbs; tumultuous upper-class suburbs; warm and loving families; yuppies; African-Americans
	<i>ER</i>	Dedicated medical professionals; intense atmosphere; tragedy and squalor	
	<i>M Squad</i>	Tough dedicated cop; mean streets; “seedy, glamorous, decent, sleazy” Chicago	
	<i>The Untouchables</i>	Emotionless, dedicated cops; mindless violence	
	<i>The Bob Newhart Show</i>	Urban, white-collar professionals; stylish urban setting; “square, white midwesternness”; self-deprecation; rejection of pomposity	
	<i>Good Times</i>	African-American family; urban housing projects; poverty and crime; sympathetic black lead; black role model; controversial black stereotypes	
	<i>Married with Children</i>	Cash-strapped, dysfunctional, sleazy, working class family	
	<i>Roseanne</i>	Working class, small town life; “ordinary, real, truthful, and resolutely non-urban, non-yuppie, and non-upscale”; sarcastic take on family life	

(Illinois continued)	<i>Family Matters</i>	Middle-class African-American family living in a pleasant suburb; goofy good nature	
	<i>According to Jim</i>	Friendly, pleasant, happy, square, middle-class suburban family	
Indiana	<i>One Day at a Time</i>	Single mom and modern teenagers; social changes; hard knocks; upward mobility; relatively gentle nature	Urban settings; class warfare; yuppies; blue collar sensibilities; violence and crime
	<i>Cheers</i> (Woody Boyd)	Cheerful, optimistic, naïve, honest, loyal bumpkin	
Michigan	<i>Home Improvement</i>	Loving upper-middle class family in a pleasant suburban home; likable characters; politeness and understanding; blue-collar sensibilities; lack of sophistication “low-key, predictable, intelligent but not particularly well-educated” protagonist	Working class and middle class families; traditional values; pleasant suburbs; African-Americans; blue-collar sensibilities; small town life
	<i>Martin</i>	Black urban professional; sarcastic outlook; African-American popular culture	
Ohio	<i>Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman</i>	A typical American housewife; traditional values; close-minded small-town	Ordinary and provincial citizens of small towns; bizarre events; the epitome of mainstream America; characters returning home
	<i>WKRP in Cincinnati</i>	Tradition-bound; a modern metropolis, but a professional dead end; warm and friendly characters	

(Ohio continued)	<i>Family Ties</i>	Middle-class family in Columbus; white-collar professionals; Ohio as microcosm of America; shifting cultural attitudes; sincere, heart-warming familial love	
	<i>The Drew Carey Show</i>	Blue-collar and middle-class Cleveland; friendly, self-effacing and unpretentious characters; industriousness	
	<i>3rd Rock from the Sun</i>	A small Ohio town as a microcosm of America; warmth and friendliness; mediocrity	
Wisconsin	<i>Happy Days</i>	Wholesome nostalgia in 1950s Milwaukee; a nuclear family; “Middle-American gooeyness”; safe, clean, setting; industriousness	Hard-working, guileless, and upright citizens living relatively uneventful lives in small towns and modest cities; working class and middle class
	<i>Laverne & Shirley</i>	Wholesome nostalgia in 1950s Milwaukee; blue-collar workers; escapism; optimism	
	<i>Step by Step</i>	Happy, blue-collar nuclear family living in a wholesome small town	
	<i>That ‘70s Show</i>	Mix of wholesome nostalgia and bawdy humor in a small-town; acerbic but loving and supportive nuclear family	
	<i>Picket Fences</i>	Oddballs in a quirky small town; sincerity; mainstream America	

CHAPTER 4 - THE MIDWEST, PART 1: THE GREAT LAKES STATES

The Midwest's share of the television landscape has not been equal to its share of the country's population, but it certainly has not been ignored. The region's television programs account for 12.4% of the television landscape, or just over a third of the images analyzed in this study. Because of the volume of television programs to be analyzed, the Midwest will be discussed in two sections. The Great Lakes states—defined here as Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin—will be addressed in this chapter. The Midwestern states that fall west of the Mississippi River (including Minnesota) will be discussed in chapter five.

Of the five Great Lakes states, Indiana has been the least visible. It has served as the backdrop for a dozen programs, but only one has been a genuine success, with the state accounting for just 0.49% of the country's television images. A few of Michigan's sixteen entries have been successful, putting the state's overall share at 0.64%. Wisconsin has been the setting for just thirteen programs, but a number of them have been successful, pushing the state's share of the country's television landscape up 0.78%. Ohio, the second most populous state in the Midwest has also been its second most televised, accounting for a relatively impressive 1.24% of the American television landscape. The most prominent state in television's Midwest, however, has been Illinois. That state has served as the setting for 150 programs, significantly more than all of the other Midwestern states combined. Illinois has accounted for 6.68% of the American television landscape, making it one of the few states whose television share exceeds its share of population.

OHIO

The first nationally televised program to originate from Ohio was not exactly a television classic. *Practice Tee*, a fifteen-minute golf lesson from pro William P. Barbour, was broadcast from Cleveland, airing on NBC's Friday night lineup for six weeks during the late summer of 1949. Ohio's second entry was more durable, and certainly more influential. *Midwestern Hayride*, which originating from the NBC affiliate in Cincinnati, premiered in June 1951 as a summer replacement for the hit comedy series *Your Show of Shows*. It was one of the earliest examples of a country-themed comedy, music, and dancing showcase on network television, preceded only by Pennsylvania's short-lived *Hayloft Hoedown*, and its success surely paved the way for Springfield, Missouri's *Ozark Jubilee* and Nashville's *Grand Ole Opry*. *Hayride* danced around the schedule every summer for the remainder of the decade, and proved popular enough to appear on NBC's fall slate in 1955, running for the duration of the 1955-1956 season. The program showcased such regular acts as the County Briar Hoppers, Slim King and the Pine Mountain Boys, Zeke Turner, Bonnie Lou Ewins, and the Hometowners. Cleveland countered with a network country music series of its own, *The Pee Wee King Show*, during the summer of 1955. It featured King, a popular country and western bandleader, and his Golden West Cowboys.

Hobby Lobby premiered in September of 1959, three weeks after *Midwestern Hayride* bowed out for good. This program featured comedian and Toledo native Cliff Arquette's alter ego, Charley Weaver, chatting with people about their hobbies. Some of the guests were ordinary folks, but some were bona fide celebrities—Zsa Zsa Gabor, for example, dropped by on one episode to talk about her passion for fencing. In what started as a minor element on the program,

Charley would also tell stories about Mount Idy, Ohio, his (fictional) hometown. These stories became so popular that the hobby feature was eventually dropped altogether, and *Hobby Lobby* became *The Charley Weaver Show*. Each week a celebrity or two would “visit” him in Mount Idy, and Charley would spin tales about the local residents, who had names like Elsie Krack, Birdie Rudd, Wallace Swine, Clara Kimball Moots, and Grandpa Snider.

Charley Weaver had a short run, departing in the spring of 1960, and Ohio would be absent from American television for nearly sixteen years. When the state reappeared, the spirit of Mount Idy was alive and well. In many ways Ohio’s television landscape has contradicted its actual geography. It is one of the most heavily industrialized and urban of the midwestern states, something at odds with the popular image of the Midwest, described by geographer James R. Shortridge as a “landscape of red barns, silos, John Deere tractors, and two-story, white farmhouses” punctuated by small towns, “each full of friendly Main Street merchants, quiet churches, courthouse towers, and grain elevators” (Shortridge 2007: 59). The contradiction is not lost on the state’s residents, a decreasing number of whom, as noted by Shortridge, consider themselves to be midwestern. Given that fact, one might expect Ohio to follow the lead of other Steel Belt states and present a television landscape with a strong urban tilt. Michigan, for example, has most of its programs set in and around Detroit, and Chicago has almost completely dominated Illinois’s television landscape.

Ohio’s television shows have not featured altogether rural settings—few midwestern states have—but its television landscape has much more in common with states like Wisconsin, Kansas, and Iowa, where a large portion of programs have been set in small, often fictional, towns. Of the eighteen programs set in the state since 1959, Ohio’s cities have served as the backdrop only half the time. Columbus and Dayton have each been represented three times,

Cleveland twice, and Cincinnati only once. The other nine program settings have been the small towns of Mount Idy, Harper Valley, Dacron, River Run, Rutherford, Stuckeyville, Fernwood, and Normal, all of which are fictional. Fernwood has, in fact, served as the setting for two scripted programs, equaling Cleveland and besting Cincinnati, the state's two largest metropolitan areas.

Ohio's television landscape is distinctive not only for its settings, but also for the nature of the characters who have populated it. The television residents of Ohio are generally not rich and fashionable; they are either middle class or blue collar. Of the twenty-two Ohio-based programs, only two have been dramas, and the state has not served as backdrop for any police, crime, legal, or action series. It is not glitz, fashion, glamor, and action that have defined Ohio on television, but the lack of it. The state's television cities and towns are usually very ordinary and characters often naïve and provincial.

Despite some unenviable characterizations of the state's residents, it would be wrong to conclude that Ohio's television entries represent a concerted effort at defamation. As much as any state, Ohio's television landscape casts it as America's spiritual hometown, a fact made evident in the 2000s, when all five of the state's entries featured a protagonist who had just moved back home to Ohio. The state often serves as the epitome of mainstream culture—average people living square in the cultural middle of America—and, because of that, forming a sort of Petri dish for examining the country's shifting cultural values and conventions. Of course, characters and places that are completely normal do not make for particularly exciting television, so most Ohio programs feature the unusual seeping through, or crashing down upon, the ordinary. Quirky, odd, and even bizarre behavior is par for the course on Ohio-based programs, with the banality of the setting serving as a sort of straight man for the comic character or event.

The Ohio-as-straight-man motif was never more evident than in the program that brought the state back to television in 1976. The title character of *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* was a typical American housewife living the sleepy little town of Fernwood with her husband, Tom, and her daughter, Heather. Tom worked with Mary's father, George Shumway, at the local auto assembly plant, while Mary took care of their pleasant home at 343 Bratner Avenue in the Woodland Hills subdivision of Fernwood. On the surface, the characters and setting of *Mary Hartman* were as normal as any that had ever appeared on a domestic sitcom. It was not, however, a typical show, but producer Norman Lear's frontal assault on the conventions of both television and the conventions of the American middle class. Mary was typical, all right, but typical to the point of being deranged. She was not very bright, and was completely impressionable. Almost everything she knew about the world came either from *Reader's Digest* or television commercials—her concluding point in any argument was invariably “But I read it in a *magazine!*” (Javna 1985: 132).

Mary's life was full of tragic and bizarre events. Tom was impotent. Heather was kidnapped by a serial killer. George disappeared. Her sister Cathy was a swinger, and her grandfather, Raymond, was a public exhibitionist known as the “Fernwood Flasher.” When Mary made chicken soup for the town's whiskey-swigging, pill-popping basketball coach, he fell into it and drowned. The Lombardis—Buck, his wife, and three children—lived next door. At least, they did until they were all hacked to death, along with their eight chickens and two goats, by an escaped lunatic. Through it all, the thing that haunted Mary the most was the waxy yellow build-up on her floors.

Perhaps the most controversial element of the show was its skewering of Christianity or, at least, some Christians. *Mary Hartman* contained vicious assaults on the Bible Belt, and the

writers seemed to delight in torturing Fernwood's born-again residents. One was the town's conservative mayor, Merle Jeter, who had hired an exconvict as police chief, and who transformed his eight-year-old son, Jimmy Joe Jeter, into a televangelist to raise money for a housing scam called "Condos for Christ." Another was the sickeningly sweet Loretta Haggars, a Christian country music singer who launched her career performing in the lounge of a bowling alley. Loretta and her husband Charlie lost their house, and, later, as they were driving to Nashville, she was paralyzed when their car collided with a station wagon full of nuns. In the end, things almost worked out for Loretta. Her single went to the top of the country charts, and she was given a chance to perform on the Dinah Shore Show. Chatting with Dinah, Loretta mentioned that she had met a man backstage who was very pleasant, even if he was Jewish. Loretta then reminded a horrified Dinah that "the Jews killed our Lord" (Javna 1985: 132). Loretta's career was ruined. Merle Jeter did not fare much better. He was ensnared in a prostitution scandal, and his televangelizing son was electrocuted when a television set fell into his bathtub. Merle remained mayor, however, swaying public opinion by standing naked before the voters and confessing his sins.

Lear had shopped *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* to the major networks, but was rejected by all of them. Undaunted, Lear released it in syndication, and a number of local affiliates began running his show as part of their weekly, late-evening schedule. *Mary Hartman* was, for a time, a sensation. More than three hundred episodes of the program were produced through 1978, when the series ended following the departure of star Louise Lasser. Although *Mary Hartman* contained a number of withering assaults on small-town midwestern values, the primary target was television itself. It was artful parody, poking fun at soap operas and even Lear's own "relevance" sitcoms. In one episode, for example, Mary suffered a nervous breakdown and was

committed to the Fernwood Psychiatric Hospital. When she sat down to watch the communal television set, Mary noticed that there was a telemeter connected to it, making Mary and her fellow psychiatric patients a rather large Nielsen ratings family.

Mary Hartman spawned a syndicated spin-off in 1977, *Fernwood 2-Night*, the Ohio town's local television talk show. Hosted by Barth Gimble (Martin Mull) and his sidekick, Jerry Hubbard (Fred Willard), *Fernwood 2-Night's* primary purpose was to skewer talk shows in the same way that *Mary Hartman* had skewered soap operas. Barth was an egotistical moron, the former host of a Miami-based talk show who had fled to Ohio while being investigated for a string of felonies. Jerry, who was somehow dumber than Barth, had previously hosted a local quiz show for the elderly called *Dialing for Dentures*, a job he had gotten only because his brother was station manager. The music was provided by Happy Kyne and the Mirth Makers. Happy was a miserable lout, who took the job so that he could plug his fast-food restaurant, Bun 'n' Run.

The guests and performances on *Fernwood 2-Night* were nearly always surreal, or at least odd: a pianist in an iron lung; the developer of a new childbirth technique called La Fromage; the leader of the Church of the Divine Lemonade; and the Salvation Army Singers, who dropped by to perform their rendition of "Da Do Ron Ron." Like *Mary Hartman*, the primary target was television itself, but *Fernwood 2-Night* aimed its sights a little more squarely at the naivety, provinciality, homogeneity, and downright ignorance of the small-town Midwest. The Fernwood Gun Association appeared to promote their new Kiddie Krime Korps (KKK), a program that would distribute firearms to children as a means of fighting street crime. Barth interviewed a couple who feared that their son had been brainwashed by a religious cult. He had started dressing in black, they explained, and was constantly dropping to his knees and chanting in an

indecipherable language. When their son was finally brought onstage, viewers discovered that he was, in fact, a Catholic priest. Other guests included a patriotic Vietnamese-American who had written a book called *Yankee Doodle Gook*, and dancer Darryl Washington, the show's first black performer, who had been bussed in from Cincinnati. Another very special guest was Morton Rose, a Jewish man from Toledo who had been pulled over for speeding through town. He was featured on the show because Barth was certain that most people in Fernwood had never seen a Jew before. The phone lines were then opened for a "Talk-to-a-Jew" segment.

After moderate success during its initial summer run, the show was brought back the following spring. Perhaps to the relief of some Ohioans, the setting had shifted to California, and the title changed to *America 2-Night*. Ohio's next entry, the workplace comedy *WKRP in Cincinnati*, debuted in 1978, and was the first Ohio entry to appear on a network schedule since 1960. It was Cincinnati's first entry since *Midwestern Hayride* and, to date, its last. Set at a local radio station, *WKRP* was a far kinder representation of Ohio than the two Fernwood-based shows. Still, Cincinnati was not exactly depicted as a prime destination for sophisticates and the upwardly mobile. *WKRP* had been bleeding money for years. It specialized in easy-listening music, and the station's primary sponsors included the Shady Hills Rest Home, Bo Peep Safety Shoes, Rolling Thunder European Regulatory Tonics, and Barry's Fashions for the Short and Portly. Les Nessman, *WKRP*'s news director, knew very little about current events, but was intensely proud of his numerous Silver Sow awards for farm reporting. Herb Tarlek was the tasteless, rude, and equally inept sales director. Arthur Carlson, the general manager, might have been the station's least qualified employee, but he kept his job because his domineering mother, Lillian, owned the station.

It was Lillian who hired the hip, young Andy Travis as the station's new program director. When he converted the station's format to rock and roll, WKRP's once-staid world was turned on its head. The move sparked a backlash among the station's mostly elderly listening audience, who picketed the lobby and released a threatening statement: "We're a small bunch, admittedly, but we're a determined fringe element that cannot be counted upon to do the sensible thing." (Johnson 2008: 141).

The events of the pilot episode established *WKRP*'s central geographic messages. It is notable that the station's change in format, one that simply brought the station up to speed with the rest of the world, was precipitated by an outsider. WKRP did not change on its own, an implication that Cincinnati was a tradition-bound, change-resistant place. This idea was neatly summarized in the lyrics of the show's opening song:

Baby, if you've ever wondered,
Wondered whatever became of me,
I'm living on the air in Cincinnati,
Cincinnati, WKRP.
Got kind of tired packing and unpacking,
Town to town, up and down the dial.
Maybe you and me were never meant to be,
But baby think of me once in a while.
I'm at WKRP in Cincinnati (Twentieth Century Fox: 2007a).

That song, which one can probably assume is written from the perspective of the show's protagonist, Andy Travis, doesn't exactly characterize Cincinnati as a place where Andy is going to fulfill his wildest dreams, but as a place he finally decided to settle for. It is difficult to imagine such a song being written for a show set in New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago. Even Minneapolis was given more credit. When Mary Richards of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* took

her job at WJM in Minneapolis, it was the place where she was going to “make it after all.” When Andy Travis took his job at WKRP in Cincinnati, it was what “became of” him.

In this regard, Andy was not alone. The prominent disc jockeys at the station were also imports and, probably not coincidentally, were also the two hippest characters on the show. Neither the spaced-out Dr. Johnny Fever nor the ultra-chic, flamboyantly attired Venus Flytrap (“What’s happening, white folks?”) were in Cincinnati because it was their first choice (Johnson 2008: 141). Johnny had lost a string of jobs in more prestigious markets for insubordination and being a stoner. Most recently he had been fired for saying “booger” on the air, and Cincinnati represented, for him, a last chance. Viewers eventually learned that Venus’s real name was Gordon Sims, and that he had gone AWOL from the war in Vietnam. He took on his pseudonym and was hiding out in Cincinnati, presumably because it was the last place anyone would look for him.

Still, *WKRP* did not create an entirely unappealing portrait of Cincinnati. The opening and closing credits of the program, filmed on location, revealed a thriving American metropolis with busy freeways, crowded sidewalks and local landmarks such as the Tyler Davidson Fountain and the Brent Spence Bridge. When Andy arrived, the station’s original staff, while not especially cool, was warm and friendly; and at least two of them even knew what they were doing. Assistant station manager Bailey Quarters was smart and ambitious and Jennifer Marlowe, who, at first glance, appeared to be the stereotypical blonde bimbo receptionist, turned out to be the most intelligent, sophisticated character on the show. Perhaps the strongest indicator of the show’s generally affectionate portrayal of its setting is the degree to which Cincinnatians embraced the show as their own. Former *WKRP* cast members are regularly invited to civic events, and the city plays host to an annual “Turkey Drop,” inspired by the *WKRP* Thanksgiving

episode that included the memorable line, “As God is my witness, I thought turkeys could fly” (20th Century Fox: 2007).

Although *WKRP in Cincinnati* remains a memorable show for many, it was not a terribly successful series during its initial run. It managed to remain on the air for four seasons, but the show entered the Nielsen top thirty only once. During the 1979-1980 season it ranked twenty-second. After its cancellation in 1982, however, syndicated reruns built a loyal following, prompting producers to reassemble much of the original *WKRP* cast and produce new episodes for syndication from 1991 to 1993.

Two more Ohio-based sitcoms premiered in 1981, both based on popular material from another medium. Set in Dayton, *Maggie* was based on the best-selling series of books by humorist Erma Bombeck. The title character, Maggie Day, was a beleaguered wife and mother of three who chatted about her problems with the staff and clientele down at Loretta’s House of Coiffures. Her problems were usually of the mundane, everyday variety, the sort of issues any American family might face—the drains were clogged, the kids needed braces, and so on. *Maggie*’s Dayton was pleasant and appealing, a sort of anti-Fernwood, and a solid, if short-lived, example of Ohio as America’s hometown. While *Maggie* represented a celebration of midwestern values, its contemporary, *Harper Valley P.T.A.* was, in many ways, a condemnation of them. Harper Valley was a sort of midwestern Peyton Place—beneath its sedate and puritanical surface lurked a world of drunks, lowlifes, and sinners. Based on a 1978 movie that, in turn, evolved from a 1968 hit record, *Harper Valley* was the story of Stella Johnson, an independent, outspoken woman who was constantly at odds with local social conventions. Stella was a widow with a thirteen-year-old daughter, and she had recently been elected to serve on Harper Valley’s P. T. A. board. This horrified the smug and sanctimonious women who

dominated the organization, who felt that her “short skirts, flirting, and radical ideas” made her a “disgusting role model for their children, not to mention a temptation for their husbands” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 586).

Maggie, *Harper Valley P.T.A.* and *WKRP in Cincinnati* all left the air after the 1981-1982 season, but the void on Ohio’s television landscape was filled the following fall. *Family Ties* proved to be not only one of Ohio’s most durable entries, but also one of television’s most endearing portraits of life in the Midwest. It was the story of the Keaton family of Columbus, headed by mom Elyse and dad Steven. *Family Ties* is a clear example of the use of Ohio as a microcosm of America. Elyse and Steven embodied the liberal zeal of the 1960s, and the show filled their backstory with archetypal activist activities—they had met at a peace rally, worked for an underground newspaper, joined the Peace Corps, and even lived on a commune. They were now white-collar professionals—Elyse an architect and Steven the manager of the local public television station—and they channeled their liberal zeal into love and lessons for their three children: seventeen-year-old Alex, fifteen-year-old Mallory, and nine-year-old Jennifer.

The focus of the show, at least initially, was the generation gap between the parents and children. Steven and Elyse’s eternal optimism was challenged by Jennifer’s pessimism, and their high-minded idealism contrasted with Mallory’s mall-rat materialism. The greatest conflict, however, was with Alex. An unabashed 1980s conservative, Alex (played by Michael J. Fox) was a clean-cut teenage entrepreneur. Rarely without his briefcase and always clad in a suit and tie, Alex slept with a picture of William F. Buckley hanging above his bed.

What ultimately defined the show, however, was not politics or social commentary. Critic Michael Saenz lauded the show for its “imaginative dialogue, laudable acting, and carefully

considered scripts,” and the general critical response to the show was similarly positive. Most writers focused on its atmosphere of heartwarming familial love (Saenz 2010: 1). “No matter what differences and conflicts the Keatons have,” wrote critic Rick Mitz, “the message of the show is that family ties are stronger than family differences” (Mitz 1988: 348). Critic John Javna echoed Mitz’s assessment:

Maybe Alex will always wince at Steven’s Bob Dylan records. Maybe Steven will never understand why Alex wears a tie to gym class. The point is, they love each other As Alex himself once said in a rare burst of insight, “We’re all good people, and that’s the real message” (Javna 1988: 124).

Each week the show’s theme song assured viewers that “there ain’t no nothing we can’t love each other through,” and the ensuing episode would provide proof. *Family Ties* became famous (or, from the point of view of some, infamous) for its “very special” episodes—serious storylines where a character was shaken to his or her foundations, and then rescued by the love of the family. One example was an episode entitled “A, My Name is Alex,” in which Alex suffers the loss of close friend in a car accident. The friend had asked Alex to help him move, Alex had declined, and as a result, had not been in the car at the time of the crash. “My life was saved out of smallness, out of lack of generosity for a friend,” said a tearful Alex. “Why am I alive? *Why am I alive?*” (Mitz 1988: 347). Some critics, including the reliably snarky Jeff Alexander, found such earnestness almost impossible to handle. Alexander described a typical episode:

One of the Keatons would do something stupid or selfish (it was usually Alex), hilarity would ensue, and then Steven and/or Elyse would blow another inch of dust off their entropying authority over the household, triggering a confrontation. It helps if all your confrontations are, like theirs, miniature transactional analysis

workshops with everyone always effortlessly using their “I feel” statements and trying to understand one another’s point of view. Otherwise, every argument would have ended with somebody spitting, “Screw you, Alex!” and then grabbing him by his tie and punching him in the head (Alexander 2008: 33).

While Alexander’s alternate ending never happened, it was not an unimaginable conclusion for *All in the Family*, a show to which *Family Ties* is often compared. The two programs were essentially photo negatives of one another. The tone was completely different, however. While *Family Ties* always ended with a figurative or literal loving embrace, *All in the Family* usually began and ended with discord. And while the yelling matches of Archie Bunker and Mike Stivic echoed down the streets of Queens, all of the warmth and sincerity of *Family Ties* was taking place in Columbus. That fact was likely not lost on the viewer. The writers of the show made frequent references to real Columbus locales and the set designers pillaged the city for props from local establishments. According to historian Andrew Cayton, the philosophy of *Family Ties* was deeply rooted in midwestern values:

The nuclear family was the center of the universe, and it taught the core values of honesty, decency, respect for others, hard work, and ambition tempered by realism. There was little that love could not overcome. In *Family Ties*, the twist was to feature a conservative son with liberal parents, reversing a conventional stereotype of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet the political differences mattered little in the end when family ties triumphed; as always in midwestern television, the private takes precedence over the public, individuals are more important than groups, and family is the alpha and omega of existence (Cayton 2007: 77).

Now remembered as one of the most evocative and popular shows of its decade, *Family Ties* actually got off to a slow start. The show earned modest ratings during its first two seasons, but got a substantial break in fall of 1984, when it was placed behind wildly popular *Cosby Show*

on NBC's powerful Thursday night line-up. *Family Ties* rocketed to the fifth position in the Nielsen ratings that year, and then to second place, behind *Cosby*, for two seasons. Its place as one of the defining programs of the 1980s was cemented, in the minds of some, at least, when President Ronald Reagan mentioned that it was his favorite television show. The ratings began to drop after a move to Sunday nights in 1987 and the series ended its run, appropriately, in 1989.

Three more Ohio-based sitcoms appeared in the wake of *Family Ties*'s departure. All relied strongly on the Ohio-as-straight-man formula, and none of them were especially successful. *The People Next Door*, which had a short run in 1989, was the story of Walter Kellogg, a New York cartoonist and widowed father of two children who had recently married Abigail MacIntyre. Walter and the kids moved with Abby to her small hometown of Covington, near Dayton. The gimmick here was Walter's imagination, which was so vivid that the things he imagined actually came to life, manifested as everything from a talking, stuffed, trophy moose head to Dr. Joyce Brothers. Of course, Abby and all the other straight-laced, sensible Midwesterners in Covington would never understand, so Walter and the kids did their best to keep it a secret. The similar, and also short-lived, fantasy sitcom, *The Mighty Jungle*, appeared in 1994. Here the protagonist was Dan Winfield, a caretaker at the Cleveland Zoo, and the gimmick was that the zoo's animals suddenly decided to start talking to him. Of course, Dan's wife, kids, and co-workers had no idea. *Good Grief!*, a comedy set in a funeral parlor (yes, a comedy set in a funeral parlor), premiered in 1990 and met its demise in less than a year. The setting was Dacron, the 63rd-largest city in the state. That the setting was named after a form of polyester says much about the program's take on Ohio. The protagonist, if that is the proper term, was Ernie Lapidus, a conman who had married Debbie Pepper, whose family owned Dacron's Sincerity Mortuary. Ernie, with the help of his father, Ringo, tried to increase the

mortuary's profit margin by running various scams and by starting an aggressive ad campaign that with a series of tasteless television commercials. Raoul was Ernie's mother, who had undergone a sex change operation. Debbie's brother, Warren, played the role of the abstemious midwesterner, attempting to end Eddie's schemes and restore some dignity to the mortuary.

None of these early-1990s entries lasted long, but Ohio's sitcom fortunes were reversed with two popular shows that debuted in the middle of the decade. *The Drew Carey Show*, which featured the title comedian as a fictionalized version of himself, premiered in 1995. *Drew Carey* split its time between Drew's professional role as assistant personnel director for Cleveland's (fictional) Winfred-Louder department store, and his personal life, which mostly consisted of hanging out with his friends Oswald, Kate, and Lewis. In that regard, the basic premise *Drew Carey* was not profoundly different from that of a number of its successful sitcom contemporaries. It mirrored "friends hanging out" hits like *Friends*, *Caroline in the City*, *Mad About You*, *Ellen*, and *Will & Grace*, and such popular workplace comedies as *Suddenly Susan*, *Spin City*, and *Just Shoot Me*. Still, substantial differences existed between *Drew Carey* and its sitcom cohort. While its competition was usually set in either New York or California, featuring characters who were, in general, hip, sophisticated, physically fit, and successful, *The Drew Carey Show* was set in the comedian's hometown of Cleveland, and featured characters who were, in general, none of those things.

Drew and his associates were all working-class stiff. Sporting a crew cut, thick-framed black glasses, and usually clad in a cheap suit, Drew was overweight, drank too much, worked too hard and, when depressed, was not above eating an entire birthday cake by himself. Tomboyish Kate O'Brien was pretty and charming, but perpetually moving from one low-paying job and unsavory boyfriend to another (she broke up with one man because his carnival was

leaving town). Tall, laconic Lewis Kiniski worked as janitor at the mysterious DrugCo pharmaceutical company, while his spectacularly dense sidekick, Oswald Harvey, drove a package delivery truck. The *Drew Carey* gang didn't sip wine in fashionable restaurants or toss about witty banter in coffee shops. They drank beer either in Drew's kitchen or at a neighborhood dive, the Warsaw Tavern. Drew lived in an unremarkable home in a working-class neighborhood. It had belonged to Drew's parents and possessed only one real luxury—a pool table. But the table, for reasons that were never fully explained, was in the backyard, frequently covered in dead leaves or snow. At work, Drew's nemesis was Mimi Bobeck, the mean-spirited, heavy-set, garishly-attired secretary, and the two exchanged nasty barbs and played elaborate practical jokes on one another. Drew's boss was Nigel Wick, a mentally unbalanced Englishman whose laziness, vanity, and pretention stood in clear contrast to the usually friendly, self-effacing, blue-collar spirit of the show's native Clevelanders.

Like fellow Ohio entries *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* and *Fernwood 2-Night*, *The Drew Carey Show* injected a fair amount of lunacy into its scripts, perhaps best exemplified by the bizarre stories related by Lewis about DrugCo, which, among other things, was genetically engineering a hybrid monkey/hippopotamus (a “monkopotamus”), breeding super-intelligent rats (who took control of the Warsaw Tavern for a time), and developing a new sex drug (which Lewis confiscated after battling the test monkeys who had been using it). Unlike the Fernwood entries, however, the surreal mechanisms employed on *Drew Carey* were rarely used to take jabs at midwestern culture. In fact, the series was almost exclusively positive in its portrayal of Cleveland. With the exception of Mimi and Wick, the characters on the show were kind-hearted, and Drew always did the right thing, even when such action came at his own expense, which it usually did. Drew was also an industrious character. He had gone three thousand consecutive

days without missing work and, most of the time, he was good at his job. He also possessed enough ambition to start his own company, Buzz Beer, which sold caffeinated beer that the gang brewed in Drew's basement. *The Drew Carey Show* did not veil its affection for Cleveland; for many years the opening credits of the show featured the cast, along with hundreds of extras, running deliriously through the streets of Cleveland to the strains of the song "Cleveland Rocks."

The Drew Carey Show was never an absolute blockbuster, though it did post decent ratings. It ranked in the Nielsen top twenty-five during its second, third, and fourth years, peaking in the fourteenth position during 1998-1999. Its tumbling ratings in later years were largely the result of stiff competition from NBC's hit drama *The West Wing* and a significant amount of indecision on the part its own network. ABC moved the show's time slot sixteen times, with *Drew Carey* appearing, at one time or another, on five different nights of the week. It was, in any case, popular enough to remain on the run for nine seasons, and when it left the air in 2004, it did so as Ohio's longest-running series to date.

Ohio's next entry, the sitcom *3rd Rock from the Sun*, first aired as a mid-season replacement on NBC in January 1996. *3rd Rock* was the story of four aliens who landed in a small Ohio town, took the form of a human family, and set about to study the culture of Earth, the least important planet in the universe. Dick Solomon, the mission's High Commander, took a job as a physics professor at a local university. There, he became a major irritation to a sardonic anthropology professor named Mary Albright who, nevertheless, would become his love interest. Dick's lieutenant, an aggressively macho security officer, took the form of his statuesque blonde sister, Sally, while the wise, old information officer was transformed into Dick's libertine teenage son, Tommy. Rounding out the crew was impressionable, slow-witted Harry Solomon, Dick's brother, who later discovered he was on the mission only because he had a "thing" in his

head that allowed them to communicate with the home planet. They tried to learn as much as possible while appearing as normal as possible (literally trying to be any Tom, Dick, and Harry), but they usually found themselves caught up in the middle of disastrous misunderstandings.

3rd Rock was set in fictional Rutherford, Ohio, (possibly a nod to President Rutherford B. Hayes, an Ohio native) which was said in the pilot episode to be in central Ohio, fifty-two miles from Cleveland. Because the program sought to examine, and often skewer, numerous facets of American culture, the size and nature of Rutherford varied from one episode to the next, sometimes a small town ringed by miles of cornfields, sometimes a relatively large city with its own arena, the Rutherdome, but there was one constant—the city was intended to represent average America. This idea fits squarely into the concept of Ohio as a microcosm of America, and it was a deliberate choice. The producers of *3rd Rock* stated that they wanted “the best cross-section of America and people that we can find.” They noted that Ohio was selected because it “epitomizes our collective image of what the country should be,” adding that “there are no trends being set in Ohio” (Cayton 2007: 75).

3rd Rock usually examined themes that were timeless and universal, such as love, sex, jealousy, conformity, aging, death, and the meaning of family, but it occasionally examined more topical issues such as inequality, prejudice, crime, political corruption, and class warfare. Such episodes occasionally revealed the seedier nature of life in and around Rutherford. On one episode, Dick discovered that Nina Campbell, Mary’s secretary, was attending a black students’ association meeting. Surprised that Nina would not invite him, Dick decided to find a similar organization that celebrated his race, and ended up taking the entire family to a white supremacist rally. The tone of *3rd Rock*, however, was never terribly serious, and the varied landscapes of Rutherford tended to lean toward the positive. It was a warm and friendly place,

and generally peaceful, which was a good thing, given that Rutherford police sergeant Don Orville, a Solomon family friend and Sally's occasional love interest, was one of the most inept television cops since Barney Fife.

Because 3rd *Rock*'s Rutherford was intended to present a cross-section of American life, the depiction of this fictional town and, by extension, Ohio, was sometimes affectionate and sometimes disparaging, with a heavy dose of mediocrity mixed in. As was the case with the characters on *Drew Carey*, the Solomons were never intended to be sophisticated or cool. In fact, when they attempted to be so, the results were always calamitous, exposing just how unsophisticated and uncool they really were. The Solomons lived in an attic apartment that was both quaint and squalid, an odd mixture of flea-market kitsch and postmodern installation art. Their landlord and downstairs neighbor was Mamie Dubcek who, likewise, managed to be fabulously regal and unrepentantly trashy at the same time. From the downscale digs of the Solomons to Mary Albright's more stylish suburban home, the landscapes of Rutherford were equally varied. The town contained upscale bookshops, restaurants, and boutiques, colorful college bars, charming cafés, and a posh gay bar called the Spartacus Lounge. There were also a few downscale locales—seedy streets and back alleys, a subpar public high school that Tommy attended, greasy fast-food restaurants, a few dive bars, and the Liquor Mart, which was located across the street from the Solomon's home. Pendleton State University, the academic home of professors Mary and Dick, was also a study in contrasts. Pendleton was depicted as a quaint liberal arts college consisting of old brick buildings and warm, wood-paneled interiors. The faculty was generally intelligent, if a bit eccentric, but clearly the place was not an elite institution. When Dick and Mary found themselves locked in the basement of the Pendleton library over a weekend, for example, Dick expressed surprise that the library was closed on

Saturdays. An exasperated Mary responded, slowly, “Dick, this is *not a good school!*” (Anchor Bay Entertainment, 2006a).

When compared to *The Drew Carey Show*, *3rd Rock* was held in somewhat higher regard by its peers. Whereas *Drew Carey* was nominated seven times, it never won an Emmy. *3rd Rock* received twenty-six nominations and won eight Emmys, including two for Kristen Johnston (Sally Solomon) and three for John Lithgow (Dick Solomon). In other ways, *3rd Rock from the Sun* had an experience similar to that of *The Drew Carey Show*. It bounced around on four different nights of NBC’s schedule and saw its time slot change nineteen times during its five-year run. In an odd twist, despite the restless scheduling of both shows, they actually ran opposite one another on Wednesday nights for two years.

Perhaps the most noteworthy connection between *3rd Rock* and *Drew Carey* was the steadfast refusal of both programs to take anything seriously. Drew Carey’s program, in particular, resembled the television exploits of fellow Midwesterners like Johnny Carson, David Letterman, and Dave Garroway, always mindful of the fact that this was, after all, just a television show, and always willing to turn convention on its head, apparently just for the hell of it. *Drew Carey* included a gratuitously gimmicky 3-D episode, for example, and several improvised live episodes performed three times each for the Eastern/Central, Mountain, and Pacific time zones. One of the stranger gimmicks was a series of “What’s Wrong with this Episode” telecasts, which included deliberate mistakes, with the viewer who wrote in with the longest list of errors receiving a cash prize.

3rd Rock from the Sun was also mischievously good-natured. It included, for example, regular, winking references to Lithgow’s previous melodramatic turns in theatrical films such

Terms of Endearment, *Footloose*, and *The Twilight Zone*. Episode titles made frequently bawdy references to the protagonist's first name, such as "I Enjoy Being a Dick," "Father Knows Dick," "World's Greatest Dick," "Will Work for Dick," and "Just Your Average Dick." French Stewart, who played Harry Solomon, identified this playful nature as the show's strongest element. "I think the thing that *3rd Rock* does best, as opposed to other sitcoms, is [that] it's unabashedly goofy," said Stewart. "I think it knows it's a sitcom, and I think it's not afraid to be that." Joseph Gordon-Levitt, who played Tommy, concurred: "What I'm most proud of is that it never takes itself seriously—ever. In that way, I think we've had more integrity than any other show on TV" (Anchor Bay Entertainment 2006b).

Both *3rd Rock* and *Drew Carey* echoed two popular midwestern sitcoms of the 1970s—*Mary Tyler Moore* and *Bob Newhart*—that were a little more dedicated to laughs and a little less dedicated to weighty social commentary than their New York counterparts like *All in the Family* and *Maude*. In the 1990s, when many New York and California-based sitcoms were often studied in their cool sophistication, *Drew Carey* and *3rd Rock* were splendidly screwy. Perhaps the strongest geographic message of both programs was that the Midwest (or, at least, Ohio) was a fun, genuine, and forthright place, and one fully comfortable with its lack of panache.

Not all Ohio entries were out for laughs, but the state's two straight dramas used a device familiar to both *Family Ties* and *3rd Rock*—Ohio as a backdrop for exploring American social conventions. *Homefront*, which debuted in 1991 and ran for two seasons, began as GIs were returning to their (fictional) hometown of River Run, Ohio, after World War II. The show featured some characters who challenged their town's and, by extension, America's entrenched conventions and taboos, including a tough, independent, widowed mother named Anne Metcalf and her enlightened daughter, Linda. The two had worked at a local factory during the war, but

both were fired as soon as the men began returning home. The factory's slimy, avaricious owner, Mike Sloan, aggressively fought unionization at the plant, and so created turmoil that would eventually lead to violence and a Communist witch hunt that targeted union organizers. Robert Davis was a black soldier who had recently returned home, hoping that his sterling war record would ease the discrimination he had faced, but it didn't. While these and similar themes of racial, gender, and class politics were significant elements of *Homefront*, it was essentially a soap opera—a sort of principled *Peyton Place*—and there were plenty of love triangles, conflicted war brides, unwanted pregnancies, and untimely deaths to go around.

The medical drama *Body and Soul*, set in present-day Columbus, was first and foremost a medical drama, but it also challenged several entrenched conventions. Dr. Rachel Griffen had returned to Columbus's Century Hospital after spending two years in East Asia, where she had come to accept the use of alternative medicine, which focused on “healing the mind and spirit as well as the body” (Brooks and Marsh: 163). She opened an alternative healing center, drawing the ire of the hospital's traditionalists, including her mentor, Dr. Isaac Braun, and the hospital's profit-driven chief, Dr. Phillip Grenier. Like most medical dramas, there were a fair share of romantic entanglements and near-death experiences, but the show failed to inspire viewers, and it was cancelled in 2003 after a one-season run.

Conventional family sitcoms, which had been absent from Ohio's television landscape for more than a decade, returned in 2003 with *Hope & Faith*. It matched neither the critical success of its predecessors (just one Emmy nomination), nor their popularity, but the show did manage a respectable three-year run. It was light family fare, bright and sunny. That is not a great surprise, given its inclusion on ABC's Friday night line-up, which has featured, over the years, *Ozzie & Harriet*, *The Flintstones*, *The Brady Bunch*, *The Partridge Family*, *That Girl*,

Donny & Marie, Webster, Diff'rent Strokes, Mr. Belvedere, Full House, Family Matters, and Sabrina the Teenage Witch. The title sisters, flaky Faith and sensible Hope, would have felt right at home on any of those shows. The series blended a pair of common Ohio sitcom themes—the return of a character to his or her hometown, and the wacky and/or cool outsider causing uproar in a community of typically sedate Midwesterners. In this instance, Faith performed both functions. She had left Ohio to pursue an acting career in Hollywood, and had landed a major role on a soap opera called *The Sacred and the Sinful*. When her character was killed off and she discovered that she was broke, she fled back home. Hope, meanwhile, was living with her husband and three children in the pleasant Columbus suburb of Glen Falls. Faith moved in with Hope, and the pair was soon embroiled in a long string of whacky Lucy-and-Ethel-style misadventures.

Another early 2000s sitcom also featured the return of an Ohioan from California. It also added a third familiar element—the use of the state as a laboratory for examining shifting American cultural conventions—which probably should have been expected from a show called *Normal, Ohio*. This sitcom featured John Goodman, fresh from his tenure on the enormously successful *Roseanne*, as Butch Gamble. A few years before, Butch had announced that he was gay, and had moved to Santa Monica. In the pilot, he came back to attend the college graduation of his son, Charlie. For the sake of his troubled son, and to the horror of his conformist family, Butch decided to stick around. Butch's father, Bill, supplied a constant barrage of cringe-inducing gay jokes, while his more tolerant mother, Joan, hoped he was only going through a phase. The implication, of course, was that small-town midwesterners were unsure how to handle homosexuality. *Normal, Ohio* didn't know how to handle the topic, either, awkwardly mixing

heavy-handed social commentary with tired stereotypes, and the show was cancelled after just six episodes.

The 2006 sitcom *10 Items or Less* featured yet another Ohioan returning to his hometown. In this case it was Leslie Pool, who moved to Dayton after his father's death to take over Greens & Grains, a supermarket that had been in his family for five generations. He had a tough task ahead of him because of competition from Super Value, a chain store located nearby. The owners of Super Value were attempting to drive Greens & Grains out of business so they could convert it into a parking lot, but Leslie was determined to stick it out. Greens & Grains may have been intended as a metaphor for a common struggle in the small city Midwest—maintaining local flavor amid the onslaught of standardized mass culture—but, like *3rd Rock and Drew Carey*, *10 Items or Less* did not take itself very seriously. Whatever its message (if there was one), *10 Items or Less* found an audience, and it aired on cable's TBS network until 2009. Although the show did contain some Fernwood-like elements, it represented a generally positive spin on life in Ohio. According to the show's creator and star, Kansas native John Lehr, "We really want to get into the Midwestern element without making fun of it. It is a funny show because of the dialogue, not because it takes place in the Midwest" (Lowry 2006: 1).

The title character of the 2000 comedy/drama *Ed* was another Ohio native returning home to take charge of a crew of oddballs. Ed Stevens had been a successful attorney in New York, but, in the course of one bad day, lost his job and discovered that his wife was having an affair with the mailman. Dejected, and with not much else to do, he decided to head back to (fictional) Stuckeyville. There Ed reconnected with schoolteacher Carol Vessey, a girl who he had admired in high school, but never had the nerve to ask out. Carol was seeing someone else,

but that did not deter him. He bought the local bowling alley, the Stuckeybowl, and set up his own legal practice.

Ed had all the makings of a hit program. It had a talented cast, and writers with a respectable pedigree—series creators Jon Beckerman and Rob Burnett had spent many years writing for David Letterman. The show employed elements of a legal drama, but its closest television relative was *Northern Exposure*. *Ed* contained the same quirky blend of comedy and drama, the same romantic tension, and the same sort of likably eccentric characters that had made its Alaskan counterpart a hit. It was a critical success, receiving three Emmy nominations its first year, but failed to gain much of an audience. NBC stuck with the show for three full seasons, trying it in three different time slots, but finally cancelled it midway through its fourth year.

Despite its modest run, *Ed* was, in many ways, the quintessential Ohio television show. Like Fernwood, Rutherford, and *Drew Carey's Cleveland*, Stuckeyville had its fair share of quirky characters and unusual situations. The show's eccentricity was perhaps best exemplified in the running gag in which Ed and his pal Mike would bribe one another to do something stupid or humiliating—drink a whole bottle of maple syrup, eat dog food, touch a stranger's bald spot, yell “I love kitties” in public, ask for Kenny Rogers's autograph from a man who was clearly not Kenny Rogers—for the princely sum of ten dollars. *Ed* definitely reflected the Ohio-as-microcosm theme. Ed Stevens's cases were sometimes unusual, as when he represented a woman suing her hairdresser over a bad prewedding haircut—but just as often they took a topical turn, examining such issues as the health-care crisis, racism, sexual harassment, and gay rights.

Stuckeyville was classic Middle America. The characters were prosperous, but not too prosperous. They are ambitious, but not mercilessly so. *Ed* also contained the placid spirit of *Family Ties*, with most of the characters coming off as warm and amiable, and combined it with the blue-collar aesthetic of *Drew Carey's* Ohio. No one in Stuckeyville seemed to think twice about a lawyer who dispensed free legal advice if his client bowled three games. Although the show's audience was limited in number, it appears to have been broad, as evidenced by its winning an award from both the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and The Family Friendly Programming Forum. Stuckeyville came as close as any other Ohio setting to being the idealized American hometown, a notion reflected by television critic Michael Abernethy: "Despite the fact that I live in a beautiful neighborhood and have very nice neighbors, I have had the urge to move for the last few weeks. I want to move to Stuckeyville, Ohio" (Abernethy 2010c: 1).

INDIANA

The demographic characteristics of Indiana's television settings are substantially different from those of Ohio. Ohio is home to three of the Midwest's ten largest cities—Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus, while Indiana has only one. Still, since 1959 Ohio's large cities have served as the setting for just six television programs while seven programs have been set in or near Indianapolis, the largest metropolitan area in Indiana. Stranger still, while nearly half of Ohio's television programs have taken place in fictional small towns, just one Indiana program has, with the state's non-Indianapolis entries taking place in the mid-sized cities of Bloomington and Muncie or in the Chicago suburbs of northwest Indiana. Finally, and even more unexpected,

the themes, characters, and events of many of Indiana's television entries contrast sharply with Michael Cayton's 2007 assessment of midwestern television:

Images of the Midwest on television conform to the stereotypes of a bland region somewhere in the middle of the United States where life is neither complicated nor sophisticated The region served as a backdrop of heartland stability in an era of rapid social change The overall image was of a safe, relatively nurturing place where decent people lived and worked in a relatively timeless world far from the social and cultural upheavals convulsing America (Cayton 2007: 75).

Indiana's television landscape is surprising, not so much for what it contains, but for what it does not. While many of the characters on its programs are not necessarily suave and sophisticated, they are also not the polite, well-scrubbed, and guileless Hoosiers living a life of quiet serenity that one might expect.

Indiana did not find its way to American televisions until 1975, but its first program seemed predestined to be a hit. *One Day at a Time* was produced by Norman Lear, the guiding force behind a number of popular 1970s sitcoms, including *All in the Family*, *Maude*, *Good Times*, and *The Jeffersons*. The new show bore some resemblance to *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, another hit sitcom about a single woman in a Midwestern city, and it was given a plum spot behind *M*A*S*H* on the CBS schedule. It did not disappoint. Despite a late arrival in December 1975, *One Day at a Time* managed to rank twelfth in the Nielsen ratings during its first season, and peaked in eighth place the following year. It was in the Nielsen top ten for four years, and in the top twenty for all but its ninth and final season.

Given its popularity, longevity, and the simple fact that it went first, *One Day at a Time* must be considered the defining Indiana program. One prominent message sent by the series was

that the contemporary urban Midwest was often anything but the safe and nurturing environment described by Cayton. It was the story of a divorced working mother, Ann Romano, and her two teenage daughters, Julie and Barbara. The three lived in an apartment in Indianapolis, where Ann had to dodge the constant advances of Dwayne Schneider, the womanizing building superintendent. Ann had married at seventeen, and was now single for the first time in years. She didn't have a college education, and found few encouraging career prospects. Her exhusband had recently lost his job, and could no longer afford child support, so Ann faced the daunting task of raising her two daughters alone. In the words of the show's creator, Whitney Blake, "Our divorcee isn't a chicly turned out woman of the world. She is vulnerable and scared" (Mitz 1988: 301).

The Indianapolis of *One Day at a Time* displayed most of the "social and cultural upheavals convulsing America" at this time, as noted by television historian Cary O'Dell:

The series, like other Lear comedies, strove to be topical, progressive, even controversial, and to mix serious issues with more comical elements The program centered around Ann Romano, a television character who found herself struggling through many of the same experiences facing real American women Romano was not TV's first divorced woman or mother, but she was probably—to that time—the most realistic Its decision not to shy away from difficult themes, its warts and all portrayal of contemporary life, especially of women's lives and of female adolescence, sets it apart. Thus the series helped expand the dimensions and role of U. S. television comedy (O'Dell 2010: 1).

If Ann Romano was television's first realistic depiction of a divorced single mother, then her daughters were the medium's first depiction of modern teenagers. *One Day at a Time* took hard looks at a number of serious issues facing young women in the 1970s—virginity, sexuality,

and birth control; alcohol and substance abuse, and teen suicide—the sorts of things that 1950s and 1960s television teens never dreamed of. Julie, in particular, was a problem child, having an affair with a forty-two-year old man and, at one point, contemplating dropping out of school.

One Day at a Time must be considered one of television's first "dramedies." Plenty of laughs occurred, but all of the characters were graduates of the school of hard knocks. Julie married in 1979, but her husband was quickly laid off from his job, forcing them to move to Texas for work. When they eventually moved back to Indianapolis, Julie disappeared, leaving her husband and young daughter behind. In 1981, Ann got engaged, but her fiancé was killed in an auto accident by a drunk driver, and Ann became the legal guardian for his teen son.

Despite its significant departure from expectations of Midwest television programs, the show did embody some of the region's signature characteristics. The heroines of Lear's New York sitcoms were financially dependent upon their husbands, and two of them—Maude Findlay and Louise Jefferson—had maids. Ann Romano did not have that option, and she displayed a remarkable degree of midwestern industriousness. She began the show as a secretary, but when one of her daughters entered college, Ann went to college as well. Once she had her degree, she began a career in advertising, working her way to partner before leaving to start her own firm. She worked so hard, in fact, that she drove herself to a heart attack, and received a "finger-wagging lecture from the doctor on the virtues of moderation in work" (Lichter, Lichther and Rothman 1991: 128). As the series ended, Ann was a comfortable upper-middle-class professional, departing Indianapolis for an exciting new job in London.

Perhaps the most distinctively midwestern trait of *One Day at a Time* was its relatively gentle nature. It was never cloying—this was a Lear sitcom, after all—and the barbs flew thick

and fast in the Romano apartment, much as they did in the Bunker, Jefferson, and Findlay households. *One Day at a Time*, however, possessed a warmer atmosphere than other Lear comedies. Whether or not the program's writers were consciously injecting a spirit of midwestern graciousness is a matter of speculation, but there is no doubt that there was slightly more love, and much less nastiness, in the air in Indianapolis. In the words of Rick Mitz:

Ann Romano was . . . TV's first feminist—not a liberated loudmouth like Maude, but a reasonable feminist . . . Like other Lear shows, *One Day at a Time* was still a member in good standing of the Crisis-of-the-Week Club. It was always Big Dilemmas that were being tackled . . . but they were solved and resolved much more calmly and quietly than on *All in the Family* or *The Jeffersons*; more discussion than outbursts of emotion. Unlike most other Lear ventures, there was little controversy surrounding the show. Not that it was bland. Just that it was sensible . . . Schneider seems to have been Lear's throwback to Archie Bunker, but over the seasons he became more seasoned and softened . . . He became the friend of the family, Uncle Schneider (Mitz 1988: 301-303).

Since *One Day at a Time*'s 1975 debut, Indiana has been home to eleven more programs, a respectable number, but none of these programs were especially successful. Six failed to last a full year, two relocated to different locales after their first season, and another two were cancelled midway through their second season. None of the four sitcoms that followed *One Day at a Time* lasted long enough to make much of an impression. *Breaking Away*, a sitcom about four buddies living in Bloomington, aired during 1980-1981 season. The most prominent theme of *Breaking Away* was class warfare. Bloomington is home to Indiana University, and much of the action involved friction between the four primary characters, who were high-school students, and the university's snooty fraternity men, who haughtily referred to the townies as "cutters," a reference to the Bloomington's working-class stonecutters. Dave was the leader of the gang, and

his passion was bicycle racing. His father, Ray, was a former stonecutter who now worked as a used-car dealer, and he wanted his idealistic son to “settle down to a meat-and-potatoes existence like his own” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 180). Cultural conflict and family differences also highlighted the sitcom *The 5 Mrs. Buchanans*, which aired for seven months of the 1994-1995 season. Four of the title characters had little in common with one another except for the mutual dislike of the fifth Mrs. Buchanan, their demanding mother-in-law. The four daughters-in-law were a study in regional stereotypes. Alex was a “fast-talking” New York Jew; Delilah the “sexy, sugary sweet and somewhat dimwitted Southerner;” Bree the extroverted Californian “whose youthful blonde good looks were the envy of her sisters-in-law”; and Vivian, the “obnoxious, class-conscious Midwesterner” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 479). Most of the action took place in a thrift store in suburban Indianapolis where the four daughters-in-law worked.

Set in Avon, near Indianapolis, the 1995 family sitcom *The Jeff Foxworthy Show* continued the class warfare theme established in *Breaking Away*. The program featured Foxworthy, American’s most famous “redneck” comedian, as the owner of a heating and air conditioning company. His success had enabled him to move his wife and young son into an upscale neighborhood, where his country ways were looked down upon by snooty neighbors, and his conceited father-in-law, a college professor. ABC cancelled *The Jeff Foxworthy* show after six months, and when NBC picked it up for a second season, the setting was changed to Georgia.

The wave of sitcoms featuring young, single friends hanging out that swept across American television in the 1990s made its way to Indiana with *Men Behaving Badly* in 1996 and *Maggie Winters* in 1998. Both had more in common with Cleveland’s blue collar contribution to this genre, *The Drew Carey Show*, than they did with New York’s more fashionable entries, *Seinfeld* and *Friends*. *Men Behaving Badly* was the story of two beer-guzzling slobs sharing an

apartment in Indianapolis. James, a photographer, was a chauvinistic weasel, while roommate Kevin, the manager of a security company, was a little more intelligent, and somewhat more successful with women. The title character of *Maggie Winters* had divorced her cheating husband and moved from Chicago back to her hometown of Shelbyville, an actual city of 17,000 located about twenty miles southwest of Indianapolis. She got a job at a local department store, moved in with her “dumpy, doting Mom,” and began to reconnect with old high school pals (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 834). Neither show was able to replicate the success of *Drew Carey*, much less that of *Seinfeld* or *Friends*, and were cancelled midway through their second seasons.

Indiana’s only fictional television town was Eerie, the setting of a campy comedy/drama that aired during the 1991-1992 season. *Eerie, Indiana* belonged to the fish-out-of-water meets oddballs-in-a-small-town category, a genre it shared with such programs as *Northern Exposure* and *Manhattan, AZ*. Thirteen-year-old Marshall Teller and his family had recently relocated to the appropriately named title town from New Jersey. Only Marshall and his new pal, Simon, seemed to notice the strangeness. Among the town’s residents were the pistol-packing mailman, the caretaker of the Bureau of Lost Items (which contained, among other things, misplaced socks), a woman who hermetically sealed her children every night to keep them young, dogs at the local pound who were plotting an uprising, and, of course, Elvis Presley.

While Indiana’s sitcoms have lacked the polish of similar programs set in New York, Los Angeles, or even Chicago, none of them could exactly be called “gritty.” The state’s sitcom residents, particularly those on *One Day at a Time*, had their trials, to be sure, but crime, poverty, and tragedy were largely absent from Indiana’s television landscape through the 1990s. That is not too surprising, given that all seven Indiana-based programs that debuted between 1975 and 1999 were comedies. Things changed significantly with the dawn of a new century. All five

Indiana-based programs that debuted between 2003 and 2007 were either dramas or reality programs, and four of them presented a considerably darker take on the Hoosier state.

The crime drama *I-800-Missing*, which premiered in 2003, was the story of Jess Mastriani, a recent college graduate who, as a result of having been struck by lightning, began having visions that helped the F. B. I. solve missing persons cases. *I-800-Missing*'s setting shifted to Quantico, Virginia, in its second season, but Indiana's television landscape wasn't safe for long. An Indianapolis-based legal drama, *Close to Home*, debuted in 2005 and aired for nearly two full seasons. It was the story of Annabeth Chase, a dedicated prosecuting attorney who had recently returned to work after giving birth to her first child. Given its pleasant suburban setting, the outlook was remarkable bleak. Annabeth's husband was killed by a drunk driver, her best friend was gunned down by the mob, and her work as a prosecutor constantly exposed her to the dregs of society. As noted by critic Cynthia Fuchs, horrific events abounded:

Violence and oppression are everywhere in *Close to Home*. And that "everywhere" is specific—the burbs, outfitted with lawns and driveways and pretty white houses with no bars on the windows. The first episode of the new CBS series began with a sort of tone poem comparing the ideal and the danger of the domestic sphere As the soundtrack grows ominous, new mom Annabeth cuddled and splashed her baby, down the street, sirens sounded. A fast-building fire raged, burning down a home and bringing out the slow-motioned firemen, one going so far as to roar in slow-audio, "Weee gawwwwt peeeple in therrrrre!" The shape and point of these dramatic couple of minutes are hardly standard for network TV, where most times, the city is the site of trauma and the suburbs where everybody loves their well-intentioned patriarchs. But in the Indiana burbs of . . . *Close to Home*, something like evil lurks perpetually (Fuchs 2005c: 1).

Two of Indiana's reality entries, *Armed and Famous* and *Juvsies*, both of which aired in 2007, provided a similarly grim take on Indiana. *Armed and Famous* featured a group of B-list

celebrities and their stint as reserve officers for the Muncie Police department. After training, each celebrity was paired with a Muncie police officer for actual street patrol. While it was difficult to take this show seriously, it did deal with real issues, and didn't do Muncie's image any favors. On the street the cops and their celebrity sidekicks encountered, among other things, burglars, shoplifters, drug dealers, drunk drivers, and even a murder suspect. *Juvis* was even more serious and sobering, following adolescent criminals at the Lake County Juvenile Detention Facility in northwest Indiana's Crown Point. The offenders were in for such crimes as assault, drug use, and drinking, and the show followed their rehabilitation and featured recreations of their crimes.

Three television Indianans played closer to the midwestern archetype. Michael Essany, Jim Gaffigan, and Woody Boyd all appeared to be products of the safe, nurturing, uncomplicated and unsophisticated environment described by Cayton, but only one of them was actually seen in his native habitat. The *Michael Essany Show*, a reality show that aired in 2003 on the *E! Entertainment* cable network, featured a nineteen-year-old college freshman from Valparaiso who had been producing a cable talk show from his parents' living room since he was fourteen. This program was not the talk show itself, but a behind-the-scenes look at the life of the "fresh-faced, deferential, yet confident" young man (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 890). It ran for just thirteen weeks, and the fame it afforded Essany did not get the best of him. He continues to live in Valparaiso, where he publishes motivational books and, as might be expected of an ambitious midwesterner, works as an executive of the Indiana Grain Company.

Two of television's Indiana archetypes were not seen in their native state, but as neophytes in large eastern cities. One was comedian and Indiana native Jim Gaffigan, who played a character of the same name on the sitcom *Welcome to New York*. Produced by another

Indiana native, David Letterman, the show premiered in 2000 and aired for four months. The fictional Jim was a Ft. Wayne weatherman who had recently taken a job at a television station in New York City, where his coworkers included Marsha, the brusque producer; Amy, the brash production assistant; and Adrian, the station's self-absorbed news anchor. Much of the humor derived from uneasy interaction between the earnest, mild-mannered Hoosier and the snarky, worldly New Yorkers. In the pilot episode, Marsha met Jim for the first time in New York, and taken aback by his plain appearance, said: "Somehow you looked elegant in Indiana surrounded by the pear-shaped folk." In another episode, Jim landed two tickets to a Colts-Jets game, and offered one to Marsha, who responded "Maybe in Indiana it's okay to fraternize with your coworkers at T. G. I. Fridays, share your onion rings and nacho supremes, but this is New York." Adrian then snatched both tickets from Jim's hand before even being invited and attempted to suck up to Marsha by offering her the tickets. When that didn't work, he scalped them to the FedEx man for cash. A frustrated Jim went to Marsha's office to complain:

JIM: Back in Indiana, tickets aren't some form of currency used to manipulate people or to make a quick buck.

MARSHA: That's because tickets hold very little value when they are to a . . .

AMY: Tractor pull. (Tropiano 2010: 1).

Despite these regional digs, the show was not entirely devoted to slandering Indianans. Gaffigan, in the words of critic Stephen Tropiano, "never comes across like a stereotypical midwestern hick, but rather, as someone who's smart and perceptive, only having a little trouble keeping up with his co-workers' snideness" (Tropiano 2010: 1).

The experience of Gaffigan's character resembled that of Letterman (who had started his career as a weatherman), and it was also somewhat similar to the experience of another Indiana innocent living in the big city. Huckleberry Tiberius "Woody" Boyd, played by Woody Harrelson, became a bartender at *Cheers* in the hit Boston sitcom's fourth season. Even though viewers of the show never saw Woody in his (fictional) hometown of Hanover, it is arguable that he is television's most famous Hoosier, and that Hanover is Indiana's most famous television town. It is also arguable that no television character, with the possible exception of *M*A*S*H's* Radar O'Reilly, ever played midwestern stereotypes to the hilt quite like Woody Boyd.

Some of those stereotypes surely displeased Indiana viewers. Hanover's claims to fame were being both the UFO and the placemat capitals of the world. It was a town where women who became pregnant out of wedlock were stoned for moral turpitude, where people who welshed on bets were rubbed in bacon fat and locked in a sty with "Romeo the friendly hog," and where bachelor parties involved dressing farm animals in women's clothing. Woody once recalled an old Hanover saying—"the pigs are smarter than the people"—and then added that this saying was invented by tourists (Bjorklund 1997: 206).

Not all of the Indiana jokes on *Cheers* poked fun at bizarre backwardness. Just as often, the humor contrasted Woody's cheerfully optimistic attitude with what sounded like an unbelievably tragic Indiana childhood. He once maimed a man in a bowling accident, suffered from smallpox, survived a cave-in, and fell off of a beanstalk, puncturing a lung and cracking two ribs. When a snarky *Cheers* denizen accused him of having just fallen off the turnip truck, Woody admitted that, in fact, he had once fallen off a turnip truck, which dragged him 300 yards down a gravel road and into a rose bush. After hearing the story, someone asked Woody if he

had any fond memories from childhood, to which Woody responded “the roses smelled nice” (Bjorklund 1997: 204).

Despite the barrage of tragic and disturbing stories from Hanover, one cannot regard the character of Woody Boyd as a wholly negative representation of Indiana. He was immensely likable, never failed to be honest and faithful, and was a true optimist. A devout Lutheran (Missouri Synod), Woody volunteered at a suicide hotline and cooked and delivered meals to the elderly. He was also ambitious, actually getting himself elected to Boston’s city council during the final season of *Cheers*. And although he was the constant target of jabs from his more sophisticated friends, Woody’s guileless character frequently exposed the often petty, bitter, and desolate lives of modern American urbanites around him. In one episode, Rebecca Howe, who was trying to live a healthier lifestyle, had a typical exchange with Woody:

REBECCA: Until I began eating clean, I never realized how a good a nice, dry, rice cake could taste.

WOODY: How can you eat those, Miss Howe? They don’t have any flavor.

REBECCA: Oh, if I eat these I’ll live longer.

WOODY: Well, I have a question. You know how you’re always talking about how you hate your life? How come you want to make it longer?

REBECCA: Shut up, Woody (Paramount 2008).

ILLINOIS

Illinois has been the setting or origin for 150 television programs, ranking a respectable but distant third behind California and New York. The majority of those states’ programs have

been set in or near Los Angeles or New York City, and Illinois's television landscape has followed suit. Only three of the state's programs have taken place outside the Chicago area, and those three did not stray far. The first was 1950's *Hawkins Falls, Population 6,200*. This fictional title town was modeled after the real-life town of Woodstock, located about forty miles northwest of Chicago. The second was the short-lived 1993 sitcom *A League of Their Own*, set in Rockford, about seventy miles northwest of the city. The third, and most significant, was *Roseanne*, the state's most popular situation comedy, which was set in the small town of Lanford, Illinois. Lanford is fictional, but the nearest large city referenced on the program was Elgin, which is located on the northwest edge of the Chicago metro area, about twenty-five miles from the city proper.

Of the state's 150 entries, ninety-eight (about two-thirds) have been serialized, fictional dramas or comedies. The remaining third have come from a wide variety of formats, many of them originating live from Chicago, and mostly before 1958. They included eighteen musical programs, seven quiz shows, six anthology programs, six variety shows, and four children's programs. Chicago also served up five instructional/educational shows, four sports programs, and three programs each in the documentary/reality and discussion/commentary genres.

The first variety show to originate from Chicago was ABC's short-lived *Vaudeo Varieties*, which began its four month run on January 14, 1949. NBC's first Chicago-based variety program debuted that April, and introduced one of early television's most influential figures. *Garroway at Large*, featuring both guest stars and regular performers, was hosted by the amiable Dave Garroway. Raised in St. Louis, Garroway brought a quirky, self-deprecating sense of humor to the show—a style not unlike that of later television icons, and fellow midwesterners, Johnny Carson and David Letterman. His program, like those of Carson and Letterman, was

casually cool and little off-kilter, featuring, for example, a summer broadcast from the roof of Chicago's NBC studios, and a New Year's Eve broadcast that honored the building's cleaning women. The show was a low-budget affair, but rather than trying to mask the fact, Garroway exploited it, producing an intimacy and warmth absent from the slick, high-budget variety programs originating from New York or Los Angeles. Television historian Joel Sternberg described the show's charm:

Taking advantage of Garroway's intellect, unique personality and relaxed, intimate broadcasting style, *Garroway at Large* scripts were more conceptual than specific and placed minimal emphasis on elaborate production The show worked to create illusions and gently shatter them with the reality of the television studio. In the best tradition of Chinese Opera, commedia dell'arte, or the Pirandellian manipulation of reality, Garroway would wander in and out of scenes or from behind sets stopping to hold quiet conversations with occasional guest celebrities, the home viewing audience, technicians and cast members Using raised eyebrows, slight gestures and knowing shrugs, he communicated eloquently and brought a "cool," glib and wry offbeat humor to prime time television (Sternberg 2010: 1).

Garroway at Large is frequently cited as the archetypal example of the "Chicago School" of television broadcasting. While the city's role as a significant source of national primetime programming would be short-lived, it is difficult to overstate the influence that Garroway and other early Chicago broadcasters had on the medium. Whereas early television efforts from New York and Los Angeles were awkward attempts to retrofit Broadway and Hollywood for the small screen, Chicago's television minds were aware that a new medium required new thinking. Radio icon Fred Allen, whose venture into television was a notorious flop, blamed this failure on the fact that he didn't produce the show in Chicago. In a 1951 article from *Theatre Arts* magazine,

he went so far as to say: “They ought to tear down Radio City, rebuild it in Chicago and call it ‘Television Town.’” The same article went on to illustrate the influence of the Chicago School:

Of television’s total output, a scant five percent originates in Chicago. But it surpasses others for ingenuity, charm and distinctive showmanship. In Chicago, bless their integrity, they’re copying neither the New York stage nor the Hollywood cinema. They’re evolving an art form that is peculiarly television’s own Chicago improvised first with the cameras. This was the boldest stroke of all. And the best camera you’re likely to see on video today is, more often than not, on a Chicago show They use a TV camera the way an artist uses a brush And you, the viewer, get a view of the show that transcends description. Do you wonder that people in the trade say the Chicago touch is to television what the French touch is to cooking. It’s that *je ne sais quoi*, that zest *plus*. You can’t define it, but oh what a pleasure to savor it If the day ever comes when television establishes a true “academy,” a place where the young and hopeful may go to learn the art of television programming, Chicago is the only conceivable place for such an institution (Van Horne 1951: 36-39).

Garroway at Large premiered in 1949, and was followed the next year by three more Chicago-based variety programs. One featured the legendary Chicago radio broadcaster Don McNeill, whose *Breakfast Club* program had first aired on network radio in 1933. Like Garroway, McNeill’s style was unassuming and sincere, one that had enabled him to “almost singlehandedly turn early-morning network radio into a profitable medium” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 378). *Don McNeill TV Club* brought the radio show to the small screen almost intact, featuring the same off-the-cuff interviews, musical numbers, comedy acts, and McNeill’s trademark sign-off, “Be good to yourself” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 378). Another of NBC’s 1950 offerings was the Chicago variety show *Saturday Square*. Broadcast from a mock-up of a Chicago street scene, viewers were invited to wander about the square watching music, comedy, or other variety acts. Among the *Saturday Square* venues was a tavern run by garrulous author

and radio host Studs Terkel. *Saturday Square* was not very successful, but the Terkel element was popular enough to get its own program, which first aired in October of 1950. *Studs' Place* featured Terkel as the owner of a Chicago barbecue joint that hosted occasional music or comedy acts, but the main attraction was the “philosophical ramblings of its star” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,325).

“It was on *Studs' Place*,” wrote the *Chicago Tribune*’s Rick Kogan, “that large numbers of people discovered what Terkel did best—talk and listen.”

Terkel, arms waving, words exploding in bursts, leaning close to his talking companions, didn’t merely conduct interviews. He engaged in conversations. He was interested in what he was talking about and who he was talking to (Kogan 2008: 1).

In contrast to the informal styles of Garroway, Terkel, and McNeill, *The Jack Carter Show* was a slick variety hour hosted by the title stand-up comedian. Featuring musical acts, comedy sketches, a big budget and big names, *Jack Carter* was the Chicago counterpart to Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca’s *Your Show of Shows*, which it preceded on NBC’s live Saturday night line-up in the spring of 1950. When *Jack Carter* returned to the air in the fall of 1950, production had shifted to New York. Dave Garroway followed suit in 1951, moving to New York to begin his influential stint as the inaugural host of NBC’s *Today Show*. Whether it was the time of day or the medium, viewers never responded to Don McNeill’s evening television program, and the *TV Club* was cancelled in December 1951. After a failed attempt at daytime television three years later, McNeill abandoned the medium altogether. He remained a force on radio, though, with his *Breakfast Club* continuing to run until 1968. *Studs' Place* left the air in 1952, not because of a lack of interest, but because of opposition he generated in certain circles.

“I was blacklisted because I took certain positions on things and never retracted,” said Terkel. “I signed many petitions that were for unfashionable causes and never retracted.” Like McNeill, Terkel returned to radio and, remarkably, remained on the air until 1998. He signed off from his last broadcast with his trademark phrase, “Take it easy, but take it” (Kogan 2008: 1).

Chicago’s early television landscape also featured a number of pioneering children’s programs, including the critically acclaimed puppet show, *Kukla, Fran & Ollie*. Puppeteer Burr Tillstrom, hostess Fran Allison, and their Kuklapolitan Players were part of NBC’s primetime schedule from 1948 to 1952, and ABC’s evening slate from 1954 to 1957. While both primetime runs were respectable, the show’s off-primetime lifespan was nothing short of remarkable. Originally titled *Junior Jamboree*, the program was first seen on experimental television broadcasts in 1939. It became a regular series in Chicago in 1947, and continued to run on NBC’s daytime schedule, on PBS, and in syndication from time to time until 1972.

Chicago’s second network children’s program was the cut-rate *Cactus Jim*, on which the title cowboy hosted old Western serials. The program premiered in 1949 and aired for two years on NBC. Two short-lived 1950 children’s entries were *Sandy Strong*, a puppet show, and *The Magic Slate*, which featured children’s stories performed by Chicago’s Goodman Children’s Theater.

The first instructional/educational program to originate from Chicago debuted in 1949. *Dr. Fix-Um*, which aired for fifteen months, was a pioneer of the do-it-yourself genre, offering tips and demonstrations for household repairs. *R. F. D. America* featured similar instruction about plants and animals, including, in true Chicago fashion, meat-carving. This show, which ran for five months, is notable for being the first program to broadcast an entire herd of cattle being

driven into a television studio. Chicago's third 1949 instructional entry was the youth-oriented *Science Circus*, which aired for three months. *Pet Shop*, which debuted in 1951 aired for sixteen months, featured guests and their pets, and provided information about pet adoption. Chicago's most memorable contribution to educational programming, however, was the venerable *Watch Mr. Wizard*, with Don Herbert and his kid-friendly science experiments. The show aired in primetime from 1951 to 1955, when its time slot was changed to Saturday mornings and production shifted to New York.

Seven quiz shows originated from Chicago during television's early years, the first four debuting on ABC in 1949. *Identify*, a sports program, premiered in February of that year, followed in April by *Majority Rules*, *Treasure Quest*, and *Ladies Be Seated*. None of these entries lasted more than a year, and neither did ABC's last Chicago-based quiz show, *Sit or Miss*, which aired for three months in 1950. The only DuMont quiz show to originate from Chicago was one of the network's most popular programs, *Down You Go*, which debuted in May, 1951. This show, based on the simple hangman word game, was regarded as one of the "wittiest, most intelligent," representatives of its genre (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 386). Much of the show's charm derived from the wit of its host, Northwestern University English professor Bergan Evans. Production of the show shifted to New York in December, 1954, and the show was popular enough to survive the demise of DuMont, airing for a time on each of the other three major networks through 1956. Another popular Chicago-based program, *Quiz Kids*, had been heard on the radio for nearly a decade when it was brought to NBC's evening television schedule in the spring of 1949. The show featured a panel of young people—aged six to sixteen—who amazed the audience by coolly answering a series of exceptionally tough questions. The show ended its primetime run on NBC in the fall of 1952, but was revived briefly by CBS in 1953 and again in

1956. The second Chicago-based quiz show to appear on NBC was the word game *Super Ghost*, which aired in the summers of 1953 and 1954.

Chicago's early musical entries were mainly fodder for the lesser networks—emerging ABC and doomed DuMont. CBS did not air any primetime musical programs from Chicago, and NBC just two—*Chicago Jazz*, which ran for five weeks in late 1949, and *Wayne King*, which aired for two and a half years, but only on NBC's Midwest stations. The ABC network led the way with *Music in Velvet*, a low key music and dance program that premiered on January 16, 1949, and ran for four months. Other short-lived musical offerings from ABC in 1949 included *The Skip Farrell Show*, *Sing-Co-Pation*, *The Little Revue*, and *ABC Barn Dance*, the last a televised version of the country music radio program *National Barn Dance*, which had aired on Chicago's WLS since 1924. ABC's 1950 musical offerings included *In the Morgan Manner*, a variety program featuring the musical stylings of Russ Morgan and his Orchestra, and *Tin Pan Alley TV*, which featured music from a different composer each week. ABC revived *Music in Velvet* for a short run in 1951, and the network's *Chicago Symphony Chamber Orchestra* aired for most of the 1951-1952 season. ABC's last musical offerings from Chicago were thoroughly midwestern, but ultimately short-lived. *Polka Time* aired during the 1956-1957 season, and *Polka-Go-Round* during the 1958-1959 season.

DuMont's first Chicago musical entry was *Al Morgan*. Featuring the title singer and pianist, it aired for about two years beginning in September, 1949. Two 1950 entries from DuMont included *Windy City Jamboree* and *Rhythm Rodeo*, both of which were pulverized in the ratings by Ed Sullivan. DuMont's increasingly bare cupboard was reflected in the spartan titles of its next two musical programs—*Music from Chicago*, which aired in 1951, and *The Music Show*, which premiered in the spring of 1953 and lasted for fifteen months. The network's

final Chicago musical entry, *Chicago Symphony*, debuted early in 1954 and aired for fifteen months. It featured classical music and expert commentary about the evening's compositions.

In addition to coverage of the city's professional franchises, Chicago has hosted four primetime sports entries, including *Harness Racing* from Maywood Park in 1951 and *Stock Car Races* from the 87th Street Speedway in 1952. *National Bowling Champions*, which was broadcast live from Chicago for nine months in 1956 and for four months in 1957, featured a pair of contestants competing in a three-game match, with the winner returning the next week to defend his title. *Baseball Corner*, which featured news, films, and interviews, originated from Chicago during the 1958 baseball season.

A number of successful daytime talk shows have Chicago roots, the most notable entries being those hosted by Oprah Winfrey, Phil Donahue, and Jerry Springer. Three primetime commentary programs also have originated from the city, including *What Do You Think?*, a short-lived book discussion program that debuted in January, 1949, and *Paul Harvey News*, a folksy commentary that aired during the 1952-1953 season. One of the most popular and durable syndicated programs to originate from Chicago would come years later. *At the Movies*, featuring the infamous “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” movie reviews of a pair of contentious critics—originally Gene Siskel of the *Chicago Tribune* and Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun-Times*—debuted in 1986 and aired for two decades.

At the Movies was the last successful, unscripted, primetime program to originate from Chicago. The city would not be much of a factor in the torrent of reality/competition programs that hit the small screen in the 2000s. Its lone entry, a flop, was nevertheless an appropriate choice for a city whose television programs have, more often than not, leaned toward comedy.

My Big Fat Obnoxious Boss brought twelve contestants to Chicago to compete for a job with a huge investment company called IOCOR, headed by Mr. N. Paul Todd. The twelve were subjected to an array of insane challenges, including selling steaming-hot bowls of soup on the Chicago sidewalks in the middle of summer, and creating a cute mascot for a manufacturer of toxic chemicals. If this all sounds a bit like Donald Trump's *The Apprentice*, that is no coincidence. Unbeknownst to the contestants, *Obnoxious Boss* was a hoax. IOCOR did not exist, Mr. N. Paul Todd (an anagram for Donald Trump) was played by an actor, and all of the decisions were actually being made by a wheel-spinning, business-suited monkey. The contestants were not amused and neither were the viewers. The show was pulled after five weeks.

Chicago's two other recent unscripted entries were far more earnest, resembling conventional documentaries more than reality fare. Both dealt with similar topics, and both had a striking thematic resemblance to the hit John Hughes films of the 1980s that depicted the angst-ridden life of local high school students. *Yearbook*, which aired for three months in 1991, followed the home and school lives of a group of seniors at Glenbard West High School in the western suburb of Glen Ellyn. *American High* appeared nine years later, this time following the lives of students at Highland Park High School in the northern suburbs. Both were relatively sincere assessments of the hopes and anxieties associated with grades, dating, sports, identity, and growing up. *American High*'s initial ratings were poor, and FOX pulled the show after two weeks. The show was then picked up by PBS, which ran the entire series, winning an Emmy for Outstanding Non-Fiction Program.

The majority of Illinois's television entries have been fictional, including six anthology series, all of which aired in the late 1940s or early 1950s. Some of those were relatively standard and forgettable, including the mystery anthology *Mr. Black* and the low-budget legal anthology

Your Witness, both of which began their short runs on ABC in 1949. Another unremarkable Chicago-based anthology series, seen only on NBC's Midwest network, was *Short Story Playhouse*, which aired during the summer of 1951.

A few of the live anthology programs were more memorable examples of the "Chicago School," constructed around unique premises and relying heavily on improvisation. One of the earliest programs was ABC's entry *Stump the Authors*, which premiered on January 15, 1949 and ran for three months. This program involved the title authors creating a story based on a random set of props they had been given. NBC's first live Chicago-based anthology series was *The Crisis*, which aired for three months in the fall of 1949. Each week a guest would tell about a dramatic event that had happened in his or her own life. The story would end when it reached a critical moment, and the show's actors would then improvise a scene detailing what they imagined might have happened next.

The most popular of the early anthology programs was the legal drama *They Stand Accused*, which first aired on CBS in 1949, and continued its run on DuMont from 1949 to 1954. The setting was a courtroom where the cases ranged from standard civil disputes to more serious criminal cases, including homicide. The trials were fictionalized versions of actual cases from the desk of Illinois Assistant Attorney William Wines, who debriefed the trial's participants before the show. Plaintiffs, defendants, and witnesses were all professional actors, but the judges and lawyers were real, and the trial played out in a spontaneous, improvised fashion before the studio audience, who then served as jury. "So realistic was the presentation," wrote Brooks and Marsh, "that many viewers were convinced that they were watching a real trial" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,378).

All of Illinois's remaining ninety-seven programs have been serialized—fictional programs with recurring plots, settings, and characters—and, of those, thirty-seven, or just over a third, have been dramatic series. Within television's dramatic genre are numerous subgenres, the most popular being westerns, professional dramas, soap operas, family dramas and crime and mystery dramas. Chicago, of course, has not been the setting for any westerns, although the protagonist in 1959's *The Man from Blackhawk*, which featured an insurance investigator who travelled throughout the frontier West, did work for a Chicago-based firm.

Virtual battalions of lawyers and judges have populated American television dramas for decades, but for whatever reason, most of those televised professionals have chosen not to call Chicago home. There have been, in fact, only two dramas that focused exclusively on legal matters in the city's television history, and both were live anthologies (*Your Witness* and *They Stand Accused*, described above) that first originated from Chicago in 1949. The closest that fictional Chicago lawyers ever got to having a serialized show was the ninety-minute drama *Chicago Story*. This was a unique attempt to crossbreed crime with legal and medical dramas, featuring a public defender, an assistant district attorney, a group of police officers, and a pair of trauma surgeons at Cook County Hospital. The format was simple—the cops would chase the crooks, someone would wind up in the hospital, and then the crooks would go to trial. Perhaps it was all just a bit too much—*Chicago Story* lasted just six months in the summer of 1982. Chicago's television cops would have plenty of other opportunities to showcase their talents, but the city's attorneys have otherwise been shut out.

Although a portion of the short-lived 1965 soap opera *Our Private World* involved life at a Chicago hospital, medical dramas have also been relatively scarce. This is somewhat unexpected, not only because of the general popularity of the genre, but also because the two

programs that ventured into Chicago's hospitals were quite popular. Chicago's *ER* proved to be the most durable medical drama in the history of the medium, but it was not Chicago's only hit in this genre, nor was it technically the first. *Chicago Hope* made its debut on Sunday, September 18, 1994, with *ER* premiering the next evening. Both shows then moved to their regular Thursday night position on the fall schedule, and ran opposite one another for a time. These series focused on the professional and personal dilemmas of their talented staffs. The physicians at the title hospital of *Chicago Hope* were led by Dr. Jeffrey Geiger, a stubborn, insensitive, ill-tempered, but exceptionally skillful physician with a penchant for risky and revolutionary medical procedures. His personality stood in stark contrast to that of his best friend, Dr. Aaron Shutt, who was subdued, amiable, and kindhearted. They often clashed with Dr. Phillip Watters, the harried hospital chief who struggled to reconcile the needs of his staff and patients with Draconian budget cuts imposed by the hospital administration. While Chicago Hope's staff performed miracles on the job, their personal lives, in the fashion of most contemporary medical dramas, were a mess. Geiger's wife had murdered their young son and was in a mental institution; Shutt was in a bitter child custody battle; and the rest of the staff dealt with divorce, affairs, suicide, and addiction. The drama largely stayed within the walls of the state-of-the-art hospital, although some of the story arcs put Chicago's darker side on display, such as when Alan Birch, the hospital's legal counsel, was gunned down by a member of a street gang.

Chicago Hope had a respectable six-year run, placing in the Nielsen top thirty during its first three years. Its success, however, was dwarfed by that of rival *ER*, which emerged as one of the most popular dramas in the history of television, exceeded only by *Gunsmoke* in terms of popularity and longevity. *ER* checked in as the second-most-popular program of the 1994-1995

season, propelled actor George Clooney to Hollywood stardom, and went on to anchor NBC's Thursday night line-up for fifteen years. It was the most-watched program on television for three seasons, including two consecutive years, and in the Nielsen top five for each of its first nine seasons. In addition to its runaway popularity, *ER* was a critical success, taking home twenty-three Emmys, including one for Outstanding Drama Series.

Set in the emergency room at Chicago's (fictional) County General Hospital, the characters and plot lines of *ER* were not profoundly different from those of *Chicago Hope*. The original crew included Dr. Doug Ross, a handsome pediatrician; Dr. Mark Greene, the quietly intense chief resident; Dr. Susan Lewis, a lonely resident; Carol Hathaway, the emotionally troubled head nurse who had recently survived a drug overdose; Dr. Peter Benton, an ill-tempered but skillful surgeon; and Dr. John Carter, a rookie resident who was a bit overwhelmed by it all. The doctors and nurses usually performed several medical miracles per episode, often involving controversial and unauthorized procedures, and they wrestled with such ethical dilemmas as assisted suicide. Their personal lives were, of course, messy. Doug Ross had had a traumatic childhood, which he dealt with by tirelessly devoting himself to young patients and sleeping with anything that moved. In one memorable episode, Ross awoke to find his one-night stand dead, and was forced to admit to investigating police officers that he didn't know her name. Mark Greene's marriage to Jennifer, an ambitious lawyer, fell apart, and she moved to St. Louis along with their daughter Rachel. Mark eventually started to put his life back together. He fell in love, got remarried, and promptly dropped dead of a brain tumor. Dr. Benton dealt with his mother's dementia and eventual death, and then with his son's deafness. He also fell in love with his mother's physical therapist, Jeanie Boulet, who he later discovered was HIV-positive. All of this, of course, was only the beginning.

The show's trademark was a pressure-cooker atmosphere. *ER* was created by author, physician, and media mogul Michael Crichton, who meant the show to be “an uncompromising look at the relentless stresses attending the lives of overworked residents in an urban emergency room.” He succeeded, according to critic John G. Nettles, who described *ER* as a “quantum leap beyond the sedate theatrics of most medical dramas—only *M*A*S*H* ever came as close to depicting this kind of nerve-wracking chaos” (Nettles 2010a: 1). A breathless pace was established right from the start. The ninety-minute pilot episode featured eighty-seven speaking parts and chronicled forty-five separate medical emergencies. To create a sense of urgency, the cameras were constantly moving, the sound effects loud and abrupt, and the sets intentionally claustrophobic.

Like *Chicago Hope*, most of the action was confined to the hospital, but Chicago was a more active character on *ER*. City streets were seldom seen, but there was always the implication that, just beyond the sliding glass doors, a frigid world pulsed with violence, squalor, and tragedy. The drama of an emergency room is, of course, supplied by emergencies, and the Chicago of *ER* provided a steady stream of them. In addition to the bloody aftermath of shootings, car crashes, and freak accidents, the staff of *ER* dealt with the grim realities of abandoned children, suicide attempts, child prostitutes, and methadone-addicted infants. On one episode, an *ER* doctor was beaten by someone angry over a patient's death. On another, a doctor was stabbed by a deranged patient, and, in one of the more memorable doses of comeuppance in television history, villainous Dr. Robert Romano had his arm sliced off by a helicopter. Critic Jeff Alexander described *ER*'s hectic atmosphere as follows:

In the late eighties and early nineties, everyone I knew was complaining about how long you had to wait every time you went to the emergency room . . . Then *ER* premiered and we quickly

got to see why: it's because doctors and nurses are too busy swarming around victims of car and subway accidents And that's *before* the paramedics start slamming their gurneys laden with yet more grisly products of the latest traffic holocaust through those incredible noisy double doors. Emergency-room people don't have time for me and you, because as soon as they're done flailing and tubing and jargoning and statting around one poor maimed bastard, another one (or fifty) is on the way (Alexander 2008: 119).

The gritty atmosphere of *ER* fit in nicely with that of many of other Chicago dramas. Twenty-three, or just under two-thirds, of Chicago's dramatic offerings have been about crime. Lawmen were, in fact, featured on the first network program to originate from the city. ABC's live *Stand by for Crime* was the first program broadcast from Chicago to the east coast, beginning on January 11, 1949. Like many other local programs of that period, the formula of *Stand by for Crime* was unique. Viewers were shown the action leading up to the point of the crime, usually a murder, which would then be investigated by Chicago detectives Webb, Kidd, and Kramer. Before the mystery was resolved, however, the program was stopped, allowing viewers to phone in their guesses of who had committed the crime. The show was not especially popular among eastern audiences, and was cancelled after eight months. *Stand by for Crime* was most notable for including the network television debut of Myron Wallace, the young actor who played Lieutenant Kidd. Myron would later change his first name to Mike, and become something of a television institution on *60 Minutes*. Chicago's second police drama, *Chicagoland Mystery Players*, featured a team of criminologists tracking down wrong-doers and made its debut on the DuMont network in 1949. This show ran for eleven months, and would be the last crime drama to originate live from Chicago.

The city's crime fighters returned to the air in 1957 with *M Squad*, an exceptionally gritty program about an elite detective unit (the "M" stood for "murder") of the Chicago Police. The

show featured Lee Marvin as the tall, menacing, gravelly voiced leader, Lt. Frank Ballinger. With a cigarette clinched between tight lips and a snap-brim fedora jammed on his head, Ballinger and his squad were prototypes for nearly all of Chicago's subsequent crime shows. "*M Squad* was as square as an LP jacket, and just about as old-fashioned," wrote critic Noel Murray, "but it was also more action-packed and gritty than the average TV procedural of its era."

From the establishing shots of snowy Chicago streets to the tours of drug dens and seedy brothels, *M Squad* sports a down-to-earth verisimilitude that helps it overcome the conventionality of its storytelling. The show is also elevated by Marvin, a flat-faced macho man who didn't go in for the robotic professionalism and morally righteous anger of *Dragnet's* Jack Webb. On *M Squad*, Marvin's detective showed flashes of fear and frustration, and would even confess in voiceover, "Sometimes I feel like giving my job up to the first guy who comes along." The Chicago underworld hated him, and his bosses rode him hard. But before each half-hour was up, he'd put another bad guy behind bars (Murray 2008: 1).

Critic Ken Tucker agreed that, while Chicago's *M Squad* bore a strong procedural resemblance to its Los Angeles counterpart, it had an atmosphere that was substantially different from

Dragnet:

Unlike the stiff Jack Webb in that series . . . Marvin is a loose-limbed energy junkie, impatiently jiggling his leg when forced to sit at his squad desk, and possessed of a blithe cockiness that's enormous fun to watch . . . "I'm not a nice guy," Ballinger says at one point . . . and you believe him. Cutting off crooks answering his questions as though they're wasting his time in getting to jail, Marvin creates a man who you just know lives by a pre-Miranda, confess-or-I'll-slug-ya code (Tucker 2009: 1).

In addition to casting the mold for the city's lawmen, *M Squad* set the standard for the depiction of Chicago itself. The show sometimes showcased the city's more famous

landmarks—the Wrigley Building could often be seen looming in the background—but most of the time the cameras followed Ballinger “out of the dingy squad room into even dingier exterior locations on mostly marginal Chicago streets” (Tucker 2009: 1). Donald Liebenson of the *Chicago Tribune* felt that *M Squad* “captured Chicago in all its seedy, glamorous, decent, sleazy and neon-illuminated glory.” Ballinger’s assessment of the city was similarly mixed. “I love Chicago,” he said in the first episode. “It’s my town.” At the end of another episode, he observed, “The people of Chicago, they look pretty good to me right now. The town looked clean, honest and innocent.” Just as often, however, Ballinger revealed a wild and wide-open city. “In a town like Chicago,” he said, “anything can happen and usually does.” Perhaps the show’s geographic spirit was best summarized by actor Lee Marvin. In a 1959 interview praising Chicago’s police officers, he revealed much about his perception of the city: “I know Chicago cops. They’re tough. They have to be. The whole city could explode. It’s like a bomb, Chicago” (Liebenson 2009: 1).

As mentioned, nearly every single Chicago crime drama since 1957 appears to have been influenced by *M Squad*. While murder and other heinous acts are de rigueur for all police and detective programs, many follow what could be described as a “trouble-in-paradise” formula, featuring backdrops that are quaint, glitzy, or just plain stunning, as in *Murder She Wrote*, *CSI*, *Hawaii 5-0*, *Magnum P. I.*, *Simon & Simon*, *Charlie’s Angels*, or *Miami Vice*. The Windy City’s entries are better described as a “crime-on-grime” formula, with the backdrop often the worst imaginable part of the city and the crimes and the criminals who commit them equally vile. Television’s crime fighters are, of course, rarely the delicate type, but those on Chicago’s programs tend to be particularly hard-boiled. They are stolid, square-jawed, and cold as Lake

Michigan in January. Like Marvin's Ballinger, they are obsessed with their jobs, leaving little time for romantic interests or anything else.

M Squad ended its three-year run in 1960, but by that time Ballinger had been joined by the equally icy Eliot Ness. *The Untouchables* debuted on ABC in 1959 and soared to eighth place in the Nielsen ratings during its second season. Ratings then sagged and the show ended its run after four years. Such a meteoric rise and fall is not unusual on television, but few other shows did so amid such a maelstrom of controversy. *The Untouchables* was set in Chicago of the early 1930s and based loosely on the real-life exploits of Eliot Ness, who had been instrumental in bringing down gangster Al Capone.

The show's distinctive look—flashy period clothes and cars contrasting beautifully with rough 1930s streets—attracted scores of viewers. It was not the cars, clothes, or sets that many viewers noticed, though. Some protested the fact that nearly all the criminal characters had Italian last names. Others argued that the show glamorized crime, with one critic noting that a street gang in Cleveland had begun to refer to itself as “The Untouchables.” Al Capone's family brought a lawsuit against the show's producers, and F. B. I. agents complained that Ness, a Treasury man, was getting credit for Bureau victories. That *The Untouchables* could get the F. B. I. and the mob on the same side of an argument speaks to the show's power.

The most controversial aspect of *The Untouchables* was, in the words of Brooks and Marsh, that it was “perhaps the most mindlessly violent program ever seen on TV up to that time” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,458). The show made *M Squad* tame by comparison, turning the streets of Chicago into a weekly bloodbath. Usually at least three gun battles occurred per episode, and everyone from snitches to prostitutes were mowed down with alarming regularity.

“*The Untouchables* elevated TV violence to an art form,” wrote critic John Javna. “Never had so many bullets been fired into so many people in one hour of television drama” (Javna 1985: 112). *TV Guide* wrote that “In practically every episode a gang leader winds up stitched to a brick wall and full of bullets, or face down in a parking lot (and full of bullets), or face up in a gutter (and still full of bullets), or hung up in an icebox, or run down in the street by a mug at the wheel of a big black Hudson touring car” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,458).

Producer Quinn Martin argued that violence was an historically accurate product of the show’s place and time, but it was clear that the show’s primary motivation was to stay ahead of an increasingly violent, and increasingly competitive, television landscape. “More action, or we are going to get clobbered,” wrote Martin in a message to his writers (Lewis and Stempel 1996: 115). Another note said “I wish you would come up with a different device than running the man down with a car, as we have done this now in three different shows.” (Collins and Javna 1988: 76). In response to increasing pressure from media watchdog groups, violence on *The Untouchables* was eventually toned down. The less bloody version of the show was, of course, not nearly as popular, and ratings plummeted.

Aside from blood and guts, *The Untouchables*’s greatest legacy was Eliot Ness, a second archetypal Chicago television cop. Brooks and Marsh described Ness as an “upright, virtuous, and humorless enforcer of the law” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1458). John Javna called him “the most humorless character ever to appear on TV,” a “steely-eyed, stone-faced avenging angel with one purpose in life—to destroy anyone who broke the law” (Javna 1985: 112). Actor Robert Stack, who played Eliot Ness, described his approach to the character as follows:

The way I played Eliot Ness, he has no odd-ball characteristic, no offbeat mannerism, no schtick. He’s merely a decent, honest

citizen who also happens to be angry because, basically, he hates crumb bums like Al Capone, and he resents bringing home only twenty-five hundred bucks a year to support his family and his kids, while thieving coppers are taking thousands a week in bribes from Capone and his henchman (Collins and Javna 1988: 75).

Such characteristics—a lack of polish, a sense of moral decency, a strong work ethic—have certainly not been uncommon among midwestern television characters. Those traits could, in fact, easily be applied to Indiana’s Woody Boyd or Iowa’s Radar O’Reilly. That said, the thing that made Eliot Ness so appealing was that he would, in the words of critic Jack Mingo, “blow away the bad guys without a second thought” (Collins and Javna 1988: 76). That trait, at least in the Midwest, is something usually reserved for a character from Chicago. Dialogue from a scene in which Eliot Ness was holstering his gun after a battle with the hoods, said it all:

HOOD: I didn’t do bad, did I?

NESS: No, you didn’t do bad. You just got yourself killed (Collins and Javna 1988: 76).

Despite its relatively short run, *The Untouchables* became a cult favorite. It resurfaced in 1987 as a hit theatrical film featuring Kevin Costner, Sean Connery, and Robert DeNiro, and again in the 1990s as a syndicated television show. It was also the last Chicago crime program for quite some time. After the show left the air in 1963, television lawmen were off Chicago’s streets for more than twenty years. One possible explanation might reside in the reaction of longtime mayor Richard J. Daley to earlier programs and to theatrical films such as 1969’s *Medium Cool*, which Daley believed cast aspersions on Chicago and its police department. Film historian Arnie Bernstein described this angle:

To this day, Daley's contempt for Hollywood portrayals of his beloved city is legendary. Hizzoner, as Daley was often referred to, couldn't stand to see Chicago or its police department portrayed in a negative light and for many years made it difficult for out-of-town filmmakers to use Windy City locations. Said one Chicago policeman who occasionally dealt with Hollywood crews, "If it's not *Mary Poppins*, the mayor doesn't want it" (Bernstein 1998: 189).

In a 1959 interview, *M Squad* star Lee Marvin indicated that his show was not welcome in Chicago, at least by those in power:

We shoot locations, twice a year. No permit, no cooperation, no nothing. They don't want any part of us Any public building, but nothing else, no stopping traffic. We shoot it and blow (Liebenson 2009: 1).

Whether or not the late mayor was responsible for the drought of crime dramas is debatable—television shows are not required to film in the city in which they are set, and often do not. Whatever the cause, just two Chicago-based crime or mystery dramas appeared on television in 1970s, and neither featured police officers as protagonists. Carl Kolchak, the title character of 1974's *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* was not tracking down mob bosses or other such mundane quarry. A crime reporter for a Chicago news service, he had the unique and unfortunate habit of encountering all manner of strange phenomena. Each week, he faced vampires, zombies, aliens, swamp creatures, witches, werewolves, a reincarnation of Jack the Ripper or, in one case, a "flesh-gobbling ape-like creature" (Collins and Javna, 198: 104). Of course, the evidence always slipped through his fingers in the end, and the full version of the story never made it past the desk of his disbelieving editor. Inexplicably placed by ABC on Friday nights behind the family friendly drama *Apple's Way*, the show understandably never found its audience, but did

inspire a number of later programs, most notably *The X-Files*. *Kolchak* also kept alive the tradition of Chicago-based crime dramas with decidedly unemotional leading men. Television historian David Martindale described Carl Kolchak as follows:

Unlike his handsome and distinguished TV newsman contemporaries, Kolchak was a muckraking slob, loud and obnoxious. He broke no rules simply because he never observed any to begin with. He was a hard man to befriend (Martindale 1991: 273).

The title character of *The Duke*, which aired for seven weeks in the spring of 1976, was as inelegant as Kolchak. Duke Ramsey was a boxer who had hung up his gloves to open a bar and to start a new life as a private investigator. Using connections from his days in the ring, Duke was able to finesse information from both lawmen and hoods, but when the chips were down, he did what came naturally. Described by David Martindale as a “two-fisted” detective, he had the ability to “‘duke’ his way out of sticky situations,” a tactic his Chicago crime-fighting predecessors would have approved (Martindale 1991: 142).

Chicago cops finally returned to the air with two programs in the 1980s. The first, *Lady Blue*, which aired for five months during the 1985-1986 season, was the story of Detective Katy Mahoney, who demonstrated that Chicago’s tough-guy cops were not always guys, and that the city was just as seedy as it had been when Eliot Ness mowed down his last criminal. Dubbed “Skirty Harry” and “Dirty Harriet” by critics, Mahoney spent a good deal of time cutting bad guys in half with her .357 Magnum. *Lady Blue* topped several television watchdog groups’ lists of most violent shows, and it is not difficult to understand why. Critic John J. O’Connor, describing the show’s pilot, wrote that:

In the middle of getting a pedicure, Katy looked up from her magazine only to see a robbery in progress at a bank across the plaza. Pulling on her boots and clutching her oversized gun, she rushed to the scene of the crime and, with pedestrians scurrying for cover, proceeded to shoot several perpetrators. Returning to the beauty parlor and pointing to her toes, she sweetly asked, “Can you do something with this mess?” Those were the first five minutes of the show After the opening teaser found a concerned Katy talking about “three weird, crazy homicides in 72 hours,” the viewer was treated to the sights of victims being killed by a poison-dart blowgun, bow and arrow, and crossbow. And in perhaps the most vivid scene, a man’s leg was caught in a rope trap, leaving him dangling by one leg over a stairwell four stories high. After the killer cut the rope, the plummeting body was carefully framed in an overhead camera shot. The hour ended with Katy blasting the demented murderer into a river with her trusty gun Standing nearby, [her partner] Terry, perhaps speaking for all of us, could only say, “Unbelievable!” (O’Connor 1985: 1).

Lady Blue was filmed on location in Chicago, as were the exteriors of the influential police drama *Hill Street Blues*, which ran from 1981 to 1987. The South Side’s Maxwell Street Station served as the stand-in for the fictitious station house, and although the show is listed in some sources as having been set in Chicago, it was theoretically in a “large, unnamed eastern city” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 616). According to television historian Fran Golden, “care was taken not to show any recognizable Chicago landmarks,” so it is likely that only a few sharp-eyed viewers, particularly those from Chicago, would have made a connection between the city and *Hill Street* (Golden 1996: 158). If they did, then the show, which was “rife with drugs, prostitution, burglary, murder, and the decay of a rotting neighborhood,” would have settled in nicely with the rest of Chicago’s crime dramas (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 616).

While *Hill Street Blues* converted Chicago into a typical American city, *Crime Story* was thoroughly rooted in its Chicago setting, at least for a while. The program debuted in 1986 and was no less grim than *Lady Blue* in its urban portrayal. Its protagonist was as dedicated and cold-

blooded as any of the city's previous lawmen. Set in the early 1960s, the program chronicled the efforts of Lt. Mike Torello, head of the city's Major Crime Unit, to solve heinous crimes. Much of the action revolved around attempts to bring down the syndicate of Capone-like mob boss Ray Luca. The homicides could be memorably gruesome, as in one episode where a disturbed teenager was convinced that his dead mother was watching him through his television set. He eventually remedied the problem by killing a hooker who lived next door, lashing her in a cruciform pose to a television transmitter and electrocuting her.

In the fashion of the classic Chicago television detectives, Torello and his team were not fazed by any manner of crime or degradation. In the pilot, as Torello and another cop were examining the blood-spattered scene of a double homicide, they had the following exchange:

TORELLO: Looks like a Jackson Pollock.

COP: Pollock?

TORELLO: He's an artist. Used to paint stuff like this.

COP: Yeah? Well, he's got a sick mind (Lee 2004: 1).

Torello was cold-blooded, single-minded, and didn't have much in the way of a personal life. Like Frank Ballinger and Eliot Ness, he also let the crooks know who was in charge. In one episode, he informed a hood that "When this is over, you hurt anybody else, I'm going to find out who you love the most—your mother, your father, your dog—it don't matter. I'm going to kill it" (Collins and Javna 1988: 79). *Crime Story* also made it abundantly clear that, when it came to Torello, no line existed between business and personal. In his pursuit of Luca, for example, Torello was not driven by the love of the cat-and-mouse game, nor by a deep and abiding respect for the law, but, according to co-creator Michael Mann, by "an all-consuming

hatred.” “I wear my obsession for Ray Luca,” said Torello in one episode. “I get up in the morning, and I put it on like I put on my suit, my tie and my .45” (Lee 2004: 1).

To match its grim stories and characters, *Crime Story* had an equally grim visual style, with its “stark nighttime scenes” and a “low-life period look” (Lewis and Stempel 1996: 66). For the most part, the show avoided Chicago’s more notable landmarks, opting instead for filming in the city’s workaday neighborhoods, like Wicker Park, Irving Park, and Pilsen. An iconic shot at the end of *Crime Story*’s opening credits was of the show’s primary characters standing, heavily armed, in front of the Superdawg drive-in on Milwaukee Avenue. Adding to the ring of authenticity was the fact that the show’s co-creator, Chuck Adamson, and its star Dennis Farina (Torello), had both actually been Chicago cops.

Chicago’s next crime-fighter was a freelancer. *Sable*, also filmed on location in the city, was the story of Nicolas Fleming, who by day was a straight-laced, nerdy children’s author. At night, though, he would don greasepaint and a black costume to fight crime as the title superhero. *Sable* was quite a departure from the city’s other crime dramas, and it aired for just seven weeks in 1987. Another unconventional, black-clad crime fighter hit Chicago’s streets in 1989. The title priest in *Father Dowling Mysteries* was played by Tom Bosley, who brought the same low-key, earthy likability as he had displayed while playing dad Howard Cunningham on *Happy Days*. Much like Jessica Fletcher on *Murder, She Wrote*, Father Dowling was always stumbling into, and ultimately solving, murder mysteries. Very little violence was shown on-screen. The city’s television spirit was perhaps best captured by Dowling’s sidekick, a nun named Stephanie, or “Sister Steve,” a surprisingly worldly young woman who was “equally adept at picking a lock, cutting a deck of cards, or picking up information on the streets” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 462).

The pair patrolled the streets of Chicago in Dowling's run-down Ford station wagon over a twelve-month run scattered between 1989 and 1991.

The Chicago crime drama returned in force in the 1990s. While just six Chicago-based crime dramas made their debut in the 1970s and 1980s, another six began in the first half of the 1990s alone. These included the syndicated remake of *The Untouchables*, which aired in forty-four installments beginning in 1993, but the first was *Gabriel's Fire* during the 1990-1991 season. The protagonist was Gabriel Bird, a kind and intelligent man, but one also tortured by a seething sense of injustice—an anger that seemed to simmer all the more in the *basso profundo* delivery of actor James Earl Jones. A former Chicago cop, Bird had been wrongfully convicted of murdering his white partner in 1969. After twenty years in prison, he was sprung by an ambitious young lawyer named Victoria Heller. He found that life could be tough for an excon, particularly given that most of the white officers on the Chicago Police force still detested him. Using his knowledge from both sides of the thin blue line, Bird became a private investigator for Victoria. He proved to be as calloused as any of Chicago's crime fighters, and the streets of Chicago were never seedier, but the show's outlook was perhaps too gloomy to attract many viewers. So, for the show's second season, the setting shifted to Los Angeles, and the show was retitled *Pros & Cons*. Victoria was gone, Bird had started his own firm, and he was now happily married. Free of the gloom and doom of Chicago, Bird was now cheerful, his rage seemingly evaporated in the California sun. He smiled all the time now—in the words of one critic, “too much, really”—suggesting that all these aloof Chicago cops ever really needed was a change in climate (Bogle, 2001: 382).

A number of other early-1990s Chicago crime dramas were similar in spirit to *Gabriel's Fire*, forgoing the icy bloodlust of *The Untouchables* and *Lady Blue* while maintaining the gritty

realism that had come to characterize the city's television landscape. *Reasonable Doubts*, one of the few Chicago programs to feature a lead character who held a law degree, was the story of Tess Kaufman, an assistant D.A. who had been assigned to the felony division of the Chicago Police Department. The twist was that Tess, like actress Marlee Matlin who portrayed her, was deaf, communicating with the detectives through sign language. Otherwise, *Reasonable Doubts*, which premiered in 1991 and ran for two seasons, was a fairly standard police procedural. Tess's task was to protect the rights of the accused, the implication being that those rights were often ignored in Chicago. Carrying on the tradition of the city's television cops was Tess's hard-boiled, "bust 'em at all costs" partner, Dicky Cobb, who, given the choice between law and order, tended to choose the latter (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,136).

The protagonists of 1992's *Angel Street* were Anita King and Dorothy Paretzky, a pair of homicide detectives who operated in an extremely dangerous section of Chicago. The intended hook, beyond the novelty of female detectives, was a personality clash between sophisticated King and street-smart Paretzky, but viewers didn't bite, and the show was pulled after four weeks. The cops of 1993's *Missing Persons* were slightly softer around the edges than their Chicago television counterparts. They were led by Lt. Ray McAuliffe, who was played by Daniel J. Travanti with the same subdued sincerity he had honed for years on *Hill Street Blues*. There were few squealing tires and not much flying lead, but Chicago was as grim and chaotic as ever. In one episode alone, a young woman was abducted by a religious cult, a boy was taken from his mother, and a dying man kidnapped his two young sons. Critic John J. O'Connor described the show's format:

The weekly formula provides two or three cases to be solved, just about always within a single episode. Happy endings are obviously preferred, but there is usually at least one case that ends tragically.

Children figure prominently in any given week. One episode had a 2-year-old waking in the middle of the night and, unable to find his parents, wandering through dark streets crying for Mommy and Daddy. Primal fears; fail-safe gimmicks (O'Connor, 1993: 1).

In the end, the gimmicks were not quite fail-safe, and *Missing Persons* vanished after five months. The most successful of the early 1990s flurry of Chicago police dramas was the most light-hearted. *Due South* premiered in 1994 and aired for two seasons on CBS before moving into first-run syndication for another year. The protagonist was Constable Benton Fraser of the Royal Canadian Mounties, who was perhaps the straightest straight man in the history of television. The preposterously courteous Fraser had been assigned to the Canadian consulate in Chicago, where he befriended Detective Ray Vecchio. Gruff and unpolished, the wisecracking, pizza-eating, and poker-playing Vecchio was an amalgam of nearly every cop in Chicago's television history. "Being an American," he once told Fraser, "I . . . know where my strength lies, and that's in being as heavily armed as possible at all times" (Mouland, 1998: 42). The Chicago of *Due South* was as hard-edged as Vecchio. "We are in the middle of a war," said Vecchio's supervisor, "a war against crime and corruption" (Mouland 1998: 18). The show had its serious moments, but was primarily an action comedy, with Chicago serving up the contrasts for the ever-polite Fraser. "His straight-arrow demeanor," wrote Brooks and Marsh, "softened up some of the harder cases on the mean streets of Chicago" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 396).

Chicago's last police drama of the 1990s was *Turks*, which was also the city's last conventional police program to date. The protagonist was Joe Turk, yet another hard-boiled cop with a failing marriage. Joe was a sergeant in a tough part of the city, the 29th precinct, where his two sons were also officers. The show was an odd mix between family drama and cop show, and it never caught on with viewers, lasting for three months in 1999.

Many of Chicago's more recent entries in the mystery and crime genres have involved gimmicks, none of them stranger than *Early Edition*, which premiered in 1996. It was the story of Gary Hobson, a down-on-his-luck stockbroker who was mysteriously given the unique opportunity to right wrongs before they had actually occurred. Having just lost his job and wife, Gary awoke one morning to find an orange cat sitting on his doorstep atop an early edition of the *Chicago Sun-Times*. It was such an early edition, in fact, that it contained the next day's news. Faced with the choice between using this information to make a fortune or to help others, noble Gary chose the latter. Every morning the cat would reappear, and each day Gary set out to prevent bad things from happening to good people. The show was filmed entirely on location and, by its very nature, set the city up for a weekly round of catastrophes. The Chicago of *Early Edition* was rife with personal tragedies, natural hazards, and unspeakable disasters. The city also presented the show's hero with a wide variety of crimes to prevent, including murder, kidnapping, gangland hits, bombings, blackmail, robberies, arson, police corruption, and even an attempted presidential assassination.

Despite all this, the tone of *Early Edition* was considerably softer than its kindred shows. Little violence was depicted on screen, and Gary Dobson was a warm, unassuming guy, described by critic Ken Tucker as a "likable sweetie," a phrase that was never used to describe Eliot Ness or Mike Torello. And despite the barrage of misfortunes that Gary was forced to prevent, Chicago lost some of its hard edge, with Tucker noting that *Early Edition* "is so genially ludicrous, it makes the Windy City look like Fantasy Island" (Tucker 1996b: 1). The show was a mild success, airing for four seasons, one of just three Chicago-based dramas in any genre to last that long.

A pair of Chicago-based dramas from the 2000s picked up where *Kolchak* had left off. *Special Unit 2*, which began a ten-month run in 2001, featured police detective Kate Benson, who had been recruited into the title squad. It was a top secret team charged with hunting down various monsters who plagued the Windy City, including dragons, trolls, demons, werewolves, mummies, and witches. Despite the unusual quarry, the city and its cops were the same as usual. The unit's headquarters were located in an "abandoned subway tunnel under a seedy Chinese laundry," and Kate's partner, Nick O'Malley, was a "fast talker with a short temper who tended to shoot first and ask questions later" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,282). A similar entry, *The Dresden Files*, featured a modern-day wizard living in Chicago who aided the police whenever their cases got too strange to be solved using conventional methods. The show had demons, ghosts, and vampires, but not many viewers, and was cancelled after twelve weeks. *Tracker*, a syndicated program that ran for twenty-two weeks beginning in 2001, concerned a group of more than two hundred aliens who had escaped from a prison in the Migar Solar System. Naturally, they chose Chicago as the place to hide out. Enter Cole, an alien cop, whose job was to recapture these prisoners and send them back to the interplanetary slammer.

Wild Card, which contained elements of comedy, mystery, and family drama, was the story of Zoe Busiek, a spunky Chicago native who had moved to Las Vegas to become a blackjack dealer. She returned home to care for her nephews and niece after the death of her sister in a car accident. Zoe suspected foul play, and after exposing the culprits behind her sister's murder, she was hired by an insurance company to investigate other mysterious cases. Filmed primarily in Toronto for Canadian television, *Wild Card* also aired on the Lifetime cable network, with thirty-six episodes produced from 2003 to 2005.

Crime was seen from the inside out on the drama *Prison Break*, which was set at a penitentiary in the Chicago area during the 2005-2006 season. Michael Burrows was a structural engineer whose brother, Lincoln, had been framed for murder and sent to death row at Fox River State Penitentiary. Michael subsequently had the blueprints of the Fox River pen tattooed on his body and deliberately botched a bank robbery so he could be sent to the same prison. The first season, as the show's title suggests, detailed the development of Michael's elaborate, and ultimately successful, plan to spring them from Fox River.

The name of the fictional prison was possibly drawn from the actual Fox River that flows west of the city. All of the nonprison scenes were shot on location in Chicago, while most the prison sequences were filmed at the Joliet Correctional Center, which had closed in 2002. While any show set in a penitentiary is not going to be full sunshine, life in Fox River was particularly gloomy. The warden was corrupt, the inmates would “cry, fight, screw, and bleed”; and the prison guards were almost cartoonishly menacing, with one telling Michael that “The Ten Commandments don't mean a box of piss in here” (Bornemann, 2005e: 1). Some credit for all this gloom must be given to the Joliet facility itself, which lent its own special weariness to the program. One journalist reported that the “claustrophobic cells, rusty steel bars, guards' turrets, and stone floor engravings with sayings such as ‘It's never too late to mend,’ imbue the complex with an atmosphere the actors describe as haunting, ominous and depressing” (Associated Press, 2001: 1).

The Burrows brothers, along with a handful of other convicts, managed to escape the prison in the first season finale, and when *Prison Break* returned in the fall, the show detailed their cross-country flight from the law. This departure may have come as a relief to Illinois residents who had grown weary of seeing their home depicted as a landscape of crime, violence,

and corruption. Upright citizens could also take solace in the fact that few of the state's many crime dramas have met with much success. Just five such dramas lasted two full seasons on network television, and only three—*The Untouchables*, *M Squad*, and *Early Edition*—lasted three years or more. *The Untouchables* remains the only Chicago-based crime drama to break into the Nielsen top thirty.

The eleven remaining Illinois-based dramatic entries—a hodgepodge of romantic and family dramas, period pieces, and soap operas—have been similarly lackluster. Only three aired for a full season; just two lasted more than one year; and none of them placed in the Nielsen top thirty. The earliest was *Hawkins Falls, Population 6,200*, which originated during the summer of 1950. *Hawkins Falls*, a typical American small town, was modeled after Woodstock, Illinois, footage of which was seen over the show's opening and closing credits. Clate Weathers, the town's newspaper editor, would narrate major stories that had happened in the town over the previous week. *Hawkins Falls* has been cited as one of the first primetime soap operas, which is partially true. Its sponsor was, in fact, a soap—in this case, Surf laundry detergent—but the show also contained some comedy and, on occasion, even musical numbers. After its summer run, *Hawkins Falls* returned for a few months in the fall of 1950. The show eventually moved to NBC's daytime schedule, where it became more of a conventional soap and ran until 1955.

Likely in response to the success of ABC's *Peyton Place*, CBS aired Chicago's second primetime soap opera in 1965. *Our Private World* was a rare primetime spinoff of a daytime soap opera, featuring a regular character from *As the World Turns*. Recent divorcee Lisa Hughes had left her hometown of Oakdale, Illinois, to start a new life as a nurse at a Chicago hospital. Stories alternated between the lives and loves of the hospital staff, and those of the wealthy

Eldredge family, who lived in suburban Oak Forest. None of it proved to be as interesting as the goings-on in Peyton Place, and the show was not renewed after its four-month summer run.

One of Chicago's few historical dramas, *Studs Lonigan*, appeared in 1979. It was the gritty story of the working-class, Irish-American Lonigan family in the early twentieth century. The focal character was Studs, who was "struggling into adulthood in a brawling city full of temptations" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,325). This show never found an audience and was cancelled after just three weeks. Another dramatic entry, *American Dream*, was equally gritty and only slightly more successful, lasting just seven weeks in 1981. It was the story of Danny Novak who, bucking the trend, decided to move his pregnant wife, three children, and father-in-law from pleasant suburban Park Ridge to a gritty part of Chicago's inner city, partly because it was more affordable and partly to "put a little 'reality' into their lives" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 47).

The 1986 romance *Jack and Mike*, which aired for one season, was a marked departure from the formula of other 1980s Chicago dramas. Here gritty and grimy gave way to young and successful in this story of a stylish and ambitious columnist for the *Chicago Mirror* and an owner and operator of three trendy restaurants. The show focused on the pair's attempt to balance their heated romance with demanding careers, and the similar tribulations of their yuppie cohort, which included an editor, a reporter, and an attorney. *American Dream* and *Jack & Mike* were both filmed on location in Chicago, as was the 1990 period drama *Brewster Place*, which starred Chicago television icon Oprah Winfrey. Set in Chicago's inner city in 1967, this show focused on Mattie Michael. She had had a rough ride in life, but remained both strong and compassionate, always willing to serve up both good food and earnest advice from the small restaurant she ran along with her best friend, Etta Mae Johnson. A heartwarming and inspiring

slice of life, the show received mixed critical reviews, but was generally praised for its good intentions. In the words of critic Donald Bogle, *Brewster Place* sought to “give television viewers a dramatic Black series with *positive* images and some sense, no matter how simplified, of African American history” (Bogle, 2001: 368). Ultimately, though, Winfrey was unable to bring her daytime magic into the evening hours, and the show lasted less than three months.

While viewers were apparently not up for urban warmth, they were more than ready for suburban depravity, at least as indicated by the long run of *Sisters*. This soap opera debuted in the spring of 1991, and returned for a run of five full seasons, making it Chicago’s third-most durable drama, trailing only *Chicago Hope* and *ER*. The show was set in the “deceptively peaceful” northern suburb of Winnetka, and followed the incredibly tumultuous lives of the four Reed sisters (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,248). Alex had wed a WASP plastic surgeon named Wade Barker, but their marriage was on the rocks, much to the dismay of their over-achieving daughter, Reed. Frankie was a powerful businesswoman who was in love with Mitch, the ex of her free-spirited sister, Teddy, an alcoholic artist turned fashion designer who had just returned from California with her teenage daughter, Cat. Georgie was the relatively sensible sister, a real-estate agent whose somewhat screwy husband John was unemployed, leaving her to provide for their sons, Evan and Trevor. Most of the episodes began with the sisters commiserating in a stream room, and they had plenty to talk about. Alex divorced, had an affair with her plumber, began a new career as a talk show host, and married Big Al Barker, who was then sent to prison for tax evasion. Her daughter Reed eloped with her boyfriend, had a baby, and moved to Los Angeles. Teddy had an affair with a millionaire named Simon Bolt, then married a police detective named James Falconer, who was promptly murdered by a drug dealer. Frankie quit her job to run a malt shop, and eventually went on to manage a prizefighter named Lucky. The show

dealt with some fairly weighty topics along the way, including divorce, childhood leukemia, breast cancer, rape, Alzheimer's, and assisted suicide, as well as the requisite car accidents, car-jackings, and some occasional cross-dressing. Beatrice, the sisters' harried mother, was, understandably, drunk most of the time.

Sisters was followed in the early 1990s by a pair of knock-offs, neither of which was successful. 1992's *Middle Ages*, also set in Winnetka, was the story of five upper-middle-class fortysomethings dealing with the insecurities, fears, and adjustments of their respective midlife crises. 1994's *Winnetka Road* was not set in Winnetka, but in the fictional suburb of Oak Bluff, where "tight jeans, bare chests, and easy sex seemed as much in evidence as on the beaches of Southern California" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1528). The show featured typical soap opera fare, but was perhaps most notable for having the chutzpah to feature a character named Jack Passion. *Middle Ages* lasted just five weeks, *Winnetka Road* six.

Chicago's last family drama to date was *Once and Again*, which debuted in 1999. It was the story of a romance between Rick, a divorced Chicago architect, and Lily, who worked for an internet company. Lily, who would eventually get her own radio show, was also going through an ugly divorce and, like Rick, had two kids. They eventually married, merged their families, and found themselves surrounded by suburban angst. As the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* put it, "You don't just watch an episode of *Once and Again*, you survive it" (Govil 2010: 1). *Once and Again* was a critical darling and, although never a ratings smash, was popular enough to remain on the air for three seasons.

If the three programs above are any indication of the state of romance in Chicago, then the couples there could use a little help, which they got for five months during the 1998-1999

season. The protagonist of *Cupid* was Trevor, a wisecracking young patient at a Chicago mental hospital who claimed to be the title cherub. Upon his release, he set out to help couples discover or, in some case, rediscover romance. These encounters served as the basis for the show's episodes, as did the relationship between Trevor and a psychologist named Claire, who was researching Trevor's case for a book.

That Illinois has mustered thirty-seven television dramas is certainly impressive, particularly when compared to its Midwestern neighbors. *The Untouchables*, *M Squad*, *Early Edition*, *Sisters*, *Once and Again*, and *Chicago Hope* all lived respectably long television lives, and *ER* was a ratings behemoth. Nevertheless, it was the situation comedy that came to dominate Illinois's television landscape. The state's sixty-one sitcoms represent about forty percent of all Illinois entries, and more than sixty percent of its scripted, serialized programs. Even more impressive are their durability. The mortality rate for situation comedies is notoriously high, but just over half of Illinois's sitcoms have lasted a full season. More than a quarter lasted at least two years, and better than one in ten survived five seasons or more—a ripe old age in the world of television comedy. Illinois-based comedies have been a Nielsen mainstay for a number of years, with the state's sitcoms spending a collective twenty-five seasons in the top thirty.

Sitcom success did not come early, for Chicago's early live telecasts included just one comedy, *Those Endearing Young Charms*. This show followed the exploits of the Charm family, who ran a mail-order catalogue business that sold household tools and appliances. Despite this intriguing premise, the show aired for just two weeks in March 1952, followed by another short run in May. Nearly two decades passed before the city's next sitcom debuted, and it wasn't any more successful. *The Chicago Teddy Bears* was the story of Linc McCray who, along with his Uncle Latzi, opened a speakeasy in Prohibition-era Chicago. Business was good, but Linc had to

deal with his cousin Nick, a two-bit gangster who was trying to take over the business. *The Untouchables* it wasn't, and the show disappeared after a two-month run in 1971.

The six other Chicago-based sitcoms to debut in the 1970s all had contemporary settings, and featured both urban and suburban settings and characters from varied ethnic and class backgrounds. Two entries from 1976 starred actors from supporting roles on earlier sitcoms who tried, but failed, to break out on their own. The first, *Mr. T and Tina*, featured Pat Morita, who had recurring roles on *M*A*S*H*, *Sanford & Son* and, most notably, on *Happy Days* as restaurateur Arnold Takahashi. Here, he played a successful Japanese engineer who had been transferred from Tokyo to Chicago, bringing along his wife, two children, uncle and sister-in-law. All of them had their orderly world turned upside down by the arrival of a “nutty, effervescent, Nebraska-born” housekeeper, Tina Kelly, who taught them the ways of America (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 909). Ethnic mismatch comedies were relatively common in the 1970s, and some, such as *Bridget Loves Bernie* and *Diff'rent Strokes*, became quite popular. *Mr. T & Tina* was not one of them. It lasted just one month and is notable only for being the first situation comedy to feature an Asian-American in a lead role.

Luckily for Morita, the axe fell so quickly on the series that he was able to return to his duties at Arnold's Drive-in in Milwaukee. McLean Stevenson did not have such a safety net, as his *M*A*S*H* character, Col. Henry Blake, had been killed after he left the show the previous spring. One of many “crowded house” sitcoms to appear on American television, *The McLean Stevenson Show* was the story of Mac Ferguson, a mild-mannered, middle-class man who ran a hardware store in Evanston, Illinois, just north of Chicago. Mac and his wife, Peggy, had two grown children, Chris and Janet. Ne'er-do-well Chris had dropped out of college to bum around Hawaii and find himself, but he eventually moved back to his parents' basement. Janet had just

left her husband and, along with her two kids, moved in as well. Unfortunately for Stevenson, his NBC series could not survive the competition from CBS's Wednesday night slate, and the show was pulled after three months. A similar fate befell *Working Stiffs*, which spent a month being crushed by *CHiPS* in 1979. A contemporary, male version of *Laverne & Shirley*, this show featured brothers Ernie and Mike O'Rourke, bumbling but determined young janitors who worked at a Chicago office building. They lived in a crummy apartment over a café, where they wiled away their idle time.

The two Chicago-based sitcoms of the 1970s to emerge as bona fide hits were *The Bob Newhart Show*, which debuted in 1972, and *Good Times*, which followed in 1974. The Nielsen rankings for both peaked in their second seasons—*Bob Newhart* at twelfth and *Good Times* in seventh—and each show resided in the Nielsen top thirty for the first four of their six seasons on the air. All the featured characters lived in high-rise apartment buildings, but the two shows offered very different views of Chicago—*Bob Newhart* from the North Side, and *Good Times* from the South.

Like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, with which it was paired on CBS's Saturday night schedule, *Bob Newhart* split its time evenly between the home and professional lives of its protagonist. Bob Newhart played Bob Hartley, a low-key psychologist who had a successful practice in downtown Chicago. Frequently seen at the office were Carol, Bob's sharp-tongued receptionist; Dr. Jerry Robinson, a hedonistic dentist who had an office across the hall; and Bob's patients, some of whom were seen on a recurring basis, including the seemingly incurable Elliot Carlin, who had turned paranoia, passive aggression, and self-hatred into something of an art form. Each evening, as seen in the show's opening credits, Bob would walk across the Wabash Bridge to the El, and take the train home to his luxury apartment on Lake Shore Drive.

His wife, Emily, an elementary school teacher, would greet him with a kiss. Bob and Emily didn't have children, but they did have Howard Borden. Howard, the airline pilot who lived in the apartment next door, was both a good friend and a constant nuisance. He ate many of his meals with the Hartleys and asked them to water his plants, even when he was home. Howard's dimwittedness was one of the show's running gags. Others included Bob's one-sided telephone conversations; his habit of trying to explain things using analogies no one could possibly understand; and his bedtime conversations with Emily, where they would switch off their respective lamps, and then one would turn the light back on to get in the last word.

The Bob Newhart Show borrowed heavily from the Chicago native's very successful stand-up career—most notably the telephone conversations—but it also bore a strong resemblance to *Mary Tyler Moore*. Produced by Moore's MTM Enterprises, *Bob Newhart* was also the story of single, white-collar professionals in their thirties and forties, and the show did for Chicago what *Mary Tyler Moore* did for Minneapolis—depicting it as “joyously urbane, mod, upbeat, stylish, and consumer savvy” (Johnson 2008: 124). The characters drank cocktails and went out on the town frequently, and shunned the suburbs. Bob, like Mary Richards, was witty and worldly.

Also like Mary, though, Bob cannot quite make the jump to cool and brash. He was torn between the sophistication afforded him by his income, education, and environment, and his inherent, entrenched, incurable dowdiness. Bob and his friends were wedged between two distinctly different American eras. As Carol complained in one episode, “I'm stuck between two generations here and I don't get the good parts of either one” (Buening 2005: 1). This position, according to Victoria Johnson, was related to Bob's “square white midwesternness” (Johnson 2008: 137). One of the more memorable scenes in this regard involved a group of prisoners who

were about to be released. Bob was supposed to talk to them about the transition back to the outside world, but had trouble connecting with them. He failed, for instance, to impress them with his “criminal past” by recounting the time he moved down to better seats at Wrigley Field. He also had trouble wresting control of the group away from Mr. Tatum, a black prisoner who dismissed Bob’s attempt to communicate as “jive.” Bob tried to make the best of it:

BOB: You want to go with that, Mr. Tatum?

TATUM: How you going to help us, Jack? You don’t even speak our language!

BOB: Well, I don’t think that’s true.

TATUM: You a suit that’s fat-mouthin’ cause you ain’t hip to what’s cold in the joint or what’s right up the street, man, you dig?

BOB: (*after a very long pause*) I’ll be darned. You *are* right. (Johnson 2008: 138).

Bob’s most famous trait, however, was his inability to communicate his emotions, which, of course, made his job as a psychologist that much funnier. According to critic Michael Buening, this was not only the core of Newhart’s comedy, but a trait perfectly suited to the show’s geography:

I knew a lot of Bob Newharts growing up. Midwesterners are known for being friendly, down-to-earth people, but this friendliness is strictly enforced at the expense of allowing outward expressions of difficult emotions, particularly in men. The acceptable way of getting around this psychological barricade is to make jokes, since laughter recognizes but also defuses pain To convey sorrow and turmoil, Newhart relies on his nearly immobile face. With the subtlest shift of his eyes he conveys exasperation, befuddlement, amusement, wariness, and desperation. I saw those expressions on many “Newhart” faces in my Midwestern youth (Buening 2005: 1).

Bob's inability to express heartfelt emotions led to many classic exchanges on the show, particularly with Emily:

EMILY: Bob, do you love me?

BOB: Sure.

EMILY: Why?

BOB: Why not? (Mitz 1988: 238).

The Bob Newhart Show left the air, of Newhart's own volition, in 1979. It remains one of Chicago's more successful sitcoms and most positive takes on the city. Bob Newhart—both the man and the show—are, in many ways, one of the Midwest's most enduring works of art. According to Vitoria Johnson, the defining element of Newhart's comedy is rooted in the region. It is a sense of humor “based on self-deprecation—in knowing one's ‘place’ and being true to one's inner square—and the deflation of ‘outsiders’ pomposity” (Johnson 2008: 113). The *New York Times* used similar language to describe the man—using images that are not all that different from those often used to describe the Midwest itself:

[Newhart is] Mr. Mid-America in a crowd, Charlie Everybody, the American flag with ribbon tied around him If comedians were articles of clothing Bob Newhart would be a classic navy blue blazer: not faddish, not flamboyant, hardly at the fashion vanguard and yet an essential component of a man's wardrobe. Always in good taste Timeless (Johnson 2008: 128-129).

Bob Newhart's South Side counterpart, *Good Times*, was the story of Florida Evans, who had previously been seen as the housekeeper of the title character on New York's *Maude*. For reasons that were never explained, Florida now lived with her family in a tenement building in

Chicago. She was married to James, a good man who did his best to make ends meet, but who found employment hard to come by. Michael, the youngest of their three children, was studious, while Thelma, the middle one, was sensitive. James Junior (J. J.), in contrast, was the jive-talking and outrageous one, whose penchant for get-rich-quick schemes, and trademark expression “*Dy-no-mite!*,” made him, for better or worse, something of a national television sensation. Also seen frequently was man-hungry Willona Woods, the Evans’s neighbor and Florida’s best friend.

Good Times saw a number of significant changes during its six years on the air. In 1976, James died in auto accident, forcing J. J. to become the breadwinner for the family, a role that inspired sometimes dubious money-making schemes. Florida’s new love interest was Carl Dixon, who owned a small repair shop, and the two of them moved south for health reasons in 1977. Willona was now the stand-in mom for the Evans children, and J. J., who had always been a talented artist, started working at an advertising agency. Florida returned the following fall, and Thelma began dating Keith Anderson, a college football star. Although they all struggled to make a living for most of the show’s run, in the end, everything worked out. Thelma married Keith, and he inked a lucrative contract to play as a professional. Willona got a big promotion at the clothing store where she worked, and J. J. sold a comic strip for national syndication.

Along with *The Jeffersons*, *Good Times* was one of the first television shows to focus on an African-American family, and it set the tone for many other black sitcoms to follow. Much of what was laudable about the show involved its geography. Set in an urban housing project—shown in the opening credits as the Robert Taylor Homes on south State Street—*Good Times* was television’s first attempt to depict, with a modicum of seriousness, life in a poor black neighborhood. For viewers used to mostly white, middle-class settings, it was, indeed, quite a geography lesson, with various episodes revolving around drug abuse, evictions, gang warfare,

rent parties, bussing, street crime, endemic unemployment, racial bigotry, and corrupt ward heelers. For the first time, viewers were introduced to a sympathetic black character, in the person of James Evans, who was not satisfied with his government's policies concerning the poor, and to a family whose finances required their two sons to sleep in the living room, and the hocking of its television set to pay rent.

Many critics, though, had problems with J. J. Over time, the noble intentions of *Good Times* fell victim to the popularity of a character who had, in the words of television historian Pamala S. Deane, "metamorphosed into a coon-stereotype reminiscent of early American film:"

His undignified antics raised the ire of the Black community. With his toothy grin, ridiculous strut and bug-eyed buffoonery, J. J. became a featured character with his trademark exclamation, "DY-NO-MITE!" J. J. lied, stole, and was barely literate. More and more episodes were centered around his exploits. Forgotten were Michael's scholastic success, James's search for a job and anything resembling family values (Deane 2010: 1).

Good Times was produced by Norman Lear, the man behind such groundbreaking and controversial sitcoms as *All in the Family* and *Maude*. Lear was certainly used to having his shows both praised and condemned at the same time, but *Good Times* was unique in that it was often praised and condemned by the same critic. That was the case with Donald Bogle, who was not alone in revealing mixed emotions. Of the show's positive characteristics, he wrote:

Good Times was considered a breakthrough because it acknowledged poverty and other urban ills confronting a segment of the African American community. Unlike *Sanford and Son's* soft treatment of life in Watts, *Good Times* was edgy, pushy, and in-your-face about its issues. The opening theme song told of "temporary layoffs and easy-credit rip-offs" and "keeping your head above water" John Amos played James with warmth and intelligence. What made his character all the more affecting was

that he was no blind victim of the system. James understood its workings, which made him feel at times all the more trapped and frustrated He was quick to articulate his plight as an untrained Black man in America. Returning home after unsuccessfully searching for a job, he told his wife, “I lost out on the last one by only four years of college, four years of high school, and two years of grade school.” On another occasion, unable to find a better job, James recalled that “the President said he was going to bring us all together, but no one told us it would be in a headline” (Bogle 2001: 199-200).

As mentioned, any positive strides made in the person of James, or any other character, were quickly dismantled by the emergence of J. J. as the show’s heart and soul—or at least as its face. Bogle described the character, and decried his effect on the show and the country:

Tall, beanpole skinny, given to mugging, clowning, and flashing his teeth Jimmie Walker’s J. J. often dressed outlandishly—floppy hats, bright shirts, ill-fitting jackets—like the old-style coon figure and usually didn’t seem to have a serious thought in his head J. J. was a blatant caricature. For a spell, J. J. became a pop hero and a favorite of kids around the country, who gleefully imitated him and bought J. J. T-shirts, belt-buckles, and pajamas. They loved the Dyn-o-mite line, which was heard in schoolyards around the country. For children, he was as unreal as Saturday morning cartoons; they loved the exaggerations, the wild getups, the stylized movements. For others, the character became an embarrassment. Here was television’s most visible young African-American male, and he was devoid of any signs of maturity and intelligence. To have given him any kind of challenging political consciousness seemed unthinkable to the writers, most of whom were white (Bogle 2001: 201-202).

On many subsequent black sitcoms—or, for that matter, on any show that raised objections for culturally insensitive material—the show’s stars would quickly defend the program’s intentions. That was not the case on *Good Times*. John Amos left the show in 1976, and Esther Rolle, who played Florida, did the same in 1977. To dispel rumors that she left

because of jealousy over co-star Jimmie Walker's increased screen time, Rolle commented that it was "a matter of pride, not pique" (Mitz 1988: 259). In a later interview, Rolle made her objections to the J. J. character clear:

He's 18 and he doesn't work. He can't read and write. He doesn't think . . . Little by little . . . they have made him more stupid and enlarged the role . . . I resent the imagery that says to black kids that you can make it by standing on the corner saying "Dyn-o-mite!" (Bogle 2001: 203).

Rolle returned to *Good Times* in 1978, having been assured by the show's producers that they would turn J. J. into more of an upstanding character. They kept their promise—J. J. did, indeed become more respectable—and, in a result that was oddly similar to the one Quinn Martin received when he scaled back violence on *The Untouchables*, ratings plummeted. *Good Times* met a quiet end in 1979.

Whatever the merits of *Good Times*, it represented, along with *Bob Newhart*, the first successful television exposure for Chicago since the days of Eliot Ness. These shows also marked the leading edge of a torrent of Illinois-based situation comedies. The number of new sitcoms more than doubled over the next decade, from seven in the 1970s to fifteen in the 1980s. The 1980s sitcoms painted a similarly diverse portrait of the city, with roughly equal numbers of family and workplace comedies, white-collar and blue-collar characters, and urban and suburban settings. As had been the case in the 1970s, the first sitcom of the new decade was a period piece, and it was a dud. The *Happy Days* spin-off *Joanie Loves Chachi* debuted in the spring of 1982, and returned for a full season the next fall. Chachi was Fonzie's young cousin, who moved to Chicago with his girlfriend Joanie to start a career in the music business. Along for the ride were his mother Louisa and stepfather Al, who opened a new restaurant in the Windy City. The

singing career didn't work out, and neither did this program. A similar fate met *It Takes Two*, which was cancelled after a single season in 1983. It was a standard-issue family sitcom, featuring upper-middle class professionals Sam and Molly Quinn, and their teenage kids, Lisa and Andy. Sam was a surgeon and Molly was a recent law school graduate who had landed a job as an assistant district attorney. Molly's new career put a dent in their love life and sent their household into disarray, but Sam, a steadfast liberal, refused to complain for fear of sounding chauvinistic. The twist was that Molly, now exposed to Chicago's vast and seedy criminal underworld, was becoming a hard-line conservative. She was heard saying about a murderer's defense, "Says it's because he comes from a broken home. Of course he comes from a broken home—he killed his father!" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 675).

Molly's rants were the last indication, at least for a while, that anything was amiss in Chicago. For some reason, many of the city's more successful 1980s sitcoms would be defined by their incredibly sunny outlook on life. Blood had been flowing freely on the streets of Chicago since the days of *M Squad*, and even the city's hit sitcoms—*Bob Newhart* and *Good Times*—had something of a downbeat tone. Beginning with *Webster* in 1983, however, things changed. *Webster* actually began with what sounds like a grim scenario—a cute, pint-sized black kid named Webster was orphaned after his parents were killed in a car accident. Webster's dad had been a pro football player, and seven years earlier had asked his burly white teammate, George Papadapolis (played by former Detroit Lion Alex Karras), to be Webster's godfather. George was now a Chicago sportscaster who had recently wed Katherine, a somewhat stuffy psychologist, and they were both more than a little surprised when Webster showed up on their doorstep. Neither George nor Katherine knew the first thing about parenting, but they made adjustments, unable to resist Webster's charms. *Webster* charmed audiences as well, spending

the first two of its four seasons ranked twenty-fifth in the Nielsen rankings. Critics, including John Javna, were not quite as enthusiastic as the viewing audience:

Webster, a little black kid, joined Alex Karras's white family when his parents were killed in a car accident, and he brought love and joy into their lives. And sweetness. And cuteness—lots of cuteness. And good feelings and heart. And warmth. And cuteness. Pass the Pepto Bismol and insulin, please (Javna 1988: 136).

For critic Donald Bogle, the disturbing thing about *Webster* was not its saccharinity, but its racial undertones:

The series did not seriously question why Webster had no relatives to care for him. Unlike *Diff'rent Strokes*, on which jokes were made about race and culture, *Webster*, in tune with the conservative 1980s, did all it could to ignore such subjects. Race problems, we're to assume, have vanished from the land. So too have cultural differences. Little Webster had no major problems adjusting to his new life in the Papadopolis household. On one episode, Webster takes a new white friend home to meet his family. The kid registers no surprise at seeing that his Black friend has white parents. That was the perspective of the series itself Nonetheless, beneath the sugar-coated, fake exterior of *Webster*, comments about race unintentionally surfaced. Webster always addressed his adopted mother as *Ma'am* "cause it kinda sounds like *Mom*." This made him sound all the more like the little pickaninny finally allowed inside the master's home Black parents complained that the series sent a poor message to Black children: that whenever advice and comfort were needed, both would be dispensed by knowledgeable whites The subtext was that there was no Black community to nourish these kids" (259-261).

Chicago became home to another seven-year-old orphan in 1984. *Punky Brewster* was the story of a plucky young girl who, having been abandoned by her parents, holed up in an empty apartment with her dog, Brandon. She was soon discovered by the building's cheerless

owner, a professional photographer named Henry Warnimount. In a matter of minutes, Punky's warmth had melted Henry's icy old heart, and, as could only happen on television, he persuaded the authorities to let Punky stay with him. Over the next few seasons, they learned quite a lot from one another. "My life was empty, Punky, until you came into it," said Henry. "You brought the sunshine to me" (Javna, 1988: 134).

Punky Brewster was not a smash hit, but it was popular enough to air for two seasons on NBC, and to return for a run in syndication in 1988 and 1989. If *Webster* had made critics recoil, however, *Punky Brewster* made them gag, and John Javna collected some of the more memorable assessments. "*Punky Brewster* is one of those shows that make you want to shower after you've seen it once," wrote critic David Bianculli of the *New York Post*. "And I don't think anything could make me see it twice." Rich DuBrow of the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* offered a similar judgment: "Gives a new meaning to the word *juvenile*. It's cute beyond words. Everything about the show was cute. It's so boring I can't imagine why anybody would watch it." Jim Gordon of the *Gary Times Register* was the most succinct, and the most direct: "I really resented the hell out of that show" (Javna 1988: 135).

A third warm, gentle comedy from the mid-1980s, *Valerie*, did not kill off its parents right away. It was the story of a typical suburban nuclear family. Valerie Hogan was a part-time graphic artist and full-time mom, raising three kids—rambunctious David and lively fraternal twins Willie and Mark—in a picture-perfect home in the quiet, upscale suburb of Oak Park. Her husband Michael, a commercial airline pilot, was frequently absent, which added to the cheery chaos of Valerie's life. The show occasionally tackled some serious issues, like drunk driving and AIDS, but the outlook was nearly always sunny—so sunny, in fact, that even the death of its protagonist could not dim its horizons. Series star Valerie Harper left the show in a contract

dispute after the second season, and was written out as having been killed in a car accident. Michael was around more often, and his divorced sister Sandy (played by the always effervescent Sandy Duncan) moved in to act as a surrogate mom to the boys. The show was ultimately retitled *The Hogan Family*, and was a success, running for five seasons, including two years in the Nielsen top twenty-five. The plots were more or less interchangeable with those of any other suburban family sitcom, and the trademark of *The Hogan Family* was safe, comfortable, escapism.

The 1986 comedy *Perfect Strangers*, which aired for seven seasons, did not feature any orphaned children, but its formula was not far removed from that of *Punky Brewster* and *Webster*. It was the story of Larry Appleton, a high-strung nerd who had moved to Chicago with hopes of starting a career as a photojournalist. He got a small apartment above the Ritz Discount Shop, where he worked for an avaricious lout named Donald Twinkacetti. Larry began to enjoy the rewards of the big city, and became friends with Susan, a nurse, and Mary Anne and Jennifer, a pair of stewardesses who lived down the hall. Into Larry's carefully structured world came Balki Bartokomous, a shepherd by trade, and Larry's very distant cousin from the Mediterranean island of Mypos. Balki was an archetypal comedy immigrant, with his unbridled optimism, profound naivety, comically thick accent, and tendency to take everything literally. He was childlike in his enthusiasm, wearing Spider Man pajamas and marveling at such miracles as pop-top pop cans, color television, and the fact that the morning paper was delivered right to the door. He moved in with a very reluctant Larry, and the adventure began. The show was not complex, but it was funny, building on a tradition established by Lucy and Ethel and Laverne and Shirley, where a pair of likably hapless characters had the remarkable ability to turn a minor disturbance into a major catastrophe.

Perfect Strangers was never a ratings behemoth, but remained on air for more than seven years. Critic James Greene, Jr. believed the show's popularity was due to simple sincerity, writing that *Perfect Strangers* and other late-1980s/early-1990s warmth-coms were "strangely comforting in a world where Magic Johnson could get AIDs and the Vice President couldn't spell potato."

They really do need and care about each other . . . and the episode that best displays this is the surprisingly sweet and touching "Falling In Love Is . . .", in which Balki is duped by a beautiful woman he is sure truly loves him (despite Larry's numerous warnings). The closing scenes where Larry comforts a crestfallen Balki over a pint of ice cream are neither corny nor pained nor overly maudlin. They're just nice (Greene 2008: 1).

In 1987, Larry finally got his big break, going to work as a reporter for *The Chicago Chronicle*, while Balki got a job in the newspaper's mail room. Another employee at the *Chronicle* was Harriette Winslow, the sharp-tongued but cheerful black elevator operator. In 1989, she and her television family got their own spin-off. *Family Matters* had the same breezy, bright, and amiable spirit as *Perfect Strangers*, and ultimately proved to be even more popular, running for nine seasons, including three in the Nielsen top thirty. Harriette lived in a middle-class suburb with her stocky husband, Carl, a crabby but lovable Chicago cop. They shared their home with their three lively kids, Eddie, Laura, and Judy, and also with Harriette's widowed sister, Rachel, and her infant son, Richie.

Audiences initially gave *Family Matters* a lukewarm reception, as did critics, who dismissed the show as "bland, predictable, and little more than a watered-down, working-class version of *The Cosby Show*" (Bogle, 2001: 330). Then came Urkel. Steve Urkel was a skinny, nerdy neighbor kid, intended as a one-time character in an episode where Carl recruited him as a

date for Laura. His big glasses, suspended high-water pants, squeaky voice, and snorting laugh led one critic to describe him as “a cross between Pee-Wee Herman and Spike Lee,” but whatever Urkel was, he became wildly popular with viewers (Bogle 2001: 330). He began to appear on nearly every episode, and although his presence didn’t appear to budge the critics’ assessment of the show, Urkel transformed *Family Matters* into a hit. The program soared to fifteenth on the Nielsen charts in its second season, and Urkel became his own industry. There was an Urkel action figure, Urkel trading cards, and even a breakfast cereal, Urkel-Os. Urkel took over the show, and stories began to focus on his fruitless pursuit of Laura and the consternation he caused his comic foil, Carl. Eventually, having been rendered homeless when his parents left the country and forgot to take him, Urkel moved in with Winslows. The show became more and more outrageous, often focusing on the small disasters caused by one of Urkel’s many outrageous inventions.

Having a cartoonish, sensational character take over an otherwise straightforward African-American family sitcom brings *Good Times* to mind, but Steve Urkel did not raise the same kinds of objections as had J. J. Evans. In fact, Harvard psychology professor Alvin Poussaint, a noted critic of black characters on American television, said of Steve Urkel, “He’s not up on street talk, not a dancing, bopping kind of kid. The fact that he’s a nerd and very bright may be a step forward—accepting that a Black kid can be bright and precocious and might end up in an Ivy League school” (Bogle, 2001: 332).

For viewers whose sense of Chicago was shaped by *Webster*, *Punky Brewster*, *The Hogan Family*, *Perfect Strangers*, and *Family Matters*, the city was a place of unremittingly wholesome bliss, where problems were trivial and love abounded. Mixed in with these successful sitcoms, however, were several indicators that the cynicism of *Bob Newhart* and *Good*

Times, and even the bloody legacy of the city's crime dramas, were not entirely dead. The first such sitcom was 1985's *Charlie & Co.*, which was the story of a working-class, African-American family living on the South Side. Charlie Richmond, played by veteran comic Flip Wilson, worked for the Department of Highways, and his wife Diana was an elementary school teacher. They lived with their three sharp-tongued children and Diana's caustic Aunt Rachel, who had a wholly antagonistic relationship with Charlie. In fact, the whole atmosphere was contentious, leaving *Charlie & Co.* standing in stark contrast to its sugar-coated Chicago sitcom cohort. The 1986 entry *Tough Cookies* was a comic spin on the tough-Chicago-cop-in-a-tough-Chicago-neighborhood formula. Detective Cliff Brady lived in the same seedy South Side neighborhood where he had grown up and, when not at work, hung out at the Windbreaker, a local dive bar populated by the expected array of bums, barflies, and bookies.

Charlie & Co. lasted eight months and *Tough Cookies* just eight weeks, so the grittiness they attempted to display was probably lost in the wake of their clean-living and far more successful sitcom counterparts. Viewers hoping for a little more grime on Chicago's television landscape got exactly what they were looking for, however, in April of 1987 with the unheralded premiere of a family sitcom called *Married with Children*. At first glance, it is difficult to call *Married with Children* a revolutionary situation comedy. It was not groundbreaking in technique like *I Love Lucy*, and did not possess the artful wit of *Cheers*, the socio-cultural import of *Mary Tyler Moore*, the geographic significance of *The Andy Griffith Show*, or the astute political commentary of *M*A*S*H*. The show was more like a bomb-throwing anarchist—upending the status quo for the sheer thrill of it.

Six family sitcoms existed in the Nielsen top thirty when *Married with Children* made its debut, including the occasionally funny but safely banal programs *Growing Pains*, *Who's the*

Boss, 227, *Kate & Allie* and *Alf*. The top two shows on television were *The Cosby Show* and *Family Ties*, both programs of unquestionable quality, but also earnest depictions of upwardly mobile families bound together by love, respect, and understanding. *Married with Children* made it immediately and abundantly clear that it was none of those things. The title sequence of the show opened with a spectacular shot of Chicago's Buckingham fountain, spouting to the sprightly strains of Frank Sinatra's "Love and Marriage." The title card then faded in and began oozing green slime. The credits ended with the abrupt sound of a cell door slamming shut. Viewers then met the Bundys, a working-class family who lived in the Chicago suburbs (the home shown was in Deerfield). Al Bundy, a former high school football star, was now a bitter, loutish salesman at Gary's Shoe Emporium who had been married for fifteen years. Peggy was a homemaker, but only in a nominal sense, as she never cooked or cleaned. Although they sometimes admitted that they didn't hate each other, the couple spent most of the time arguing. They fought about money, Al's lack of sexual prowess, and Peggy's laziness. Daughter Kelly was perhaps the dumbest dumb blonde ever seen on television, and viewers quickly learned about her extreme sexual prowess—she once claimed to be "one paternity suit away from a Caribbean home" (Stuller-Gigliione 2010: 1). Eventually, Kelly somehow managed to graduate from high school, and worked as a waitress and part-time television model for Ice Hole Beer and the Pet Boys exterminating company. Bud was her younger brother, a borderline delinquent who at first seemed destined to follow in his father's shoes. He did attend and graduate from college, however, working his way through as an employee of the Illinois Bureau of Motor Vehicles.

The Bundy's were contrasted with their newlywed neighbors, Steve and Marcy, a young pair of successful bankers and political activists who were very much in love. Then, they started interacting with the Bundys. When Steve, a banker, authorized a loan to Al, he defaulted, and

Steve lost his job. After several months of unemployment and an extended nervous breakdown, he left to become a park ranger at Yosemite. A heartbroken Marcy eventually married Jefferson D'Arcy during a drinking binge at a banking convention. Despite his charm and good looks, Jefferson proved to be a freeloading lout. The story of Steve and Marcy made it clear—things do not turn out so well when one begins to fall into the Bundy orbit.

Married with Children was created by Michael Moyer and Ron Leavitt, who made a concerted effort to make it everything *The Cosby Show*—then television's highest-rated program—was not. The hallmarks of *Cosby* were class, sophistication, and family warmth, while Moyer and Leavitt redefined what it meant to be tasteless, vulgar, and cynical. *Married with Children* was known informally among its cast and crew as *Not the Cosbys*, and the name of the self-righteous next-door neighbor who the Bundys wantonly destroyed, Marcy D'Arcy, sounded more than a little like that of *Cosby* executive producer Marcy Carsey.

While much has been made of *Married with Children* being was the stylistic antipode of *Cosby*, one of the more notable things about the show was the difference in social class. While the Huxtables of *Cosby* lived a comfortable upper-middle class lifestyle in a well-groomed Brooklyn brownstone, the Bundys were digging through the couch cushions for change and scraps of food. The Bundys were one of the first sitcom families in years for whom money, or the lack thereof, was a constant source of anxiety. Critic Steven D. Stark described the socioeconomics of a typical television show:

From *Leave it to Beaver* and *Perry Mason* to *Friends* and *ER*, television has been grounded in the upper-middle-class experience. On TV, even the cops live in homes or co-ops which would make an investment banker envious One look at the Huxtables' wardrobe on *The Cosby Show* . . . and viewers are bound to find something they wish they had, but don't (Stark 1997: 353).

While *Married with Children* never explored social class, or anything else, in a serious manner, it was quite something, in the era of *Cosby*, *Family Ties*, and *Growing Pains*, to see a family take their folding chairs to the supermarket produce aisle during a heat wave because they didn't have air conditioning. In one episode, while the Bundys were attending a family funeral, they stole the dead man's refrigerator—not so they could sell it, but simply for its food. In another episode, Al forced Kelly and Bud to keep a live chicken in their car because it was cheaper to register a farm vehicle at the DMV. Unfortunately, Al, in a moment of weakness, got hungry and ate the chicken.

In addition to such bizarre happenings, *Married with Children* gained notoriety for constantly pushing its luck with the lowly FOX network's part-time censor. Controversy surrounded the running story of Al's antifeminist activist group NO MA'AM (the National Organization of Men Against Amazonian Masterhood), the meetings for which mainly involved alcohol and pornography. The only activism in which the group actually engaged was a trip to Washington, D. C., to save Al's favorite television show, *Psycho Dad*, which was a celebration of domestic murders. In two instances FOX actually delayed episodes— one called "A Period Piece," which dealt with menstruation, and another, "Her Cups Runneth Over," featuring Al's road trip to a Wisconsin lingerie shop. Eventually, both episodes did run. That such stories made it to air, particularly in an early Sunday evening time slot, irked a number of viewers, including one from the Detroit suburbs named Terry Rakolta. Running a campaign to boycott FOX and companies that advertised on *Married with Children*, she took her crusade to *Nightline*, where she made the following case:

I picked on *Married with Children* because they are so consistently offensive. They exploit women, they stereotype poor people, they're anti-family. And every week that I've watched them, they're worse and worse. I think this is really outrageous. It's sending the wrong messages to the American family (Stuller-Gigliione 2010: 1).

Television historian Joan Stuller-Gigliione described Rakolta's eventual, but rather dubious, victory:

Advertisers such as major movie studios and many retail stores refused to buy commercials on the new FOX network Media brokers cited a bad connotation. Newsweek magazine featured a front page story on "Trash TV" Among FOX's greatest problems at the time of the controversy was limited viewer awareness. Many viewers simply did not know a fourth network existed Many FOX stations had weak UHF signals which were difficult to receive. Rakolta's complaints garnered substantial national publicity and this seemed to assist the network in solving many of its difficulties. After *Nightline*, *Good Morning America*, *Today* and most other national and local news shows featured the controversy over *Married with Children* viewer awareness rose dramatically. People purposely sought out their local FOX affiliate and *Married with Children* became a success (Stuller-Gigliione 2010: 1).

Despite FOX's subsequent rapid growth, it would still be many years before the network could host a show capable of putting up *Cosby*-like numbers. That said, *Married with Children* was a ringing success. By 1995, it was the longest-tenured situation comedy on television. Its decade-long run made it Illinois's longest-lasting sitcom, and the second-most durable of all the state's entries, after *ER*.

The success of *Married with Children*, in conjunction with the continuing popularity of *The Cosby Show*, *Growing Pains*, and *Who's the Boss?*, suggested that television audiences were

perhaps now primed for a show that would occupy the vacant middle ground between *Cosby* sincerity and *Married with Children* anarchy. It got precisely that in 1988 with *Roseanne*, a show that critic Ken Tucker called “the finest portrait of white working-class life in TV history” (Tucker 2005: 111).

Set in the fictional small town of Lanford, Illinois, *Roseanne* was the story of the working-class Conner family. Roseanne was the mom, and she held various odd jobs over the years—at a plastics factory, and as a waitress, a barmaid, and a beautician before opening her own sandwich shop. Husband Dan was a small-time drywall contractor who eventually operated a motorcycle shop. Their three children included stressed-out Becky, moody tomboy Darlene, and quiet D. J., who was constantly being dumped on by his sisters. Also seen frequently was Roseanne’s sister, Jackie, who worked with Roseanne at the plastics factory before becoming a cop.

Like many of its successful sitcom contemporaries—*The Cosby Show*, *Seinfeld*, and *Home Improvement*, to name a few—*Roseanne* was based on the stand-up routine of its star. Roseanne Barr had developed quite a following in the 1980s, having adopted the classic Phyllis Diller formula of a harried, underappreciated housewife. “My husband complained that he needed more space,” she would say, “so I locked him out” (Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman 1991: 80). Another typical Roseanne line—“I figure by the time my husband comes home at night, if those kids are still alive, I’ve done my job” (Butler 2010: 1). What made Barr different from Diller and other comics in the same vein is that her exasperation sometimes bordered on rage, as indicated by the following statement from a *New Yorker* interview:

I gave birth to ya and I can take ya out, too. I think that’s what makes me a bit different from other women. Because I’ll beat the

shit out of them, and not just verbally. I'm not opposed to violence. In fact, I think it's great. I think women should be more violent—kill more of their husbands (Stark 1997: 356).

When this material was transferred to the small screen, it was unlike anything viewers had seen before. Critics hailed the show as “ordinary, real, truthful, and resolutely non-urban, non-yuppie, and non-upscale” (Johnson 2008: 156). The cast, while not necessarily unattractive, was certainly not TV-pretty. Dan and Roseanne were overweight, overworked, and underpaid. They were always short of money, they didn't like their jobs, and they blew off steam by drinking beer, watching television, or bowling. Ken Tucker wrote that the show was “about the strains of marriage when two people work hard all day, about how difficult it is to pay attention to the emotional growth spurts and withdrawals of your children when you're preoccupied with thinking about how to grab some overtime money, about how love and fury constantly commingle under the roof of a too-small, messy house.” No other show, said Tucker, “made the effort to pay the bills so engrossing” (Tucker 2005: 140-141).

Viewers, without doubt, were engrossed. *Roseanne* became the second-most-watched show on television during its rookie season, a feat it would pull off two more times, and tied the venerable *Cosby Show* at the top of the Nielsen ratings in 1989-1990. *Roseanne* resided in the Nielsen top four for its first six years, and was in the top thirty for all but its ninth and final season. The show was a commercial and critical success, and something of a cultural revolution. A study by *Advertising Age* determined that Roseanne Barr had, in 1989, appeared on more magazine covers in a single year than anyone else in American history.

The primary reason for the initial success of *Roseanne* was, quite simply, because it was genuinely funny, but it is also hard to ignore that it came, like its more controversial working-

class counterpart, *Married with Children*, on the heels of a decade dedicated to upper-class hubris and upper-middle class egocentrism on shows like *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *L.A. Law*, and *thirtysomething*. “There was something refreshing,” wrote critic Steven D. Stark, “about a loud, studiously sloppy comedy whose lead was a woman 50 pounds overweight” (Stark 1997: 352). In addition to shaking up television’s caste system, *Roseanne* constantly rebelled against what had been a decade of slushy sitcom wholesomeness, pushing the limits of what was permissible on a mainstream comedy. Jackie had a baby out of wedlock. Leon, Roseanne’s boss, married another man. One episode dealt with the subject of masturbation, and another concerned daughter Becky’s desire for birth control. Probably the most famous (or infamous) was an episode in which Roseanne and Jackie visited a lesbian bar in Elgin, where Roseanne kissed a woman.

As mentioned, the most remarkable thing about *Roseanne* was that, despite angering some viewers with its caustic humor, it put up *Cosby*-type ratings. “Marriage stinks with a capital *suck*,” was a typical Roseanne observation (West and Bergund 2005: 9). When her kids left for school, she commented “Quick. They’re gone. Change the locks” (Butler 2010: 1). On one episode she jokingly offered up one of her kids in exchange for a new dishwasher, and on another, when one of her children asked why she was so mean, she replied, “Because I hate kids and I’m not your real Mom” (Stark 1997: 355). For Steven D. Stark, this was revolutionary. “Instead of venerating children, like virtually all other domestic sitcoms,” he wrote, “*Roseanne* good-humoredly violated the once-inviolable (Stark 1997: 355)

All of this was, of course, terribly out of character for a hit midwestern sitcom. *Roseanne* lacked the wholesomeness of *Happy Days* and *Laverne & Shirley*, the friendliness of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, the abundant familial love of *Family Ties*, and even the bittersweet familial

love of *One Day at a Time*. Without doubt, the most significant geographic legacy of *Roseanne* was its depiction of a small-town, midwestern family that was not afraid to take the gloves off or, for that matter, throw a few sucker punches.

That said, the Connors were not wholly dysfunctional. Deep down they loved one another and Dan Conner, in particular, upheld the midwestern tradition of being a loving, supportive dad, particular in his relationship with his moody daughter, Darlene. Ken Tucker singled out a scene in which Dan was comforting Darlene after she cut her finger by “telling her to ‘think about a pretty flower’—a touching leap of banal imagination for a blue-collar hero:”

If Dan would go to some lengths to avoid fixing a clogged sink or toilet, he never let down his family—and when he did, by, say, getting low-balled on a contracting-job bid, he always kept up appearances, such as his were, kidding the kids about their romances or fights with friends. I always noted that Dan knew the names of his kids’ friends, an infallible sign of a good father, I have noticed in real life. He’d waggle his enormous fanny as he bent over into the ‘fridge, looking for that last beer, knowing that it was best to take comfort in the small amusements of life to achieve larger happiness (Tucker 2005: 111).

While Dan upheld the midwestern tradition of the humble “blue-collar hero,” *Roseanne* (both Barr and Conner) continued to demolish regional stereotypes. The show was deliberate in depicting the small-town Midwest as a world that, while not chic and sophisticated, could still be witty and worldly. For Barr, this was not artistic license, but simply the result of an attempt to be realistic, as indicated in an interview with the *New York Times*:

I want to do a show that reflects how people really live. Telling the truth at any point [on TV] is really revolutionary When you tell the truth you don’t insult the audience’s intelligence I grew up with people in the Midwest and, in fact, they’re as hip as anyone else. In fact, you grow up with more minority people in

your neighborhoods in the Midwest than you do in L. A. or New York, because we were factory working-class people, generally. So, we grew up in the same neighborhoods. We're not so isolated. It's all kinds of colors of people in the Midwest. All that talking down to the audience stuff really drives me crazy (Johnson 2008: 156).

Although *Married with Children* and *Roseanne* represented a significant break in tone from the saccharine family sitcoms that otherwise characterized Chicago and much of the rest of the country, in the mid-1980s, they were still family sitcoms. The difference, for Illinois, was that sitcoms set primarily in a workplace or public space—shows like *Alice*, *Newhart*, *Cheers*, *Night Court*, *Designing Women*, and *Murphy Brown*—were comparatively rare in the state.

Four of Chicago's 1980s entries did focus on the workplace, but none of them were especially successful. The first was, if nothing else, an interesting television footnote. In September, 1984, ten years and three days before the blockbuster Chicago-based medical drama *ER* first aired, a Chicago-based medical sitcom called *E/R* made its debut. This show chronicled the antics of the emergency room staff and patients at (fictional) Clark Street Hospital. The central character was Dr. Howard Sheinfeld, a wisecracking general practitioner who moonlighted in the emergency room to cover alimony payments. Sheinfeld was played Elliot Gould, who originated the character of Dr. "Trapper" John McIntyre in the film version of *M*A*S*H*. The program also featured a young emergency room doctor played by George Clooney, who would later play another, slightly older, emergency room doctor on *ER*. The first *E/R*, however, could not measure up to either of these shows, and was cancelled after one season. Chicago's second 1980s workplace comedy came with an equally impressive pedigree. *Mary*, featuring Mary Tyler Moore, was the story of Mary Brenner, a divorced journalist who lost her job when the prestigious magazine she worked for went under. She then was forced to become a

consumer-advocate columnist for a trashy tabloid called *The Chicago Eagle*. Viewers did not take to Mary Brenner as they had to Mary Richards and Laura Petry, and the show lasted just four months. The 1989 sitcom *Have Faith*, which featured the antics of a group of nutty priests and their equally nutty flock at St. Catherine's Church in inner-city Chicago, did not fare any better, lasting just three months.

The most successful Chicago workplace comedy to debut in the 1980s was *Anything But Love*, a journalism comedy that, as its name suggested, contained a dash of romance. Marty Gold was a reporter for *Chicago Weekly* magazine. He was respected for his skill and toughness on the job, but his personal life was a mess. He met aspiring writer Hannah Miller on an airplane. The two hit it off, and he helped her land a job as a researcher for the magazine. The series simultaneously chronicled the slow but sure development of their romantic relationship together with the inner workings, and expectedly zany staff, of the newsroom at *Chicago Weekly*. *Anything But Love* debuted in the spring of 1989 and did exceptionally well, ranking tenth on the Nielsen charts. That success, however, was largely attributable to following *Roseanne* on ABC's Tuesday night schedule. When *Anything But Love* returned for its first full season that fall, the network inexplicably placed it behind the goofy teen comedy *Doogie Howser, M.D.* on Wednesday nights, and ratings plummeted. The show managed to survive until the summer of 1992, but its air time was sporadic, with ABC placing the show on hiatus five times during its fifty-six episode run. While poor management appears to have been the primary reason for *Anything But Love*'s demise, critic Noel Murray suggested that the show's struggles might have resulted from being just a little ahead of its time:

The mid-to-late-'90s were a golden age for TV in general and the sitcom in particular, made all the more special because it came after one of the medium's most fallow periods, when only the

occasional *St. Elsewhere* or *Cheers* offered relief from an unending tide of *Family Matters*. One of those rare signs of life was *Anything But Love*, a smart, genteel romantic comedy that . . . gave Richard Lewis and Jamie Lee Curtis a forum for their curiously complementary talents. It took Lewis's cuddly version of neurotic kvetching and Curtis's engaging take on the literate, lonely single gal to break a good show out of the kitsch-com box Still, it's clear now that Lewis and Curtis were straining against late-'80s sitcom strictures, trying to turn their show into a *Mad About You* or *Friends* just a few years too early (Murray 2007b: 1).

If Murray was correct in his assessment—that *Anything But Love* was a prototype for programs like *Mad About You* and *Friends*—then the show represented a rather ironic vanguard of the Chicago television landscape as it moved into the new decade. These were the very shows that most of the city's 1990s sitcom entries seemed intent on replicating. While some of Illinois's preeminent 1980s family sitcoms—*Married with Children*, *Roseanne*, and *Family Matters*—would carry on well into the next decade, most of Chicago's new sitcom entries would focus on characters who were young, single, urban professionals. Suburban settings and the nuclear family almost completely vanished. Twenty-three new Chicago-based situation comedies premiered in the 1990s, an increase of nearly fifty percent over the 1980s, but the collective track record of these new programs was miserable. While eight 1980's Chicago sitcoms lasted at least two full seasons—and some much longer than that—just three of the city's 1990s sitcom debuts would endure that long, and none would break into the Nielsen top thirty. For whatever reason, American audiences were more than willing to tune in and watch single yuppies grouse about life in New York, but not Chicago.

The first Chicago-based sitcom to debut in the 1990s was not actually a yuppie-com, but an extension of the working-class aesthetic perfected by *Married with Children* and *Roseanne*. 1991's *Top of the Heap* was, in fact, a spin-off of *Married with Children*, containing all of the

crassness of its parent program, but experiencing none of its success. The protagonist was Charlie Verducci, the superintendent of a Chicago tenement who, like Al Bundy, was always into one sleazy get-rich scheme or another. His latest was to have his son, Vinnie, move up in class by marrying rich. To that end, Charlie got Vinnie a job at the posh suburban Rolling Hills Country Club. *Top of the Heap* lasted just three months, but FOX attempted to resuscitate the show the following summer under the title *Vinnie & Bobby*. Charlie was gone, but Vinnie was still living in the same crummy apartment, this time with his friend—a freeloading misogynist named Bobby. This time around, Vinnie was trying to make good by working construction and attending night classes at Dick Butkus Community College, but the show disappeared after three months.

Most of Chicago's other young and single apartment dwellers of the 1990s were a bit better off, and considerably brighter, but most of their shows were not any more successful. As mentioned, the 1990s television landscape was awash with yuppies-hanging-out sitcoms, exemplified by *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, *Mad About You*, *Ellen*, *Caroline in the City*, *Suddenly Susan*, *The Single Guy*, and *Dharma & Greg*. So, no simple explanation exists for Chicago versions of this formula being unsuccessful. It is possible, however, that while viewers could accept Chicago as a land of nuclear families, be they functional or dysfunctional, or as the gritty urban quagmire of its police and medical dramas, they could not quite accept the city as one of young, trendy, professionals.

A second explanation for the lack of success among Chicago's yuppie sitcoms is that they were not very original. Most appeared to be put together from a box of spare sitcom parts. They typically featured a pair of pals, often thrust together by fate. They worked together or shared an apartment or both, and that apartment, as often as not, was across the street from Wrigley Field.

One roommate was stuffy and responsible, the other free-spirited and/or free-loading. Sometimes one was black and one white, sometimes they were brothers, and very often the free-loader had just been kicked out of his apartment by a vengeful girlfriend or ex-wife. When these Chicago yuppies were not spending time at the corner bar, they worked in the media industry, the sports industry, or were artists struggling for that big break.

The Building, which aired for five weeks in 1993, featured Bonnie Hunt as the stereotypical struggling actress. *Chicago Sons*, which aired for four months in 1997, was the story of the three Kulchak brothers, one an ambitious architect, and two freeloaders. When not chasing girls, they hung out at Murphy's Bar. *Between Brothers*, which ran on FOX for four months in 1997 and on UPN for eight months in 1999, was the story of four black roommates, two of them brothers, again all with distinct personalities. Again, when not chasing girls, they hung out at the Corner Pub. The sitcom *Buddies*, which aired for four weeks in 1996, mixed black and white roommates, both aspiring filmmakers. The sitcom *Guys Like Us*, which aired for four months of the 1998-1999 season, featured another pair of black and white roommates. The gimmick here, in a nod to *Urkel*, *Webster*, and *Punky Brewster*, was *Maestro*, a six-year-old brother of one roommate who moved in after their dad got a job in Venezuela. *Wild Oats*, which aired for four weeks in 1994, featured Brian, a photographer, and his buddy Brian, an unemployed freeloader. They hung out with friends Shelly and Liz at a bar called The Hangar, where they mainly talked about sex.

Four of Chicago's yuppie sitcoms of the 1990s featured single parents, but they were not far removed in spirit or formula from their childless counterparts. *Getting By*, which premiered in the spring of 1993 and returned in the fall for a full season, featured still another pair of roommates. Divorced Cathy and widowed Dolores were social workers, with two kids each, who

decided to save money by sharing a home in the near-west suburb of Oak Park. Cathy was cheerful and optimistic, while Dolores was a no-nonsense realist. Their kids learned to get along, while Dolores set out to teach her “goody two-shoes partner the ways of the ‘real’ world” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 532). *Second Half*, which aired the same season, was the story of John Palmaro, a sportswriter for *The Chicago Daily Post*, who had just been kicked out of the house by his wife. Slovenly, disorganized John barely managed to survive on his own, and could usually be found “slouched in his sparsely furnished apartment watching TV, surrounded by empty pizza cartons” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,209). Luckily, his sister Denise, the sensible one, lived just across the hall, which came in handy when John’s two young daughters visited him on weekends. *Home Court* aired during the 1995-1996 season and was the story of Sydney J. Solomon, a family court judge and single mother of four who was almost as tough at home as she was in the courtroom. *The Gregory Hines Show*, which aired during the 1997-1998 season, was the story of Ben Stevenson, a widower who was trying put his life back together after the death of his wife. Ben had a young son, Matty, and worked as an editor for a small publisher in Oak Park.

With all of these young, eligible professionals scurrying about Chicago, some were bound to meet up eventually, as they did on *For Your Love*. Also set in Oak Park, the story involved three couples in various stages of commitment. Dean, an architect and former NFL placekicker, and Sheri, a facialist, had been married for five years. The newlyweds were Mel, an attorney, and Malena, a psychiatrist, who were self-described “buppies” (black yuppies). Mel’s brother, Reggie, was a successful restaurateur who was trying to overcome his fear of commitment and take his relationship with divorcee Bobbi to the next level. Story lines revolved around the usual domestic tiffs and the characters’ struggles to build their careers. This yuppie

comedy appeared to be doomed to the same fate as its Chicago counterparts, being canned by NBC after three months in 1998, but was salvaged by the WB network the following fall. That the majority of the principal characters on *For Your Love* were black fit in with the WB's strategy of catering to minority audiences, and the show enjoyed a moderately successful four-year run on its new network.

Just as the 1990s brought a shift in sitcoms from nuclear families to yuppies, the decade also witnessed a significant increase in the number of workplace comedies. The first Chicago version was a homecoming for Bob Newhart. After two successful shows in the 1970s and 1980s, he returned in 1992 with another sitcom entitled *Bob*. This time around, Newhart played Bob McKay, who, after twenty years as an artist for Chicago's Schmitt Greeting Card Company, finally got an opportunity to fulfill his dream of creating a comic book. Whether it was a sign of the times, or simply Newhart wanting to try something new, McKay represented a distinct departure from the lovably low-key exasperation that had characterized the actor's other sitcom heroes. In this incarnation, according to Brooks and Marsh, Bob "had a temper, railed about the short-comings and faults of his co-workers and friends, and even threatened to microwave Otto, the family cat" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 158). While viewers had embraced such churlish behavior on *Roseanne* and *Married with Children*, they were not looking for the same from Bob Newhart. *Bob* was cancelled five weeks into its second season.

Five more Chicago workplace comedies made their debut in the 1990s, but only one survived its first season. In 1995, a decade before Dunder-Mifflin's Scranton branch hit the air, a Chicago-based sitcom called *The Office* made its debut. It focused on the relationships among secretaries and bosses at a packaging design firm, and lasted just six weeks. Bonnie Hunt returned to television the same year in the newsroom comedy, *The Bonnie Hunt Show*.

Attempting to channel the spirit of Mary Tyler Moore, Hunt played a “terminally nice, relentlessly naïve” Wisconsinite who moved to the big city to take a job as a television reporter (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 615). Unlike the relatively congenial atmosphere of WJM in Minneapolis, the environment of Chicago’s WBDR was hurried, intense, and competitive. Hunt’s second sitcom was only slightly more successful than her previous Chicago entry. Whereas *The Bonnie Hunt Show* lasted ten weeks, *The Building* ran for only five.

Chicago’s other 1990s workplace sitcoms reflected the increasingly diverse television landscape of the time, with all three featuring African-American leads. *Getting Personal*, which aired for seven months in 1998, starred Vivica A. Fox and Duane Martin as employees of a local commercial production firm. *Damon*, which aired for eight months the same year, featured comic Damon Wayans as a master-of-disguises undercover cop and fellow *In Living Color* veteran David Alan Grier as his bumbling older brother, a security guard who would have given anything to become a cop. The most successful of the trio was *The Steve Harvey Show*, which premiered in 1996 on the new WB network. Harvey played Steve Hightower, a former front man for a soul group called the High Tops. With his career in decline, Steve took a job teaching music and art at inner-city Booker T. Washington High School. Other school employees included Cedric Robinson, an out-of-shape gym coach; Regina Grier, Steve’s former classmate and the school’s usually sensible principal; and Lovita Jenkins, her boisterous secretary. Students included Romeo Santana, a slacker ladies’ man who always strolled into class late; Stanley “Bullethead” Kuznokci, a dimwitted yet devious teachers’ aide; Lydia, a pushy soon-to-be valedictorian; and Coretta Cox, a bulldozer of a girl who had the hots for Romeo. Episodes revolved around the students’ various coming-of-age scrapes, the professional and personal lives of the faculty, and the developing relationships between Steve and Victoria and between Cedric and Lovita.

The WB's somewhat lowly status prevented *The Steve Harvey Show* from achieving stellar ratings, but it managed to run more than five years, and was significant to the Chicago television landscape in a number of ways. It was the longest-running Chicago-based sitcom to debut in the 1990s; one of the longest-running Chicago-based programs to feature a predominantly black cast; the first successful sitcom in a number of years to take place in Chicago's inner city; and the only Chicago-based program in any genre to focus primarily on a school. *The Steve Harvey Show* never ranked above 125th on the Nielsen charts, but it was, for a time, television's highest-rated show in African-American households. Wendy Raquel Robinson, who played Regina Grier, said she believed the show was popular with black audiences "because the characters and situations are so easy to identify with. We try to keep it as real as possible," she added, "and people respect that and find humor in it as well" (*Jet* 1999: 62).

As with many popular black sitcoms, the show was not without its detractors. Critic Ray Richmond called it a "typically pandering comedy from the WB that takes a smart sitcom performer and magically transforms him into a buffoonish black stereotype." Richmond added that the show played "shamelessly off such black stereotypes as big-butt jokes and jive talk, a formula that the WB appears oddly to have adopted as its mandate" (Richmond 1996: 1). Steve Harvey, of course, could have responded by pointing to the fourteen NAACP Image Awards the show received during its run. He spoke about the show's image and appeal in a 1999 interview:

We always try to have, even though it's a comedy, a positive portrayal of ourselves on TV. I will not allow any stereotypical humor I don't allow my character to participate in any buffoonery. No slapstick The main characters on the show always portray a positive image of us as Black people Black people can identify with us. The principal of the school is stylish, bright and articulate. I think that's one of the main appeals. Then there's Steve who's Steve. I'm not going to deviate from who I am. (*Jet* 1999: 60-62).

The Steve Harvey Show ended its run midway through the 2001-2002, and, in a sense, represented the end of an era for the WB network. In 1996, when *Steve Harvey* made its debut, seven programs with mostly African-American casts ran on the network's fall schedule. In the fall of 2002, none did so.

Amid the avalanche of programs focusing on young, single, urban professionals, few Chicago-based sitcoms of the 1990s featured suburban settings, the nuclear family, or the working class. One short-lived example was *The Good Life*, a "rather pedestrian home-and-workplace comedy" about John Bowman, a good-natured, blue-collar guy (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 550). He lived in the suburbs with his wife and three kids and managed a loading dock for Honest Abe Security Products. *The Good Life* lasted less than four months in 1994.

Another 1990s program that partially embraced the family sitcom formula was the youth-oriented *Kenan & Kel*, sixty-one episodes of which were seen on cable television's Nickelodeon network from 1996 to 1999. Kenan was a goofy, chunky black teenager whose schemes caused endless grief for both his parents and for his hypertensive boss at Rigby's grocery store. Kenan's strict dad, Roger, was an air traffic controller. Sheryl was his savvy and somewhat more forgiving mom. The focus of the show, however, was always on the Abbot-and-Costello-like misadventures of Kenan and his sidekick, Kel.

Another Chicago-based kidcom, *Two of a Kind*, aired during the 1998-1999 season. This show starred the eleven-year-old Olsen twins of *Full House* fame, and featured the same sort of sugary, family-friendly misadventures that had become a staple of ABC's Friday night slate. Baseball fanatic Mary-Kate was tomboyish, while sister Ashley was straight-laced and studious.

Their lovable goofball dad Kevin was a widowed professor who had just hired one of his students, high-spirited Carrie, as a nanny. The whole gang lived, of course, in an apartment across the street from Wrigley Field.

The only Illinois-based sitcom of the 1990s not set in Chicago was *A League of Their Own*. Based on the hit film of the same name about the Rockford Peaches, a women's professional baseball team of the 1940s, the show continued the trend of having at least one failed Illinois period sitcom per decade. It lasted just three weeks in 1993.

Despite the generally lackluster performance of its 1990s entries, the blitz of Chicago-based comedies continued in the 2000s, with fifteen more sitcoms added in the first six seasons of the new decade. Ten of these programs continued the trend of focusing on young urban singles. Like their 1990s cohort, the plots and characters of these programs were, for the most part, interchangeable and forgettable. Emphasis was again placed on members of the marketing, finance, advertising, and media industries, with a handful of frustrated artists thrown in for good measure. Roommates were often a mismatch of the sensible and the slovenly, some of whom had just been thrown out of the house by their significant others. Obsessions involved either sex or sports, which they discussed at length at the corner bar, and, as usual, few of these shows managed to last a full season, making it appropriate that the title of one of the decade's earliest entries was *Cursed*.

Cursed was the story of Jack Nagle, who had everything going for him, at least at the start. He was charming and handsome, and had a successful career in marketing. Unfortunately for Jack, he upset the wrong woman on a blind date. She placed a curse on him, and everything began to unravel. The show lived up to its name in the ratings, and NBC pulled the show off the

air for retooling numerous times. It ultimately scattered seventeen episodes from October of 2000 to April of 2001 before finally being removed permanently. Other cursed yuppie sitcoms of the decade included *Then Came You*, the story of a recently divorced book editor who fell in love with a younger man, which aired for six weeks in 2000. *What About Joan?*, which aired for four months in 2001, was the story of a neurotic high school English teacher. Stories involved friendships with fellow teachers and her relationship with boyfriend Jake. *Andy Richter Controls the Universe*, which premiered in the spring of 2002 and aired for six months, was the story of an aspiring writer who toiled away at an enormous, impersonal corporation called Pickering Industries. He wrote technical manuals, dealt with his bizarre co-workers, and often let his vivid imagination run wild. The yuppie sitcom *Coupling*, succinctly summarized by Brooks and Marsh, was a show about “six young singles who hung out at a trendy Chicago bar and talked about sex” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 290). *Coupling* was based on a hit British sitcom of the same name, but the American version lost something in translation, and lasted just four weeks in 2003. *The Bad Girl's Guide* was the story of JJ Hayden, an executive at a Chicago advertising agency who, according to the author whose books inspired the series, was “a woman who was sassy, provocative, questioned authority and knew what she wanted in life and how to get it with style, confidence, and humor” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 98). JJ's roommate, Sarah, was, yes, the sensible one, but she was sometimes drawn in to JJ's bad-girl world. Almost certainly inspired by the wild success of New York's *Sex and the City*, *Bad Girl's Guide* lasted just eight weeks in 2005.

Happy Hour was the story of Henry Beckman, who had been kicked out of his apartment by a girlfriend, forcing him to move in with his friend Larry. The guys were complete opposites, of course, and hung out at Teddy's, a local bar. *The Loop*, which aired for two months in the

spring of 2006 and returned for another two months the following summer, was the story of Sam Sullivan, a young executive at Chicago-based Trans Alliance airline. Sensible Sam lived with his brother, Sully, a slacker, and they both hung out at a bar tended by their friend, Lizzy. *Pepper Dennis*, which aired for three months in the spring of 2006, was the story of the professional and personal life of a Chicago television reporter. At work, Pepper dealt with the typical array of allies and adversaries, while on the home front, confident Pepper had just gained a new roommate—her unconfident sister, Kathy.

The mind-numbing lack of originality that characterized most of the above programs was not lost on television critics. In his review of *What About Joan*, critic Andy Denhart identified the show's fundamental flaw, both in terms of formula and geography:

The situation in “What About Joan” isn't inherently funny or ripe with possibility; it's just a tired amalgam of a woman with a job and some friends and a boyfriend. The show doesn't use Joan's high school workplace for much more than another set on which to angle for a few laughs. Likewise, although the show is set and entirely filmed in Chicago . . . the city is hardly ever used except for a gratuitous El reference here and a painting of the Wrigley Building there (Denhart, 2001: 1).

Although Denhart's assessment of the show and, by extension, most of Chicago's recent sitcom entries, is certainly correct, he errs in thinking that stylistic originality is a vital ingredient in building a more successful Chicago sitcom. *Andy Richter Controls the Universe* was universally adored for its fresh, deadpan, and dead-on assessment of modern corporate life, with one critic calling it “one of the few truly great comedies on TV” (Goodman 2002: 1). Another declared that “most sitcoms aren't even remotely funny by comparison” (Chocano 2002: 1). Despite such accolades, *Andy Richter* was a ratings flop. No simple explanation exists for

why some shows succeed and others fail, but it is notable that the one yuppie sitcom of the 2000s to experience any degree of longevity was the one that, while not being stylistically groundbreaking, made the most of its backdrop. *My Boys* was thoroughly immersed in Chicago's idiosyncrasies. Perhaps all that viewers were looking for in a Chicago yuppie sitcom was a little more Chicago.

My Boys was the story of P. J. Franklin, a pretty blonde tomboy, a baseball fanatic, and a sports columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times*. She loved hanging out in bars, playing softball, and hosting a weekly poker game for her boys. These boys included P. J.'s married, henpecked brother, Andy; Bobby, a rival sportswriter for the *Chicago Tribune*; Kenny, who sold sports memorabilia; Mike, who worked for the Cubs; and Brendan, a disc jockey at a local rock station who crashed on P. J.'s couch whenever his girlfriend kicked him out. Such details—the obsession with sports, the propensity for hanging out in bars, and the freeloading apartment crasher—are hardly groundbreaking for a Chicago yuppie sitcom. *My Boys* even drew some comparisons to New York's *Sex and the City* for employing a narrative device in which the protagonist pecks away at her laptop while a voice-over monologue ponders matters relating both to the episode at hand and to her upcoming newspaper column. Beyond that, though, the two shows could not have been more different. Unlike her Manhattan counterpart, P. J. did not sip cosmopolitans in trendy clubs, but instead drank cheap beer in sports bars and pizza joints. She also opted for a t-shirt, jeans, and beat-up tennis shoes. Described by series creator Betsy Thomas as “anti-*Sex and the City*,” *My Boys* dispensed with cool sophistication and embraced a Chicago that was, in the words of one critic, an “ESPN-filled, deep-fried . . . beer-battered comfort zone” (Kipp 2008: 1). The show included frequent scenes at Wrigley Field and references to iconic Chicago establishments such as Ed Debevic's, Al's Beef, Leon's Famous Ribs,

The Hideout, and The Billy Goat Tavern. *My Boys* production designer Greg Grande described the sense of place that he and his team attempted to capture on the program:

Chicago is so unlike New York and Los Angeles in that it has this intimacy about it It's made up of real neighborhoods. There are lots of people walking around; everybody's just hanging out. Bars, restaurants, shops and neighbors are right outside your front door. Those layers of character and intimacy translate inside people's homes as well (Wunderlich 2007: 1).

For television critic Ted Cox, the geographic savvy of *My Boys* was not found in its production design, but in the demeanor of its characters. Among the cast, he singled out comedian and northwest Indiana native Jim Gaffigan, who played P. J.'s brother Andy "with a self-deprecating cynicism so familiar it seems to have been passed down from one generation of Chicagoans to the next with mother's milk" (Cox 2006: 40). Whatever the source of its charm, the show was the longest-running of the Chicago single yuppie sitcoms of the decade, from 2006 to 2010.

It is important to note that *My Boys* was one of the first original sitcoms to be produced for the cable outlet TBS, so its audience was smaller and its leash longer than it would have been on one of the major networks. No truly successful Chicago-based yuppie sitcom has yet appeared on any of the major networks, at least since *The Bob Newhart Show* left the air in 1978. In the 2000s, the city's sitcoms began to slowly return to the territory that had created so many hits in the 1980s. Family life was prominently featured in five of Chicago's sitcom entries in the 2000s, although the first had to split its time with the workplace.

Bonnie Hunt finally found a modicum of success in 2002 with her third go around on a local sitcom. *Life with Bonnie*, which ran for two full seasons, was the story of a frazzled but

friendly host of a local television talk show. At home was her doctor husband, Mark, and their three young children. Bonnie's work family included her obsessive producer, David, a hip piano player, Tony, and glib stagehands Marv and Holly. The most memorable moments of *Life with Bonnie* were ad-libbed interviews with such guest stars as David Duchovny, Tom Hanks, Carl Reiner, Robin Williams, and Jonathan Winters.

Two family comedies from the 2000s featured a heavy dose of ethnic flavor. *My Big Fat Greek Life* starred Nia Vardalos, and picked up where her sleeper hit theatrical film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* had left off. Nia had just married husband Thomas, a WASPish English teacher who was writing his dissertation. Most of the episodes revolved around the newlyweds trying to stave off waves of advice from her big, intrusive Greek family. The program never managed to replicate the movie's success, and lasted just eight weeks in 2003. The sitcom *Freddie*, which aired during the 2005-2006 season, was formulaic in having intrusive relatives and a suddenly crowded house, but it had the distinction of being the first Chicago program to focus on a Latino family. Freddie, a successful restaurateur and ladies' man, saw his dream life end when his apartment was invaded by four females. These included his sister Sophia and niece Zoey, who moved in after Sophia's divorce; sister-in-law Allison, who moved in after the death of Freddie's brother; and Freddie's fearsome grandmother. Things got more crowded still when Freddie's (what else?) freeloading buddy Chris moved in.

Just two of the numerous Chicago-based sitcoms of the 2000s were conventional sitcoms about a nuclear family living in the suburbs, but they were among the most successful. The Jim Belushi comedy *According to Jim*, which premiered in 2001, and its counterpart, *Still Standing*, which debuted the following year, were completely gimmick-free. In fact, they were so formulaic as to be almost indistinguishable from one another. Brooks and Marsh described

According to Jim as “another one of those sunny family sitcoms in which a lovable lug was married to a beautiful and much smarter wife”—a description that could just as easily have been applied to *Still Standing* (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 10). The title character of *According to Jim* was a self-absorbed construction contractor who lived in a charming suburban home with his wife and three kids. Bill of *Still Standing* was similarly situated.

Both *According to Jim* and *Still Standing* could easily be written off as sad anachronisms adrift in a sea of far more trendy programs about young, urban professionals had they not been so popular. *According to Jim* lasted eight years, making it Illinois’s longest-running sitcom since *Family Matters*. *Still Standing* aired for four years, reaching the nineteenth spot in the Nielsen ratings its second season—the highest-rated Illinois-based sitcom since *Roseanne*. Nevertheless, critics crucified both shows, and were particularly hard on *According to Jim*. *USA Today* argued that the show “is the kind of sitcom that makes people hate sitcoms,” while *The Washington Post* called it “an inexorably execrable” sitcom, and *Entertainment Weekly* facetiously described it as “another worthy addition to the Belushi canon” (Rice 2005: 1). These complaints have some merit, for *According to Jim* was hardly groundbreaking comedy. The following exchange was typical for the show:

JIM: What do I need to get in shape for? I’m in great shape.

CHERYL: Oh, what shape is that . . . a circle? (Rice 2005: 1).

The central geographic message of *Still Standing* and *According to Jim* was as simple as the shows’ dialogue. Both programs depicted the Chicago suburbs as friendly, pleasant, and happy places. “We’re not reinventing the wheel here,” said Jim Belushi. “We’re doing a straight-up family show at a time people want to see a family show” (Rice 2005: 1). Perhaps the most

important element of these programs was found not in the geography of their setting, but in that of their audiences. *According to Jim* was always far more popular in the central United States than on the coasts—its number one market was Louisville, Kentucky—and the show’s producers appeared to have had more than a passing interest in that fact. After years when the conventional wisdom of television suggested that all shows should cater to the largest markets and trendiest audiences, *According to Jim* focused instead on the rest of the country. “We look at the comedy from the prism of our own eyes, when we should be looking at it from the prism of the country,” said producer Mark Pedowitz. ABC’s president of primetime entertainment, Stephen McPherson, agreed, and supported his argument with a little-known geographic fact—“There are a lot of people between L.A. and New York” (Rice 2005: 1).

MICHIGAN

Michigan’s primetime television landscape got an early, if somewhat brief, start, courtesy of a legendary children’s comic. *Soupy’s On*, featuring Soupy Sales, began as a local program in Detroit in 1953. *Soupy Sales* became the state’s first national primetime television entry in 1955, airing each week night from 7:00 to 7:15 on ABC as a summer replacement for Chicago’s *Kukla, Fran & Ollie*. Soupy continued to produce shows in Detroit for the network’s Saturday afternoon line-up until 1961. After that, production alternated between New York and Hollywood, and Soupy continued to entertain children until 1979.

Michigan was all but absent from the television landscape from the 1950s through the 1980s, placing only four more entries, none of which lasted for more than four months. Then, following the debut of its most successful entry, *Home Improvement*, a flurry of eleven

Michigan-based shows appeared between 1991 and 2006. Michigan's television landscape has had a strong urban bias, particularly toward its largest city. Eleven of Michigan's fourteen post-Soupy entries have been set in the Detroit area, with one in Grand Rapids, one in Flint, and another in an unnamed small city. Just one has had a rural setting, and that show was at an interstate truck stop. Most, but not all, of Michigan's entries have had a relatively sunny outlook, with the working-class or middle class family sitcom being the most common genre represented.

The Fitzpatricks, which aired for just over three months during the 1977-1978 season, was something of a Rust Belt version of *The Waltons*. It was the story of a blue-collar, Irish Catholic family living in Flint. Mike Fitzpatrick, a steelworker, and wife Maggie, a waitress, had four children and a grizzled old dog named Detroit. Little life lessons abounded as Mike and Maggie struggled to make ends meet and the kids went through the usual coming-of-age tribulations. Taking place at the opposite end of the socio-economic spectrum, but featuring a far gloomier tone, was the boardroom drama *Wheels*. This was the story of National Motors, a Detroit-based auto company trying to stay afloat in the cutthroat industry during the 1960s. *Wheels* was based on a successful Alex Hailey novel that NBC had turned into an equally successful miniseries, but the regular series was a flop, lasting just three weeks in 1979. Michigan's first sitcom, *Joe's World*, which debuted in 1979, was in some ways a comedy version of *The Fitzpatricks*. The world in question was that of Joe Wabash, a working-stiff house painter from Detroit. The show divided its time between his professional life with a typically zany sitcom crew and his home, where he and wife Katie had five children. *Joe's World* lasted just four months, but its central theme—that of a traditional, blue-collar, man's man struggling to adapt to a changing world—would be a prominent theme in many subsequent Michigan sitcoms, particularly in its next, and most successful, entry.

When *Joe's World* left the air in the spring of 1980, Michigan's television landscape disappeared for more than a decade, but when it re-emerged, it did so with one of the biggest hits of the 1990s. *Home Improvement*, which premiered in 1991, was based on the popular stand-up comedy routines of series star Tim Allen. Allen played Tim "The Tool Man" Taylor, the host of *Tool Time*, a local Detroit TV show on which Tim and his sidekick, the bearded, flannel-wearing, and preposterously earnest Al Borland, dispensed advice on home maintenance and auto repair. *Tool Time* gave the enthusiastic, yet very accident-prone Tim an opportunity to showcase the latest products from the show's sponsor, Binford Tools, and these demonstrations ended, as often as not, with disastrous results. Tim shared a pleasant suburban home with his wife, Jill, and their three young boys, Brad, Randy, and Mark. Jill was pursuing a master's degree in psychology, which often came in handy, as Tim's efforts at self-improvement were often as disastrous as his tool adventures. Also "seen" was Wilson, Tim's next door neighbor, who was always offering sage advice. Although he appeared in nearly every episode, Tim and the viewers never got a glimpse of Wilson's entire face.

Home Improvement was an enormous success. It finished its rookie season ranked fourth on the Nielsen charts, and was in the top three for each of the next seasons. Such ratings are roughly equivalent to those of other sitcom juggernauts like *The Cosby Show*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, and *Roseanne*, but few critics seemed to notice. Television historian Steven D. Stark noted that *Seinfeld*, which *Home Improvement* beat senseless in the ratings when the two went head-to-head in 1992, garnered volumes of praise. *Home Improvement* was, by comparison, "perhaps the quietest Number 1 in TV history, eliciting few critical comments and winning little more than a slew of (what else?) People's Choice awards, in which the public does the voting" (Stark 1997: 379).

Although *Home Improvement* was a truly funny show with a very likable lead character, it was hardly groundbreaking television. Plots for a typical episode were as old as the medium itself—a botched romantic dinner, a camping trip gone awry, a forgotten birthday, mishaps at Christmas, parents enduring a school play, or swapping a live pet for a dead one. A recurring theme, at least in early episodes, was Tim’s obsession with adding more power to every household appliance he encountered, the very thought of which caused him to grunt like a gorilla. The result, of course, was always an elaborate sight gag—Tim attempts to turbocharge the dishwasher and the kitchen counter explodes.

An important factor in *Home Improvement*’s runaway success was the relationship between Tim and Jill. The family sitcom world, particularly in recent years, has been populated primarily by husbands who were either self-absorbed jerks or bumbling idiots, married to wives who were either exasperated care-takers or screeching harpies, leaving the viewer to wonder why on earth the two ever married. Tim and Jill, on the other hand, seemed perfect for one another.

Like many television husbands, Tim could not possibly understand why Jill found things like opera and dance interesting, but unlike many television husbands, he tried. A recurring theme on *Home Improvement* was Tim’s frequent, and usually disastrous, attempts to impress his wife. Likewise, Jill, who found Tim’s antics a bit frustrating at times, did her level best to be understanding. These exercises in politeness and understanding might be the show’s most quintessentially midwestern trait. Although she did not put it down to geography, critic Nikki Tranter acknowledged that *Home Improvement*’s married couple stood in stark contrast to the New York couple of the equally popular *Everybody Loves Raymond*:

The love shared by Tim and Jill and the awareness and understanding of both characters (especially Jill towards Tim) is

exhilarating to see in light of a show like *Raymond* Ray is always lying his way out of watching the kids or attending his wife Deb's book club. Though Tim also considers Jill's interests For Women Only, the difference between the two couples is Jill's relentless understanding of her husband's obsessions. If Deb rarely goes a scene without referring to her husband's inadequacy as a father or a husband, Jill remains resilient and supportive. Tim's destruction of the dishwasher in *Home Improvement*'s pilot, for example, perfectly demonstrates her patience. "I'll get the broom," she sighs It's up to Tim to learn his lesson in his own way—Jill doesn't snipe, but only waits for his apology, which he makes without conniving on her part. When Tim's enthusiasm crosses into insensitivity . . . she makes clear her disapproval. When he brings a radio to dinner to hear the Pistons game, though, she laughs off his selfishness No matter how infuriating Tim's perpetual childishness might be, Jill assumes he means well (Tranter 2005a: 1).

Whether or not the reasons for the differences between midwesterners Tim and Jill and New Yorkers Ray and Deb is really a matter of geography, there is no denying the fact that Tim Taylor was a midwestern archetype, "low-key, predictable, intelligent but not particularly well-educated, with a little dirt under his fingernails" (Stark 1997: 383). Tim was hardworking and successful, but not an overly-ambitious workaholic. Nikki Tranter characterized him as a man who relished his place in the home as "breadwinner and fix-it man," adding that "not only does he go out of his way to make life easy as can be for Jill and the kids, he's receptive to just about any of his family's desires" (Tranter 2005a: 1).

To be sure, *Home Improvement*'s scripts took occasional jabs at Tim's lack of sophistication. A common gag was his mangling of Wilson's worldly words. When Wilson noted that the "Koran honors its jesters," Tim replied, "Yeah, those Koreans know what's funny." On another episode, when Tim was struggling with the death of an old friend, Wilson listed some of the ways that different cultures express grief:

In parts of Mexico, the bereaved decorate the grave with smiling puppets, and they eat chocolate coffins. And on the Solomon Islands, they hang the dead man's arms on his hut. And in feudal Japan, when a Lord died, the Ronin samurai would show their loyalty by disemboweling themselves.

When Tim tried to relay this same information to Jill, it came out as, “In some cultures they put chocolate puppets in coffins and on the Chinoogie Islands or someplace, they hang arms on aluminum siding. And Ronnie the Samurai—you don’t wanna know what he does” (Tranter 2006: 1).

Despite the digs at Tim’s cultural illiteracy, *Home Improvement* stands as one of television’s most thoroughly appealing depictions of life in the modern Midwest. The show was free of cynicism, yet had the ring of truth, as evidenced by a 1990s *TV Guide* poll in which young Americans voted Tim and Jill the television parents most similar to their own. *Home Improvement* was, in the words of critic Chuck Eddy, a return to the “semi-extinct idea of a nuclear family whose members actually like each other” (Stark 1997: 383).

Home Improvement paved the way for seven more Michigan-based sitcoms. None of them came anywhere near matching the success of their predecessor, but two—1992’s *Martin* and 1994’s *Sister Sister*—enjoyed relatively long runs. On *Martin*, another comedian brought the themes of his stand-up act to the small screen. Martin Lawrence played Martin Payne, an abrasive, somewhat misogynistic talk show host on Detroit radio station WZUP. In a gimmick reminiscent of the stand-up acts on *Seinfeld*, episodes of *Martin* involved Payne discussing topics on the radio that somehow related to the theme of that particular episode. At the end of the second season, WZUP was sold, its format changed to country music, and Martin was fired. He eventually got a job as a producer, and then host, of a local TV talk show, *Word on the Street*.

Martin was one of a number of 1990s FOX programs that featured predominantly black casts. The show rarely took hard looks at issues of race and racism, but, to be fair, *Martin* didn't really take hard looks at anything, as noted by critic Jamie S. Rich:

Structurally, *Martin* didn't break any new ground. A young professional in the city hangs out with his friends and his girlfriend and gets into trouble—that pretty much sums up the premise for any number of TV comedies. Individual plots weren't overly creative, either, falling back on standard situation comedy lines like a group of friends all winning a car and having to share it, a man getting sick and acting like a baby, and even putting on a variety show (Rich 2007: 1).

When *Martin* referenced racial issues, it did so with sly, funny references to serious matters. In one episode, for example, a fat white plumber choked on some food while working in Martin's bathroom. After trying unsuccessfully to resuscitate the man with a plunger, Martin tried calling 911 and, to ensure a rapid response, imitated the voice of a white man. The emergency dispatcher was not convinced. Before help could be sent, Martin would have to pass a racially biased pop culture quiz to prove that he was, indeed, Caucasian. Finally, believing the plumber to be dead, Martin and his friends proposed a variety of outlandish schemes to get the corpse out of the apartment, knowing full well that it was not good for a black man to have a dead white man found in his apartment.

Martin was deeply rooted in black popular culture, and featured frequent appearances by African-American television and comedy icons, such as Garrett Morris, Sherman Hemsley, Chris Rock, and Will Smith. As a broad comedy, it could appeal to anyone, but it was particularly popular with black viewers. In a sense, *Martin* was to African-American culture what *Seinfeld* was to the New York scene—a total immersion in the culture was not necessary to enjoy the

program, but an appreciation for it certainly helped. That fact, according to Rich, is what made the show unique:

A lot of the humor in *Martin* is race specific, but only in that FOX was letting Lawrence be true to the culture without having to cater to white audiences. This means references to African American pop icons and leaders, as well as more community-specific jokes. It was a smart move, as it gave *Martin* a fresh pizzazz most network sitcoms were lacking back then (Rich 2007: 1).

While *Martin* occasionally, and deliberately, crossed the boundaries of good taste, *Sister, Sister* was a gentle, cheery family sitcom, typical of the ABC Friday night line-up where it made its debut. The title twins were Tia and Tamera, who accidentally discovered one another fourteen years after they were separated at birth. The girls vowed never to be separated again, which proved problematic for their parents. Working class Lisa, a loud, pushy seamstress, had raised Tia in inner-city Detroit, while subdued Ray, a black yuppie who owned a limousine service, had raised Tamera in an affluent suburb. The family was reunited, and most of the episodes involved the girls' sitcom misadventures, coming-of-age tales, and the unlikely rekindling of Lisa and Ray's romance.

The runs of *Martin* and *Sister, Sister* were typical of many 1990s sitcoms with African-American casts. Neither had impressive ratings, but both had long runs. As mentioned, upstart networks like FOX, UPN, and the WB often catered to African-American viewers in order to establish a core audience. *Martin* never cracked the Nielsen top thirty, but remained on the air for five years. *Sister, Sister* initially struggled on ABC. The network changed the show's time slot five times during its first season, and ultimately cancelled it after little more than a year on the air. The show was then picked up by the WB network, where it aired for four seasons. Like

Martin, Sister, Sister never cracked the Nielsen top thirty, but, then, neither did any other WB program.

The state's other post-*Home Improvement* sitcom entries did not fare well, but all contained elements similar to their more successful brethren. *Rhythm & Blues*, which appeared in 1992, was, like *Martin*, set at a black Detroit radio station. A hip new disc jockey named Bobby Soul had been hired, sight unseen, by the station's owner, Veronica Washington. The twist was that Bobby was white, and when Veronica discovered that, she fired him. To her chagrin, both the station's staff and listeners came to Bobby's defense, and she was forced to bring him back. *Rhythm & Blues*'s audience was not as enthusiastic as WBLZ's, and the show was off the air in a month.

Thunder Alley premiered in 1994 and ran for a year and half, and *Soul Man* lasted for the duration of the 1997-1998 season. Both bore a resemblance to *Home Improvement*, starring television icons as easy-going, earthy gearheads trying to domesticate themselves for the sake of their families. *Thunder Alley* featured Ed Asner as Gil Jones, a widowed former stock-car driver who now operated a prosperous Detroit auto shop. Gil's world was turned upside down when his daughter, Bobbi, got a divorce and moved in along with her three kids. *Soul Man* featured Dan Aykroyd as widower Mike Weber, a man who had forsaken his wild, hell-raising youth to become an Episcopal priest in suburban Detroit. Although he kept his motorcycle and leather jacket, he was now doing his best to become a role model for his parishioners and children.

Run of the House, which premiered in 2003 and lasted six months, was a standard-issue family sitcom, although it did take the novel approach of dispensing with the parents. It was the story of the Franklin family of Grand Rapids, whose parents had moved to Arizona due to the

father's health problems. The three older Franklin kids—Kurt, Chris, and Sally—were all in their twenties, while the youngest, Brooke, was fifteen. They stayed in Michigan, where they had standard sitcom misadventures, all the while disagreeing on how to raise Brooke, who appeared to the most mature one in the lot.

Whether they were well-crafted and enduring hits such as *Home Improvement* and *Martin* or warmed-over bits of trifle like *Run of the House*, Michigan's entries of the 1990s and 2000s all exude a strong sense of midwestern optimism. Unlike the characters from the earlier *Joe's World* and *The Fitzpatricks*, these more recent entries appear to have escaped the economic calamity that has befallen the state. Featuring numerous employees of the local television and radio industries, several business owners, and a host of college students, everybody appeared financially secure. And unlike many other major American cities depicted on television, Detroit, ironically, is depicted as largely free of crime, unemployment, and poverty.

The sitcom *Muddling Through*, the cartoon *God, the Devil, and Bob*, and the drama *Blade* offered somewhat less buoyant views of Michigan life. *Muddling Through* was the story of Connie Drego, who had recently been released from prison for shooting her two-timing husband, Sonny. As the series began, Connie went back to work at Drego's Oasis, her family's combination diner/motel/truck stop somewhere in rural Michigan. Once home, Connie had to deal with resentful daughters, a sleazy ex-husband, and Drego's mostly disreputable clientele. *Muddling Through* aired as a summer replacement on CBS in 1994, and the network never gave the show a shot on the fall schedule.

NBC had higher hopes for *God, the Devil, and Bob*, giving it a shot in the plum post-*Friends* time slot in the spring of 2000. As the show began, God and the Devil were meeting for

a couple of beers in a seedy Detroit bar, and they had just made a bet. The Devil would select one man, whom God would put through a series of tests. If he proved to be a righteous man, God would spare humanity. If not, God would scrap creation and start over again. The Devil, of course, selected the biggest screw-up he could find. Enter Bob, a man who drank too much, loved pornography, went to strip clubs with his fellow auto workers, and who was a generally lackluster husband and father. Bob was hardly Tim Taylor, but he did resemble a pair of classic midwestern television characters, mixing the habits of Al Bundy from *Married with Children* with the demeanor of Bob Hartley from *The Bob Newhart Show*.

In the first episode, Bob was encouraged to connect with his gloomy daughter Megan, so he took her to her favorite place, the shopping mall, for a heart-to-heart conversation:

MEGAN: I lied about getting my period last year. All my friends had theirs and I felt like a little girl Pretty lame, huh?

BOB: Well, girls mature at different ages, there's no right age. There's a whole range from, uh, well . . .

MEGAN: Ten?

BOB: From ten . . . all the way to . . .

MEGAN: Sixteen.

BOB: Sixteen Okay?

MEGAN: No, I wanna be like all my friends.

BOB: Yeah. Well, I guess we all do (Tranter 2005b).

In that brief exchange, Bob established himself as one of television's standard-issue midwestern dads. He wanted to help his daughter, but was clearly uncomfortable with any sort of emotional intensity, particularly when it involved the topic at hand. So, he offered the kind of emotional

support that midwestern television fathers offer best—commiseration. Critics loved *God, the Devil, and Bob*, but some religious groups cried blasphemy. Supporters pointed out that the show was not a critique of Christianity, but rather a modern twist on the Biblical story of Job. Nevertheless, a number of affiliates refused to air the show, and NBC caved, pulling the show in less than a month.

Perhaps the darkest of all of Michigan's entries was the ultraviolent action drama *Blade*, which premiered on cable's Spike TV in 2006. Blade was an intimidating black vampire who had learned to control his thirst for blood by injecting himself with an artificial serum. Now a force for good, and a deadly one at that, Blade made it his mission to seek out and destroy evil vampires, prowling "the dark, mean streets of Detroit looking for evidence of the latest vampire schemes to ravage the city" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 153). Despite being based on a popular movie series of the same name, television's *Blade* drew a meager audience, even for cable, and was cancelled after three months.

A similar fate befell NBC's 1999 entry *Freaks and Geeks*, which told the story of two groups of students at a Michigan high school in 1980. *Freaks and Geeks* was a difficult show to classify. While the show was primarily a comedy, its hour-long format, lack of canned laughter, and often serious undertones placed it outside the world of conventional sitcoms. It was also geographically ambiguous. The town in which the show was set was never named or even identified by general location. The very first lines in the script for *Freaks and Geeks*'s pilot episode, however, established the show as somehow thoroughly midwestern:

William McKinley High School: Michigan. We are on the football field of a medium-sized high school in a semi-rural part of Michigan. Flatlands. Roads stretch into subdivisions one way and green fields the other (Cohen 2004: 7).

From there, viewers were introduced to the two title groups. What distinguished freaks from the geeks was their place in the school's social hierarchy. The freaks were rebels. They slacked off, drank, smoked pot, and willfully rejected cultural conventions. Geeks, on the other hand, were at the bottom of the student pecking order whether they liked it or not. They were scrawny, nerdy, and bullied. The lead geek was freshman Sam Weir, who worshipped cheerleader Cindy Sanders almost as much as he did comedian Steve Martin, whose poster adorned his bedroom wall. Sam's buddies included wisecracking Neal Schweiber, a borscht-belt comedian in a fourteen-year-old's body, and spaced-out Bill Haverchuck, who wore braces and coke-bottle glasses. The freaks included burnout Daniel Desario, smartass Ken Miller, good-hearted Nick Andropolis, and sharp-tongued Kim Kelly. At the heart of the show was Sam's older sister, Lindsay, herself a geek and champion "mathlete," who increasingly found herself drawn into the circle of freaks.

Freaks and Geeks didn't take home many industry awards, and was a ratings flop, lasting just five months. It has, however, become a cult classic in its DVD afterlife, largely due to the subsequent popularity of stars James Franco, Seth Rogen, and Jason Segal, and the later theatrical film success of series creator Judd Apatow. Critics adored the show, applauding the realism of its characters, who were neither one-dimensional nor unbelievably complex, and for capturing the spirit of the times. In the words of critic Fred Kovey, *Freaks and Geeks* was a "subtle and sublimely amusing look at life in the eighties that downplays the kitsch and instead offers a realistic look at high school in the Reagan years" (Kovey 2010b: 1).

Just as *Freaks and Geeks* captured the *zeitgeist* of the 1980s without resorting to cartoonish nostalgia, it captured the *ortgeist* of the small-town Midwest without resorting to

worn regional stereotypes. The young characters on the show were smart and worldly, as tuned into youth pop culture and counterculture as any of their coastal, big-city counterparts. That said, the viewer got the sense that all of the kids (Lindsay in particular) felt the limitations of life in their little hometown. The more buffoonish midwestern stereotypes were reserved for the show's adults, especially for Sam and Lindsay's father, Harold Weir. A modest, straight-laced owner of a sporting-goods store, Harold was a loving father and a good man, but also hell-bent on keeping Sam and Lindsay on a tight leash. When Lindsay brought one of the freaks home, Harold was beside himself, later exclaiming to his wife, "Next thing you know she'll be Patty Hearst! She'll have a gun to our heads!" (Tucker 2005: 128). For Fred Kovey, the omnipresence of parents was the key difference between the lives of these small-town Michigan teenagers and those of their Southern California counterparts:

Unlike most programs aimed hard at a teenage audience, *Freaks and Geeks* makes parents visible: they are everywhere. Just when the kids are about to have the type of improbable adventures that litter *Popular* (as they did *Beverly Hills 90210* before it went all *Melrose Place*), an authority figure steps in and ruins the fun Sounds like high school in real life—frustrating and a little bit boring. Meanwhile, the gang on *Popular* is off to a show and then back across town to hang out in a friend's mansion where mom and dad never seem to be home. Their only limits are the ones they impose on themselves, that is, they live the teenage fantasy. No wonder teenagers who love *Popular* find *Freaks and Geeks* unappealing (Kovey 2010c: 1).

WISCONSIN

If the Midwest of the popular imagination can be characterized as a region that awakens nostalgia for a time when hard-working, guileless, and upright citizens lived relatively uneventful lives in small towns and modest cities, then no state's television landscape is more

thoroughly midwestern than that of Wisconsin. Of the state's thirteen entries, only three have been set in Milwaukee, the state's metropolitan area. Of those, two were set in the 1950s, and they could hardly be considered urbane. Wisconsin's ten remaining entries took place elsewhere, either in midsized cities such as Racine and Madison, small towns like Port Washington and Rome, or in fictional locales with such quaint names as Waterford Falls and Point Place. With few exceptions, television's Wisconsinites are not detectives, surgeons, artists, entertainers, business magnates, or high-powered attorneys. They work in hardware stores, breweries, factories, and beauty shops, or as mechanics, contractors, teachers, and nurses. Nearly all of the state's entries have been sitcoms, sparing Wisconsin the grittiness of programs like *ER*, the pettiness and greed of programs like *Dallas*, and, with the exception of its lone dramatic entry, the piles of corpses from programs such as the *CSI* franchise. Of course, comedies can be as caustic as any drama, but not in Wisconsin. The state's sitcoms have tended to be devoid of the snarky attitude that characterized *Seinfeld* and *Murphy Brown*, the cynicism of *All in the Family* or *Roseanne*, and the indelicacies of shows like *Three's Company* or *Night Court*. Television's Wisconsinites are decent, respectable, and genuine, and tend to demonstrate a positive outlook. It is fitting that the state's most successful show was called *Happy Days*.

Originally the story of a group of high school kids living in Milwaukee, *Happy Days* began as a half-hearted attempt on the part of ABC to cash in on the nostalgia for the 1950s that swept through America in the 1970s. *Happy Days* debuted in January of 1974 as a midseason replacement for the struggling *Temperatures Rising*. To the network's surprise, *Happy Days* evolved into a smash hit. It was television's most-watched show during the 1976-1977 season, spent three years in the Nielsen top three, and all but two of its eleven seasons in the top thirty.

The show's initial success was aided by the presence of Ron Howard, who had endeared himself to American audiences as Opie Taylor on *The Andy Griffith Show*, and as star of the 1973 theatrical blockbuster *American Graffiti*, which had played no small part in sparking the nostalgia craze. Howard played Richie Cunningham, a character he originated in a skit called "Love and Happy Days" on the anthology series *Love, American Style*. Also seen on the series were Richie's pals, Ralph Malph and Warren "Potsie" Weber, and the Cunningham family, headed by dad, Howard, who operated Cunningham Hardware, and mom, Marion. Richie had an older brother, who was eventually written out of the series, and a kid sister, Joanie. While not attending Jefferson High, Richie, Potsie, and Ralph hung out at Arnold's Drive-in, sipping malts and listening to a jukebox filled with the records of Fats Domino, Connie Francis, Bill Haley, Johnnie Ray, and Kay Starr.

Whenever Richie found himself in a dilemma—which was often—he would turn to his parents or, just as frequently, Arthur Fonzarelli, for advice. Fonzarelli, also known as "Fonzie" or "The Fonz," was the supercool and streetwise dropout who could make all the girls in Milwaukee wilt. He rode a motorcycle, wore a leather jacket, and held court at Arnold's, where the men's room was known as his "office." The Fonz, played by Henry Winkler, was initially a minor character. He had been added to the cast by series creator Garry Marshall to "lessen the show's middle-American gooeyness," but when the character quickly became a television sensation, *Happy Days* increasingly focused on the close friendship of the two opposites—straight-laced Richie and rebellious Fonzie (Lewis and Stempel 1996: 254).

Happy Days regularly, almost relentlessly, reinforced the notion that the Midwest was a safe, clean, morally righteous region. To be fair, the show, particularly in its early years, was not as pure as the driven snow. Although the details were always muted, evidence abounded that

Fonzie was not a sexual novice. Richie was, of course, and much of the comedy revolved around his attempts to deal with roiling hormones. He went to a stag party, visited a strip club, and, in a rare show of rebellion, mounted an organized resistance movement against a plan to build a freeway through the local make-out spot, Inspiration Point. And when Howard decided to build a bomb shelter, Richie pondered not the threat of a nuclear holocaust, but what a great place it would be to take a girl. Still, the show was fairly tame, presenting, in the words of television historian Lisa Anne Lewis, a “saccharine perspective on American youth culture of the 1950s:”

With rock and roll confined to the jukebox of Al’s Diner, the kids worried over first loves, homecoming parades, and the occasional innocuous rumble. The Cunninghams represented the middle class family values of the era. Minor skirmishes erupted between parents and children, but dinner together was never missed There was no inkling of the “generation gap” discourse which was beginning to differentiate youth from their parents in the 1950s, and which was still active in the mid-1970s when the show was created (Lewis 2010: 1).

A cast change on *Happy Days* led to a common event on midwestern television shows, when the character with the most promise is forced to leave their hometown to fulfill his or her ambitions. From the beginning, wrote Lewis, the audience knew that Richie would “someday outgrow Milwaukee” and that “Fonzie had fewer choices, and was the type to stay behind” (Lewis 2010: 1). That is precisely what happened. When Ron Howard left *Happy Days* at the end of the show’s seventh season, his character was written out as having joined the army after graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. *Happy Days* was now Fonzie’s show, but remained strongly connected to popular notions about its setting. Although Fonzie was rebellious and extremely cool—two traits that don’t exactly conform to regional stereotypes—he was still, in many ways, a midwestern archetype. Despite his defiant attitude, the Fonz was

always a font of moral righteousness. In many ways, his character paralleled that of Mr. Cunningham, as he was “as likely to dispense careful, family-oriented wisdom, as to suggest rebellion of the slightest sort” (Lewis 2010: 1). Fonzie also reflected midwestern industriousness and upward mobility. As the seasons passed, he went to night school, became co-owner of Arnold’s Drive-in and Bronco’s Garage, the shop teacher at Jefferson, and, eventually, the Dean of Boys at George S. Patton Vocational High School. The Fonz never lost that supercool edge, but for a character who had started the series as a dropout and street tough, he had certainly gained an air of respectability.

By the time *Happy Days* ended its long run in 1984, it had, likewise, become a prominent element in American society, its position cemented when Fonzie’s leather jacket was enshrined at the Smithsonian. It also became a cultural institution in Milwaukee. Despite the fact that the show had never done any filming in the city—even the exteriors for Arnold’s and the Cunningham home were shot in California—Milwaukee embraced *Happy Days* as its own. In 1983, the cast of *Happy Days* visited Milwaukee, and actor Tom Bosley, who played Howard Cunningham, was presented with the key to the city before a crowd of 150,000. Fifteen years later, Henry Winkler was on hand when the city dedicated a life-size bronze statue of the Fonz along the Milwaukee River.

Of course, *Happy Days* was only part of the 1950s Milwaukee television universe. One of its early episodes featured a pair of working-class girls named Laverne De Fazio and Shirley Feeney, and in 1976 they got their own spin-off. Laverne and Shirley were roommates and best friends, and much of the comedy was derived from their contrasting personalities. Shirley was quiet, naïve, and almost childlike, while Laverne was loud, boisterous, and aggressive. Also seen were their goofball neighbors, Lenny Kosnowski and Andrew “Squiggly” Squiggman, who, like

Fonzie, sported the 1950s greaser look, but with none of the cool. Another friend, Carmine “The Big Ragu” Ragusa, was a singer who had the hots for Shirley.

Laverne & Shirley proved to be as popular as *Happy Days*. It debuted in second place in the Nielsen ratings, just behind its parent program, and then climbed into the top spot the next two seasons, giving Milwaukee the highest-rated show on television for three straight years. Its success, however, was shorter-lived. When it moved from the safe harbor behind *Happy Days* on Tuesday nights to Thursdays in the fall of 1979, ratings plummeted. In 1980, the setting was shifted to Burbank, California, and the show returned to its old turf on Tuesday nights. One or both of these moves helped, and the show returned to the Nielsen top thirty for its remaining three seasons.

Laverne & Shirley bottled the same nostalgic wholesomeness as *Happy Days*, but its aesthetic was even more deeply rooted in the 1950s, with producer Garry Marshall explaining that he deliberately created the show to replicate the same kinds of madcap misadventures that had befallen Lucy and Ethel on *I Love Lucy*. While *Happy Days* occasionally examined serious themes, *Laverne & Shirley* was steadfastly slapstick, and some critics derided it as “TV junk food” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 770). The plots were, without question, a bit on the light side—the girls discovering a ring of German spies out to steal the secret formula for Shotz beer; planning their high school reunion; trying to be fashion models; and falling in love with the fireman who came to put out a small blaze in their bedroom. In the words of Rick Mitz, the message of *Laverne & Shirley* was that “there is no message here. Relax. Have a good time. Watch us. It was entertainment for entertainment’s sake” (Mitz 1988: 297).

Laverne & Shirley contained themes common to a number of midwestern programs. As Marshall indicated, the show was decidedly blue collar. The girls worked as bottle cappers at Schotz Brewery (a fictional spoof of actual Milwaukee breweries), where Lenny and Squiggy were also employed as truck drivers. When not at work or in their apartments, the gang hung out at the Pizza Bowl, a combination pizza parlor, beer bar, and bowling alley owned by Laverne's loud-mouthed, but kind-hearted, widower father, Frank. The show's working-class aura was epitomized in a brief exchange between Laverne and Stanley, a man Laverne had a crush on. She had intentionally dropped her bracelet to get his attention, and when Stanley picked it up he noticed it was adorned with small metal cows:

LAVERNE: Yeah, it's a souvenir from the Chicago stockyards.

STANLEY: I didn't know they had a gift shop.

LAVERNE: It's right behind where they slaughter the cows—you really gotta look for it (Mitz 1988: 295).

As mentioned, Garry Marshall had intentionally patterned the show after *I Love Lucy* to set it apart from the wave of “relevance” sitcoms in the early 1970s. According to Marshall, the attitudes and actions of the characters were intended to have the same effect:

The other ladies on sitcoms are classy—they're well-off, smart, and they dress well. Laverne and Shirley are not classy. They're blue-collar workers who went to work right after high school. They're decent people (Mitz 1988: 300).

Fundamental decency was another of the show's hallmarks. Like the characters of *Happy Days* and many other midwestern shows, Laverne and Shirley were relentlessly wholesome. In a way, the protagonists were in a state of arrested pubescence. Laverne adorned all of her clothing

with large cursive “L”s and the strongest beverage she would usually drink was her trademark milk and Pepsi. Posters of teen idols adorned Shirley’s walls, and her closest confidant was an enormous stuffed animal named Boo-Boo Kitty. And while they might have been a little man-hungry, Laverne and Shirley always “took offense whenever their virtue was brought into question” (Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman 1991: 29).

The most prominent feature of *Laverne & Shirley* was its relentlessly optimistic outlook. Like Mary Richards in Minneapolis, Laverne and Shirley were independent women bent on making something of themselves. Even though they had little education and less money, the girls were determined to succeed, a determination spelled out in the show’s optimistic theme song, “Making Our Dreams Come True,” which boomed the lines, “There is nothing we won’t try, never heard the word impossible, this time, there’s no stopping us, we’re gonna do it!” For television historian Dawn Michelle Nill, those lines neatly summarized the outlook of the two protagonists:

With the advantage of two decades of hindsight, *Laverne and Shirley* painted a picture of the 1950s from the single, independent woman’s point of view. The plots of the episodes reflected concerns about holding a factory job, making it as an independent woman, and dealing with friends and relatives in the process of developing a life of one’s own. Many plots revolved around the girls dating this man or that, or pondering the ideal men they would like to have met: sensitive, handsome doctors. If on the surface the characters appeared to be longing to fulfill the stereotypical 1950s role of woman, their true actions and attitudes cast them as two of television’s first liberated women. They thought for themselves and made things happen in their social circles. Together they fought for causes, from workers’ rights at the bottling plant to animal rights at the pound. They helped each other and they helped their friends (Nill 2010: 1).

Although *Happy Days* and *Laverne & Shirley* were never intended to serve as hard-hitting examinations of life in the 1950s, they do suggest much about what television producers thought about life in the Midwest. Rick Mitz, for example, argued that “*Happy Days* was pieced together to appeal to the big, gluttoned, beer-filled potbelly of Middle America” (Mitz 1988: 323):

Shows like *Happy Days* . . . were not created to appeal to everyone. In fact, they were designed to appeal to the minority of U. S. TV watchers, those people who watch seven to ten hours of programs a day. In the industry these people are referred to as “the heavy-viewing center,” “the wad,” and “Billy and Mary Six-Pack.” An NBC programmer said it best: “Most TV watchers are like a kid with candy, who eats and eats. They’re nice people. They have good jobs. But they don’t want to think. *Dummies*, I call them” (Mitz 1988: 265).

Whatever the virtues of their viewers or producers, *Happy Days* and *Laverne & Shirley* were unquestionably popular, and remain Wisconsin’s two most successful television entries. Since their debut, eleven more programs have been set in the state. Three managed to last more than one season, including the sitcoms *Step by Step* and *That ‘70s Show*, and the state’s lone dramatic entry, *Picket Fences*. No Wisconsin program, however, has managed to crack the Nielsen top thirty since *Happy Days* checked in at the twenty-eighth position during the 1982-1983 season.

Step by Step, which premiered in 1991 and aired for seven seasons, was essentially a retread of *The Brady Bunch*. The series began when a pair of Wisconsinites, contractor Frank Lambert and beautician Carol Foster, met on separate vacations in Jamaica, fell madly in love, and flew home to merge their families—Frank’s three kids and Carol’s three kids—together. It was a bright, happy sitcom, in the vein of most other programs that aired on ABC’s lightweight Friday night schedule. Stories revolved around the pains of dealing with new stepparents and

stepsiblings, and the standard-issue array of crises associated with growing up. *Step by Step* played on some familiar midwestern themes. It was set in a small town—in this case, Port Washington, Wisconsin—and featured a pair of leads who were unquestionably blue collar. The show’s defining element, however, was its profound and pervasive atmosphere of wholesomeness. This might have surprised some viewers, given that the show’s two stars, Patrick Duffy of *Dallas* and Suzanne Somers of *Three’s Company*, made their mark in a pair of shows whose preoccupations were, respectively, avarice and sex. It would not have been a surprise, however, to anyone who pays attention to production credits. *Step by Step* was created by Thomas L. Miller and Robert L. Boyett, the same team who created the equally clean-cut sitcoms *Family Matters*, *Full House*, and *Perfect Strangers*. Writing for *Entertainment Weekly*, critic Ken Tucker (who gave *Step by Step* a “C” on a ratings scale that mimicked the A to F academic scale) summarized the show’s character, popularity, and intended audience in a 1991 review:

It’s exactly what you might expect: a sitcom as well-executed and weightless as everything else produced by what ABC calls “the hit comedy workshop” of creators Thomas L. Miller and Robert L. Boyett The kids squabble, but fairly amiably, and Duffy shows an unexpectedly goofy side of his personality that is charming. Somers is Somers, beaming out a smile so wide it threatens to split her face in half You’ll see my *Step by Step* grade below, but you should also know that the youngsters in my house, who have made ABC’s Friday-night slate of Miller-Boyett sitcoms a devout ritual, give the series a strong B+. It pains me to write that, but fair is fair (Tucker 1991b: 1).

Wisconsin’s most recent success was *That ‘70s Show*, a sitcom that debuted in 1998 and ran for eight years. While the show’s sunny disposition invites some comparison to *Step by Step*, *That ‘70s Show* was clearly channeling the spirit of *Happy Days*. The most direct correlation is

spatial and temporal, with both shows set in Wisconsin, twenty years in the past. Point Place, which served as backdrop for *That '70s Show*, is fictional, although users of the *Internet Movie Database* cite evidence that it is near Kenosha. It was the story of a high school kid, Eric Forman, and his friends, which included Michael Kelso, a likable yet self-absorbed buffoon; Jackie Burkhardt, Kelso's equally self-absorbed rich girlfriend; Donna Pinciotti, a sarcastic, pretty, and tomboyish redhead who lived next door; Steve Hyde, a scruffy and brusque rebel; and Fez, an impressionable and thickly accented foreign-exchange student whose place of origin and real name were never revealed. As was the case with Richie and the Cunninghams, much of the action focused on Eric and took place around the Forman home. Eric's cranky but endearing father, Red, worked at an auto parts factory, while his sweet and bubbly mother, Kitty, was a nurse.

Parallels between these two Wisconsin nostalgia shows were sometimes striking. On *Happy Days*, for example, the rebellious Fonzie, whose father had abandoned him, moved in with the Cunninghams and learned the ways of a loving nuclear family. On *That '70s Show*, the rebellious Hyde, whose father had abandoned him, moved in with the Formans and learned the ways of a loving, if someone sharper-tongued, nuclear family. Such obvious parallels were given a sly acknowledgment in one episode, when Marion Ross, who had played Richie Cunningham's mother on *Happy Days*, showed up to play Eric Forman's grandmother.

There were also some significant differences between the two shows. Bill Haley and Fats Domino were replaced by Alice Cooper and Cheap Trick, ducktails and leather jackets by long hair and platform shoes, and sipping malts at Arnold's by smoking pot in the Forman basement. Likewise, innuendo was replaced with overtly sexual references, and the boundless economic optimism of the fifties gave way to grim economic realities. The factory where Red worked shut

down, forcing him to work at Price Mart, a large discount store that was threatening to put the appliance store run by Donna's dad, Bob, out of business. Despite these differences, however, *Happy Days* and *That '70s Show* were kindred spirits, sharing a consistent, and thoroughly midwestern, set of moral values, as noted by critic Fred Kovey:

Episode after episode, the central joke of *That '70s Show* is that the kids who should be enjoying their post-sixties cultural freedom spend all their time hanging out in the basement of the squarest household on the block. Granted, part of the attraction is that they can smoke pot when no one's home, but mostly, the show suggests, they just crave the staid, structured atmosphere that is missing in their broken, "modern" families *That '70s Show* has faith in the central truth . . . that there is nothing so bad that family, real or surrogate, can't get you through it. It's a point that is made over and over. This past season, Hyde . . . found himself in dire straits after his mother ran off and left the already fatherless adolescent totally alone. Even though they were low on cash due to factory scalebacks, the Formans did the right thing and took the boy in It was totally in character for the Formans, as always a beacon of sense and solidity in the chaos around them (Kovey 2010a: 1).

Some of Wisconsin's other sitcom entries featured themes familiar to midwestern programs, but none were around long enough to leave much of an impression. While *Happy Days*, *Laverne & Shirley*, *Step by Step*, and *That '70s Show* aired for a combined thirty seasons, Wisconsin's eight remaining sitcoms lasted, collectively, less than two. The first of these lesser entries was 1978's *The Waverly Wonders*, a comedy featuring former NFL quarterback Joe Namath as a retired pro basketball player who returned to his small fictional hometown of Eastfield, Wisconsin, to coach the title basketball team, which hadn't had a victory in three years. The kids of *Waverly Wonders* may have been terrible at basketball, but they were, in typical Wisconsin fashion, very polite, including John Tate, a player who was so painfully shy that he wouldn't even take a shot. The blue-collar aesthetic of Wisconsin's more successful

sitcoms was resurrected in the short-lived 1995 entry *George Wendt Show*, in which the portly *Cheers* alum played the host of a *Car Talk*-like radio show that was broadcast from his repair shop in Madison. The similarly amiable 1990 entry *American Dreamer* was the story of Tom Nash, who was trying to break off a piece of Wisconsin's serenity and graciousness for himself. Tom had been a successful international television news correspondent, but when his wife died, he moved with his two teenage kids to a small town to write a thoughtful newspaper column about life in the wilds of Middle America. His editor tried to convince Tom to come back to Chicago and cover hard news, to which Tom replied, "Why do you torture yourself by coming up here once a week? You know the fresh air and the general decency of the people upset you" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 47).

That these comic retreads depicting Wisconsinites as earthy and decent people were failures should not suggest that viewers were looking for shows set in the state that were edgy or critical of their setting. Programs that attempted to do so fared just as poorly. The outlandish 1987 sitcom *Women in Prison* was a case in point. Set at the fictional Bass Women's Prison, the show's title said it all, as did its gaudy theme song, which included the lines, "So misunderstood, now you're missing a life that was so good While other girls make dates, you make license plates you're in JAIL!" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,534). The 1988 sitcom *Raising Miranda* had a similarly unappealing premise, telling the story of a Racine construction contractor whose wife had left him to raise their fifteen-year-old daughter alone. 1995's *A Whole New Ballgame*, a backstage look at a local television newscast, was a thinly veiled rip off of *WKRP in Cincinnati*, and had the distinction of being the only television program set in contemporary Milwaukee. It was also unique for Wisconsin in that its central character, a self-centered, misogynistic former

baseball player named Brett Sooner, was almost entirely unlikable. Not surprisingly, none of these shows lasted a full season.

Viewers have rejected not only all Wisconsin-based shows with disagreeable premises and characters, but also those that belittle life in the state's small towns. 1990's nightly syndicated *My Talk Show*, a strange sitcom/talk show hybrid, bore a striking resemblance to Ohio's *Fernwood 2-Night* as it examined a bizarre small town through the lens of a bush-league talk show. Set in fictional Derby, Wisconsin, *My Talk Show* was hosted by fictional Jennifer Bass, whose living room doubled as the set for the show, complete with bleachers for a live audience. Some of the guests were real—mostly C-list celebrities like Jerry Mathers and Mr. T—while others were actors who played Derby's eccentric citizens, including Anne Marie, the pompous star of the local dinner theater, and Marty, Jennifer's insufferable brother-in-law, whose trailer was permanently parked in Jennifer's driveway. *My Talk Show* never found an audience, and was out of production in three months. 2003's *A Minute With Stan Hooper* was a fish-out-of-water variation on the same theme, and had an even shorter run. A fictionalized hybrid of Andy Rooney and Charles Kuralt, Stan Hooper was a New York television journalist who specialized in folksy segments about small-town America. As the series began, Stan and his wife decided to go native, moving to fictional Waterford Falls, Wisconsin, where Stan encountered the expected array of small town oddballs. The plots of the program's thirteen episodes were essentially interchangeable with those of *Green Acres* or *Newhart*, with *Stan Hooper*'s distinguishing feature being that it almost certainly set a record for frequency of jokes about cheese.

Wisconsin's lone dramatic entry was also set in a quirky little town. *Picket Fences*, which debuted in 1992 and ran for four seasons, took place in Rome, Wisconsin. There really is a Rome

in Wisconsin, and still photographs from there were featured in the show's opening credits. Jimmy Brock, his wife, Jill, and their three children, Kimberly, Matthew, and Zach, were the central characters, supported by a large cast of eccentric townsfolk and equally strange visitors. Given Rome's similarity to the little towns of *Twin Peaks* and *Northern Exposure*, *Picket Fences* was certainly part of a 1990s trend, but *Picket Fences* was a difficult show to pigeonhole. Jimmy was the town sheriff, and many episodes revolved around his job, making *Picket Fences* something of a police show. Jill was the town doctor, and many of the episodes revolved around her job, making *Picket Fences* something a medical drama. The familial relationships of the Brocks were also central to the show, as were power struggles among the town's residents and the cases that came before Rome's crotchety old Judge Henry Bone. The show was, alternately, a family drama, soap opera, and legal drama, leading critics to compare it to everything from *L. A. Law* to *Murder, She Wrote* to *The Waltons* to *Dallas*.

Whatever *Picket Fences*'s genre, it was, above all, strange, lending to Wisconsin an eerie motif also common to television's version of Washington, Maine, and Kansas. Plot developments on *Picket Fences* included, but were certainly not limited to, the lethal poisoning of the Tin Man from Rome's community-theater production of *The Wizard of Oz*; a schoolgirl who brought a severed hand to show-and-tell; a circus midget's attempt to save an elephant from animal cruelty; a serial bather who broke into people's home to use their bathtubs; and a murder victim who had been stuffed into her dishwasher with her cherished collectible plates. A teacher at the elementary school was a transsexual, the town coroner had a genital fixation, the town priest had a shoe fetish, the mayor spontaneously combusted, and Jimmy discovered that a nearby farm was using cows as surrogate mothers for human fetuses.

While the above themes are hardly the things one might expect from the home state of Richie Cunningham, *Picket Fences* did contain some thoroughly midwestern elements. A number of the region's television programs have used their settings as a sort of American microcosm—as a laboratory for examining American cultural values—but none more palpably than *Picket Fences*. The show addressed some serious contemporary issues, including date rape, abortion, birth control, religion, sexual freedoms, racial prejudice, and euthanasia. Ann Donahue, one of the show's writers, felt that these moral explorations were at the heart of the program, calling *Picket Fences* a “First Amendment Show:”

What you'll find time and time again is that the episodes deal with everybody's right to their space, their religion, their death, their life. Everybody's always saying, “I want to do this,” which is what we do in America. Everybody says, “Well, that's fine until it's in my back yard or against my beliefs or . . .”—fill in the blank That's where the drama and humor come from (Thompson 1996: 171).

And as far as *Picket Fences* seemed from the “Middle American goeyness” of *Happy Days*, the moral uprightness of the Cunninghams was not entirely lacking in the citizens of Rome. Critic Robert J. Thompson argued that “in spite of all this quirkiness and relevance, *Picket Fences* remains strikingly sincere and without irony,” adding that “characters seem to listen to reason in the show, and most of the people in the town seem to be struggling to do the right thing” (Thompson 1996: 173).

CONCLUSION

Wisconsin's television landscape has been steeped in positive midwestern stereotypes. Although its programs have varied in tone, the universal message has been that the state is populated by hard-working, sincere, and upright working-class and middle-class families. Most of them lived in small cities or towns, the rest in a nostalgic, small-town version of 1950s Milwaukee. Two of Wisconsin's earliest and most popular shows, *Happy Days* and *Laverne & Shirley*, were a mixture of nuclear-family serenity and working-class optimism, and depicted Milwaukee as a place where even the most rebellious character—Arthur Fonzarelli—was a font of altruistic wisdom and a model of industriousness. Such warm and sincere messages were reinforced in a contemporary, small-town setting on the cheerful, wholesome, and long-running family sitcom *Step by Step*, and were also evident in the state's less sanguine entries. Despite its acerbic language and slacker characters, *That '70s Show* was ultimately a wholesomely nostalgic show that celebrated family love and loyalty to friends, and despite the darkly comical tragedies that forever plagued their little town, the characters of *Picket Fences* remained remarkably optimistic and sincere.

Across the lake, Michigan was similarly stocked with working-class and middle-class families, traditional values, and pleasant neighborhoods. Michigan's archetypal television man was a likable, well-meaning, blue-collar gearhead, the most popular of which was Tim Taylor of the cheerful family sitcom, *Home Improvement*. What Tim lacked in sophistication, he made up for in earthy sincerity, and the entire program was one long exercise in politeness and understanding. Michigan's television landscape has been slightly more urbanized than Wisconsin's, and the population slightly more ethnically diverse. Detroit was the setting for the long-running sitcom *Martin*, about an African-American radio and television show host. The

material on *Martin* was much more abrasive than that of *Home Improvement*, but in keeping with the overall tone of the state, the mood was generally carefree. Michigan television has, for the most part, been devoid of poverty or crime. Although allusions exist to the mean streets of Detroit and other urban settings, such landscapes were rarely seen.

Indiana has, somewhat surprisingly, had a much higher dose of urban struggle. Very few of the state's programs have been set in small towns, and the rate of crime and violence in the state's television cities has been relatively high. Programs focusing on such images have been balanced by a few shows featuring young urban professionals, albeit those with decidedly blue-collar sensibilities, but the unifying trait of most of Indiana's programs has been a lack of success. The state's only truly popular show was *One Day at a Time*, the first successful television program to realistically examine the life of working single mother, and one of the first to take a hard look at the often troubled life of the modern teenager. One of television's first "dramadies," *One Day at a Time* put its Indianapolis characters through a long series of trials and tragedies, but it could hardly be considered a condemning take on its setting. If anything, the show was an affirmation of midwestern values, with the industrious Ann Romano always rising above her modest and tumultuous lot in life. More important, the show struck a much gentler and loving chord than other Norman Lear "relevance" comedies of the era. Television's other famous Hoosier, *Cheers*'s Woody Boyd, was a lighthearted take on the same story. This naïve Indiana farm kid, while not exactly a paragon of intelligence and sophistication, had nevertheless risen above what sounded like an incredibly tragic childhood to achieve his goals, and was always depicted as being far more cheerful, optimistic, honest, and loyal than his urban, east-coast counterparts.

Woody Boyd's Hanover, Indiana, could easily have served as a sister city to most of Ohio's fictional small towns, the most famous of which were *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* and *Fernwood 2-Night's* Fernwood, *3rd Rock from the Sun's* Rutherford, and *Ed's* Stuckeyville. These and other Ohio small-town programs were, like the stories from Woody's unseen Indiana hometown, both a celebration and a condemnation of small-town midwestern values. The characters from these towns were usually earnest, if a bit provincial, and the settings were thoroughly ordinary. A comic approach running through all of these programs was the "Ohio-as-straight-man" technique, with the banality and mediocrity of the setting contrasted with often bizarre events, but the ultimate message was that Ohio was a physical manifestation of mainstream America—that it was, for better or worse, America's spiritual center.

Surprisingly few programs have been set in Ohio's largest cities—Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Columbus—but each of these cities hosted one popular situation comedy. *WKRP in Cincinnati* sent mixed messages about its setting. Although the show's Cincinnati was generally unsophisticated and tradition-bound, it was also depicted as a modern, thriving metropolis filled with warm, genuine, and friendly characters. *The Drew Carey Show's* take on Cleveland was similar. The young, single friends on the show were far less successful and chic than their New York and California counterparts, but *Drew Carey's* take on Cleveland was almost entirely affectionate, featuring friendly, self-effacing, and unpretentious characters. Columbus's middle class family sitcom *Family Ties* was an even more positive spin on life in the modern Midwest, and with its examination of the new 1980s generation gap, no show put Ohio closer to the spiritual center of America. Although the show gave viewers a weekly dose of tension and conflict, its ultimate message was that there was nothing that family love could not overcome.

Another element of Ohio's television landscape that reinforced its image as the wholesome, friendly, ordinary heart of America was the fact that it never hosted a successful drama of any kind. That has not been the case in Illinois, where Chicago has set the industry standard for urban squalor. Depictions of the Windy City have varied widely from program to program, but have been awash in crime, poverty, violence, and corruption. Fortunately for Chicago's television residents, there has also been no shortage of tough, aloof, and icily dedicated lawmen in the city, beginning with *M Squad*'s Frank Ballinger and *The Untouchables*'s Eliot Ness.

Chicago's seediness was also on display during the very long and successful run of the emergency room drama *ER*. Although the crime, violence, and tragedy of a typical Chicago day were not regularly displayed for the viewer, the bloody aftermath of such events was. The emergency room of County General often resembled the triage unit of *M*A*S*H*, and the hospital itself occasionally resembled a war zone. On the upside, *ER* provided Chicago's television landscape with a long parade of successful, dedicated, and very skilled, if somewhat weary and unlucky, professionals. Successful programs that have chronicled the work life of white collar professionals, other than those in law enforcement, have actually been relatively rare among Chicago's entries. Along with *ER* and its medical colleague, *Chicago Hope*, a prominent exception to this rule was *The Bob Newhart Show*, which presented the work and home life of psychologist Bob Hartley. Hartley and his wife lived in a luxury high rise in a Chicago that was, for a change, depicted as being stylish, clean and upscale. They were successful and intelligent, but had no children. This childless trait was typical of Chicago's television landscape in the 1990s and 2000s, when it was absolutely littered with programs about young, successful, childless urban professionals. Strangely, however, nearly all of them failed. It is possibly a

coincidence, but certainly a peculiar one, that while some similar programs set in California and New York did exceptionally well, none of the sitcoms featuring young, handsome, glamorous, urban professionals in Chicago have clicked with viewers.

It is possible that viewers simply did not expect Chicagoans to have Hollywood values. While cops Eliot Ness and Frank Ballinger certainly possessed a large measure of cool, the term “young and glamorous” would never be used to describe either of them. The same can be said of many, but not all, of *ER*’s doctors and nurses, and it certainly applies to Bob Hartley. Much of the comedy on *Bob Newhart* was derived from what Victoria Johnson (2008) called Bob’s “square white midwesternness,” and many of Chicago’s television icons match Noel Murray’s (2008) description of *M Squad*—“as square as an LP jacket, and just about as old-fashioned.” This old-fashioned stolidness was evident in a rash of successful Chicago sitcoms chronicling suburban, nuclear families. Those shows, such as *Webster*, *The Hogan Family*, and *Family Matters* in the 1980s and *Still Standing* and *According to Jim* in the 2000s, were so squeaky-clean that they made *Family Ties* look like a Peckinpah film.

A lack of glamor might be the defining trait of the Illinois television landscape, but it has not always been manifested in such a straight-laced way. Just as often, Chicago has rejected glamor in the manner expected of the hog-butcher, stormy, brawling, big-shouldered city described by Carl Sandburg. In its earliest television entries, Chicago was a city of erudite quiz shows and symphonies, but it was just as often a city of polkas, stock car races, cattle drives, and meat carving demonstrations. The folksy, informal style of Chicago programs hosted by Studs Terkel, Don McNeill, and, most notably, Dave Garroway, provided a sharp contrast to the often slick productions from New York and Los Angeles. Years later, Chicagoan Bob Newhart would make self-deprecating humor and the rejection of pomposity central to his landmark sitcom. At

the same time, *Good Times* offered television's first serious look at life in a black ghetto. A few years later, *Married with Children* would break from television convention and offer a comical portrait of a cash-strapped, dysfunctional, sleazy, working-class family. It would be *Roseanne*, the acerbic take on working class, small-town family life, and the one successful Illinois program set outside of the Chicago area, that would best capture the fundamental spirit of the state's television landscape—a spirit described by Victoria Johnson as “ordinary, real, truthful” and resolutely “non-yuppie and non-upscale.”

TABLE 5. DEFINING PROGRAMS AND COMMON TRAITS: THE TRANS-MISSISSIPPI MIDWEST

State	Defining Programs	Key Program Elements	Other Common Traits
Iowa	<i>M*A*S*H</i> (Radar O'Reilly)	A shy, quiet, and unassuming, unsophisticated but also honest, hardworking and dependable farm kid	Idealism; family love; small towns; farms; mainstream America; sanctuary; industriousness; independence; loyalty; honesty
Kansas	<i>Gunsmoke</i>	A strong, fearless, sympathetic and philosophical masculine lead civilizing a wild and lawless frontier; geographic and emotional isolation; populism; conservative values	Small towns and farms; isolation; boredom; the transition from Midwest to West; "hicks, rubes and yokels"; loving families; traditional values; loneliness and terror
	<i>Smallville</i>	Intelligent, complex, yet earthy and honest small-town folks; agriculture	
Minnesota	<i>The Mary Tyler Moore Show</i>	The prototypical show about a modern, independent woman; Minneapolis as a big, intimidating, thriving, modern metropolis; lack of ethnic diversity; small-town squareness; excessive politeness; "Presbyterian militancy"; likable characters	Polite, likable, self-deprecating characters; almost total lack of crime, poverty, degradation, and violence
	<i>Little House on the Prairie</i>	"An oasis of gentle homilies, solid family values, and sweet social harmony"	
	<i>Coach</i>	Friendly, escapist atmosphere; earthy, likable characters	

Missouri	<i>Ozark Jubilee</i>	A warm, folksy, sincere, cheerful aura; hillbillies “moaning and wailing”	Modern urban sophistication meets old-fashioned, small-town virtues; a mixture of seedy urban centers, pleasant suburbs, small towns, and rural backwaters. Mixture of syrupy optimism and bitter realism; mainstream America; stubbornness, earthy wit, and rejection of all things effete and snobbish; young, urban African Americans
	<i>Grace Under Fire</i>	The professional and family life of a sarcastic, blue-collar, single mom; small-town life that was not nostalgic or sentimental; wit and sophistication; industriousness	
	<i>The Beverly Hillbillies</i> (The Clampetts)	Simple, uneducated, unsophisticated hillbillies; charming, unpretentious, egalitarian people	
Nebraska	<i>Heartland</i>	The story of an “an old and crusty but lovable small-town bigot”	Modern and urban meets old-fashioned and rural; Middle American values
North Dakota and South Dakota	<i>Father Murphy</i>	A righteous man standing up to a tide of corruption and evil	A wild and lawless frontier; a quirky contemporary town

CHAPTER 5 - THE MIDWEST, PART 2: THE TRANS-MISSISSIPPI MIDWEST

The Trans-Mississippi Midwest, which here will include the whole of Minnesota, has accounted for about 2.6% of the American television landscape. Programs set in Iowa, Nebraska, and the Dakotas have not fared particularly well, with these states' fifteen shows collectively accounting for 0.32% of the country's television images. Minnesota's eight programs have included a number of hit shows, and that state alone has represented 0.51% of America's television landscape. Missouri, the most populous of these seven states, has also landed the most programs—eighteen—and those shows have accounted for 0.83% of the country's television images. Kansas has served as the setting for fewer shows than Missouri—fourteen—but its overall share of the American television landscape has been slightly larger, at 0.95%. That is due, in large part, to the fact that it was the home of television's longest-running drama.

MISSOURI

Speaking for the residents of his home state, author and self-styled geographer William Least Heat-Moon wrote that “A Missourian gets used to Southerners thinking him a Yankee, a Northerner considering him a cracker, a Westerner sneering at his effete Easternness, and the Easterner taking him for a cowhand” (Heat-Moon 1982: 28). While it is unlikely that Heat-Moon was thinking specifically of TV shows when he made that statement, it is wholly appropriate to Missouri's television landscape. To the east of Missouri is Illinois, where the television landscape was shaped by the urbanity of *The Bob Newhart Show*, the rust-belt aesthetic of *Good Times*, *Married with Children*, and *Roseanne*, the middle-class suburbs of sunny family sitcoms

like *Webster* and *According to Jim*, and the gritty urban realism of *The Untouchables* and *ER*. To the north is thoroughly midwestern Iowa, birthplace of Radar O'Reilly and James T. Kirk. Kansas, to the west is a collection of lonesome small towns, while, to the south, Arkansas and Tennessee feature the sleepy southern town of *Evening Shade* and the mighty engine of country music and cornpone comedy in Nashville. Missouri's television programs have dabbled in all of these themes and genres, but the state's television landscape has not been dominated by any of them. Missouri is home to both modern urban sophistication and old-fashioned, small-town virtues. It has also showcased America's seedy urban underbelly and its rural, redneck backwaters. Of the states eighteen entries, ten have been set in St. Louis or Kansas City, while eight have either been set in fictional small towns, or originated from the smaller cities of Joplin and Springfield.

Missouri's early television landscape was, in fact, dominated by Springfield. In the 1950s, it was one of the few serious challengers to Nashville's status as a country music capital, and Springfield took an early lead when it came to television. Premiering on network television nine months before the *Grand Ole Opry* was Springfield's *Ozark Jubilee*. This country variety showcase aired on ABC from January of 1955 through the fall of 1960, also using the titles *Country Music Jubilee* and *Jubilee U.S.A.* Hosted by Opry veteran Red Foley, regulars on the show included top names in country music, such as Webb Pierce and Porter Wagoner. The program also showcased amateur talent, including a portion called the "Junior Jubilee." One such person was a "sweet-as-peaches little 11-year-old girl with a booming voice" named Brenda Lee, who became a *Jubilee* favorite and later a force on the country and pop charts (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,042).

Springfield produced two similar network programs around the same time, including

ABC's *Talent Varieties*, which aired for three months in 1955, and NBC's *Five Star Jubilee*, which aired for five months in 1961. While none of those entries were a smash in the ratings, their numbers were steady, leading *Ozark Jubilee* coproducer Si Siman to claim—accurately, in terms of audience draw—that:

Springfield, Missouri, was the third highest origination point for national television—third only to New York and Hollywood. More than Chicago. More than Washington, D. C We were able to convince ABC that “country” was a lot more popular than people realized (Johnson 2008: 68).

All three Springfield entries were a mixed blessing for Missouri's television image. Certainly they gave the state a warm, folksy aura, characteristics exemplified by the cheerful and sincere persona of Red Foley. Each week, the viewer was greeted by barbershop quartets, square dancers, and even 4-H Club award winners. A few hymns were sprinkled in, often performed before a backdrop of an old country church, and Red Foley concluded each episode with a brief sermon. According to critic Victoria E. Johnson, this conclusion presented the show's sharpest geographic message:

These gospel segments explicitly reinforce the Heartland community's . . . steadfast adherence to pre-modern values of family, church, and hometown in the face of rapid postwar change Each week's closing credits explicitly positioned the “heart of the Ozarks” at the geographic center of America and, conceptually, as the bed-rock of postwar society from which all good things radiate outward—as a residually place-bound corrective to the anxiety, materialism, self-involvement, and distance from “real folk” perceived to be ever-more prevalent in modern life (Johnson 2008: 70).

At the same time, programs like *Ozark Jubilee* almost certainly inspired symptoms of

what essayist and Missouri native Calvin Trillin has identified as “rubophobia,” which is “not fear of rubes, but fear of being taken for a rube” (Kendall 1986: 14). Missourians of this ilk likely bristled at Springfield’s early television offerings, for their tone was far from cosmopolitan. Such rustic elements as *The Oklahoma Wranglers*, *The Country Rhythm Boys*, and the Tall Timber Trio certainly did not generate much respect from the television establishment. Although NBC’s *Five Star Jubilee* was a national offering, the network decided not to broadcast it in the New York market, citing the show’s “primarily rural appeal” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 479). In their summary of the lavishly produced crossover program *The Johnny Cash Show*, Brooks and Marsh contrasted it with *Ozark Jubilee*, which they describe as being “strictly for the sticks” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 713). Critics of the 1950s agreed, appearing to be almost baffled by *Jubilee*’s success. One critic bemoaned the program’s “supreme lack of show-business knowledge,” while *Time* magazine, which characterized the program as “hillbillies . . . moaning and wailing,” asked, in befuddlement, “Why is it so successful?” *TV Guide*’s report on the *Ozark Jubilee*, even when chronicling the show’s success, came across as a smug insult:

Ever wonder which show attracts the widest family circle to the TV set each week? Wal, now, it’s that li’l ole *Ozark Jubilee* that you don’t hear so much about but that sure does pack in the country-music fans on Saturday night . . . According to the American Research Bureau, *Jubilee* has 28 percent more people per set watching than the average of all evening shows. In other words, it appeals to Grampaw and all the tads, too (Johnson 2008: 68).

Despite its success, ABC suddenly pulled *Ozark Jubilee* off the air in 1960, ostensibly because the network had purchased rights to broadcast a series of prize fights that would air in *Jubilee*’s place on Saturday nights. In reality, the show ended because Red Foley had been

indicted on charges of tax evasion, something “hardly consonant with the down-home sincerity he projected on the show” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,042). Foley was acquitted in 1961, and would go on to be featured on the ABC sitcom *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, but Springfield’s days as a center for national television production were over.

Missouri’s only other entry from the 1950s set a far different tone from *Jubilee*. Down-home atmosphere and country music were traded in for hot jazz and the mean streets of Prohibition-era Kansas City on *Pete Kelly’s Blues*. The title character was a trumpeter and band leader at a Cherry Street speakeasy in the 1920s. The show followed Pete, his piano-playing pal Fred, and a blues singer named Savannah Brown as they stumbled into various scrapes, including murders and kidnappings. Based on a 1951 radio show and 1955 film, both starring Jack Webb, the television version featured William Reynolds as Pete Kelly, and lasted for five months in 1959.

With the exception of the short-lived *Five Star Jubilee*, Missouri was off the air during the tumultuous 1960s. The state returned with three programs in the 1970s, each possessing standard themes for midwestern programs. The first was the 1974 drama *Lucas Tanner*, which featured future *Good Morning America* host David Hartman as the title character, a former major league pitcher and sportswriter who had just lost his wife and young son in a car accident. As it often does on television, the Midwest offered a fresh start to Tanner, who took a job as an English teacher at Harry S. Truman High School in the St. Louis suburb of Webster Groves. As is also frequently the case, the native Midwesterners proved to be stubbornly tradition-bound, and most of the teachers at Truman High were resistant to Tanner’s unorthodox teaching style. Tanner’s students were grateful, however, and it was that gratitude that kept Lucas from giving up. NBC, hoping to tap into antiestablishment zeitgeist among younger viewers, touted the show

in a 1974 *TV Guide* advertisement with the line, “Once he pitched in the majors, now he throws curves at the establishment—and his students love him for it!” The show never caught on, however, and *Lucas Tanner* was sent to the showers after one season.

Kansas City’s lone 1970s entry played on the familiar regional theme of nostalgia. The sitcom *Apple Pie* was, as its name suggested, a sugary slice of Americana. Set in 1933, it was the story of Ginger-Nell Hollyhock, a middle-aged hairdresser who cured her loneliness by recruiting a family via a classified ad in the newspaper. A husband, daughter, son, and even a doddering old grandpa all came to live with her in this way, just “for the laughs” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 73). *Apple Pie* was off the air after two weeks in 1978.

Missouri’s third entry of the decade was 1979’s *The Baxters*. This title clan lived in suburban St. Louis, and was about as middle-class and Middle American as a family could get. Fred Baxter sold insurance, and had a wife Mary, a housekeeper, and three children—Naomi, Jonah, and Rachel. Many of the region’s shows have examined contemporary American social issues, but none quite so literally as *The Baxters*. The first half of each episode was played out as a standard sitcom, with the family facing some sort of moral quandary such as whether or not Grandmother Baxter should go to a nursing home or what to think about the fact that Jonah’s teacher was gay. The issue was never resolved, however. Instead, during the second half of the show, cameras would go to a studio audience, who would discuss what *they* thought the Baxters should do. A separate audience and moderator existed in each television market, and, in some cities, viewers could call in and offer their thoughts.

The Baxters began as a local program in Boston in 1977, the project of a divinity student for his Sunday morning public affairs show. It attracted a cult following and was produced for

nationwide syndication during the 1979-1980 season. The show was not especially successful, but was given another shot during the 1980-1981 season. Although produced in Hollywood and then Toronto, the St. Louis setting certainly suggests that this city was perceived to be a representative sample of mainstream America.

Three more Missouri-based programs made their debuts in the 1980s, none of them with much success. The sitcom *Making the Grade*, which aired for six weeks in 1982, featured the dedicated and idealistic teachers of Franklin High, an overcrowded, gang-infested, inner city St. Louis school. Kansas City was the setting for *The Popcorn Kid* for a month in 1987. This was a contemporary sitcom about a group of high school kids who worked at a revival movie house called The Majestic.

Another Missouri sitcom of the 1980s arrived on the coattails of *M*A*S*H*, one of television's most iconic programs. For a decade, viewers had been entranced by life at a mobile army hospital during the Korean War. The program introduced Americans to a large cast of memorable characters, many of whom represented a broad spectrum of midwestern archetypes. There was Henry Blake, a gentle goofball from Illinois; Radar O'Reilly, a naïve Iowa farm boy; Maxwell Klinger, a flamboyant Steel Belt ethnic type from Toledo, Ohio; and Ft. Wayne, Indiana's Frank Burns, an avaricious and ultimately spineless automaton who appeared to have stepped right out a Sinclair Lewis novel. When Blake, the 4077th's commanding officer, was killed at the end of the show's third season, viewers were introduced to his replacement, Colonel Sherman T. Potter of Missouri. Potter was regular army, having served since World War I, and was, when compared to the flighty Blake, a strict disciplinarian. He was also genuine, honest, and loyal, serving as a sort of father figure to the doctors and nurses of the 4077th. Despite having spent most of his television life in Korea, Potter was certainly one of television's most

famous fictional Missourians. With his stubbornness, earthy wit, and rejection of all things effete and snobbish, most residents likely considered him a positive reflection of their state, and he probably also reminded many viewers of a pair of famous non-fictional Missourians: Harry S Truman and Mark Twain. In fact, the Potter character was given connections to both of them. Like Twain, he hailed from Hannibal, and in one episode Potter claimed to have served in the army with President Truman.

Sherman Potter returned to civilian life, and to Missouri, in the 1983 *M*A*S*H* sequel *AfterMASH*. Joined by fellow 4077th colleagues Max Klinger and Father Francis Mulcahy, Potter assumed command of the Pershing Veterans Hospital in the fictional town of River Bend. Like its predecessor, *AfterMASH* blended comedy with earnest appraisals of the “human wreckage created by war,” and for a time it was nearly as successful (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 24). *AfterMASH* was ranked fifteenth in the Nielsen ratings during its premiere season, making it the first Missouri-based show to rank in the Nielsen top thirty. The next season, however, the show was moved from Tuesday nights where it ran up against NBC’s action series, *The A-Team*. Ratings plummeted, and *AfterMASH* was cancelled a few weeks into its second year.

Before 1993, no Missouri-based show had lasted as long as two seasons. This changed with the arrival of a pair of popular sitcoms. The first, St. Louis-based *The John Larroquette Show*, was one of the bleakest portrayals of urban life ever to be seen on a midwestern sitcom. The protagonist, John Hemingway, seemed respectable at first—a cultured and well-educated man who collected Thomas Pynchon first editions. Unfortunately, John had battled alcohol for years, losing his wife and career in the process. Supporting characters included the kind and sophisticated Carly Watkins, who also was a prostitute, and an intelligent, socially-conscious young black man named Dexter Wilson who seethed with anger. Unable to find employment

anywhere else, John had taken a job as the graveyard shift manager of the Crossroads, the “world’s seediest bus terminal,” located in an incredibly dangerous part of St. Louis (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 762). Dexter ran the diner at the Crossroads while Carly “worked” the lounge. Also seen were Mahalia, John’s brash assistant; Gene, a big, gruff custodian; lackluster police officers Adam Hampton and Eve Eggers; and Oscar, the station’s resident bum.

When compared to other 1993 sitcoms like *Coach*, *Full House*, *Home Improvement*, *Family Matters*, and even *Seinfeld* and *Murphy Brown*, *The John Larroquette Show* was exceptionally grim. In addition to John’s on-going battle with the bottle, the Crossroads was witness to numerous robberies, a hostage crisis, a runaway teen, a baby abandoned in the station’s dumpster, and even the appearance of a neo-Nazi named Steve Hitler. In the first episode, John hung a sign, stolen from an amusement park, that said it all: “This is a Dark Ride” (Tucker 2005: 84).

John Larroquette developed a devout following, but the show described by *TV Guide* as “sitcom *noir*” struggled to find a large audience. In the third season NBC launched a television version of gentrification to broaden the show’s appeal. The crew of the Crossroads was moved to the day shift, Carly gave up her career and married a millionaire, and Oscar the bum got a job at the station’s newsstand. These changes not only failed to attract new viewers, but also alienated old ones, and *The John Larroquette Show* was cancelled midway through its fourth season. That was, nevertheless, a fairly long run by Missouri standards, and for those who tuned in it certainly marked a dramatic shift away from the folksy atmosphere of Colonel Sherman Potter and Red Foley.

The shift in tone seen in *John Larroquette*’s St. Louis was but also present in that show’s

more successful contemporary, 1993's *Grace Under Fire*. *Grace* was also part of a broader movement that was reshaping sitcoms in the early 1990s. Like Jerry Seinfeld, Ellen DeGeneres, Tim Allen, and Roseanne Barr, comedian Brett Butler brought material from her stand-up act to the small screen. She is often compared to Barr—both were cynical, uncompromising, and independent—and the spirit of *Grace Under Fire* very much resembled that of *Roseanne*. Both were set in small towns in the hinterland of a large city, and both focused on the home and work lives of a blue-collar antiheroine. Butler played Grace Kelly, a divorced single mother who worked at an oil refinery in fictional Victory, Missouri, near St. Louis. At the job, where she was an affirmative-action hire—or, as she put it, “quota babe”—Grace was adept at taking grief from her gruff, mostly male coworkers, and even better at dishing it out. At home, Grace was a recovering alcoholic, and struggled to make ends meet while raising her three kids—Quentin, Libby, and Patrick. Also seen were Grace's friends, Nadine, Wade, and Russell, all of whom had similarly troubled lives.

Grace Under Fire was unique in its geographic outlook, and that uniqueness was rooted in Brett Butler's personal geography. Born in Montgomery, Alabama, Butler and her five sisters were raised by their “bohemian and extremely literate” mother in Atlanta. Butler credited her mother, who named Brett for the heroine of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, for instilling in her both a love of literature and an appreciation for dark comedy. Butler's life was also quite troubled. Her alcoholic father abandoned the family when she was four, and at age nineteen, Butler herself married a physically abusive alcoholic. She left the marriage after three years, moved to Houston, and started doing stand-up comedy that mirrored her upbringing. “I come from a family where the humor was really dark,” said Butler, “a house headed by interesting, intelligent, bohemian, minimally agnostic parents in the middle of the Bible Belt, where girls

were either good or bad, where when I got married at age 20, everyone said ‘Sugar, you’re finally settling down’” (De Vries 1994: 2). Butler drew comparison to the likes of Richard Pryor and Lenny Bruce for her fresh, intelligent jokes about “trailer parks, gun racks, pickup trucks, and the SOB-type men who love them” (Schwarzbaum 1994b: 1). “Here I was, this Southern white chick, but I realized that my humor was like urban minority comics,” said Butler, “the humor of the oppressed” (De Vries 1994: 2).

Butler’s comic formula was carried intact to her television program. Her Missouri community both sustained and shattered the worst stereotypes about working-class, small-town life. The entrenched flaws were represented by Jimmy Kelly, whom Grace described as her “knuckle-dragging, cousin-loving, beer-sucking redneck” of an exhusband (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 555). On the other hand, Victory was also home to witty, sophisticated people like Grace and her friends. And although Grace’s life was not easy by any means, she was not a fatalist. Like Ann Romano of *One Day at a Time*, she was a model of midwestern industriousness. Grace attended night school and, toward the end of the show’s run, had moved into the ranks of white-collar professionals, working at an advertising agency in St. Louis.

Critics lauded the show, with one calling it “hip, smart, funny and oddly populist all at once” (De Vries 1994: 2). For a time, *Grace Under Fire* was actually more popular than *Roseanne*, and was Missouri’s first genuine hit. *Grace* ranked fifth in the Nielsen ratings during its first season, easily the highest-rated new show that year, and climbed to the fourth spot the following year. Ratings remained good during the 1995-1996 season, when the show was ranked thirteenth, but began to sink rapidly the following year. Attributed by some, fairly or unfairly, to behind-the-scenes turmoil created by its demanding star, *Grace Under Fire* quickly disintegrated, and was cancelled midway through its fifth season in 1998.

The two Missouri shows that followed *John Larroquette* and *Grace Under Fire* in 1994 swung the landscape of the state back to the sunny side of the street. The premise of the sitcom *On Our Own* certainly sounded bleak. It was the story of the Jerrico family—seven middle class kids in St. Louis, aged eighteen months to twenty years—who had been orphaned by a car accident. The oldest, Josh, did his best to hold the family together, but when agents from Family Services came around, they announced that the younger kids faced foster care if a more mature adult could not be found. Josh, and the show’s producers, were apparently familiar with the recent Robin Williams theatrical hit *Mrs. Doubtfire*, so he donned a dress and wig and became Aunt Jelcinda, the Jerricos’ new guardian. This “slapstick warmth-com” lasted just one season, and is most notable for being the first Missouri-based program to feature a predominantly black cast (Brooks 2007: 1,015). Appearing the same year was *Someone Like Me*, which told the story of Gaby Stepjak, a precocious eleven-year-old St. Louis girl, her calculating teenage sister, her “dotting all-American” mom, her sincere stepdad, and her best friend, Jane (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,269). This cheery sitcom never caught on, and was cancelled after just seven weeks.

The modest wave of Missouri-based sitcoms of the 1990s concluded with *Malcolm & Eddie*, which debuted in 1996. This was the story of two young black men in contemporary Kansas City. Serious, driven Malcolm was an aspiring sports journalist, while happy-go-lucky Eddie operated an auto repair shop and towing service. The show mixed several familiar sitcom concepts. In the spirit of *The Odd Couple*, Malcolm and Eddie shared little in common beyond a run-down apartment above Kelly’s Sports Bar. They were often seen hanging out at the bar with its crew of zany characters, a la *Cheers*, and they were almost constantly ensnared in a series of Eddie’s hair-brained schemes, a la *I Love Lucy*.

Perhaps the most notable thing about *Malcolm & Eddie*, from a geographic perspective, is that it featured a predominantly black cast. Black sitcoms set in the Midwest are not an absolute rarity, but most have been set in either Detroit or Chicago. The presence of Kansas City's *Malcolm & Eddie* and St. Louis's *On Our Own* and *The John Larroquette Show* (which had a number of African-American supporting characters) makes the television landscape of Missouri something of an ethnic anomaly, particularly when compared to other states in the trans-Mississippi Midwest. *Malcolm & Eddie* also reflected another, more general, trend in television. Like a number of black sitcoms, the show appeared on the viewer-starved UPN network. As noted earlier, the UPN and WB networks often relied on African-American audiences to sustain viewership in the late 1990s just as FOX had done in the early 1990s. As much as any other show, *Malcolm & Eddie* exposed the large racial divide in American audiences. In 1997, *Jet* magazine reported that *Malcolm & Eddie* ranked sixth among black television households. The next year, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that of the 175 programs to appear on the six major networks, *Malcolm & Eddie* ranked dead last.

Racial issues were exposed not just in terms of the show's audience, but also in its reviews. It can be argued that Malcolm and Eddie were positive role models. As the series progressed, they eventually bought the building in which they lived, expanding Eddie's towing business and converting the sports bar into a jazz club called the Fifty/Fifty. The series stars, Malcolm-Jamal Warner and Eddie Griffin were both, in fact, nominated for NAACP Image Awards in 2001, a good indicator that African-Americans found role models in the show. To some critics, however, *Malcolm & Eddie* was little more than a 1990s update of *Amos & Andy*, pitting, in the words of Robin R. Means Coleman, "the more normal character against the popular, focal buffoon character," with Malcolm being the "responsible, tempered

businessperson,” and Eddie representing “dancing, shucking and jiving” stereotype. *Malcolm & Eddie*, said Means Coleman, “ensured that the coon stereotype would have a secure place in the 1990s.” Critic Robert Bianco concurred, writing that “any behavior that borders on the intellectual is mocked; any sign of ‘uppity’ aspiration is mocked. On *Malcolm*, a man is ridiculed for reading poetry—and he’s a fat man, which is supposed to make it twice as funny” (Means Coleman 1998: 128). Whatever the show’s cultural merits, it was popular enough among its primarily African-American audience to remain on the air for four years, making it the last Missouri-based sitcom to enjoy a measure of success.

Three more Missouri entries appeared in the mid-2000s, and all marked a shift away from the state’s metropolitan areas. Among them was the formulaic sitcom *Free Ride*, which was the story of Nate Stahlings. Having graduated from the University of California at Santa Barbara, Nate moved into his parent’s garage in fictional Johnson City, Missouri, while he tried to figure out what to do next. Viewers didn’t much care what Nate did, and the show was cancelled after six weeks. Premiering the same year was Missouri’s lone documentary/reality entry, *Trick My Truck*, which was shot on location at 4-State Trucks in Joplin. Described by Brooks and Marsh as a “down-home version of MTV’s *Pimp My Ride*,” this program featured a team of tractor-trailer mechanics who took a run-of-the-mill rig and, with the help of the trucker’s family, surprised him or her with a customized dream ride (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1425).

Trick My Truck was not quite as rustic as Brooks and Marsh suggest, but it did appear on Country Music Television, a clear indication that the intended viewers were the children and grandchildren of the audience that had made shows like *Ozark Jubilee* popular. And despite its gruff persona, the ultimate message of the show was every bit as wholesome as anything offered up on *The Waltons*. The majority of the ambushed truckers were decent, humble people who had

fallen on hard times—a former Marine who was taking on extra miles to raise money after his daughter was diagnosed with cancer; a woman who had gotten into trucking when it was still considered a man’s world, but whose rig was on the ropes; and countless families who simply wanted to reward their truckers for years of selfless hard work. All of this made *Trick My Truck* a sort of homily about the meek inheriting the earth, or, at the very least, a pretty nice truck.

The 2004 drama *Jack and Bobby* had a similarly moralistic message. Set in a small, contemporary Missouri town, it told the story of a gregarious sixteen-year-old named Jack McCallister, his “bookish, asthmatic” little brother, Bobby, and their single mom, Grace, a history professor at nearby Plains State University whose frank attitude and strident liberalism often rubbed some of her colleagues, friends, and family the wrong way (Brooks 2007: 682). The show was a coming-of-age drama with a catch—Bobby was the future President of the United States. *Jack and Bobby* cast small-town Missouri as a state awash in persistently positive Heartland virtues, as indicated by the not-too-subtle name of the fictional town in which the show was set—Hart. The significance of show’s setting was not lost on critic Lee Siegel:

Though the boys have famous Kennedy names, there really isn’t anything Kennedy-like about them. They’re of modest means If anything, they’re more like Harry Truman. The show, in fact, is set in Missouri, where the boys attend “Truman High”—the names “Jack” and “Bobby” just add a little allure (Siegel 2007: 299).

Like Truman, Bobby McCallister’s character was inexorably tied to his Missouri upbringing. Although he was not flawless, the show cast him in undeniably favorable light. Using an unusual format, viewers each week were shown interviews from the year 2049, during the final days of Bobby’s presidency, in which his future friends and colleagues spoke of various

aspects of his character. Each episode focused on a particular character trait, such as honesty or leadership, and then showed how events in Bobby's youth helped shape that particular trait.

Jack and Bobby was never able to build a large audience, even by the standards of the fledgling WB network. In part, this was because of the WB's inexplicable decision to run the show on Wednesday nights opposite *The West Wing*, a program that almost certainly drew the same audience at which *Jack and Bobby* was aimed. The show held on for one season, but was not renewed the following year.

An odd element of the television geography of Missouri is that some of the most popular characters associated with the state have been, in one way or another, disconnected from its physical landscape. That disconnection likely came as a tremendous relief to Missouri's rubophobes, because each these characters and settings implied that the state was absolutely chock-full of hillbillies and hayseeds. One of television's most famous backwaters was Hooterville, the backdrop for the wildly popular 1960s sitcoms *Petticoat Junction* and *Green Acres*. According to the producer of these two series, Paul Henning, Hooterville was inspired by Eldon, Missouri, the hometown of his wife's grandparents. The exact location of Hooterville, however, was never actually identified on the show. A similar situation occurred in the long-running 1980s sitcom *Mama's Family*. This was the story of a family of rubes and their sharp-tongued, beer-swilling matriarch, and the setting was Raytown, which is also the name of a Kansas City suburb. Although a few sharp-eyed fans have cited subtle references from the program that place it in Missouri, the precise location of Raytown was never made explicit on the show itself.

Of less consolation to Missouri's rubophobes was the sitcom *The Beverly Hillbillies*. As its title suggests, the setting here was California, but the title hillbillies, the Clampett family, were obviously from out of town. And unlike the ambiguous geography of Hooterville and Raytown, context made it clear that the Clampetts were Missourians. To make matters worse for Missouri rubophobes, the hillbilly stereotypes were poured on thick.

The premise for the show was simple enough that it could be summarized in a theme song—one that is permanently etched into the memory of millions of Americans. Jed Clampett was a poor Ozarks mountaineer who, through a stroke of sheer luck, discovered vast oil deposits on his land. After a company made Jed a generous offer, his cousin Pearl convinced the family to move to California so that they could enjoy a better life. So they loaded up his old rattletrap, *Grapes of Wrath*-vintage truck (a converted 1921 Oldsmobile roadster), and moved to Beverly Hills. Along for the ride were Jed's handsome, exuberant, but profoundly stupid nephew, Jethro Bodine; Jed's beautiful, sweet-natured, animal-loving, tomboy daughter, Elly May; and Jed's wiry firecracker of a mother-in-law, Daisy "Granny" Moses. Once moved into an opulent Beverly Hills mansion, the Clampetts entrusted their wealth to Milburn Drysdale, the avaricious banker who lived next door. Drysdale ran himself ragged trying to keep the Clampetts' business. Looking out for the Clampetts was Drysdale's secretary and moral compass, the stuffy but friendly Jane Hathaway.

From the start, *The Beverly Hillbillies* was a smashing success. Its debut episode, which aired in September of 1962, was watched by half of all American television households. It was television's top-rated show by the end of its first month on the air, and remained there for its first two seasons. The show was in the Nielsen top thirty during all but the last of its nine seasons, and was in the top ten for five of those years. To this day, *The Beverly Hillbillies* holds the

record for the highest-rated individual half-hour episode of any television series, and eight of its episodes rank in the top fifty. It was also an enormous success internationally, leading one British critic to comment, “More people in the world know *The Beverly Hillbillies*, it is safe to assert, than know President Johnson or even the Pope” (Harkins 1990: 190). The show’s theme song, performed by bluegrass legends Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, was a number-one hit on the country charts, and the show had a long and successful life in syndicated reruns after it left the air in 1971.

The Beverly Hillbillies was laden with tired Ozarks stereotypes, particularly in the characters of Jethro, Elly May, and Granny, who were carbon copies of *L’il Abner* characters Abner, Daisy May, and Mammy. Each week, the show highlighted another element of the Clampetts backwardness. When an IRS agent showed up, Granny greeted him with a shotgun. It was revealed that it had been years since Jed listened to the radio, read a newspaper, or saw a movie. Jethro tried to join the military, and so he went off to an amusement park called Marineland, mistaking it for a base. Granny mistook an ostrich for a giant chicken and a kangaroo for a giant rabbit. Granny watched television and, thinking that the soap opera was real, set off to rescue the actor who was in trouble. When Granny saw actors in Union uniforms she thought the Civil War had resumed and so donned her Confederate duds.

Television critics, according to historian Tim Hollis, “simply could not think of enough derogatory things to say about *The Beverly Hillbillies*” (Hollis 2008: 183). *Variety* magazine wrote that “at no time . . . does it give the viewer credit for even a smattering of intelligence . . . even the hillbillies should take umbrage” (Harkins 2004: 190). Historian Paul Cullum wrote that “the show became in certain quarters something of a public embarrassment . . . emblematic of the nation’s having slipped another notch into pandering anti-intellectualism—a pervasive

‘bubbling crude’ which stained all in its wake” (Cullum 2010: 1). Writing nearly three decades after *The Beverly Hillbillies* left the air, critic Sam Frank lamented the show’s enduring popularity, saying that “we will never be rid of these moronic bumpkins” (Frank 1999: 204).

Despite all of these unkind words, the show’s immense popularity suggests that it had at least some redeeming qualities. It was lowbrow humor, to be sure, but it was also, in the words of Anthony Harkins, “well crafted and genuinely funny.” Harkins cited critic Gilbert Seldes who, although dismayed by the show’s “encouragement to ignorance,” wrote that “the single simple, and to some people outrageous, fact is that *The Beverly Hillbillies* is funny” (Harkins 2004: 191).

The lead characters were also appealing. *The Beverly Hillbillies* was obviously not out to shatter hillbilly stereotypes, but it did dispense with some of the more unpleasant ones. “The word ‘hillbillies,’” said Filmways Television president Al Simon, “brought to mind the picture of dirty, unkempt people wearing long beards, inhabiting dilapidated shacks with outhouses out back.” In the wake of the show, asserted Simon, “the word has a new meaning all over America. Now, it denotes charming, delightful, wonderful, clean, wholesome people.” Anthony Harkins outlined some of the ways that *The Beverly Hillbillies* rewrote the stereotype:

Long flowing beards and outhouses never appeared on the show nor did family feuds or shootouts with law enforcement agents. And although moonshining remained a common trope, drunkenness of the hillbilly characters did not. The Clampett clan dressed in jeans, linen blouses, and plaid shirts, but except for Jed’s signature tattered slouch hat, their attire was clean and untorn. The alluring physiques of Elly May and Jethro played on the standard conceptions of the innate sexuality of mountaineers and lines about Elly May’s voluptuous body peppered the early episodes, but both characters were consistently portrayed as either impossibly sexually incompetent or naïve. Likewise, potential threat and violence remained latent in all the characters (Harkins 2004: 191-192).

It is also noteworthy that, while *The Beverly Hillbillies* avoided some of the negative hillbilly stereotypes, it always embraced the positive ones. The Clampetts, particularly Jed, came off as friendly, independent, and sensible. They were also proud of their culture, refusing to shed regional language, diet, and dress, or even to get rid of that rattling old truck. The one character who occasionally tried to assimilate with modern California culture was Jethro, and he was always made to look like a buffoon when he did. Perhaps the most endearing trait of the Clampetts was their egalitarian view of the world. While nearly everyone else looked down on them, they refused to return the favor. “The way I look at it,” said Jed in one episode, “ain’t nobody got a right to be ashamed of nobody else. Good Lord made us all” he said, “and if we’s good enough for Him we sure ought to be good enough for each other” (Harkins 2004: 195).

Something often lost in the critical response to *The Beverly Hillbillies* was the matter of who the show was ridiculing. Despite constant cracks at the Clampett’s backwardness, in the end, the characters who wound up in the show’s satirical crosshairs were Milburn Drysdale and his fellow Californians. Tim Hollis argued that this may have been, at least subconsciously, the real reason for the harsh critical backlash against the show. “Although the critics might not have consciously realized it,” wrote Hollis, “what they truly found irritating about the show may have been the fact that for the first time the hillbilly characters were portrayed as imminently likable—much more so than their pseudosophisticated southern California neighbors” (Hollis 2008: 183). The character of Granny was the most pointed in her assessment of California, calling Beverly Hills “the laziest, greasiest, unfriendliest mess o’ people I ever laid my eyes on!” Like Hollis, Harkins argues that the real message behind *The Beverly Hillbillies* was not about the Ozarks at all, but about modern urban America:

Whereas her Ozark neighbors prized her skills as a cook, housekeeper, distiller, herbalist, and meteorologist, in Beverly Hills, Granny is considered at best eccentric, and at worst, a menace. And well she should be, for she is the character who most often exposes the vapidness and uselessness of the lifestyles in Beverly Hills, and by extension, of much of comfortably affluent American society In stark contrast to Jed's loyalty, honesty, and integrity and Granny's tenaciousness, the world beyond the Clampett household is peopled almost exclusively by money-grubbers, snobs, con artists, and sycophants. The show's main antagonist, Jed's banker Milburn Drysdale . . . is a man so miserly and so desperate to keep the Clampetts as his main depositors that he is willing to go to any lengths to keep them happy, no matter how much he must humiliate and degrade himself to do so His wife Margaret . . . a vain and petty snob, is a hypochondriac who dotes on her poodle and considers the Clampetts uncouth barbarians who humiliate her in the eyes of high society. . . . The program therefore presents modern America, at least superficially, as venal, boorish, materialistic, and, ultimately, ethically and spiritually hollow (Harkins 2004: 194-196).

The man to thank (or blame) for *The Beverly Hillbillies* was Paul Henning, a native of Independence, Missouri. Henning had been a singer and actor at radio station KMBC in Kansas City before moving on to a writing career in Hollywood. There, he had a hand in nearly every important rural comedy to appear on American television for three decades. He was a writer for *The Real McCoys* and *The Andy Griffith Show*, and created the successful 1950s sitcom *The Bob Cummings Show*. Cummings was also a native Missourian, and his character, Bob Collins, a cool bachelor photographer, would occasionally fly back to his hometown of Joplin to visit his cracker-barrel grandpa, Josh. Henning's most memorable creations, however, were entirely homespun, including *Green Acres*, *Petticoat Junction*, and, of course, *The Beverly Hillbillies*.

Initially, the precise location of the Clampett spread was vague—somewhere in the Ozarks—but it was later defined as being near Silver Dollar City, a hillbilly-themed amusement park in Branson, Missouri. That area still bears the imprint of Henning and the Clampetts.

Visitors driving into Branson pass through the Ruth and Paul Henning State Conservation Area, and the beat-up Clampett truck is on permanent display at the College of the Ozarks in nearby Point Lookout. According to Henning, his affection for the Ozarks began in childhood, when he attended a Boy Scout camp in Noel, Missouri, which is located in the southwest corner of the state. “I just sort of fell in love with the whole picture down there,” said Henning, “and the people were so kind and gracious. It was a wonderful experience.” Henning began pondering a sitcom about Ozarkers in the 1950s, but had a problem in finding a way to both feature Ozark characters and “to escape the week-to-week depressive setting of the backwoods thing” (Harkins 2004: 188). Eventually, the idea of hillbillies in Beverly Hills came to Henning, and the rest, of course, is history.

That Henning found the Ozarks to be both “wonderful” and “depressive” says much about the geographic message of *The Beverly Hillbillies*. The Ozarks of the show was poor and backward, but also alluring in its simplicity. In the pilot episode, for example, when Jed was contemplating whether or not he should move to California, he asked his cousin Pearl for advice. Their exchange made the show’s message about the Ozarks clear:

PEARL: Jed, how can you even ask? Look around you! You’re eight miles from the nearest neighbor! You’re overrun with skunks, possums, coons and bobcats! You got kerosene lamps for light, a wood stove to cook on winter and summer, you’re drinking homemade moonshine, washin’ with homemade lye soap, and your bathroom is fifty feet from the house! And you ask should you move!

JED: Yeah, I guess you’re right. A man’d be a dang fool to leave all this! (Harkins 2004: 195).

IOWA

Iowa has served as the setting for seven programs—three dramas and four comedies—and none stuck around for a full year. The state's first dramatic entry, *Apple's Way*, made its debut in February of 1974 and lasted for eleven months. It told the story of George Apple, an architect who, having grown weary of the rat race of Los Angeles, relocated his wife and four children to his hometown in Iowa, which had been founded by his ancestors. A devoutly religious man, George was idealistic, compassionate, and involved in community causes, even though most local people thought he was a nut. His city-bred children had some difficulty adjusting, but they eventually came to appreciate the town. Created by Earl Hamner, Jr., *Apple's Way* featured the same sorts of homilies about family and community that had made Hamner's *The Waltons* such a success.

Another family drama, 1983's *Two Marriages*, was set in a tidy, tranquil suburb of an unnamed Iowa city, and chronicled two middle-class families. Like its comic contemporary, *Family Ties*, the show used the Midwest as a backdrop for examining changing social conventions. Ann Daley was a construction engineer, while her husband Jim worked on a dairy farm. They had one young child of their own, and two from previous marriages: Jim's eleven-year-old Vietnamese-American daughter and Ann's rebellious teenage son. Living across the well-kept lawn were the Armstrongs. Art was a surgeon, and he and his wife, Nancy, a homemaker, had two kids—one a wise and sensitive teenager, the other carefree. The show centered on the contrasts between the modern Daley family and the more conventional Armstrongs, and particularly on Nancy's envy of Ann's liberated lifestyle, but not for long. *Two Marriages* was cancelled after eight months.

In the 2006 thriller *Runaway*, Iowa once again provided sanctuary for a coastal resident, but in a much more urgent sense. Paul Rader was a Maryland attorney who had been falsely accused of murder. Pursued by the law and the real killer, he fled with his wife and children to Bridgewater, Iowa, where they took assumed names. Paul worked as a waiter at a local diner while he continued to search for the truth. Whether or not the Rader family learned the same kind of life-affirming midwestern lessons as did the Apples must remain a matter of speculation, since *Runaway* was cancelled after just three episodes.

The first of Iowa's four sitcoms was *Nancy*, which debuted in 1970. It was the story of the daughter of the President of the United States, who fell in love with an Iowa veterinarian named Adam. Their prying relatives, the press, and the secret service made romance a little difficult, but they eventually married and settled in his small hometown. The only people who left them alone were television viewers, and *Nancy* was cancelled after about four months. Similarly, the short-lived sitcom *Julie*, which premiered in 1993, featured Julie Andrews as a New York television star who fell in love with an Iowan named Sam who was, of course, also a veterinarian. Julie settled down in the serenity of Sioux City to help him raise his two kids, but also moved production of her hit variety show to Iowa. Whether the fictional Julie's show succeeded is anyone's guess, for the real Julie's show was cancelled after six weeks.

Double Trouble, which debuted in 1984, was the story of two teenage twin girls who were (what else?) a study in contrasts. Allison was the responsible one, Kate the troublemaker. Art, their widowed father, owned a gym and dance studio in their hometown of Des Moines. Apparently Iowa could not contain these two, and the show relocated to New York City after its first season. The sitcom *Drexell's Class*, which debuted in 1991, concerned a fifth grade teacher in fictional Cedar Bluffs. Otis Drexell was not an especially likable fellow, particularly by Iowa

standards, being angry and manipulative. Ratings were dismal, and the show was overhauled quickly, with the focus shifted to Drexell's home life. These changes were not enough to attract new viewers, and *Drexell's Class* was cancelled after ten months.

Given the dismal track record of Iowa's seven entries, it is likely that all of them have been forgotten by all but the most avid fans. This is not to suggest, however, that television has not shaped the perception that the general audience has of Iowans. Although neither was ever seen in his native environment, two of television's best-known characters, Corporal Walter Eugene "Radar" O'Reilly and Captain James Tiberius Kirk, hailed from the Hawkeye State. In terms of personality, the two could not have been more different from one another, but they both possessed character traits that are squarely in tune with the midwestern archetype. Radar O'Reilly, the company clerk for the 4077th M*A*S*H, appeared on the Korean War comedy for seven years—a longer run than all Iowa-based programs combined. Radar grew up on a farm outside Ottumwa, and made frequent references to the loved ones he left behind, including his mother Edna, his Uncle Ed, his dog Ranger, and his cow Betsy. Radar, in the words of James Kelly, "reflected the image that many people have of Midwesterners:"

"Radar" O'Reilly . . . was timid, quiet, and unassuming, but also honest and dependable with a strong work ethic. He was shy His favorite drink was Grape Nehi, implying he was unfamiliar with the sophisticated alcoholic drinks of cities. Although he was liked by almost everyone, he often complained to other characters on the show about their lack of respect for him and his occupation His affection for his mother and the family farm were links to a traditional rural society and family life. Although the TV show ostensibly takes place during the Korean War, the attitudes and behavior of the other characters . . . were more typical of the recent Vietnam War era. The character of Radar, in contrast, seemed truly associated with an earlier time, in the 1950s and the Korean War era (Kelly 2007: 119).

Before the timid Iowa corporal, there was the dashing Iowa captain, James T. Kirk of the starship *U. S. S. Enterprise*. Kirk, it almost goes without saying, was the protagonist of *Star Trek*, a mildly successful 1960s science fiction series that would go on to become the stuff of television legend. During the 1966-1967 season, *Star Trek*'s first and highest-rated year, the show was ranked fifty-second on the Nielsen charts. It was ultimately cancelled by NBC after three viewer-starved years. Then came an unprecedented afterlife. The show became a cult classic in syndication, and eventually spawned five television spin-offs, eleven feature films, and countless fan conventions.

Buried somewhere in the original series was a mention that Captain Kirk was from Iowa, a device, according to Michael Martone, that allowed the viewer to “fill in the attendant mythology of values that this shorthand would lend to a character, to the character’s character—hardworking, honest, independent, loyal. All of it” (Martone 2000: 9). That Kirk’s Iowa heritage would have some currency on a show set in deep space in the twenty-third century says much about the impact place image can have on television, and what has happened in real-life Riverside, Iowa, says much about the impact that television can have on a place’s image.

Riverside, a town of just under a thousand people on the north bank of the English River in southeastern Iowa claims to be the future birthplace of James T. Kirk. The original series never actually mentioned the name of Kirk’s hometown, but in 1983, enterprising Riverside city councilman Steve Miller wrote a letter to the franchise’s producers claiming to be one of Kirk’s ancestors and requesting that Riverside be officially designated as Kirk’s birthplace. His request was granted, and Riverside became part of the official *Star Trek* canon when it was mentioned in a subsequent film. An official site for the birth was selected, and a marker was placed there to commemorate the future event. Each June, busloads of Trekkies, many dressed as their favorite

characters, descend upon the town for Trek Fest, which includes a parade, street dance, beer garden, carnival rides, trivia contest and, of course, screenings of *Star Trek* episodes. Attendees can swap *Trek* memorabilia and buy local souvenirs, including “Kirk Dirt”—a vial of soil scooped from the birthplace. Plans were made to erect a statue of Kirk in a town park, but the town could not raise enough money to buy permission to use actor William Shatner’s likeness, so they settled for a twenty-foot replica of the *Enterprise*. Signs that welcome visitors to Riverside, which used to say “Riverside—where the best begins,” now read “Riverside—where the *Trek* begins”—much ado about an event that is not scheduled to occur until March 22, 2228 (Martone 2000: 9).

MINNESOTA

Minnesota has served as the backdrop for just eight television series, but three of them proved to be popular and durable, particularly the state’s first entry. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, which debuted in 1970, was not only Minnesota’s signature program, but also a show that redefined the American television landscape, particularly in its portrayal of modern women, the modern workplace, and life in the urban Midwest. It was the story of Mary Richards, who had just been dumped by the long-time fiancé she had helped support while he was in medical school. Determined to start life anew, Mary left her small hometown of Roseburg, Minnesota, and headed for Minneapolis, where she got a job working in the newsroom of WJM-TV, the lowest-rated television station in the Twin Cities. She moved into an apartment in a quaint old Victorian home, where her neighbor was a loud, aggressive, man-hungry New Yorker named Rhoda Morgenstern. Her new boss was Lou Grant, the ill-tempered, hard-drinking news director whose crusty exterior masked a soft heart. Sex-crazed Sue Ann Nivens did the station’s “Happy

Homemaker” segments, and Murray Slaughter was the station’s head writer. Murray was Mary’s chief ally, and generally cheerful and friendly, but he could also be incredibly caustic, particularly when dealing with WJM’s anchorman, Ted Baxter. Ted, whose dressing room was filled with celebrity photos—all of himself—was one of the most pompous, self-aggrandizing characters in television history, once explaining to a reporter that he went into television because “God told him he was too handsome for radio” (Alley and Brown 1989: 122). Ted was also a moron, whose idiocy was a constant source of frustration and amusement to his co-workers. In the words of Murray, “You’re Ted. Does it ever bother you that you’re Ted?” (Javna 1988: 80).

Mary Tyler Moore was groundbreaking television, both in content and style. It looked very different from most of the sitcoms that had preceded it. Plot was always secondary to character, with the show relying on verbal sparring rather than whacky situations to get its laughs, and the characters themselves were layered, dynamic people who changed as the relationships among them developed. Most important, the show was smart, described by Brooks and Marsh as “one of the most literate, realistic, and enduring situation comedies of the 1970s” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 863).

The most noteworthy aspect of *Mary Tyler Moore* was the simple fact that it focused on an independent, single, career woman. Single women had been featured on television before, of course, but they had generally fallen into one of two categories—young women looking for Mr. Right, or more mature women who were single either by widowhood or, in some rare cases, by divorce. Mary was in her early thirties, but neither widowed nor divorced. She was single because she chose to be. It wasn’t that Mary was opposed to marriage, but she was not desperate or solely dedicated to the search for the ideal mate. In fact, although Mary did date throughout the series, she never had a steady boyfriend. Even more remarkable for its time, the show

implied that Mary occasionally spent the night with a man. “We never made a point of it,” said series cocreator Jim Brooks, “but in our eyes Mary was not a virgin. She wasn’t a man-hungry animal like Rhoda, but very definitely she had an active, fully rounded sex life” (Alley and Brown 1989: 7-8). The show was sly about this point, but it did lead to a few memorable moments, as when Mary was visiting her parents, and her mother said to her father “don’t forget to take your pill,” to which Mary, absently, replied, “I won’t” (Javna 1988: 80).

While Mary was certainly no radical, she represented to many the very model of a progressive 1970s woman. She possessed the kind of political and social values that, in the words of one critic, made her “recoil at anti-Semitism, stand firm for a free press, believe in racial equality, respect gay rights, believe in equal pay for women, favor gun control, and endorse the new freedom in sexual mores (Alley and Brown 1989: 92). While *Mary Tyler Moore* was rarely an overtly political program, it contained a message that had never been delivered in primetime television—that a woman’s success was not defined by her ability to land a husband. When Mary’s ne’er-do-well fiancé eventually showed in Minneapolis, asking her to return to him, Mary told him goodbye. When he told her to take care of herself, she quietly replied, “I think I just did” (Mitz 1988: 215).

In terms of America’s television geography, the most groundbreaking thing about *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* was its setting in the Midwest. In the more than two decades of primetime network programming that preceded *Mary Tyler Moore*, only a few sitcoms had been located there, and most of them, such as *My Three Sons*, had only vaguely midwestern settings. In fact, prior to 1970, just two midwestern sitcoms actually mentioned the states in which they were located—Kansas’s *The Phil Silvers Show* and Illinois’s *Those Endearing Young Charms*. The latter was the only show to be set in an urban area—Chicago—and it lasted less than two

months. That *Mary Tyler Moore* and its modernist message was set in Minneapolis, rather than New York, Boston, Los Angeles, or San Francisco, was nothing short of astounding. Recalling his initial pitch of the show to CBS, Grant Tinker, Moore's husband and coproducer, stated that "all I had to start them off . . . was the premise of Mary being single and thirty and living in Minneapolis—which on the face of it is a pretty dull thought!" (Johnson 2008: 128). The selection of such a seemingly dowdy backdrop was cause for some concern, as noted by Victoria E. Johnson:

Although broadcast history lore states that the creators of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* were greeted with consternation upon proposing that their series would feature a single woman over the age of thirty, less often mentioned is another relatively controversial element of their pitch—that the program would be set in the middle of America, specifically, in Minneapolis. Minneapolis was a location that, in 1970, did not immediately call to mind the image central to the show and to its hoped-for new audience demographic of hip, young, urban professionals—much less the glamour of a celebrity such as Mary Tyler Moore (Johnson 2008: 112).

According to Mary Tyler Moore herself, Minneapolis was chosen because it was a setting "that hadn't been seen to death on television already . . . full of life and young people and old people; fat, skinny, tall, thin" (Johnson 2008: 134). James L. Brooks, however, suggested that he and co-creator Allan Burns had a different, and far simpler, motivation. They wanted a program that used, almost exclusively, just two settings—Mary's apartment and the WJM newsroom—and they needed an excuse to keep the characters indoors. "Early on we thought of Seattle because of the constant rain there," said Brooks, but they eventually decided on Minneapolis, because it was a place where "the major industry is snow removal" (Alley and Brown 1989: 6).

A quiet reference to that fact may have been contained in the address of Mary's apartment—119 North Weatherly.

If residents of the Twin Cities were hoping for a program to portray their city as a thriving, modern metropolis, they could scarcely have done better than *Mary Tyler Moore*. It was not that everything said was laudatory, for the show certainly took a few digs at the city, particularly at its apparent lack of cultural variety, as noted by Victoria E. Johnson:

Notably *not* “worldly” in its portrayal, Minneapolis is frequently the butt of the show’s gentle joking about its lack of diversity. Examples across the series include throwaway lines from Ted Baxter’s WJM newscasts, such as “And that’s a look at the Filipino community in the Twin Cities. And weren’t they three of the nicest people you’d ever want to meet?” Or, noting that a “field trip” would be required “to see hippies,” that the Mexican population of Minneapolis is “one,” and that the only Japanese restaurant within driving distance of the Twin Cities is “Chef LeRoy’s Teriyaki” (Johnson 2008: 137).

These few jabs aside, the show made it abundantly clear that Mary Richards did not go to Minneapolis with a sense of resignation, but rather went filled with ambition. That fact, along with a characterization of the city as stylish, big, and even intimidating, was reinforced for viewers each week in an opening title sequence that “truly reveled in the . . . dynamism of city life” (Johnson 2008: 133). In that sequence, a somewhat anxious Mary was seen driving down the interstate in her Ford Mustang, looking out upon spectacular urban views at dusk. She was seen walking through neighborhoods, down snowy, tree-lined sidewalks, along the river, and then through the bustling downtown, gazing up in awe. All the while the theme song implored, “How will you make it on your own? This world is awfully big. Girl this time you’re all alone, but it’s time you started living” (Johnson 2008: 132). The title sequence was punctuated with a

shot of Mary walking through downtown Minneapolis's crowded Nicollet Mall. As the theme song concluded with the line, "You might just make it after all," a smiling Mary cheerfully tossed her hat into the air, a symbolic gesture traditionally associated with commencement ceremonies. Mary had graduated to the big city.

The last line of the *Mary Tyler Moore* theme song—"you might just make it after all"—says much about an element of the show that made it so believable. Mary did not arrive in Minneapolis tailor-made for her new role as a modern, independent woman. She did indeed make it, but it took time. It is noteworthy that, after a few seasons the final line of the song was changed to "you're gonna make it after all," but it did take some adjustments (Johnson 2003: 133). She was in the city now, but Mary was still very much a country mouse, and early on the show highlighted Mary's small-town squareness, with Mary stating in one episode, "I'm an experienced woman. I've been around . . . Well, all right, I might not have been around, but I've been . . . nearby" (West and Bergund 2005: 51).

In some ways, Mary was cast from the same mold as Radar O'Reilly of *M*A*S*H* and Woody Boyd of *Cheers*—symbols of small-town midwestern wholesomeness and naiveté, forced to come to grips with the realities of modern life. "She was partly," said James L. Brooks, "a quivering *chick*—as the term used to be employed—too open and trusting, a sort of Norman Rockwell creation" (Alley and Brown 1989: 7). One of the clearest geographic messages of the show was the contrast between Mary and her new neighbor. Rhoda Morgenstern, a Jewish New Yorker, was a native of "neighborhoods you're afraid to walk alone in" (Johnson 2008: 135). She was aggressive, self-assured, brash, and quite comfortable discussing risqué matters. Mary, on the other hand, was passive, quiet, and exceptionally polite, a former homecoming queen and straight-A student who wore flannel pajamas to bed. It was Rhoda, as much as anyone, who

pushed Mary to embrace her new freedom. On one episode, Mary was nervously contemplating whether or not it was all right to date a friend's exhusband, to which Rhoda replied, "Not only do I think it's all right, the *whole world* thinks it's all right. *Lawrence Welk* thinks it's all right!" (Johnson 2008: 135-136).

At work, Mary's gentleness, humility, and sense of propriety were contrasted with Murray's cynicism, Ted's vanity, and Sue Ann's bottomless appetite for sex. Her main counterpoint, however, was her grumpy, boozing boss, a man everyone else called "Lou," but who Mary always called "Mr. Grant." Although the two became close friends, hard-edged Lou and soft-hearted Mary were often at odds, and their first meeting said much about both characters. As Lou was interviewing Mary for the job at WJM, he pulled a whiskey bottle and pair of highball glasses out of his desk drawer and offered Mary a drink. She politely, and properly, declined, but Lou was insistent. A hesitant Mary requested a Brandy Alexander, to which Lou responded by quietly returning the bottle to his desk and suggesting coffee. He then asked Mary about her religion, prompting the following exchange:

MARY: Mr. Grant, I don't know quite how to say this, but you're not allowed to ask that when someone is applying for a job. It's against the law.

LOU: Wanna call a cop?

MARY: No.

LOU: Good. Would you think I was violating your civil rights if I asked you if you're married?

MARY: Presbyterian.

The scene revealed to viewers the "quivering chick" side of Mary's character. Her small-town squareness was highlighted in her choice of beverage and in her pained politeness, and she

revealed that she was not entirely comfortable discussing the fact that she was not married. Later in the scene, however, Mary revealed her strength, telling Lou “You’ve been asking a lot of very personal questions that don’t have a thing to do with my qualifications” (Alley and Brown, 1989: 9).

In the same episode, Mary met Rhoda, whose first words to Mary were, “Hello. Get out of my apartment.” Rhoda, it seemed, had had her eye on this particular set of rooms for months, but the landlady, Phyllis, gave it to Mary instead. Rhoda assailed both Phyllis and Mary, and Mary remained polite and quiet through most of the scene. But when she had taken enough of Rhoda’s abuse, she stood up for herself, just as she had to Mr. Grant. She let Rhoda know that she was no pushover, and that she was capable of pushing back. This was a character trait that *Mary Tyler Moore’s* writers referred to as Mary’s “Presbyterian militancy.” According to the show’s creators, such a militant was someone who “could certainly ‘push back’ when the situation demanded it, even though she might be reluctant to do so” (Alley and Brown 1989: 7).

Mary’s politeness may have been her most quintessentially midwestern trait. On one episode, Lou asked Mary to fire someone at the station, to which she replied, “I’m very bad at firing people Mr. Grant. Once I had to move rather than fire a housekeeper” (Javna 1985: 162). Not only was Mary nice, but she insisted that everyone else be nice, too. On another episode, WJM hired a resident critic, Professor Carl Heller, who prided himself on hating everything. When Mary could stand it no more, she reminded him that “we are supposed to appeal to the public, you know, not just to the intellectual elite. Just being negative isn’t really constructive” (Johnson 2008: 140).

One of the show's recurring themes involved shattering a character's façade—revealing the sensitive beings behind Lou's gruffness and Murray's cynicism or the frightened, approval-craving child cowering beneath Ted's vast ego—and Mary was no exception. Her Presbyterian militancy occasionally got the best of her, and she found herself unable to live up to her own high ideals. Perhaps the best example of this technique was found on what many consider to be *Mary Tyler Moore's* best episode, "Chuckles Bites the Dust." The show began with Ted announcing the death of a beloved local clown. It seemed that he had been marching in a parade, dressed as a peanut, and was trampled to death by a circus elephant. In the newsroom, Lou solemnly entered his office:

LOU: Lucky more people weren't hurt. Lucky that elephant didn't go after anybody else.

MURRAY: That's right. After all, you know how hard it is to stop after just one peanut.

MARY: Why is everybody being so callous about this? The man is dead. And it seems to me that Mr. Grant and I are the only ones in this whole place who are showing any reverence.

As soon as she said this, Lou came out of his office, doubled over in hysterical laughter from Murray's joke. Mary was horrified, and Lou tried to explain, saying "It's a release, Mary. People need that when dealing with tragedy. Everybody does it." An indignant Mary replied, "I don't." The scene repeated itself the next day at Chuckles's funeral:

LOU: I wonder which ones are the other clowns.

MURRAY: You'll know soon. They're all going to jump out of a little hearse.

MARY: Murray—enough is enough. This is a funeral. Somebody has died. It's not something to make jokes about. We came here to show respect—not to laugh.

When the minister began to deliver the eulogy, everyone in the room, including Lou and Murray, became very solemn and dignified. All went well until Reverend Burke mentioned Chuckles's Aunt Yoo-Hoo, when Mary, unexpectedly, was forced to stifle a laugh. The Reverend continued:

REVEREND BURKE: Mr. Fee-Fi-Fo would always pick himself up, dust himself off, and say: "I hurt my foo-foo."

(Mary again stifles a laugh; the others in the row glare at her.)

REVEREND BURKE: From time to time we all fall down and hurt our foo-foos.

(Mary tries to hide her hysteria. The other people in the chapel turn to look at her.)

REVEREND BURKE: And what did Chuckles ask in return? Not much—in his own words: "A little song, a little dance, a little seltzer down your pants."

(Mary bursts into embarrassing laughter. Everyone turns to look, including the minister.)

REVEREND BURKE: Excuse me, young lady . . . yes, you
Would you stand up, please? *(Mary reluctantly rises.)* You feel like laughing, don't you? *(Mary gestures futilely.)* Don't try to stop yourself. Go ahead, laugh out loud. Don't you see? Nothing could have made Chuckles happier. He lived to make people laugh. He found tears offensive, deeply offensive. He hated to see people cry. Go ahead, my dear—laugh.

(Mary bursts into tears.) (Mitz 1988: 218).

Years later, a few episodes of New York's *Seinfeld* offered up equally funny scenes set at wakes or funerals, with the characters acting in a similarly inappropriate way. The joke there, however, was that they were behaving exactly as the viewer expected them to behave. In the case of Chuckles's funeral, the scene worked because Mary's behavior conflicted so profoundly with her midwestern sense of decorum. It is, indeed, difficult to imagine such a scene working as well

on any of *Mary Tyler Moore*'s New York-based contemporaries. A similar lapse would not have been quite as funny if it had happened to Archie Bunker, Maude Findlay, or George Jefferson.

If there was a central geographic theme to *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, it was, quite simply, that Minnesotans are nice people. Brooks and Marsh noted that, "unlike the efforts generated by producer Norman Lear, typified by *All in the Family* and *Maude*, there was never an attempt to humiliate or ridicule" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 863). James L. Brooks put it succinctly: "Mary believed that people should be open and loving toward one another" (Alley and Brown 1989: 8). Of course, a program with a theme song called "Love is All Around" could not be expected to have a mean-spirited protagonist, but it was not just Mary who was nice. Brooks and Marsh also noted of Lou Grant that, "underneath that harsh exterior beat the heart of a pussycat." They described Murray as a man who "had a positive outlook no matter what happened, and was a good friend to all" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 863).

Then again, there was Ted, whose arrogance and occasional cruelty hardly seemed consistent with the show's warm and friendly Minnesota aura. Fans of the show would note, however, that it was frequently suggested that Ted was actually from California. A running gag was Ted's tendency to lapse into autobiography, and the story always began the same way: "It all started in a 5000 watt radio station in Fresno, California . . ." (Javna 1985: 162).

And even if Ted happened to hail from Minnesota originally, there was no denying that the setting of *The Mary Tyler Moor Show* lent it an appealing atmosphere that helped propel its success, as noted by critic John Javna:

We . . . responded to the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*'s authentically mid-western orientation. The characters lacked the pseudo-sophisticated veneer that mars so many Hollywood products. They

were real human beings, and real viewers were delighted to watch them (Javna 1985: 160)

The Mary Tyler Moore Show never quite rivaled the ratings of other smash hit sitcoms on CBS's legendary Saturday night schedule in the 1970s—shows like *All in the Family*, *M*A*S*H*, and *The Jeffersons*—but it still did well during its seven-year run. It peaked in seventh place on the Nielsen charts during the 1972-1973 season, was in the top twenty-five for all but its final season, and received a record-smashing twenty-seven Emmy awards. Mary Tyler Moore, Ed Asner (Lou), and Valerie Harper (Rhoda) each received three Emmys, Ted Knight (Ted) and Betty White (Sue Ann) won two, and Cloris Leachman (Phyllis) one. The show received five Emmys for writing, and took home the Emmy for Outstanding Comedy Series in 1975, 1976, and 1977. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* also spawned three successful spin-offs (*Lou Grant*, *Phyllis*, and *Rhoda*); launched MTM Enterprises (which would produce some of the most critically-acclaimed programs of the 1970s and 1980s); and its writing alumni would go on to create other iconic shows, including *The Cosby Show*, *Cheers*, and *The Simpsons*.

Residents of the Twin Cities all appear to have fully embraced *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*; all, that is, except for a humanities professor at the University of Minnesota. She owned the Victorian home on Kenwood Parkway that supplied the exterior shots of Mary Richards's apartment during the show's first few seasons. Initially excited to have her home featured on the show, the professor soon grew weary of the fans who gathered outside the home and, in some cases, even came up to ring the doorbell. When an MTM camera crew returned to film a fresh round of establishing shots, she refused to cooperate. When the crew decided to film anyway, the professor draped banners from Mary's window that read "Impeach Nixon" (Javna 1988: 80). Soon after, Mary Richards moved to a new apartment in a downtown high rise. The camera

crews had been effectively repelled, but not the fans. Nearly three decades after the show left the air, one source reported that over thirty tour busses a day continued to cruise past Mary Richards's old apartment (Johnson 2008).

The continuing affection that Minnesotans feel for *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* was illustrated in 2002, when a statue recreating Mary Richards's iconic hat toss was unveiled in downtown Minneapolis. The dedication drew live global coverage from CNN, thousands of well-wishers, and Moore herself, who noted that she felt a connection to Minneapolis "more than I do to my real hometown of Brooklyn" (Johnson 2008: 144). The event was a strong indicator of the importance of popular media in shaping a city's sense of itself, a sentiment indicated by journalist and Minnesota native Jerry Haines:

To many people who grew up there, the state could be summarized as taciturn Lutheran elders and Spam casserole. To the nation at large we were known mostly for cold weather. We were indistinguishable from Iowa and the Dakotas Then Sir Tyrone Guthrie founded a world-renowned theater there, Mary Tyler Moore set her TV program there, the Twins went to the World Series, and Garrison Keillor built a national radio program around us Formerly merely cold, now we were cool, sophisticated, enviable (Johnson 2008: 145).

Some of the key elements of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* could be found in nearly every Minnesota-based program that followed it. Television's version of Minnesota is almost entirely devoid of the crime, poverty, degradation, and violence. Its people for the most part, are incredibly sincere and kind, none more so than Mary Richards herself. As the show's theme song suggests, love was all around, and this remarkable atmosphere of kindness and understanding has continued.

Mary Tyler Moore was followed by another Minnesota-based hit, the historical family drama *Little House on the Prairie*, which premiered in 1974. Based on the popular series of novels by Laura Ingalls Wilder, it told the story the Ingalls family, homesteaders who had moved from Kansas to a farm near the small, growing community of Walnut Grove in the late 1870s. The family was headed by Charles Ingalls and his wife, Caroline, who had three daughters. Life was hard, and the Ingalls battled the elements and struggled to wrestle a living out of the untamed land. But, just as it would be for Mary Richards a century later, love was all around. Instead of an American frontier filled with stories of greed, anger, and violence, *Little House on the Prairie* featured no cowboys and Indians, no wild saloons, and practically no violence. A sort of flatlander version of *The Waltons*, the family and community of *Little House* provided a weekly dose of life lessons, washed down with gallons of sugary dialogue. In the first episode, for example, little Laura said, warmly, that “Home is the nicest word there is” (Robinson 2003: 138). The viewing audience gobbled it up. The show ran for nine heart-warming, tear-jerking years and ranked in the Nielsen top thirty for all but its second season, peaking in the seventh spot during year four.

Little House was certainly a departure from much of the rest of the television landscape at the time. Marc Robinson noted that, “amidst the screech of police car tires and howls of laughter emanating from most other TV shows of the seventies, *Little House on the Prairie* was an oasis of gentle homilies, solid family values, and sweet social harmony” (Robinson 2003: 138). Historian James Stuart Olson has suggested that its success had as much to do with what was happening in America during the 1970s as it did with its portrayal of America a century before:

During the 1970s, *Little House on the Prairie* possessed enduring qualities that seemed to have disappeared in 1970s America. Such problems as the energy crisis, inflation, unemployment, and

foreign policy impotence afflicted the United States, and many Americans found comfort and peace in the simple homilies and rural, small-town familiarity of *Little House*. When television critics of the 1990s called for more “family viewing,” they had *Little House on the Prairie* in mind (Olson 1999: 233).

Another historical family drama, the strikingly similar *The New Land*, premiered three days after *Little House on the Prairie*. Here the family was the Larsens, young Scandinavian immigrants who fought an equally tough battle to tame the land near fictional Solna, Minnesota, in the 1850s. Ultimately, though, the Larsens could not overcome their head-to-head competition, *All in the Family*, and the show was cancelled after just six weeks.

All of Minnesota’s subsequent entries were comedies, and the first was by far the most successful. Premiering in 1989, *Coach* was the story of Hayden Fox, head football coach for Minnesota State University’s Screaming Eagles. Most of the episodes split time between Hayden’s office, where, along with assistants Luther Van Dam and Dauber Dybinski, he desperately searched for ways to improve the Screaming Eagle’s dismal record, and his home, a spectacularly masculine lodge built near a lake outside of town. Hayden had an on-again, off-again romance with Christine Armstrong, whom he eventually married, and he was trying to reconnect with Kelly, his daughter from a previous marriage who was now a freshman at Minnesota State.

Unlike *Mary Tyler Moore*, which mainly got its laughs from the witty banter among the principal characters, *Coach*’s comic philosophy owed its inspiration to the broader sitcoms of the 1950s, such as *The Honeymooners*. Like Ralph Kramden, Hayden Fox was constantly seeing his best-laid plans go awry and, like Alice Kramden, Christine Armstrong often found herself calmly cleaning up the shattered pieces of her less sensible counterpart’s schemes. Luther and Dauber

shared the position of Ed Norton, the loony sidekick who could, without much effort, make a bad situation for their pal much, much worse.

Philosophical approaches aside, *Coach* did share some things with *Mary Tyler Moore*, including the presence of Jerry Van Dyke, who played Luther. Van Dyke had made a few guest appearances on *Mary Tyler Moore* and, not coincidentally, had played the brother-in-law of Moore's Laura Petry on *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. Another connection was Christine Armstrong who, like Mary Richards, was a smart, independent woman who just happened to work for a Minneapolis television station (no word on whether or not it was WJM).

The more distinct connection between the two shows, however, was the disposition of the characters. As a football coach, it was not surprising that Hayden Fox was capable of some Ted Baxter-like vanity, but he was much closer in spirit to Lou Grant. Like Lou, Hayden was completely immersed in his work, short-tempered, full of bluster, and tough-shelled. Also like Lou, deep down inside Hayden was a pussycat. He was a faithful friend to Luther and Dauber, loyal and kind to Christine, and a doting father to Kelly. Luther and Dauber, in a sense, combined Mary Richards's kindness and sincerity with Ted Baxter's stupidity, but in a broader sense they were more closely connected to fellow midwestern characters Woody Boyd and Radar O'Reilly; a pair of lovable and cheerful, if somewhat slow-witted and naïve supporting characters. In short, it was a likable cast. In the Minnesota of *Coach*, love was, once again, all around. As critic Ken Tucker said of *Coach*, "it's comfort television, the kind of thing people watch simply to be with characters they like" (Tucker 1996a: 1).

Tucker also noted in the same review that he didn't much care for the show, and the critical response to *Coach* was always lukewarm. In its seven seasons, *Coach* received just two

Emmy Awards, compared to *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*'s twenty-seven. In terms of the ratings, however, *Coach* was actually the more successful show. *Coach* ranked eighteenth on the Nielsen charts after its first full season, remained there during its second, and then climbed into the top ten for three straight seasons, peaking in sixth place. In the show's sixth season, *Coach*'s ratings sagged and the show's producers shook things up by having Hayden land a job in pro football. Most of the characters were shipped off to Florida in 1995, where *Coach* expired after two more seasons.

Like *Mary Tyler Moore*, *Coach* was filmed in Hollywood, but it also used authentic midwestern exterior shots. There was no real Minnesota State University when the show premiered, although Mankato State University did adopt that name in 1999. Exteriors for the show were actually shot at the University of Iowa, the alma mater of series creator Barry Kemp. Kemp insisted that Hayden Fox was a wholly fictional creation, but college football fans probably couldn't help but notice that the protagonist's name bore more than a passing resemblance to that of long-time Hawkeyes head football coach Hayden Fry.

The departure of Coach Fox and his staff for Orlando in 1995 marked the beginning of the end for successful sitcoms set in Minnesota. *Mary Tyler Moore* and *Coach* combined for thirteen years in the state, but all four of Minnesota's subsequent comedies combined for less than one. 1995's *If Not For You*, a workplace comedy set at Gopher Records, a Minneapolis recording studio, lasted just four weeks. *The Louie Show*, about a psychotherapist in Duluth, premiered the following January and lasted two months. Then came *The Tom Show*, a family and workplace comedy set in Minneapolis, which premiered in 1997 and lasted just under seven months. The state's final entry to date was *Let's Bowl*, a goofy parody of local bowling shows

that began airing in 1997 on a local Minneapolis television station. It was eventually broadcast for ten weeks on cable's Comedy Central in 2001.

Like *Coach*, these subsequent shows all bore the Mary Richards stamp, with *If Not for You* recreating the workplace “family” of WMJ and *The Tom Show* taking on the familiar backdrop of a local Twin Cities television station. The most distinct connection, however, was the continuing characterization of Minnesotans as genuinely nice people. Tom of *The Tom Show* was a gregarious lug and loving father. On *The Louie Show*, comedian Louie Anderson played a psychotherapist whose bluntness often got him into hot water. Nevertheless, Louie was, as described by Brooks and Marsh, “such an endearing guy with a wonderful, self-deprecating sense of humor that almost nobody could remain upset with him for long” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 814). Even *Let's Bowl* was an exercise in politeness. The two contestants, who were brought on the show because they had had some minor disagreement, bowled against one another for such dubious prizes as a quarter-ton of sausage, a used snowmobile, or a trip to Duluth. The grand prize, however, was something Mary Richards would have thoroughly approved—an apology.

KANSAS

Based on its settings alone, the contemporary television landscape of Kansas is quintessentially midwestern. Of the state's six scripted programs with contemporary settings, just one has taken place in a large city, while the rest have been set in or around fictional small towns with names like Roseville, Smallville, and Jericho. Kansas is unique among its regional counterparts in that its contemporary programs make frequent references to agriculture, and

while none of these shows have been focused on the business of farming, three have taken the novel approach of having the central character actually live on a farm. Moreover, these programs have not, for the most part, belittled the residents of rural areas or small towns. In fact, the one program that Kansans seemed to find the most objectionable—2003's *Married to the Kellys*—was the one program set in Kansas City. This is not to suggest that all of the Kansas programs depict modern life there as especially desirable. Some have projected a strong sense of suffocating isolation or profound boredom, but they are rarely stinging indictments of Kansans themselves.

Kansas also represents television's clearest transition from Midwest to West. The Dakotas have been characterized primarily as western, with only one thematically midwestern program based there. Minnesota, on the other hand, is seen on television as thoroughly midwestern, with only one program, *Little House on the Prairie*, suggesting western themes. The three other trans-Mississippi midwestern states—Missouri, Iowa, and Nebraska—have not been the setting for any westerns. Kansas, in contrast, contains a relatively large, and roughly equal, number of programs that fit thematically into both regions. Younger viewers, particularly those who kept the teen drama *Smallville* on television for a number of years, would probably consider the state to be midwestern. Among older viewers, however, Kansas is much more likely to be identified as being purely a western locale.

When Kansas entered the television landscape in 1955, it did so with a bang—a literal one—from the Colt revolver of U. S. Marshal Matt Dillon. Brooks and Marsh described the scene:

The opening of the show said it all. There was Matt in a fast-draw showdown in the main street of Dodge City. The other man fired a fraction of a second faster, but missed completely, while Matt's

aim was true. Matt could be beaten up, shot, and ambushed, but that indomitable will would never be defeated (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 571).

Matt Dillon was the protagonist of *Gunsmoke*, which was not only the definitive television western, but also one of the most durable and popular television programs in any genre. The show ran for an astounding twenty seasons, a mark for a primetime scripted program only recently matched by *Law & Order* and *The Simpsons*. *Gunsmoke* spent eighteen seasons in the Nielsen top thirty, including thirteen in the top ten. It was the most popular show on television for four consecutive seasons, a feat that has not been equaled by any other television drama. *Gunsmoke* was not only television's most popular western, but one of the vanguards of the genre. During the 1956-1957 season, it was one of only two westerns to register in the Nielsen top thirty (the other, incidentally, was another Kansas entry, *The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp*). Two years later, fourteen westerns were in the top thirty. Seven of those programs reached the top ten, including the 1958-1959 season's four highest-rated shows.

Set in the 1870s, *Gunsmoke*'s cast of characters included Galen Adams, the town's kindly physician, and Kitty Russell, a tough-minded but soft-hearted saloon keeper. Chester Goode was the loyal, straight-arrow deputy, later replaced by the considerably scruffier, but equally faithful Festus Hagen. The heart and soul of the show, however, was the tall, heroic, and soft-spoken Matt Dillon, and most of the episodes revolved around Matt's efforts to maintain law and order in the bustling frontier town of Dodge City.

Gunsmoke ushered in the era of the adult western, in which cheaply produced, youth-oriented oaters like *Hopalong Cassidy* and *The Lone Ranger* were replaced by shows with higher production values and far more complex characters, plots, and themes. On *Gunsmoke*, the horses

still galloped and the lead still flew, but there were also careful examinations of interpersonal relationships, explorations of civil rights and civil disobedience, and depictions of rapes and lynchings. Each episode was a sort of morality play, exploring fundamental questions about the nature of a civilized society.

If Matt Dillon was the embodiment of Kansas values—and for millions of television viewers for two decades, he almost certainly was—then Kansans could not have asked for a better representative. Like most western heroes, he was strong and fearless, but he was also philosophical and sympathetic. “If violence was called for,” wrote one critic, “it was applied reluctantly. If compassion was the answer, it was available” (Newcomb 2010: 1). He was a powerful civilizing force, and a warrior against irresponsibility and lawlessness. In one episode he took a crooked farmer to task for not providing for his needy family, and in another, he protected a sick Indian woman from the angry citizens of Dodge City, who wanted to refuse her medical care. In another instance, described by Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman, Matt argued that order should not be achieved without the appropriate application of the law;

Matt Dillon runs into an old friend named Murdoch, whom the governor has ordered to hunt down and execute a violent gang of outlaws. When Matt and Murdoch capture some of the gang, two of them turn out to be young boys. Matt urges Murdoch to spare the boys, who are too young to have been part of the gang when the execution order was issued. Murdoch refuses, saying they’re guilty of something. Matt argues that you can’t hang a man on a John Doe warrant without proof, and scolds Murdoch for “talking a lot about hanging and very little about justice or due process of the law” (Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman 1991: 212-213).

Another defining element of Matt Dillon’s character was his lack of visible, emotional connection to those around him. Such apparent detachment connected him to scores of

midwestern and western television characters, from Chicago's Eliot Ness to Wyoming's nameless Virginian. This "loner" mentality is not uncommon among television lawmen, but the fact that *Gunsmoke* ran for so long made the trait all the more noticeable in Matt Dillon. He was an agreeable man and a loyal one, but he never developed an especially affectionate relationship with anyone. Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman describe an episode in which Marshal Dillon, while tracking down a gang of outlaws, ran across his exgirlfriend, Liola.

When Liola is wounded, Matt takes her into town for medical treatment. While recuperating, she talks to Doc about the happier times. In one scene she asks whether Matt is "still married to the badge." Doc replies that he is, and Liola recalls wistfully that she almost got Matt away from the badge. Doc admits that he was sorry at the time that she failed. But now he believes the job has been good for Matt, keeping him going despite the rigors involved. It is clear that Matt wasn't cut out for domestic life; his life is his work. No one, not even Miss Kitty, laments his lack of social life or his total devotion to enforcing justice (Lichter, Lichter and Rothman 1991: 128).

In addition to being an interesting study in regional psychology, Matt Dillon's character, and *Gunsmoke* in general, displayed striking parallels to the political philosophy of Kansas. Dillon's belief in racial amity mirrored that of many of Kansas's founders, and his dedication to civic responsibility and tendency to fight for the little man echoed the state's traditionally populist leanings. The central themes of *Gunsmoke* also reflect the values of modern Kansas, which is to say those of the modern conservative. The show offered countless examples of the importance of family, the power of religious devotion, the merits of traditional values, and the virtues of limited government. The show's most explicit message concerned the importance of rugged individualism, as manifested in Matt Dillon's fierce independent streak. According to Steven D. Stark, on *Gunsmoke*, as it was on many other television westerns, "the message was

clear: It's not the law or big government which can make America a great place to live in, but the basic decency of the good man" (Stark 1997: 88). In a way, the western genre was almost a commercial for the modern conservative movement, as was evident in a 1953 speech by the decade's most famous nonfictional Kansan, Dwight D. Eisenhower:

I was raised in a little town of which most of you have never heard. But in the West it is a famous place. It is called Abilene, Kansas. We had as our marshal for a long time a man named Wild Bill Hickok. If you don't know anything about him, read your Westerns more. Now that town had a code, and I was raised as a boy to prize that code. It was: meet anyone face to face with whom you disagree. You could not sneak up on him from behind, or do any damage to him, without suffering the penalty of an outraged citizenry. If you met him face to face and took the same risks he did, you could get away with almost anything, as long as the bullet was in the front (Eisenhower 1953: 1).

While *Gunsmoke* remains, without rival, Kansas's defining program, and by far its longest-running entry, it was neither the only Kansas-based program to debut in the fall of 1955, nor even the first. *The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp*, which premiered four days before *Gunsmoke*, was also a pioneer of the adult western genre. *Wyatt Earp*, like *Gunsmoke*, was as much an examination of personal and societal relationships as it was an action showcase. The series began with Earp taking a job as marshal of Ellsworth, Kansas. In the second season, he took the same position in Dodge City (with no reference to Matt Dillon), joined by brothers Virgil and Morgan, and the legendary Doc Holliday. *Wyatt Earp* was ranked eighteenth in the Nielsen ratings during its second season, and moved into the top ten for the next two years. In the fall of 1959, the setting shifted to Tombstone, Arizona.

Subsequent Kansas westerns followed the familiar theme of a noble man attempting to tame a savage and lawless territory, but none managed to match the success of their

predecessors. *Wichita Town*, *The Road West*, and *Cimarron Strip* each lasted for one season, while *Custer* lasted just four months. Set in the years shortly after the Civil War, 1959's *Wichita Town* featured Joel McCrea as cowboy Mike Dunbar, who took a job as U. S. Marshal and tried to bring order to the lawless town. *The Road West*, which debuted in 1966, told the story of Benjamin Pride, who moved his family from Ohio to Kansas shortly after the Civil War in an attempt to carve a living out of the promising but often unforgiving land. *Cimarron Strip* ran the following season, and was the story of U. S. Marshal Jim Crown, who patrolled the border between Kansas and Indian Territory in the late 1800s. Kansas's last stand in the Western genre was *Custer*, which had a short run in the fall of 1967. Set at Ft. Hays in 1868, the program focused on Lt. Colonel George A. Custer's command of the 7th Cavalry Regiment, a motley crew of outlaws, mavericks, ex-Confederates, and renegades, chronicling Custer's efforts to transform the 7th into a force capable of protecting settlers from Crazy Horse's Sioux.

Custer's short run reflected the flagging popularity of television westerns in the late 1960s. As mentioned, fourteen westerns could be found in the Nielsen top thirty during the 1958-1959 season. That number dropped to ten the following year, to six at the conclusion of the 1961-1962 season, and then to just three at the end of the 1967-1968 season. Two years later, only two westerns—*Gunsmoke* and *Bonanza*—charted in the Nielsen top thirty, while in 1974, not only was *Gunsmoke* the only western in the top thirty, it was the only western on television at all.

The meteoric rise and slow erosion of the western genre's popularity is not anomalous in the history of American television. Tastes change. The rise and fall of the variety show in the 1950s, the slapstick sitcom in the 1960s, the socially relevant comedy of the 1970s, the primetime soap of the 1980s, and the reality show of the 2000s are all indicative of that fact. The

collapse in the 1970s of once-mighty westerns like *Gunsmoke*, *Bonanza*, and *The Virginian* might simply be a matter of the shows having run their course. Another theory, however, suggests that the demise of the television western might have indicated a major shift in American cultural attitudes. In the 1970s, according to Steven D. Stark, the political values represented by the western fell out of favor on a television landscape that was now dominated by the likes of *All in the Family* and *M*A*S*H*.

In the wake of the Kennedy assassination in 1963, and the turbulence of the civil-rights movement and the counterculture, the whole premise of the traditional Western began to seem suspect. American values were in doubt. Loners began to be viewed as questionable. Tombstone seemed to resemble a police state. Rugged masculinity was out of favor The psychological and gender revolutions of the past 30 years have made the emotionless Western virtually obsolete. The same fate has met heroes in the Western mold—including a taciturn Kansan from near Dodge City named Bob Dole, whose persona would have fit right into the Westerns of the 1950s, but fell flat in 1996 (Stark 1997: 90-91).

Still another factor in the fall of the television western might have been shifting demographics. The television western's audience, more likely to be older and rural, was unappealing to television advertisers. Or perhaps the confines of Dodge City, Tombstone, and the Ponderosa Ranch simply seemed out of step with an increasingly metropolitan United States. Isolation was, indeed, a strong theme of *Gunsmoke*. Horace Newcomb wrote that "Dodge City stands as an outpost of civilization, the edge of America . . . surrounded by the dangers of the frontier . . . [and] always under threat from untamed forces (Newcomb 2010: 1). That sense of isolation was not the exclusive property of Kansas's westerns, but was also dominant on all four Kansas-based sitcoms. The three that appeared after the 1970s were all flops, the longest lasting ten months, but Kansas's first sitcom entry was a bona fide hit.

September 1955 was a big month for Kansas television. The only three Kansas-based programs that would break into the Nielsen top thirty premiered that month: *The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp* on September 6, *Gunsmoke* on September 10, and a sitcom called *You'll Never Get Rich* on September 20. Set at Fort Baxter, near Roseville, Kansas (both fictional), *You'll Never Get Rich* featured Phil Silvers as Master Sergeant Ernie Bilko. He was head of the company's motor pool, and the brains behind nearly all the camp's shadier activities. Most of the episodes involved Bilko outsmarting his superior officers, running the base's gambling operations, and cooking up various get-rich-quick schemes that, as the show's title suggested, never quite worked out.

CBS did not appear to have particularly high hopes for *You'll Never Get Rich*, placing it on Tuesday nights opposite Mr. Television himself, Milton Berle, and, oddly enough, against Kansas's own *Wyatt Earp*. The show, nevertheless, finished its first two seasons in thirtieth and twenty-second place, respectively—no small accomplishment given the competition. And although it never achieved *Gunsmoke*-type ratings, it was, in many ways, a landmark show. Despite its relatively short run, the program was nominated for seventeen Emmy awards, winning eight, including three straight for best comedy series. It was one of the first television programs to inspire a published collection of scripts, and one of the first to attain a sort of cult status by way of a long life in rerun syndication. It was also, notably, the first television program to regularly use African-American actors in “generic” roles, meaning roles that were not designed specifically for black actors. They were simply there as a matter of course.

Credit for the show's popularity must be given, in part, to its charismatically frenetic star. This fact was acknowledged two months into the show's run, when it was renamed *The Phil Silvers Show*. The show's popularity probably also stemmed from its examinations of the

banality and frustration of everyday army life, with Bilko's schemes representing a sort of fantasy for scores of servicemen. Even though Bilko and his men were supposedly in charge of the motor pool, they were never seen working, at least not on cars. Bilko never broke military rules, but he was artful in bending them. Likewise, he was never directly insubordinate, but nevertheless constantly proving himself superior to his superiors, mainly by separating them from their money. All of this doubtlessly resonated in living rooms occupied by a large number of military veterans, as noted by television historian Douglas Gomery:

The show was a send up of Army life . . . and loved by ex-GIs of World War II and the Korean conflict, a generation still close to its own military experiences, and willing to laugh at them Possibly the funniest [episode] was "The Case of Harry Speakup," in which a Bilko scheme backfires and he is forced to help induct a chimpanzee into the Army. Only Bilko could run such a recruit past Army doctors and psychiatrists, have him pass an IQ test and receive a uniform, be formally sworn in as a private, and then moments later honorably discharged. No bureaucracy has ever been spoofed better than was the Cold War U. S. Army in this 26-minute comic masterpiece (Gomery 2010: 1).

Although it was almost universally praised by critics, the runaway popularity of *The Phil Silvers Show* faded quickly. The program's ratings fell during its third season, and it was cancelled after its fourth. The likely reason for this fall from grace was a move from Tuesday to Friday nights, but it also is worth noting that the show's downturn coincided with a shift in setting. In 1958, Bilko's company was transferred from Kansas to California.

In television reference literature, the setting for a show is usually mentioned in passing or, in some cases, not at all. In entries describing the *Phil Silvers Show*, however, the Kansas setting is usually referenced almost immediately, and is mentioned as an integral part of the show's set-up. Douglas Gomery has suggested that Bilko had plenty of time to dream up his

various schemes because he was “stuck in the wide open spaces of rural Kansas” (2010: 1). Likewise, Brooks and Marsh wrote that Sgt. Bilko perpetrated his cons and schemes because he had “little to do in the wilds of Middle America” (2007: 1079). Rick Mitz described Ft. Baxter as “a nearly forgotten outpost of the U. S. Army” (1988: 113), and John Javna called it “a backwater military base with no defined mission” (1985: 170). The middle-of-nowhere characterization of Fort Baxter and Roseville, it appears, made the nefarious exploits of Bilko seem comically harmless, and also helped to underscore the tedium and monotony of military life.

As mentioned, despite its relatively short original run, *The Phil Silvers Show* became a cult classic during its long afterlife in syndicated reruns. That has not been the case for any other of Kansas’s sitcoms. In 1974, a different sort of con man descended on Kansas in the mellow sitcom *Paper Moon*, which featured the father-daughter team of Moses and Addie Pray travelling about the state during the Great Depression selling Bibles and attempting to pull off various money-making schemes. *Paper Moon* was based on an acclaimed 1973 film that had starred a real-life father and daughter team, Ryan and Tatum O’Neal. The television version lasted only thirteen weeks, and has largely passed into obscurity, but it does contain a few interesting footnotes. On the TV version, Moses was played by Christopher Connelly, who had played Ryan O’Neal’s brother on *Peyton Place*, while Addie was played by a then-obscure young actress named Jodie Foster. It is also notable for being the only Kansas-based program to actually film on location in the state. Beyond that, little has been written about television’s *Paper Moon*, but if it attempted to evoke the same spirit as the film, which featured a bleak, black-and-white landscape that brought to mind the home of Dorothy Gale on *The Wizard of Oz*, then the Kansas

of Moses and Addie would not have been altogether different from that of Matt Dillon and Ernie Bilko—vast, wild, and isolated.

The middle-of-nowhere theme continued in the short-lived 1994 sitcom *Tom*. Tom Graham, an amusement-park-ride welder, lived in Kansas with his wife, appropriately named Dorothy. Tom and Dorothy had five kids, which made for cramped living when Tom borrowed a construction trailer and moved the whole brood to his family's derelict farm, which was located next to the dump for a small town. Tom set about building his dream house, which for most of the show's three-month run consisted of a rather large hole. Tom and Dorothy made the best of life in the overcrowded trailer, but the kids were not enthusiastic, because "they all felt isolated out at the dump" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 290).

While the situation the characters on *Tom* found themselves in was not altogether enticing, the portrayal of the characters themselves was reasonably positive. Ironically, the one Kansas-based show that went to great lengths to portray Kansans as backward yokels was the only one to have a contemporary, metropolitan setting. Originally titled *Return to Kansas*, the 2003 sitcom *Married to the Kellys* was a fish-out-of-water story about Tom Wagner, a novelist from New York whose charming wife, Susan, persuaded him to move to suburban Kansas City so that she could be closer to her nutty family, the title Kellys. The show was created by Tom Hertz, and was inspired by his marriage to Overland Park native Susan Kelly. In an interview with the *Wichita Eagle*, Hertz argued that, "It's about family, not geography," adding that "about twenty of the Kellys came to Los Angeles for the taping. They loved it" (Cutright 2003: 5C).

Whether or not the show was about geography, it wasn't lacking in geographic symbols, and those symbols did not exactly portray modern, urban Kansas in flattering terms. Despite

being in the affluent suburbs of a metropolitan area of more than two million people, an early promotional photograph for *Married to the Kellys* showed the cast sitting in the bed of an ancient Dodge pickup truck that was parked in a cornfield. The Kelly family enjoyed sitting out on their porch, clad in flannel shirts, shucking corn. They consumed unholy amounts of pork and paintings of cows adorned their walls.

“Almost everyone in the Kelly family,” wrote critic Linda Holmes, “is strange and unbalanced in that warm, funny, middle-America sort of way” (Holmes 2003: 1). Susan’s mother, Sandy, possessed a friendly exterior that masked a strong need for control. She had collected dog figurines, one representing each member of the family, and a display on her wall indicated which Kelly was currently in her dog house. Bill, Susan’s big, earthy dad, did whatever it took to keep his wife happy, while her brother Lewis was painfully shy, relating better to the spiders he kept as pets than to the people around him. Susan’s sister, Mary, was a shrill, know-it-all graduate student who frequently reminded others that she was writing her dissertation, a fact that made her “almost a professor.” Chris was Mary’s milquetoast husband, who viewed Tom as a threat to his status as the favorite son-in-law. And then there was Uncle Dave, an obnoxious right-wing banker who sported a mullet and a pinky ring, and who was not thrilled about a New York Jew joining the family.

The possibility exists that the *Kellys* show was intended, like *The Beverly Hillbillies*, to cut both ways—that is, to be as much a critique of New Yorker Tom as it was of the Kansas Kellys. Indeed, the character of Tom was not especially likable. In the original pilot, when Susan told him that, “My parents think you are the coolest guy,” Tom snorted, “In Kansas, I am” (Cutright 2003: 5C). Critic Scott D. Pierce, however, did not feel that the laughs on *Married to*

the Kellys were directed at Tom, calling the show “yet another Hollywood vision of middle Americans as hicks, rubes and yokels:”

There’s that underlying message that people from New York City are just so much smarter and sophisticated than the folks who shuck corn and play parlor games And there’s a scene in Friday’s pilot that’s quite telling. As the Kellys sit down to dinner, they begin to sing grace—a little song familiar to millions of Americans who have attended summer camp of one sort or another. And the audience laughs. Creator/executive producer Tom Hertz, a New Yorker who based the show on his own wife’s Midwest family, insists that we’re supposed to be laughing at the character of Tom, who’s visibly uncomfortable. But that’s not the way it plays out—the audience is laughing at this family that prays before the meal (Pierce 2003: 1).

In her review of the show, Midwesterner Linda Holmes took the opportunity, albeit facetiously, to clear up some of misconceptions about the region that *Married to the Kellys* might have created:

We don’t like our families any better than you do. Don’t get me wrong—we like them a lot of the time, but once we’re adults, we don’t necessarily want to spend all our free time with them the way Mrs. Kelly’s kids do. If our moms did make one of those “doghouse” displays in the kitchen, most of us also wouldn’t think it was really cool the way her kids do Sometimes, we don’t smile. We smile when it’s called for, but there are times when we don’t. The entire cast of *Married to the Kellys* looks like it just polished off a carton of Crest Whitestrips and a tanker of tequila There’s just not as much relentless whimsy as there is in the Kellys’ house (Holmes 2003: 1).

Critic Stephen Kelly suggested that the show’s biggest problem was not geographic bias, but the fact that it just wasn’t that funny. “The jokes are as flat as ten miles of Kansas highway,” wrote Kelly. “Take this exchange between Tom and Mary, for instance:”

MARY: You did a good job of shucking that corn. If the writing career falls through, you can always become a farmer.

TOM: Yeah, then you can come over and milk my cows (Kelly 2003d: 1).

Funny or not, many Kansans were not laughing when they began to see promotional material from the show in 2003. The groundswell of discontent was so great that Kansas Travel and Tourism Director Scott Allegrucci felt it necessary to urge calm in a message to the state's various local convention and visitor bureaus and chambers of commerce:

We can be assured that Kansas will be the butt of some jokes I suggest that any protest on the part of any entity in Kansas will simply confirm the stereotypes that some fear the show will focus on Even if the show is less than we might hope for, it is worth more than we can ever pay [in publicity for the state]. This can only be good for Kansas—even if the show is a dog All TV shows are built upon stereotypes . . . and we should expect some that do not reflect us or our values (Alm 2003: C3).

Allegrucci added that the mere fact a show was set in Kansas, “confirms to me that there is something attractive about the Midwest and small-town values, and that can only be good for us.” Jeff Sheets, director of the Dickinson County Historical Society in Abilene, was not convinced. “It looked like *The Beverly Hillbillies*,” he said. “I’m hoping that’s not the case. We’ve fought hard to get Kansas to be seen as a tourism destination, and this may be a slap in the face.” David Flask, the former president of the South Central Kansas Tourism Region, was not as alarmed. “The show might be off the air in three months,” he said (Alm 2003: C3). In the end, Flask was wrong. The show was off the air in ten months.

While *Married to the Kellys* caused a firestorm of concern across the state, no one seemed to notice Kansas's single reality entry. *The Will* appeared early in 2005, and featured ten people, all relatives or acquaintances of seventy-three-year-old real estate developer Bill Long, competing to see who would inherit his Kansas ranch. Viewers did not have much time to find such a premise objectionable, as it was cancelled after just one episode.

While *The Will* was tying a record for the shortest run in television history, Kansas's first contemporary drama was emerging as the state's longest-running program since *Gunsmoke*. *Smallville*, which premiered in 2001, was the updated story of the early life of Clark Kent, the alter ego of the legendary comic book, radio, film, and television superhero, Superman. In this version, Kal-El arrived in a hail of kryptonite that fell on Smallville in 1989. He was adopted by Jonathan and Martha Kent and, as the show began, was just entering high school. *Smallville* was, in part, a teen soap opera. It dealt with Clark's alternating feelings of insecurity and optimism, his friendships and romantic entanglements, and other coming-of-age themes. It was also a supernatural action series, with many early episodes chronicling Clark's battles with townspeople turned evil by the kryptonite that had coincided with his arrival.

Although *Smallville* was definitely a television version of Kansas that viewers had never seen, it was thoroughly midwestern. To begin, the show made numerous references to agriculture. Clark's adoptive parents were struggling to hang on to the family farm, while the wealthy parents of Clark's best friend and future archenemy, Lex Luthor, owned the town's fertilizer plant. And the character of Clark Kent was exactly what viewers expected from a Kansas farm boy. For critic Mary Colgan, Clark as was an "erstwhile boy scout," and the embodiment of "corn-fed good boyness . . . wholesome, strapping, respectful to his parents, and a gentleman with the ladies (Colgan 2003: 1). Clark's character was representative of the show's

overall atmosphere. *Smallville* was milder than other youth-oriented action shows of its era, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *Dark Angel*, and far tamer than most recent teen soaps. The warm family life exuded by the Kents often made the show feel more like *The Waltons* or *7th Heaven* than *Dawson's Creek* or *Beverly Hills 90210*.

That is not to say that *Smallville* was stereotypically Kansas-clean, or that the little town was populated by simple country bumpkins. The characters were intelligent, complex, and, this being a soap opera, conflicted. Some of the story lines revolved around very real dilemmas faced by teenagers, particularly those growing up in small towns. There was Clark's classmate Brendan, a student of limited ability, who was petrified about what Smallville held for him once high school was over. There was also Chloe, a super-smart, overachieving editor of the high school newspaper who couldn't wait to move away to college and start her real life.

Perhaps the strongest geographic message of the show, though, was found in the show's third season, after Clark donned a ring made of red kryptonite and thereby unleashed his evil side. The scene was described by critic Mary Colgan:

Season three opens with Clark wreaking havoc all over Metropolis in fabulous super-villain fashion: driving hot cars, robbing banks, and doing it all with a smile. In *Smallville*, good is located in the country (i.e., Smallville), in plain, honest farm folks, and in helping people. Evil is flashy and ritzy; it's the city (Metropolis), power, riches, and corruption. So it's no surprise that when Clark hides from his pain within his alter ego, he does so in Metropolis (Colgan 2003: 1).

Smallville did contain jabs at the title town's smallness—its name, for example—and the fact that its claim to fame was being the “Creamed Corn Capital of the World.” That said, viewers did not find life in Smallville to be too monotonous. Because it appeared on the viewer-

starved WB network (and its later incarnation, the CW), *Smallville* was never a ratings blockbuster. It was popular enough, however, to remain on air for a decade, and was particularly liked by younger audiences. The median age of a *Smallville* viewer in 2003 was twenty-nine, somewhat surprising for a show whose main character, at least in the early years, lived on a farm in Kansas.

Young viewers were probably not watching *Smallville* for the agriculture, of course, but for the hair-raising forces of darkness that Clark Kent faced on a weekly basis. His show was not alone in that regard. In fact, Kansas soon became a primary destination for viewers looking to have their spines tingled. *Supernatural*, a drama that debuted in 2005, was one such example. While the show cannot really be counted as a Kansas entry—the setting changed from week to week—the two protagonists were Kansas natives. The Winchester brothers, Dean and Sam, travelled around the country battling a host of supernatural creatures. The first scene took place in 1983, when Dean and Sam were young boys. Critic Mary Colgan described the action:

Skeletal, Halloween-ish shadows encroach on a cozy suburban home. Inside, wholesomely named Mary and John tuck their two boys into bed. Later, Mary is awakened by her crying infant. When she enters the kids' room, lights buzz and flicker as she slowly realizes that the figure by the crib is not her husband . . . John finds her stuck to the ceiling, terrified and dripping blood into the crib, before flames engulf her. Her unfathomable death determines her sons' futures (Colgan 2005: 1).

The setting for this cheery scene was Lawrence, Kansas, a location chosen, according to series creator Eric Kripke, because of its close proximity to the tiny town of Stull. The Stull Cemetery has become a legend among aficionados of the supernatural, and the fifth season of *Supernatural* ended with Dean and Sam doing battle there with no less than old Lucifer himself.

The isolation theme of Kansas's earlier entries and the supernatural theme of its later ones are nicely compatible. Viewers who remember films such as *Night of the Living Dead*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and *In Cold Blood* know that when the action shifts to a darkened, isolated farmhouse, things usually do not turn out well. The eerie isolation of a small Kansas town was used to such effect in the 2006 drama *Jericho*, which aired for two seasons. Here, the threats were not supernatural, but they were no less unsettling. Fictional Jericho was a normal little town, and the principal characters were the sort with which viewers would be familiar: mayor, sheriff, doctor, barkeep, teacher, grocery store owner, and farmer. All hell broke loose when Jericho's residents heard reports that nuclear bombs were being detonated all over the United States, a fact confirmed when they saw a mushroom cloud rise on the horizon in the direction of Denver. Strangers began to drift into town. Some were refugees simply seeking shelter, while others had more mysterious motives. A few were scavengers, blatantly raiding the town of its scarce resources. Expeditions were organized to nearby towns in search of information and supplies, but, like horror film characters in an abandoned farmhouse, Jericho residents were largely cut off from the outside world, left to their own devices on the lonely plains of western Kansas.

While it seems unlikely that the *Jericho* sort of motif—residents of an isolated town constantly threatened with destruction—would ever become the basis for a children's cartoon, that was the case on *Courage the Cowardly Dog*, which debuted in 1999 on the Cartoon Network and ran for four years. Set in Nowhere, Kansas, which was depicted as a vast, empty plain, this animated series was the story of a fat, pink mutt and his eccentric elderly owners, Muriel and Eustace. Courage had reason to be cowardly. Nowhere was in a perpetual state of siege, not only from the usual Kansas culprits, such as blizzards, tornadoes, droughts, and travelling con men,

but also from far more bizarre sources, including evil cats, mummies, zombies, killer rats and goats, killer fungus and eggplants, alien chickens and squid, cannibal pigs, and weremoles.

As odd as it may sound, *Courage* carried with it a positive message and, stranger still, it was one that was not profoundly different from that of *Gunsmoke*. Critic John G. Nettles wrote that “although Courage lives in a perpetual state of anxiety, his devotion to Muriel inevitably wins out over his fears and Courage lives up to his name.” Nettles added that “this may be the best thing of many that the show has going for it, the persistent message that ‘courage’ isn’t being fearless but rather doing the right thing despite one’s fear.”

In addition to its decidedly unique villains, the show also had its own visual style, in which the animation was superimposed over real photographs. That technique may have provided the show’s most positive geographic message, at least for those who have, at one time or another, been enchanted by the physical geography of the Great Plains. Nettles wrote that “when the photo moon rises over the farmhouse and the surrounding plain of desolate nothingness it is hyperreal and beautiful—a magnificent view from Nowhere” (Nettles 2010b: 1).

NEBRASKA

Unlike its Plains-Midwest neighbors, Kansas and the Dakotas, Nebraska has never served as the setting for a western or, for that matter, a drama of any genre. All four of its entries have had contemporary settings and a comic tone. They were also all doomed, none lasting more than

three months, and all appearing as summer replacements—television’s version of the clearance rack. Nebraska did have the distinction of hosting one of the Midwest’s few reality television programs, although “distinction” might not be the appropriate word for *Tommy Lee Goes to College*, which lasted for six weeks in 2005. The title subject was the 42-year-old former drummer for the rock band Mötley Crüe who, having missed college, set off for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Although he never officially enrolled, he did attend classes, where the students were awestruck and the professors less so. Tommy also formed his own fraternity, auditioned for the marching band, took exams and, of course, partied. The show was certainly never intended to be a hard-hitting look at college life, much less at Nebraska, but the backdrop was probably not a random choice. Depositing the shaggy-haired, tattooed, and hard-living California rock star into the wilds of the Midwest was almost certainly intended for comic effect, with one critic noting that scenes were “carefully selected to create a ‘fish out of water’ saga” (Gibron 2005: 1).

Nebraska’s three other entries have been sitcoms, and two of them did not exhibit any sort of midwestern stereotype. Instead, they were so formulaic that they were interchangeable with dozens of shows set throughout the United States. *First Impressions*, which ran for eight weeks in the summer of 1988, was the story of Frank Dutton, a single father and owner of “Media of Omaha,” a company that produced commercials. The supporting characters were straight from central casting—Lindsay his cute nine-year-old daughter, Mrs. Madison the nosy next-door neighbor, Dave his neurotic business partner, Donna his incredibly naïve receptionist, and Raymond, his gambling-addicted sound engineer. *Rachel Gunn, R. N.*, which ran for thirteen weeks in the summer of 1992, was set in Nebraska’s Little Innocence Hospital. It told the story of the cynical, but dedicated, head nurse of the surgery ward. Working alongside Rachel was a

typically zany and ethnically diverse cast of supporting characters, including a guileless and eager young nurse, a Vietnam veteran, a squeamish black orderly, and a fat, angry dietician.

A third Nebraska sitcom, *Heartland*, made greater use or, arguably, misuse of its setting, but did not meet with any more success, lasting just ten weeks in 1989. The show took place in and around the farmhouse of Tom and Casey Stafford, but the focus was on B. L. McCutcheon, Casey's father, who had been forced to move in after his own farm was repossessed by the bank. In true T.V.-father-in-law fashion, B. L. couldn't stand Tom, but was partial to his three grandchildren. These included Johnny, a television addict who dreamed of moving to sunny southern California; Kim, an adopted Vietnamese daughter; and Gus, a lumbering farm boy whose best friend was an enormous pet sow. B. L. was something of a Corn Belt version of Archie Bunker, billed in promotional material by CBS as "an old and crusty but lovable small-town bigot who has something insulting to say about everyone" (Margulies 1989: 1). For better or worse, *Heartland* was noteworthy for taking the rare step to actually set a midwestern program on a farm, but it relied on tired midwestern jokes. In the words of *New York Times* critic John J. O'Connor:

B. L. can be trying when he sounds off about big-city folk, including Jane Fonda, of course Moving away from television's standard suburban setting for sitcoms, the series manages to find a laugh or two in the most unlikely situations, including attempts by a greedy banker to get the family farm for an agricultural conglomerate. There is even a tornado ("God's way of telling people not to live in trailer parks," one family member notes). Checking on the house the next morning, Tom announces, "It's still here, but there's a dead witch under the house and everything's in color" (O'Connor 1989: 1).

THE DAKOTAS

In terms of their television landscape, North and South Dakota are the least midwestern of the Midwest's states, existing strictly as a remnant of the Old West or a figment of Canadian imagination. The only program with a contemporary setting to use the Dakotas as a backdrop was the adventure comedy *My Secret Identity*. Seventy-two episodes of the program were produced in Canada for the CTV network from 1988 to 1991, with a concurrent release in syndication in the United States. Set in Briarwood, North Dakota, the program concerned a teenager who had developed superpowers after being exposed to radiation during an experiment his next-door neighbor, a friendly but eccentric scientist, conducted. Episodes involved typical events of a student's life, and the occasional need to thwart crime and disaster.

The remaining three entries for the Dakotas were actually set before either state entered the Union, in the enormous Dakota Territory of the late 1800s. All three reflected the classic Western theme of a righteous man standing up to corruption and evil, and the Dakota Territory of television was certainly in dire need of heroes. The syndicated series *Man Without a Gun* released the first of its fifty-two episodes in the fall of 1958. Set in the 1880s, it chronicled the crusades of a newspaper editor, memorably named Rex Reason. As the title suggests, Reason primarily used his newspaper as a means of achieving law and order, but "a good fistfight now and then helped things along" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 848). 1963's *The Dakotas* was a short-lived and fairly typical oater about a U. S. Marshal and his deputies fighting crime in Bad Lands and Black Hills of the late 1800s. The Dakotas' last Western entry was its most successful. Featuring former football star and occasional flower pitchman Merlin Olsen, *Father Murphy* debuted in the fall of 1981 and aired for just over a year. John Murphy was a drifter during the

Black Hills mining boom of the 1870s. He happened upon the town of Jackson and rallied the local people against the town boss, whose henchman promptly blew up the miners' camp. This left Murphy to care for two dozen now-orphaned children. Posing as a priest, "Father" Murphy opened an orphanage, and then fended off evil territory officials, who were intent on sending the children to a work camp.

CONCLUSION

North Dakota's single contemporary entry, *My Secret Identity*, was the story of the eccentrics who populated a sleepy little town—a theme not unfamiliar to midwestern television programs—but, for the most part, the Dakotas are the most thematically western of the midwestern states. All of that area's remaining programs took place during the days of the Old West, and shows like *Father Murphy* followed the familiar western theme of a courageous man standing up to corruption and evil on a wild and lawless frontier. Nebraska, on the other hand, has been the least western of the Plains states, with most of its shows chronicling contemporary urban life. The one Nebraska-based program to exploit regional stereotypes was *Heartland*, a comedy about a cantankerous old farmer and his family, but none of the state's programs were successful, and their geographic legacy almost certainly forgotten by the majority of viewers.

The same can be said for shows set in Iowa. The state's mixture of comedies and dramas explored familiar midwestern themes—small-town life, mainstream and traditional values, and a population that was idealistic, industrious, and independent—but all of these programs were flops. Iowa did, however, provide one of the Midwest's most memorable television characters, *M*A*S*H's* Radar O'Reilly. Like *Cheers's* Woody Boyd, Radar was an unassuming, dependable, polite, and likable farm kid who often served to expose the cynicism of the more

sophisticated characters around him. These same traits dominated the television landscape of Iowa's northern neighbor, but unlike Iowa, Minnesota has been home to three very successful programs. The tone and setting for these shows varied widely. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* was the prototypical program about a modern, independent woman, and it depicted Minneapolis as a thriving, modern metropolis. *Little House on the Prairie* was the story of the sometimes harsh realities of life on the frontier prairie, while *Coach* was a goofy, escapist comedy about the family and work life of a harried college football coach. What unified all of these shows, though, were the Radar O'Reilly-like qualities of their characters. Almost every one of them was likable, humble, a bit square, and excessively polite. Nearly all of Minnesota's lesser entries followed suit, featuring nice characters living in pleasant environs that were completely devoid of crime, poverty, and violence.

Missouri has broken ranks with many of its Trans-Mississippi Midwest counterparts. Its television landscape has been more ethnically diverse, more urban, and more likely to feature unsavory landscapes and characters. None of Missouri's northern or western neighbors have featured the sort of urban seediness on display in *The John Larroquette Show* and, although it was set in a small town, *Grace Under Fire* dispensed with the nostalgia, wholesomeness, and sentimentality that characterized many of the region's programs. That said, Missouri's television landscape has also had no shortage of old-fashioned values, small-town virtues, pleasant families, syrupy optimism, and earthy wit. Three of Missouri's television icons—Red Foley, host of *Ozark Jubilee*, Jed Clampett of *The Beverly Hillbillies*, and Sherman Potter of *M*A*S*H*—had characteristics that were very much part of the Midwest's heartland ethos. They were warm, friendly, and unpretentious, and rejected anything that could be considered effete or snobbish.

If there is a dominant theme among Kansas's television entries, it is that of an admirable character living in unenviable circumstances. This was true of the state's western entries, particularly *Gunsmoke*, where the strong, fearless, and philosophical Matt Dillon battled violence and prejudice in an isolated town on a wild frontier. The state's successful contemporary programs also followed this theme. The goofy and likable Ernie Bilko battled boredom at a forgotten outpost of the U. S. Army, and the intelligent and honest residents of *Smallville*, which included no less than Superman himself, battled the forces of evil in their isolated little town. With the exception of the objectionable yokelism of *Married to the Kellys*, all of Kansas's lesser entries have followed suit. Most of the characters were likably earthy and respectable, but in their little towns and on their farms, they suffered from isolation, boredom, and, on more than one occasion, outright terror.

TABLE 6. DEFINING PROGRAMS AND COMMON TRAITS: THE SOUTH

State	Defining Programs	Key Program Elements	Other Common Traits
Alabama	<i>Any Day Now</i>	Poverty; race and racism; slow-paced life; friendship; strong women; the present entrenched in the past	
Arkansas	<i>Evening Shade</i>	A sleepy, tradition-bound little town populated by colorful, witty, likeable characters	Modern urban areas; rural backwaters
Kentucky	<i>The Wonderful John Acton</i>	Good-natured, small-town nostalgia	Rural nostalgia
Georgia	<i>The Dukes of Hazzard</i>	A small town and its rural hinterland; crooked politicians and cops; charming, unsophisticated, uneducated, populist, respectful heroes; escapism; lack of a middle class; country ingenuity	Black vs. white, big city vs. backwoods, Old South vs. New South; corrupt cops and politicians; populist resistance; scantily clad tomboys; African-Americans; progressive, sophisticated, and generally white-collar Atlanta; languid small towns; the Civil Rights movement; the “Redneck revival”
	<i>Designing Women</i>	Single, intelligent; accomplished, outspoken Atlanta women; Old South charm; black character featured as a matter of course	
	<i>Matlock</i>	A respected, Harvard-educated Atlanta attorney; simple, unassuming, country ingenuity; black character featured as a matter of course	
	<i>Profiler</i>	A strong female lead; Atlanta as somewhat dangerous, but cosmopolitan city	

Louisiana	<i>Frank's Place</i>	Successful African-American professional drawn to New Orleans by its "food, its music, its social clubs, its jazzy seductiveness"; a "romantic, almost dream-like, aura"	New Orleans as a colorfully seedy, cheerfully boozy, free-living city suffering from crime, illicit sex, drugs, violence, corruption; modern cities surrounded by wilderness and spooky swamps
Mississippi	<i>In the Heat of the Night</i>	Racial issues; the transition from Old South to New South; conservative values; slow pace of life; violence and crime; a high "redneck factor"; a tight-knit community	Isolated backwaters
North Carolina	<i>The Andy Griffith Show</i>	Leisurely paced life in an ideal small town; a "city-slickers idea of heaven"; warm and sincere characters; a tight-knit community; the importance of family; escapism; simple townfolk; unsophisticated rural hillbillies; small-town ingenuity	Modern urban areas mixed with small, out-of-the-way towns; gentle warmth; nostalgia; tumultuous life in a modern small town
South Carolina	<i>American Gothic</i>	A charming small town haunted by a dark secret	
Tennessee	<i>Hee Haw</i>	Country music; goofball sense of humor and determinedly unsophisticated atmosphere; "idea-free, pure entertainment"	Country variety programs; violent, impoverished and backward small towns

Tennessee (continued)	<i>Nashville Now</i>	Country-themed talk and variety program	
Virginia	<i>The Waltons</i>	Wholesome rural nostalgia; a loving family; traditional values; bittersweet stories; dignity, warmth, quiet intelligence, and simple wisdom; splendid isolation	Bright, motivated government employees; optimism; warm and loving families
	<i>American Dad</i>	Middle class nuclear family; suburban conformity; parody of neoconservatism and right-wing paranoia; family values	
West Virginia	<i>Hawkins</i>	Prestigious lawyer living in a small town; earnest and intelligent country folk	

CHAPTER 6 - THE SOUTH

At first glance, it appears that television has treated the South a little unfairly. It is home to over 19% of the country's population, but has accounted for just 5.3% of the television landscape, and even those numbers are deceiving. Tennessee has accounted for an impressive 2.54% of the American television landscape, or just under half of the medium's southern images. Tennessee also has accomplished this with just twenty-five entries, indicating that a number of the state's programs have enjoyed remarkably long lives. Still, many of those shows were country music and variety programs, and the most successful of them aired in syndication or on cable television, rather than on the major networks.

Many southern states have fared very poorly on television. West Virginia and South Carolina each count only one entry, and neither lasted more than a year. Kentucky has served as the setting for four programs, but they have been similarly short-lived. Alabama, Arkansas, and Mississippi have each served as the backdrop for one somewhat successful program. Collectively, however, these six states account for just thirteen total programs, which is fewer than the total for Kansas alone. These same six states have collectively accounted for 0.54% of the television landscape, which is less than the individual mark of Maryland. North Carolina has a slightly more impressive history, having served as the setting for seven programs that account for 0.39% of the country's television images, but that is mostly attributable to one very successful show. Virginia has also notched seven television entries, and they have accounted for 0.47% of the American television landscape, but that is also largely because of the success of a single show. Louisiana ranks third in terms of total programs with twelve, but few of these shows have lasted long, and its share of the television landscape is equal to that of North Carolina, at

0.39%. Georgia ranks second in the South, totaling sixteen programs, a few of which have been fairly durable, and accounts for 0.97% of the country's television landscape. Absent Tennessee, however, the South has accounted for just 2.76% of the American television landscape, which is less than that of the District of Columbia alone.

KENTUCKY

Kentucky's television landscape has been fairly sparse, and that seems at least partially due to the state's lack of large urban centers. Large metropolitan areas are disproportionately represented on the American television landscape, and Louisville, the state's largest metro area, ranks behind forty-one other American cities in terms of population. The Kentucky of television is also not a modern urban one, but rather rooted in the past. None of its four programs have survived beyond one season.

The first entry, *The Wonderful John Acton*, was set in 1919 in the small town of Ludlow on the Ohio River and told the story of a county clerk who lived in the back room of his general store. A warm reminiscence of small-town life, this program was similar in spirit to later shows such as *The Andy Griffith Show* and *The Waltons*, but not nearly as successful, surviving just three months in the summer of 1953. Kentucky's second entry, *Young Dan 'l Boone*, was an adventure series of about the famous woodsman when he was in his twenties. A sort of nineteenth-century backwoods *Mod Squad*, the show also featured Boone's sweetheart, Rebecca, and a multicultural trio of sidekicks: a 12-year-old English boy, a Cherokee, and a runaway slave. Viewers did not know what to do with the series, and it was cancelled after four weeks in 1977. Kentucky then was off the air for two decades before returning in 1998 with the short-

lived soap opera *Legacy*. Set near Lexington in the 1880s, it was the story of the Logans, a wealthy Irish family that owned a horse farm. The patriarch was Ned, a widower who had been incapacitated after being shot. His eldest son, Sean, was secretly in love with Marina, the family's black housekeeper. Clay, the hot-headed younger son added to the mix along with two daughters, shy Alice and precocious Lexy. Much of the program's tension involved the rural Winters clan that was bent on destroying the Logans. *Legacy* clearly was an attempt to revive the spirit of filthy-rich-family soap operas, such *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, which had been so popular in the 1980s. Big Oil was more interesting than Big Horse, apparently, and the show was cancelled after about four months. Kentucky's final entry, and only contemporary one, was *Cheerleader Nation*, a documentary series about the squad at Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School in Lexington, and their successful quest for a fourth national championship. It aired on the Lifetime Network for eight weeks in 2006.

WEST VIRGINIA

West Virginia's lone television entry—1973's *Hawkins*—did for the legal drama what *The Andy Griffith Show* did for the sitcom. At the heart of both shows was the folksy charm of its star—on *Hawkins* it was Hollywood icon Jimmy Stewart—and a similar geographic message. Billy Jim Hawkins lived in a small town, but had built a national reputation as an expert on murder cases. With his assistant, cousin R. J., he travelled the country clearing his clients and helping to apprehend the real culprits. Television historian David Martindale's description of *Hawkins* echoes statements made by others about *Andy Griffith*:

Perceived by many as just some local yokel—a slow-talking country lawyer with an equally slow wit—he was in fact a crafty criminal defense attorney, one so sharp he could have given Perry

Mason a run for his money He was a hard man not to admire—and impossible not to like Hawkins' forthrightness and earnestness was continually played against the seediness of the series' guest characters (Martindale 1991: 225).

The difference between *Hawkins* and *Andy Griffith*, of course, was longevity. *Hawkins* lasted the duration of the 1973-1974 season, but was part of a rotating line-up with *CBS Tuesday Night Movies* and, of all things, *Shaft*, so only nine episodes of the show aired.

TENNESSEE

Although a few southern states can boast entries that were more enduringly popular than any of Tennessee's programs—North Carolina's *The Andy Griffith Show* and Virginia's *The Waltons*, for example—no other southern state's television landscape can match Tennessee in terms of sheer quantity. The Volunteer State has served as the backdrop for twenty-five programs, which is nine more than its closest regional counterpart, Georgia; more than double that of Louisiana; and greater than the total entries for Kentucky, West Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, and Mississippi combined. This large volume is mostly attributable to primetime programming that originated from Nashville, the heart of the nation's country music industry. After the demise of national broadcasting from such cities as Philadelphia and Chicago in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Nashville remained one of the few places outside New York and California to produce primetime television programs. Nearly all of them had a country flavor.

Tennessee's first national television program originated from the Mother Church of country music, the Grand Ole Opry. A performance at the venerable Nashville theater had long

been considered the pinnacle of any country musician's career, and live shows from the venue had been broadcast on national radio since 1925. *The Grand Ole Opry* finally arrived on network television in October 1955, when ABC aired hour-long simulcasts of the radio program once a month. Oddly, despite featuring some of country music's icons, including Ernest Tubb, Hank Snow, Chet Atkins, Marty Robbins, Roy Acuff, and June Carter, the ABC broadcast did not last as long as "lesser" country music entries such as Springfield, Missouri's *Ozark Jubilee* or Cincinnati's *Midwestern Hayride*. ABC pulled the plug on the show in September 1956, ending primetime television's flirtation with Nashville for more than a decade, and setting the stage for the national networks' rather stormy relationship with the city's music industry.

Nashville's second entry, *The Johnny Cash Show*, premiered on ABC in the summer of 1969. Many of its performers were also from the country music field, including Cash himself, the Carter Family, and the Statler Brothers, but the show also showcased talent spanning the musical spectrum, including such guests as Louis Armstrong, Eric Clapton, Arlo Guthrie, Jose Feliciano, Pete Seeger, and James Taylor. Eight days after the debut of *Johnny Cash*, CBS rolled out its own Nashville-based variety program, which, unlike *Johnny Cash*, was purely, unabashedly, and, some argued, offensively country-fried. The almost mythical story of *Hee Haw*'s origin was related by television insider Bob Shanks in his 1976 memoir *The Cool Fire*:

One friend of mine, Bernie Brillstein, an intelligent and jolly talent manager and producer, had tried for months to sell a prestige series he believed in. Zero. He was getting absolutely nowhere In frustration, he grabbed up a copy of *Variety* to see what the hell was selling. In the top ten shows he saw *Beverly Hillbillies*, *Green Acres*, *Glen Campbell*, and *Laugh-In*. Consciously, maliciously almost, he sat down and grafted all of these programs onto his one giant nerve end of frustration. When he had it, he called CBS . . . got an appointment, and in two minutes, sold the show (Shanks 1976: 153).

The most substantial difference between *The Johnny Cash Show* and *Hee Haw* was the goofball sense of humor and determinedly unsophisticated atmosphere of the latter. Sprinkled in with the serious musical numbers were songs with titles like “Who’s Gonna Mow Your Grass?,” “Your Squaw’s On the Warpath,” and “Hobo Meditations.” The setting for the show was Kornfield Kounty, a place that, in the words of one historian, “made Hooterville look like Times Square” (Hollis 2008: 221). The male comedians usually dressed in overalls, while voluptuous female comics were usually poured into skimpy outfits inspired by Daisy Mae Scragg of Al Capp’s *L’il Abner* comic strip. Like *Laugh-In*, there was a rapid-fire succession of one-liners, blackouts, and sketches, but instead of the jokes being delivered from the windows of a psychedelic “joke wall,” or from a hipster cocktail party, *Hee Haw*’s were delivered by actors lounging about in rocking chairs, on haystacks, or in a cornfield. And while bad jokes on *Laugh-In* merited a bucket of water, those telling duds on *Hee Haw* were smacked on the head with a rubber chicken or on the backside with a fence plank.

Like the show’s jokes, most of the comedians on *Hee Haw* were industry veterans, including Opry mainstays Grandpa Jones, Minnie Pearl, Stringbean Akeman, and Archie Campbell; *Petticoat Junction* veterans Gunilla Hutton and Jeannine Riley; and George Lindsay, who brought the character of Goober Pyle intact from *The Andy Griffith Show*. Then there was Kornfield Kounty’s resident idiot, Alvin “Junior” Samples. Samples, an obese, slow-talking, good-ole boy from Cumming, Georgia, had been working at a sawmill when copies of him spinning a wild fishing yarn began making rounds at country music stations. This recording, entitled *World’s Biggest Whopper*, made him a minor celebrity in country circles, and he was a natural fit for *Hee Haw*’s style of humor.

If the gags on *Hee Haw* were considered by many to be cut-rate, the production was not. The show was performed in the studios of Nashville's WTVF, which sent nearly seventy miles of videotape to Los Angeles each season, where the Leviathan task of editing the show was performed. While the tone of the show was laconic, its pace was frenetic. Whereas a typical variety show contained about twenty distinct segments, an average episode of *Hee Haw* had nearly 150. More important, the show's musical talent was no laughing matter. Like *The Johnny Cash Show*, *Hee Haw*'s musical guests included some of the legends of country music: Merle Haggard, Waylon Jennings, Jerry Lee Lewis, Loretta Lynn, Charley Pride, and Conway Twitty. Moreover, the show was hosted by Roy Clark and Buck Owens, both top-notch country musicians in their own right.

Despite the show's impressive array of musical talent, television critics were, almost without exception, absolutely horrified by *Hee Haw*. The show was described as "tripe," "degrading," "vile," and "awful," with one critic claiming that "CBS ought to be ashamed." *TV Guide*'s Cleveland Amory called the show "Outhouse *Laugh-In*," the *Houston Chronicle*'s Ann Hodges wrote that it was "possibly the worst show I've ever seen," and Cecil Smith of the *Los Angeles Times* described *Hee Haw* as "the most irrelevant, stupid and ghastly program in recent history" (Andrews 1980: 46, 51).

For some, *Hee Haw* was not simply an artistic abomination, but a political and cultural one as well. James Branscome, the director of the strip-mining watchdog group Save Our Kentucky, believed that CBS, which aired *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *Green Acres*, and *Hee Haw* consecutively on Tuesday nights in 1970, was being every bit as exploitive and destructive as the coal industry. He called the network's action "the most effective effort ever exerted by a nation to belittle, demean, and otherwise destroy a minority people within its boundaries." Had another

minority group been portrayed in a similar manner, he added, it would have provoked “an immediate public outcry” (Harkins 2004: 203). Part of the critical backlash directed at *Hee Haw* likely stemmed from the show’s origin as a replacement for the politically irreverent, and recently cancelled, CBS variety show *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*. One *TV Guide* critic, for example, was disgusted that *Hee Haw* had “come to life over the dead bodies of the Smothers Brothers, who were always making those terrific jokes about racial tensions, the Vietnam War, Congressional ethics, air pollution, and the military-industrial complex” (Hollis 2008: 224).

Hee Haw’s rise to prominence during one of the most politically and economically turbulent eras in recent history troubled or even baffled some critics. But at least one believed the show’s popularity was actually a product of its times. Neil Hickey described *Hee Haw* as a “rapid rural romp of retrogressive rejoinders distilled into idea-free, pure entertainment for America’s tired brain” (Andrews 1980: 44). *Hee Haw* cohost Buck Owens seemed to agree, commenting that: “We try to entertain all ages. We’re not a hip show. We stay away from inside jokes as much as possible Anybody can grasp this material” (Andrews 1980: 50).

If nothing else, *Hee Haw* was a ratings success. The program was ranked twentieth in the Nielsen rating in its rookie year, and climbed to number sixteen the next season. *The Johnny Cash Show* was similarly popular. After beginning life as a summer replacement program in 1969, it ranked fifteenth on the Nielsen charts for the 1969-1970 season. Both shows, however, were gone in 1971. This was not a result of declining ratings, but rather part of a corporate decision now commonly referred to as television’s “rural purge.” In the late 1960s, CBS had enjoyed enormous hits with a number of rural-themed comedies and variety shows, including *Gomer Pyle*, *U. S. M. C.*, *Mayberry*, *R. F. D.*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *Green Acres*, *Hee Haw*,

The Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour, and *The Jim Nabors Hour* (which featured the star of *Gomer Pyle* and debuted shortly after that show's departure). It also had a stable of veteran programs with strong audiences among rural, small-town, and older viewers, including *The Red Skelton Hour*, *The Ed Sullivan Show*, *My Three Sons*, and *Family Affair*. ABC was less reliant on such programming, but it did count *The Johnny Cash Show* and *The Lawrence Welk Show* among its more dependable programs. At the conclusion of the 1970-1971 season, eleven of these thirteen programs were cancelled, and by the end of the next year, all of them were gone.

Although CBS is the network most often cited as responsible for the purge, it was actually NBC that precipitated it. Long mired in second place behind the "Tiffany Network," NBC took the novel, even revolutionary approach of sharing its demographic research with advertisers. NBC persuaded potential customers that its programming—shows like *Laugh-In*, *Julia*, *The Flip Wilson Show*, and *Adam-12*—appealed to a younger, more urban audience that was more susceptible to advertising. The programs on CBS, they contended, attracted older, small-town and rural viewers; those who consumed less and were more likely to buy the same products they had always purchased. When NBC's marketing strategy worked, this fact did not go unnoticed at CBS:

New CBS president Bob Wood . . . realized that the network was faring poorly with most big city viewers and saw that the audience for the network's rural-based shows was now composed almost exclusively of children, the elderly, older blue-collar workers, and folks in rural and small-town locales—all told, the least desirable viewer demographics for attracting advertisers According to a perhaps apocryphal story Buddy Ebsen recounted years later, network head William Paley's wife was greeted by her friends at a posh New York restaurant as "the wife of the owner of the hillbilly network." Thus, with Paley's full backing, Wood made a move beginning in the spring of 1970 to purge every rural-based program from the CBS lineup. As *Green Acres*'s regular Pat Buttram lamented: "they cancelled everything with a tree—including

Lassie.” By 1971, CBS had made the “turn toward relevance” and was broadcasting programs featuring young people with “sixties values” such as *All in the Family*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and, a year later, *M*A*S*H* (Harkins 2007: 201-203).

Despite the purge, Kornfield Kounty refused to die. New episodes of *Hee Haw* were produced and released in syndication and, although its success continued to baffle critics, the program continued off the networks for two more decades. *Hee Haw*’s popularity inspired two more long-running syndicated country music programs in the early 1970s, both originating from Opryland, U. S. A., in Nashville. *That Good Ole Nashville Music* was in production from 1970 to 1985, and *Pop! Goes the Country* ran from 1974 to 1982. Two shorter-lived syndicated Nashville music programs also aired in 1976: twenty-six episodes of Opryland’s *Music Hall America* and fifty-two episodes of *Dolly*, hosted by emerging country star Dolly Parton.

NBC aired a knock-off of *Hee Haw*, called *The Nashville Palace*, during the 1981-1982 season, but the major networks mostly ignored the obvious appetite for country-themed programs. Outsiders attempted to fill that void on March 7, 1983, by launching The Nashville Network (TNN) on cable television. The new network’s daytime line-up consisted mainly of hunting, fishing, and racing programs, but its evening schedule was almost all country music. The cornerstone was *Nashville Now*, a live, nightly talk and variety show hosted by Ralph Emery. Brooks and Marsh record that “everybody who was anybody in country music showed up here, making the show almost as much of an institution in Nashville as the Grand Ole Opry itself” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 962). Another early regular series was *You Can Be a Star*, a talent contest for amateur country acts that ran from 1983 to 1989, and again during the 1991-1992 season. *Gospel Jubilee*, TNN’s southern gospel entry from Opryland, aired during the 1990-1991 season. *Crook and Chase*, a down-home country music talk show premiered in 1986.

In 1993, upon the retirement of Ralph Emery and *Nashville Now*, *Crook and Chase* was expanded and retitled *Music City Tonight*, running until 1996.

Another popular TNN program, *Club Dance*, was the network's answer to *American Bandstand* and *Dance Fever*. Originating from Knoxville, the show was hosted by Shelly Mangrum and "fatherly Phil Campbell, the soda-pop bartender" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 263). Cashing in on the country line-dancing fad, and featuring professional, amateur, young, and old dancers alike, *Club Dance* aired from 1991 to 1999, producing a remarkable 1,848 episodes. *The Statler Brothers Show*, which premiered in the fall of 1991, was a throwback to the days of Ed Sullivan. It featured the title group and other country acts, plus a wide range of comedians, jugglers, ventriloquists, and magicians. This show, despite its dusty format, became the biggest hit on TNN and prompted the network to launch a second variety program, *Prime Time Country*, in 1996. Both programs lasted until 1999.

The seemingly antiquated nature of TNN shows prompted one critic to quip, "Vaudeville never died, it just moved to Nashville" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1304). If there is a central geographic message indicated by the success of such programming, it is that a large portion of America's television audience had been alienated by the rural purge of 1971. In fact, *Hee Haw*'s long syndicated run and the very existence of TNN suggests a rejection, among some viewers, of all things hip and urban. At the very least, this programming certainly created for the television audience a lasting image of Tennessee as the home for all things down-home.

In 1997, TNN's Nashville-based owners sold the network to the Westinghouse Corporation, which then purchased, of all things, CBS, putting that network's executives in charge of TNN. As if it were settling an old score, CBS immediately dropped TNN's guitar logo

and began a Shermanesque campaign to replace TNN's country music and rural lifestyle programs with general interest movies and reruns. In April of 2000, Viacom, the owner of MTV, purchased CBS and completed the transition. The Nashville Network's name was changed first to "The National Network," and then, in 2003, to "Spike TV." It now featured testosterone-soaked programs oriented toward young males.

With the lid of TNN's coffin finally nailed shut, the number of nationally broadcast country programs dwindled significantly, although the country variety format was revived with some success from 2003 through 2008. *Nashville Star* was the USA Network's answer to *American Idol*, with amateur country musicians competing for a record contract, with the finals taking place at Opryland.

In contrast to its long-running and successful array of country music variety programs, Tennessee has served as the backdrop to just seven scripted programs, only one of which lasted more than a year. Four of these programs still had a musical flair, including the first, a 1977 crime drama called *Nashville 99* that featured Claude Akins as a veteran cop. Country music star Jerry Reed played his sidekick, and other country musicians often appeared as themselves. The show was not well-received, with one critic sarcastically calling it "absolutely the finest police series ever filmed on location in Nashville using country western singers as guest stars" (Collins 1988: 119). Audiences didn't think much of it either, and *Nashville 99* was off-duty after just four weeks. The sitcom *Hee Haw Honeys* premiered in 1978 and aired for twenty-six weeks. This syndicated program featured five members the *Hee Haw* cast playing the role of operators of a Nashville night club. It was a thinly veiled variety show, and not terribly different from its parent program, featuring cornball humor and country music performances.

Boone, a drama chronicling the life of a young singer, debuted in 1983. Set in 1953 in the small town of Trinity, near Nashville, *Boone* was the story of Boone Sawyer, whose life bore more than a passing resemblance to that of Elvis Presley. Boone wanted to be a rockabilly star—something that neither the Grand Ole Opry nor his parents (who wanted him to be a minister)—were ready for. Boone’s best friends were Rome Hawley, a motorcycle thug, and Mr. Johnson, a blind blues musician. The show was not especially successful, lasting just eleven months. Oddly enough, neither was a series based on the real deal in 1990. *Elvis*, which was filmed on location in Memphis, was a series of vignettes chronicling the rock god’s life before stardom.

Only three Tennessee-based programs have strayed from the country music theme, and none of them painted a particularly appealing portrait of the Volunteer State. The drama *Walking Tall*, the story of rural sheriff, ran for five months in 1981. This program was based on the movie series of the same name which, in turn, was based on the real life of Buford Pusser, the sheriff of rural McNeal County. Pusser had taken on illegal gambling and prostitution in his county, using a four-foot-long club he called “The Pacifier” to keep scofflaws in line. The sitcom *Filthy Rich* aired during the 1982-1983 season. A spoof of *Dynasty* and *Dallas*, the program was about the family of Big Guy Beck, a land baron who, before dying and being cryogenically frozen, recorded a long video will. Each week a new section of the will was played for the family, who ranged from arrogant aristocrat to lowly rube, and who were forced to conform to Big Guy’s odd demands. Tennessee’s last scripted entry to date was *Christy*, a historical drama, which premiered in 1994 and aired for sixteen months. Set in rural Cutter Gap in 1912, *Christy* told the story of the spirited nineteen-year-old title character who had left a comfortable life to teach at a missionary school. Life in Cutter Gap was harsh, with blood feuds among local families, and an

impoverished, mostly illiterate population who resented education and the “more civilized lifestyle” that Christy represented (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 253).

ARKANSAS

Arkansas has been the setting for three television programs, with the first and most successful making its debut in 1990. Set in a small town of the same name, the sitcom *Evening Shade* featured Burt Reynolds as Wood Newton, who had been a star high school running back for the Evening Shade Mules. After a successful college and pro career, Wood returned home to coach the Mules, who were in the midst of a fifty-seven game losing streak. Hanging out with Wood at the Barbecue Villa were his wife Ava, the town’s prosecuting attorney; her curmudgeonly father, Evan Evans; and tart Aunt Frieda Evans. Also seen were the town stripper, a cranky doctor, a wimpy math teacher, and the three Newton children.

Evening Shade had a somewhat brief, but successful run, ranking in the Nielsen top twenty during the second and third of its four seasons. This success may have been propelled by a certain air of authenticity. Even though *Evening Shade* did trot out a few familiar southern characters (Evan and Frieda appeared to have strolled right out of a Tennessee Williams play) and portrayed the town as tradition-bound, the show nevertheless largely avoided blatantly pejorative southern stereotypes. It actually became a favorite of the critics. *Los Angeles Times* critic Howard Rosenberg, for example, wrote that *Evening Shade* had “roots, character and lusty wit.”

Besides being very funny, this series from Harry Thomason and Linda Bloodworth-Thomason (*Designing Women*) has an appealingly distinct tone and an honesty in its relationships that

dramatically set it apart from most TV comedies. The characters are richly eccentric, the writing sexy and tartly Southern and the performances excellent (Rosenberg 1990: 1).

Although it does not have a football team, Evening Shade, Arkansas, really exists, a town of about four hundred in the northeastern part of the state. Chosen by series coproducer and Arkansas native Harry Thomason simply because “it has a wonderful sound,” shots of the town were used in the show’s credits and in some establishing shots, with other exteriors filmed in Little Rock and Fayetteville (Golden 1996: 100). The people of Evening Shade apparently had no problems with the show, and actually invited Burt Reynolds to deliver the keynote address at the town’s high school commencement, which he did in 1991.

Arkansas’s other two programs were of the unscripted variety, including 2002’s *ICU: Arkansas Children’s Hospital*, a short-lived documentary series chronicling the work of pediatric cardiologists in Little Rock. The subject matter of the state’s third entry was not nearly as grim, but, to some, far more horrifying. In 2003, the first installment of the reality series *The Simple Life* stranded wealthy, self-indulgent, California party girls Nicole Richie and Paris Hilton in tiny Altus, Arkansas, sans credit cards and cell phones. They lived on the farm of the Leding family, who patiently endured the girls’ pettiness, materialism, and, to put it politely, lack of sexual restraint. To raise funds, the girls were forced to work at a fast-food restaurant, for a cattle auctioneer, and on chicken and dairy farms. They also spent time getting drunk at a local pub and dance club, organizing the Altus Springtime Gala, and getting to know the customs of the locals.

In essence, *The Simple Life* was *The Beverly Hillbillies* thrown in reverse, and it raised the same fundamental geographic question—who, exactly, were viewers supposed to be laughing

at—the simple folks of Altus, or the spoiled brats from California? Critic Terry Sawyer took the latter view:

Democrats would do well to tape this show as evidence for any future hearings about the estate tax, as suffering is here doled out where suffering is due. If anyone should find herself on the ass end of the boob tube, it should be the fake-n-bake party heiress whose most recent barnacle on the hull of proper fame was a grainy private porno featuring a sleazy former boyfriend Nicole Richie and Paris Hilton have no discernible talents (I haven't seen the video) and personalities as pleasant as a bout of dry heaving *The Simple Life* introduces the girls during a “typical” day: they spend thousands of dollars without seeming to think. (Hilton walks into one store to spend \$1,500 on a bag for her dog, confident that mommy’s credit card is on file.) It was, in fact, a cagey opening gambit: after watching these coddled vipers giddily stuff their voids, I was eager to see the wealth teat ripped from their mouths. For them, it’s a kind of punishment; as one of Hilton’s friends observes, “I’d rather have no food for six weeks than no cell phone” (Sawyer 2003: 1).

Critic Ken Tucker did not buy Sawyer’s argument, but rather saw *The Simple Life* as one in a long line of programs where the wealthy and entitled tread upon the meek, never learning a single lesson:

It started out . . . as a concept that would level the *Green Acres* playing field: Socialite brats Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie, separated from their cash and credit cards . . . were dispatched to rural America, there to be shaken out of their pampered complacency by ordinary folks unimpressed with the pair’s notoriety Well, turns out the series devolved into a weekly half hour that could have been called *Let’s Sneer at the Hicks*. Paris and Nicole imposed their condescending rudeness and sense of privilege on everyone they met (Tucker 2005: 60).

NORTH CAROLINA

Prior to 1960, only four programs had been set in the American South. Tennessee's *Grand Ole Opry*, as just discussed, was joined by *The Adventures of Jim Bowie* and *Yancy Derringer*, both based in Louisiana and essentially southern variations on the western. The only scripted program set in the contemporary region had been the Louisiana detective drama *Bourbon Street Beat*, which lasted just one season. All of this made the 1960 debut of North Carolina's *The Andy Griffith Show* a truly transformative event for television geography. It was North Carolina's first show, the South's first sitcom, and the first program set in the region to gain widespread popularity. More than four decades after its departure, it not only must be considered the most popular television program set in the South, but also warrants consideration for being the most enduringly popular show in the history of the medium.

Part of the show's appeal—a large part, it appears—was its simple, homespun, gimmick-free nature. Griffith played Andy Taylor, a widower who was the sheriff of a small North Carolina town called Mayberry. Andy's deputy was his cousin, Barney Fife, a loyal sidekick and good friend, and easily the most hyperactively hapless lawman in television history. Much of the action took place at the town's combination sheriff's office, courthouse, and jail, but *Andy Griffith* rarely functioned as a bona fide police show, since so little real crime ever happened in Mayberry. Most of the episodes revolved around Andy's relationship with his young son Opie, Andy and Barney's relationships with their girlfriends, and the relationships among the citizens of Mayberry and the surrounding area.

Despite the show's slow-moving simplicity, or perhaps because of it, *The Andy Griffith Show* was immediately popular. It ranked fourth on the Nielsen charts during its rookie season,

and never placed lower than seventh during its eight-year run. When Griffith decided to call it quits at the conclusion of the 1967-1968 season, his show had become the highest-rated program on television, and it went on to have an incredibly successful afterlife in rerun syndication. *Andy Griffith* has never really left the air, appearing daily, often more than once, on cable networks and local stations throughout the country. A 1986 made-for-TV reunion movie, *Return to Mayberry*, was the highest rated telefilm of that season. A stunning array of books have been published regarding the show, from scholarly works to cookbooks based on Aunt Bee's dishes, and the *Andy Griffith Show* Rerun Watchers Club counts more than 1,300 chapters from North Carolina to Australia to Saudi Arabia to Germany.

Much of the show's enduring popularity is attributable to the show's writers, producers, and especially its stars—Don Knotts alone received five Emmy awards for his portrayal of Barney Fife—but this statement can be made for a number of successful series. *All in the Family*, for example, received more awards and had much higher ratings during its original run than did *The Andy Griffith Show*, but it does not enjoy the same sort of cult-like following today. The indestructibility of *Andy Griffith* is, as noted by media historian Tim Hollis, almost mysterious:

Reams of paper have been used to write about *The Andy Griffith Show* from every conceivable angle. It has been analyzed, dissected, tested, sliced and diced, and still no one can seem to pinpoint just why it was such a hit in its own day and quite probably even more popular among television audiences today. The high quality of the writing and acting certainly had much to do with it, but that still does not explain TV buffs' almost fanatical adulation of the program (Hollis 2008: 177-178).

While no single factor can explain this mystery, the leading candidate is its setting. Many of *Andy Griffith*'s sitcom contemporaries were also set in fictional cities and towns, but most of

these backdrops were a sort of vaguely defined “Anytown, U. S. A.,” such as the Hillsdale of *Dennis the Menace*, Bryant Park of *My Three Sons*, Hilldale of *The Donna Reed Show*, Springfield of *Father Knows Best*, and Mayfield of *Leave it Beaver*. None of these locales left the same sort of impression—or, to use the geographer’s terminology, created the same sense of place—as did the little town of 1,200 in the hill country of North Carolina.

Each week, the essence of life in Mayberry was on display for viewers in the *Andy Griffith*’s opening credits. Andy and Opie, fishing poles in hand, walked along a brightly lit country lane as the show’s theme song—a whistled version of the tune “Gone Fishin’”—played in the background. As they came to the shore of Myer’s Lake, Andy paused as Opie picked up a rock and threw it into the water, and then the two went on their unhurried way. “In 30 seconds, that opening,” wrote critic Sam Frank, “underscored the show’s main relationship while signaling to millions that it was relax-and-enjoy-yourself time (Frank 1999: 134).

The show’s leisurely pace and idealized sense of place are most often cited by historians and critics as being central to the show’s appeal. As noted by television historian Richard Kelly, “No show in the history of television . . . has so successfully mastered the art of nostalgia and created an imaginative role model of an ideal society as *The Andy Griffith Show*” (Kelly 1987: 41). Critic John Javna described Mayberry as being “a picture postcard of a small southern Main Street, a slice of steaming apple pie, a little bit of Bret Harte come to life (Javna 1988: 146). Ed Bark, writing for the *Dallas Morning News*, went so far as to suggest that the *Andy Griffith*’s sense of place was more important to the success of the show than were the laughs:

Not too many people found it hilariously funny It’s more of a warm show—maybe the first warm-edy—just a pleasant half hour to watch. I didn’t roll over laughing over *Andy Griffith*, but I always felt good after watching an episode of it. It’s a kind of

small town America that will never find its way back into prime time, but you can tell . . . that people still feel affection for the place (Javna 1988: 47).

A common theme in critical assessments of the show's enduring popularity is a longing, on the part of the viewer, for a bygone era. As critic Leigh H. Edwards put it, *The Andy Griffith Show* "captures America's yearning for lost innocence, for small-town safety and community," but it is worth noting that this yearning was also important to the show's initial success (Edwards 2005b: 1). In Mayberry, there was no civil unrest, race riots, emerging counterculture, student demonstrations, Kennedy assassination, or Vietnam War. According to historian Anthony Harkins, the most striking break that *Andy Griffith* made from the real world was Mayberry's relationship to the American South of the 1960s:

[*Andy Griffith*] presented positive portrayals of southern small-town life and rural folk that explicitly offset news coverage that consistently presented real-life southerners as villains. As a nearly pacifist small-town sheriff who refuses to wear a gun and who forces his trigger-happy deputy to keep his single bullet for his own revolver in his shirt pocket, Andy Griffith's character offered a studied contrast to racist violent southern sheriffs such as Jim Clark of Selma, Alabama, and "Bull" Connor of Birmingham, who were widely portrayed in early 1960s news media as the personification of southern white "massive resistance" to the Civil Rights movement (Harkins 2004: 197).

There is no denying that Mayberry was something of a fantasy land. It was not only a departure from the reality of 1960s America, but also an escape from the hard realities of life in any time and place. In Mayberry, as noted by Richard Kelly, there was no "violence, serious disease, believable death, hatred, lust, or any of the other ills of most societies" (Kelly 1987: 42).

It would be unfair, however, to characterize *The Andy Griffith Show* as pure treacle. What the show lacked in socially relevant plots and weighty themes, it made up for in complex characters. Critic Ken Tucker argued that “the genius of this gentle sitcom was the way its fantasy surface—placid life in the never-world of Mayberry, North Carolina—belied the realistic emotions roiling inside every character” (Tucker 2005: 96). To put it another way, while the *Andy Griffith Show* avoided some of the basic realities of its time and place, the characters and the town they inhabited seemed thoroughly real. Andy Taylor was, without doubt, a great dad and a great sheriff, but unlike many of his omniscient, infallible television counterparts in both occupations, he made mistakes along the way. Likewise, unlike the protagonists of *Leave it to Beaver* or *Dennis the Menace*, Opie was neither a blank slate nor a precocious hellion, but a sensitive, thoughtful kid who learned that life’s lessons were not always simple, and who often questioned the moral relativity of the adult world around him. And then there was Barney, whose officious bluster made him, more often than not, the butt of nearly every joke in Mayberry. Behind that thin lawman veneer, however, was a bubbling mass of insecurities that made him an immensely likable character, one who nobody in Mayberry or the viewing audience really wanted to see get hurt. In that regard, he was a sort of antagonistic protagonist, and a very different comic foil than existed on most other television sitcoms.

Perhaps the most revolutionary thing about *Andy Griffith* was the degree to which it developed its own geography. Leading the way for later television towns like *Northern Exposure*’s Cicely and *The Simpsons*’s Springfield, the secondary characters were rarely one-dimensional, one-shot figures who passed through an episode simply to move the plot along, but fully developed, recurring characters who were integral in shaping Mayberry’s sense of place. There was Andy’s Aunt Bee, who served as a housekeeper and as something of a foster mother

for both of the Taylor boys. On the rare occasion that the Mayberry jail had a long-term occupant, they could count on Aunt Bee bringing a home-cooked meal right to their cell. The most frequent short-term occupant was Otis Campbell, the amiable, unrepentant town drunk. Otis checked in every Saturday night to sleep it off, and would let himself out the next morning, using the key that hung on a hook next to his personal cell. Working down at Wally's Garage was Gomer Pyle, a good-natured rube who set the standard for later, similar characters such as Woody Boyd and Radar O'Reilly. Like his cousin, Goober, Gomer was so completely ingenuous that he made Barney look worldly. Another Mayberry mainstay was the slow-moving, kindly barber, Floyd Lawson, who while not dreaming of opening a three-chair shop in Mount Pilot, was busy mistakenly attributing all manner of famous quotes and sayings to Calvin Coolidge. Also seen were Ellie Walker, the town pharmacist and Andy's love interest in early episodes; Clara Edwards, Bee's fussy friend; Helen Crump, Opie's teacher and Andy's later love interest; Thelma Lou, Barney's long-suffering girlfriend; and scores of other recurring characters who helped flesh out the Mayberry universe.

At the center of that universe, of course, was Andy Taylor. As mentioned, in an era when southerners, particularly southern lawmen, were often the featured villains on the evening news, the region's inhabitants could not have found a more likable fictional character to repair their tattered image each week on television. Although he was not flawless, and certainly not urbane, he was sagacious, friendly, and respectable. In the words of critic Michael Douglas, Andy Taylor was "a bright humanist with a badge who enforces the law by bringing out the best in everybody" (Javna 1988: 46).

Andy was a World War II veteran, an expert woodsman and, in the tradition of *To Kill a Mockingbird's* Atticus Finch, a man who didn't much care for guns, despite being a crack shot.

As mentioned, he usually refused to carry a weapon because he didn't want to earn respect by threat of violence. Instead, he resolved Mayberry's frequent minor crises through diplomacy, drawing on his gift for storytelling to give townspeople the means to solve their own problems.

As noted by *Richmond Times Dispatch* television critic Douglas Durden:

One of the attractions was that Andy was so nice all the time. So understanding. And he could solve problems without being too intrusive. He controlled everything but never imposed himself on a situation. He never made the characters *feel* that he was controlling everything. His relationship with Mayberry was like a fantasy of what a perfect father should be (Javna 1988: 47).

While Andy was not protecting Mayberry's citizens from themselves, he was warding off unscrupulous city-slickers who passed through the town and saw it as an easy mark. Unlike the Clampetts of *The Beverly Hillbillies*, who unwittingly undid would-be predators with their own naïveté, Andy was no bumpkin. In one episode, for example, a pair of bank robbers cracked the vault of the Mayberry bank, only to find Andy waiting calmly inside. The combination, it seemed, had been lost years ago, necessitating the installation of a back door. Andy thanked them for finally getting the vault open before hauling them off to the jail. In this way, Andy was something of a small-town version of Lt. Columbo, a cunning crime fighter who was constantly being underestimated by his adversaries.

As often as not, the city-slickers who passed through Mayberry were victims of their own arrogance. Mayberry was first introduced to the television world on an episode of *The Danny Thomas Show*, in which Danny, while passing through the little town, was pulled over by Andy Taylor for running a stop sign. Danny, believing he was being shaken down by a crooked small-town cop, demanded to see the Justice of the Peace who, as it turned out, was also Andy Taylor.

Danny was found guilty, refused to pay the fine, and was locked up in a cell. Over the course of the episode, Danny came to respect Andy and, in the end, agreed to pay the fine. That basic plot—where an insolent out-of-towner is undone by the folksy wisdom of Andy and eventually sees the error of his or her ways—was used time and again, and underscored one of the show’s fundamental geographic themes. That theme was that small towns were nothing to sneer at, and that city folks needed to be reminded, from time to time, that sophistication and wisdom are not the same thing.

The Andy Griffith Show was, without doubt, a ringing endorsement of small-town life. It provided a contrast to other depictions of small towns, exemplified by the Sinclair Lewis novel *Main Street*, in which local residents were belittled for not realizing just how pathetic their little town really was. It is notable that Barney Fife was the one person in Mayberry who constantly resented the town’s small stature. He modeled himself after the hard-bitten, glamorous urban crime fighters he saw in the movies, called his gun “baby,” and prayed for a major crime or some other calamity to befall Mayberry. And, on those rare occasions when the little town offered him a chance to be a real lawman, he always screwed up. When he wasn’t nearly shooting himself in the foot with his one bullet or accidentally locking himself in a jail cell, he was arresting the wrong person or frenetically overreacting to a minor event, as in the episode when he put almost the entire town in jail. In one way or another, the viewer was constantly reminded that Barney would be much better off if, like Andy, he simply accepted and embraced the nature of his little town, rather than rejecting it.

Another important geographic element of the program was its treatment of the folk who populated the hills around Mayberry. While *Andy Griffith* was a show that “generally celebrated the simple pleasures and tribulations of small-town life,” it did utilize some common, and often

negative, “hillbilly” stereotypes (Harkins 2004: 181). Seen most often during the show’s first four years, these hillbillies were mostly portrayed as simple-minded country people who took cash for supplying the town with illegal moonshine, but who otherwise rejected modern life, as in an episode where farmer Rafe Hollister refused to be given a tetanus shot. At worst, they were portrayed as “incompetently violent rubes,” who engaged in senseless family feuds precipitated by some long-forgotten incident (Harkins 2004: 182). Among the more frequent characters seen crawling out of this anachronistic world were Briscoe Darling and his family. According to Harkins, the Darlings were a mixture of negative and positive hillbilly stereotypes, walking a fine line between parody and authenticity:

Briscoe Darling . . . and his family represent the footloose musical mountaineer Symbols of an outmoded but authentic mountain culture, the Darlings are superstitious, undereducated, slow-talking or mute (a running gag was that none of the four Darling boys ever said a word except when singing), and comfortably self-sufficient. But their primary function on the show was to provide musical entertainment. In actuality, the Darling sons were the Missouri Ozarks string band the Dillards, who wrote many of the songs they performed on the program. Music is central to the Darlings’ way of life, a point driven home by family patriarch Briscoe. “You got time to breathe, you got time for music,” he tells Andy in one episode. Although clearly presented as comical throwbacks, this is not a demeaning portrait . . . but one that celebrates genuine indigenous folk music. The Darlings mention many laughably titled songs such as “Never Hit Your Grandma with a Big Stick,” but the songs they actually played were either songs the Dillards had composed or traditional southern folk tunes like “Boil Them Cabbage Down” and “There is a Time for Love and Laughter.” The family always seems somewhat ill at ease during their periodic visits to Mayberry and even pose a potential threat to the townsfolk (Briscoe kidnaps Aunt Bee in one episode and brings her back to his cabin in an effort to convince her to marry him). But Sheriff Taylor appreciates their authentic mountain mannerisms and culture, and the feeling is mutual. “That haircut of yours may be city-style,” Briscoe warmly tells Taylor, “but your heart was shaped in a bowl” (Harkins 2004: 182).

Briscoe Darling was played by Denver Pyle, a veteran of numerous TV westerns, who would revive his characterization of a slow-talking, philosophical southern patriarch as Uncle Jesse on *The Dukes of Hazzard*. The most memorable of Mayberry's hillbillies, however, was portrayed by New York native Howard Morris, who had first risen to fame as a regular on Sid Caesar's landmark comedy program *Your Show of Shows*. Known for his frenzied physical comedy and tremendous range of vocal characterizations, Morris did a memorable turn on *Andy Griffith* as Ernest T. Bass, a screeching, rock-throwing lunatic who, according to Harkins, exemplified some of the darker hillbilly stereotypes:

If the Darlings represent the slightly reckless musical mountaineers, Ernest T. Bass symbolizes the deranged mountain man, so wild that even his fellow hill folk consider him a threat Bass is a half-savage who has a simian-like gait and shrieks like a chimpanzee. His trademark is throwing rocks and bricks through windows Although he continually tries to fit into society and social institutions—different episodes portray his effort to join the army, to mingle at a formal reception, and to gain a primary-school education—his every encounter with civilization inevitably proves disastrous and each episode closes with Sheriff Taylor hastening him back to the mountains hoping he will not return. Although Bass is ostensibly a comedic character, potential violence always underlies his eccentricity, and the distance between his characterization and the outwardly vicious . . . mountain savages of *Deliverance* is not that great (Harkins 2004: 183-184).

The Darlings and Ernest T. Bass appeared in numerous episodes during *Andy Griffith's* early years, particularly, and probably not coincidentally, in 1963 and 1964, when *The Beverly Hillbillies* was the highest-rated show on television. They disappeared after October 1966. Still, before, after, and even during this "hillbilly surge," the streets of Mayberry remained the primary focus. It was always much more of a small-town show than a rural one.

As mentioned, *Andy Griffith's* assessment of southern small-town life was unceasingly positive. Its central geographic message was that life there moved very slowly. Scenes took place at the All Souls Church, where Andy and Barney sang in the choir; in the woods around Myer's Lake; at Andy's lodge, at the courthouse and barbershop; on the sidewalks where old men played checkers or dominoes; or on the front porch of Andy's house, where he and Barney were often seen recovering from one of Aunt Bee's enormous suppers. The style of the show, in the words of television historian Jerry Haggins, was "strikingly distinct, employing a relaxed, almost lethargic tone" (Haggins 2010: 1). Physical evidence of that languid pace could be found in the show's scripts, which usually ran about thirty pages, as compared to those of a fast-paced sitcom like *The Phil Silvers Show*, which averaged forty-five pages. The major plot points of a typical episode were often book-ended, or even interrupted, by casual conversations between the characters, as when Barney discussed his most recent major purchase:

BARNEY: The last big buy I made was my mom's and dad's anniversary present.

ANDY: What'd ya get 'em?

BARNEY: A septic tank.

ANDY: For their anniversary?

BARNEY: They're awful hard people to buy for. Besides, it was something they can use. They were really thrilled. It had two tons of concrete in it. All steel reinforced.

ANDY: You're a fine son, Barn.

BARNEY: I try. (Mitz 1988: 145).

Perhaps the single best description of the town's pace came from Andy Taylor himself, when he was asked in an episode for a description of Mayberry:

There's not much to tell. It's just a little town. We hang around, get up in the morning and go to work and come home. For entertainment, we have television and movies, and we take rides in the car out of town on Sunday. We have our local baseball team, and we fish, and we have creeks we swim in. Evenings we sit around on the porch and visit, watch the children playing under the streetlights. (Javna 1988: 47).

The place that became the model for millions about small-town southern life was actually located on a studio back lot in Culver City, California. Exteriors were filmed in Franklin Canyon, with Franklin Lake, a Los Angeles reservoir, serving as the famous fishing hole from the opening credits. Mayberry was modeled, in part, after Andy Griffith's hometown, Mount Airy, North Carolina, which is located near the Virginia border, in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, about 142 miles from Raleigh. Mayberry was situated in approximately the same place, located, depending on the episode, fifty-five, sixty, or a hundred miles from Raleigh. A few of Mayberry's establishments, such as the Snappy Lunch and the Grand Theatre, share names with real Mount Airy institutions. The larger part of Mayberry's geography was, of course, shaped in the minds of the show's writers and viewers. It is important to note that *The Andy Griffith Show* was not actually created by Griffith himself, but by New Yorker Sheldon Leonard who, in the words of critic Ken Tucker, "must have dreamed up the Southern town of Mayberry as a city-slicker's idea of heaven" (Tucker 2005: 118-119).

The notion that Mayberry was the real star of *Andy Griffith* is supported by its continuance on CBS's Monday night line-up for three years after Griffith's 1968 departure. *Mayberry R.F.D.* featured much of the original cast and a new lead character, Sam Jones. Sam, like Andy, was a widower with a young son. He had just moved to Mayberry, and was elected to the town council despite having no particular interest in, or qualifications for the job. This new

position allowed him to serve much the same purpose as Andy, a focus for the interactions of Mayberry's residents. This rather contrived scenario worked, for the show ranked fourth in the Nielsen ratings during its first two seasons. Although it slipped in its third year, it was still ranked fifteenth when it was cancelled as part of CBS's great rural purge of 1971.

With *Mayberry R. F. D.*'s cancellation, North Carolina disappeared from the television landscape for more than twenty years, and would have to wait three decades for a show that lasted more than a single season. Between 1994 and 2002, four programs—two comedies and two dramas—were set in the state. The comedies were set in urban areas, and both chronicled the lives of African-American families. *My Brother and Me*, which aired for three months in 1994 on cable's Nickelodeon network, was the story of an eight-year-old boy named Dee Dee who lived with his family in suburban Charlotte. His mother, Jennifer, was a driver's education instructor and his father, Roger, a sportswriter. Dee Dee idolized his cool older brother in this good-natured sitcom but battled with his self-centered sister. *Goode Behavior*, which aired during the 1996-1997 season, featured Sherman Hemsley as Willie, a scheming excon who had been sent to prison for insider trading. He was paroled on the condition that he live with his son, the conceited Franklin, who was dean of humanities at Chapel Hill's fictional Henshaw State University. Barbara was Franklin's wife, a television news anchor, and Bianca their materialistic daughter.

North Carolina's first two dramas channeled the spirit of Mayberry, at least to some degree. *The Road Home*, which aired for seven weeks in 1994, was a heartwarming story about Jack and Alison Mason and their four kids. In the premiere, they were a Detroit family on summer vacation in Alison's hometown in coastal North Carolina when they discovered that her

brother was having trouble keeping up the family's shrimping business and that her mother was in failing health. In true television drama fashion, they decided to stick around and help out.

The good-natured drama *State of Grace*, which aired during the 2001-2002 season, was the story of two twelve-year-old girls who met at an upscale Catholic school, St. Christina's in the Pines. Set in a small town near Asheville in 1965, the two primary characters were Hannah Rayburn, the new girl whose family had just arrived from Chicago to start a furniture factory, and gregarious Grace McKee, who took Hannah under her wing. Much of the show revolved around the girls' contrasting families. Grace's home life had wealth and glamor, but was somewhat desolate. Her parents were divorced and her mother often away, leaving Grace in the care of the family's maid and chauffeur. Hannah's Jewish family, on the other hand, was very close, loving and uproarious, but also intense, nervous, and smothering. Most of the stories involved lessons about cultural differences and the usual coming-of-age fare. *State of Grace* tackled some serious themes, most notably the anti-Semitism that the Rayburns often encountered, but, in general, the show possessed the same gentle warmth that had characterized *The Andy Griffith Show*.

North Carolina's third drama, *One Tree Hill*, was not so warm and hardly gentle. Filmed in Wilmington, the old stomping grounds of the WB network's Massachusetts-based teen soap, *Dawson's Creek*, *One Tree Hill* debuted in 2003 as a testosterone-drenched replacement for Dawson and the gang. In spirit it was a world away from Mayberry. Dan Scott had been a basketball star in his hometown of Tree Hill, North Carolina, and his high-school sweetheart, Karen Roe, had gotten pregnant their senior year and gave birth to a son, Lucas. Dan had abandoned her and gone to college where he married Deb, and they had a son, Nathan. As the series began, Dan's basketball career was over and he returned to Tree Hill to open a car

dealership. Spoiled Nathan became the star of the high school basketball team, while sullen Lucas, who had been raised by a single mom, played street ball on his own. Eventually he joined the team, sparking quite a competition, on the court and off, between the two half-brothers. In addition to plenty of basketball, the show contained the usual soap-opera elements: love triangles, divorce, heart attacks, drinking problems, bankruptcy, casual sex, rehab, near-death experiences, obsessed stalkers, suicide attempts, and teen pregnancy.

One Tree Hill continued to run through 2010, making it North Carolina's longest-running program since *Andy Griffith*. Appearing on the WB (now CW) network, the show has never put up stellar numbers, and it is highly unlikely that *One Tree Hill* will ever inspire the same kind of zealotry that has kept *Mayberry* on the air for more a half century. Its longevity, however, is still geographically significant. The show's audience is young, and obviously devoted, and their attachment to the program indicates an increasing willingness to accept a new vision of the small-town South.

SOUTH CAROLINA

As mentioned, Maine's television landscape played on the state's reputation of quiet charm by soaking all of that quaintness in pools of blood, and the same was the case in South Carolina's lone television entry, *American Gothic*. The town of Trinity certainly seemed idyllic, with beautiful antebellum homes, ornate lawns, a charming downtown, and moonlight-and-magnolias atmosphere, but it had a dark side, specifically in the form of the town sheriff. Whereas *Mayberry*'s Sheriff Andy Taylor had used his easy-going wit to maintain law and order, Trinity's Sheriff Lucas Buck waxed demonic, committing murders or inducing others to do the

same. The principal plot involved his attempts to get closer to ten-year-old Caleb, who did not know Lucas was his father or that Lucas had raped his mother. Lucas killed Caleb's older sister and, as the series approached its end, eventually tried to kill Caleb as well. Viewers preferred Mayberry, and *American Gothic* expired after running for the duration of the 1995-1996 season.

LOUISIANA

Viewers in most southern states had to wait some time to see themselves represented on American television. North Carolina and Virginia first appeared in the 1960s; Georgia and West Virginia in the 1970s; Mississippi in the 1980s; and Alabama, Arkansas, and South Carolina in the 1990s. Kentucky and Tennessee each had one short-lived program in the 1950s, but it was Louisiana that led the way, serving as a setting to three programs in that decade. Altogether, Louisiana has had twelve television entries, a respectable number by regional standards, but none of them were particularly successful. No Louisiana-based program has ever appeared in the Nielsen top thirty, and only one network program set in the state has lasted more than one season. For those who did watch, they found a state characterized by colorful, free-living people, with a fair amount of crime, violence, corruption, and an occasional swamp creature mixed in.

The state's first program, *The Adventures of Jim Bowie*, debuted in 1956 and aired for two years. Set in 1830s Louisiana, it was a sort of "southern western," as was its counterpart, *Yancy Derringer*, which premiered in 1958 and ran for just under a year. The title character of *Yancy Derringer* had all the ingredients of a conventional western hero. He was an ex-Confederate soldier, a dedicated crime fighter, a gambler and ladies' man, and he even had his own Native American sidekick, a Pawnee named Pahoo. The show took place shortly after the Civil War, and its characterization of New Orleans as a wide-open city was not terribly different

from most other programs that have been set there. *Jim Bowie* featured the adventures of the title frontiersman and plantation owner with a number of other legendary characters from the early West thrown in: Johnny Appleseed, John James Audubon, Davy Crockett, Sam Houston, and Andrew Jackson. Several episodes were wilderness adventures, but many also took place in New Orleans, and let the viewer know that, even in the 1830s, the Crescent City was already colorfully corrupt. Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman described one such episode:

As the story opens, Bowie is telling one Senator Holcomb about the campaigning he did for both Holcomb and Jackson. Holcomb responds that, "such loyalty should not go unrewarded." He tells Bowie that Jackson has "a very deep sense of gratitude. So deep, in fact, that his enemies label his devotion to his friends as the spoils system." He then offers Bowie the office of Collector for the Port of New Orleans in exchange for procuring a favorite racehorse for the President. Holcomb's pitch presses all the right buttons. "Think of the prestige, my boy, not to mention the fortune for a man of your talents." This last is accompanied by a knowing look To get the money he needs, Bowie casts his lot with his friend Sam Houston, who is portrayed here as a local politician. In the end, however, Houston double-crosses him, steals the horse, and rides off to give it to the President himself (Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman 1991: 263).

That New Orleans, a city of middling size, would appear on television so early and so often suggests that Americans have had a genuine interest in the city, or at least that television producers thought this was so. The track record of the city's entries seems to suggest the latter. Every drama set in New Orleans has had a shorter run than the one before. *Bourbon Street Beat* premiered in 1959 and lasted slightly less than a year. *Longstreet* debuted in 1971 and lasted eleven months. It was followed in 1996 by *The Big Easy*, which lasted nine months. *Orleans* ran for three months in 1997, and *Thief* lasted just six weeks in 2006. All five of these programs

were contemporary crime dramas, and all five followed the lead of *Jim Bowie* and *Yancy Derringer* in portraying the Crescent City as being both colorful and shady.

Bourbon Street Beat was one of a rash of ABC programs of the late 1950s and early 1960s to chronicle the lives of debonair young detectives, but it was by far the least successful among them. In an unusual twist, two of the program's main characters actually survived cancellation. *Bourbon Street* detective Rex Randolph headed to Los Angeles to join *77 Sunset Strip*, while his partner, Kenny Madison, moved to Miami and *Surfside Six*. In the years following Rex and Kenny's departure, New Orleans's crime dramas became increasingly colorful and seedy. The title character of *Longstreet* was a highly successful insurance investigator who worked the streets of New Orleans for the Great Pacific Casualty Insurance Company. The twist was that Mike Longstreet was blind. Adding color was a lively cast of supporting characters, including Mike's braille teacher and Girl Friday, Nikki Bell; his Kung Fu instructor Li Tsung (played by Bruce Lee); and his German shepherd guide dog, Pax.

The Big Easy was the story of colorful ladies' man and police detective Remy McSwain. The only-in-New-Orleans supporting characters on the program included a jazz musician and street informant named Smiley Dupree, and the improbably named assistant district attorney, Lightnin' Hawkins. In true New Orleans fashion, Remy was "always ready to bend the law to get things done—as was everyone else in the Crescent City, apparently" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 139). The equally sleazy crime drama *Orleans* was the story of a New Orleans judge named Luther Charbonnet. Storylines revolved around the personal lives of Luther and his three children, set against a backdrop rife with sex, murder, drugs, and organized crime. Luther was having an affair with Rosalee, a young black defense attorney, while his son, a young prosecutor named Jesse, was having an affair with his cousin Rene. Daughter Paulette was a riverboat

casino manager with a shadowy past, and son Claude, a detective for the New Orleans police, was trying to rid his department of corruption. The coup de grace of Crescent City crime was *Thief*, an exceptionally violent series about a New Orleans-based crew of expert thieves and their high-profile targets. The crew of *Thief* included Elmo, who was trying to raise money for his impoverished family, drug addict Izzy, and Jack, the Pentecostal cracker who believed that God was helping him steal. The primary antagonists of *Thief* were Vincent Chan, an assassin for the Chinese mafia, and John Hayes, a corrupt New Orleans cop.

Two reality programs found their way to the post-Katrina New Orleans of 2006, both featuring activities consistent with action on the city's previous television entries. *Celebrity Poker Showdown*, where celebrities played Texas Hold 'Em for charity, relocated from Las Vegas to Harrah's in New Orleans for its final season. This program had a cheerfully boozy atmosphere, with eliminated players making wisecracks from the garishly decorated "Losers Lounge." New Orleans's second reality entry traced its roots to Coyote Ugly, a country bar in New York City, notorious for raucous late nights and scantily clad, bar-dancing cowgirls. In 2000, Coyote Ugly inspired a movie of the same name, and the movie, in turn, inspired numerous franchises of Coyote Ugly across the country. In *The Ultimate Coyote Ugly Search*, ten women competed for employment (and \$25,000) at the newest Coyote Ugly in New Orleans.

Only two of Louisiana's entries have been set outside of New Orleans. Although their formulas varied somewhat from the standard fare, they did possess the same kind of sinister, shadowy flavor. Louisiana's longest-running series, and one of its most unusual, was set in the swamps near Houma. *Swamp Thing*, which aired in seventy-two installments from 1990 to 1993, was a campy cable television version of the cult-classic comic book and movie series. As the series began, an environmental disaster caused by evil Dr. Anton Arcane had transformed likable

Dr. Alec Holland into a creature “resembling a large stick of broccoli” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1342). Episodes involved the noble Swamp Thing’s efforts to protect the local wetlands and its residents from the schemes of the greedy Dr. Arcane.

The Riches also appeared on basic cable, with nineteen episodes airing in 2006 and 2007. It was the story of the Malloys, a family of Roma (Gypsies) who travelled about swindling unsuspecting citizens. Wayne was the imaginative, charismatic father, and Dahlia his unstable, drug-addicted wife who had just gotten out of jail. Their three children, Cael, Sam, and Di Di, were all accomplished grifters. In the premiere, Dahlia’s violent brother, Dale, the head of the clan, declared that Di Di must marry her idiot cousin, prompting Wayne and Dahlia to steal the clan’s money and flee in their beat-up RV. While driving they were involved in a car accident that killed a young couple, the Riches. The Malloys promptly stole the Riches’ identity and settled into a posh life in a gated community near Baton Rouge.

Out of Louisiana’s twelve entries, just one was a sitcom, but it was not of the conventional sort. In the 2000s, sitcoms that dispensed with the traditional laugh track and three-wall set had become commonplace. Had *Frank’s Place* appeared in the 2000s, it might have had a longer lifespan, but viewers were not sure what to make of it in 1987. Adored by the creative community, *Frank’s Place* was nominated for nine Emmy awards, winning three, and also won the prestigious Humanitas Prize given to programs that “affirm human dignity and probe the meaning of life” (Bogle 2001: 325). With a largely black cast, the show did well among African-American households, but finished its first season ranked sixty-second on the Nielsen charts, and was cancelled after airing for a little more than a year.

Frank's Place was the story of Frank Parrish, a former history professor who left his native New England for New Orleans after inheriting a Creole restaurant, the Chez Louisiane, from his estranged father. Flavored with Dixieland music, episodes focused on Frank's adjustments to the unusual city, his eccentric restaurant staff, and the equally eccentric customers, which included a con-man minister and the owners of the neighborhood funeral parlor. Critics applauded the show for its depiction of an educated, middle-class, black man who managed to maintain connections to his cultural roots, and for its forthright examinations of racial issues between blacks and whites and within the African-American community. *Frank's Place* did not shy away from tough topics, tackling cancer, suicide, drug abuse, and drunk driving, but the show was also quite funny. Even better was its remarkable portrayal of New Orleans. On *Frank's Place*, life in New Orleans was balanced—sometimes rough, even grim, but also romantic and almost dream-like at times. In the words of critic Donald Bogle, Frank soon found himself “as intrigued as we are by the city’s rich culture: its food, its music, its social clubs, its jazzy seductiveness.”

In many respects, *Frank's Place* was a mood piece, a dream play, its tone set at each week's opening with the voice of Louis Armstrong on the soundtrack singing ‘Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans?’ This melancholic, evocative song conjures up the New Orleans of our imagination: a city of lights and color, magic and Mardi Gras, mystery and romance *Frank's Place* had a misty, hazy look making it seem all the more like a story filtered through memory and dreams (Bogle 2001: 323).

ALABAMA

Alabama has been the setting for just two television entries, and neither appeared on a major network. The first, *Any Day Now*, aired on cable's Lifetime network from 1998 to 2002.

Set in Birmingham, this languid drama was the story of the friendship of Mary Elizabeth (M. E.) O'Brien and Rene Jackson. M. E. was white and from the wrong side of the tracks, while Rene was black and the daughter of a respected civil rights lawyer. M. E. had become pregnant at a young age by her boyfriend Colliar, a miserable slug who was even lower on the socio-economic ladder than M. E. They remained in Birmingham, where their life was plagued by tragedy. Colliar never amounted to much, the first of their three children had drowned, and their teenage daughter was in constant trouble. Nevertheless, M. E. was able to get a book published and was offered a teaching position at a local college. Rene had left Birmingham to become a successful lawyer in Washington, D. C., but returned home after her father's death to carry on his work. The two friends reconnected, with the action alternating between the trials of their present-day life and coming-of-age stories from their childhood in the 1960s.

Any Day Now's presence on Lifetime guaranteed a relatively small audience, but, for what it's worth, it was for a time the network's highest-rated drama, and it was generally well-received by critics. They lauded the show's frank examination of racial issues, and its featuring a pair of mature female protagonists. In that regard, *Any Day Now* was certainly different from most other television programs of its era. That said, its geographic message was nothing new, but simply a reinforcement of the geographic message of countless books and films, and even a few television shows, most notably Georgia's *I'll Fly Away*. Whether it was M. E.'s wrong-side-of-the-tracks upbringing, her racist parents, and her lazy husband, or the fact that Rene was yet another black character who returned to the South as a sacrifice for the Cause, *Any Day Now* did not go out of its way to shatter common images of the region. Whether or not these images are accurate is another matter, but the Alabama of *Any Day Now* is exactly the sort of Alabama that viewers could have expected—a place where everything moves slowly, where racial tension is

strong, and where life, like the relationship of M. E. and Rene, is firmly rooted in the remembrance of days past.

If there was one familiar Alabama stereotype that *Any Day Now* missed, it was the state's all-consuming passion for football, but MTV covered that in 2006 with *Two-a-Days*, a documentary series about a high school team, the players' families and girlfriends, and the determined, tough-as-nails coach. The program was filmed in Hoover, Alabama, home of the Buccaneers who were seeking their fourth state championship. One player summed up the town's attitude toward the sport: "Football has pretty much been my whole life" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,445).

VIRGINIA

Virginia's two earliest entries were period pieces, the first a Civil War drama that aired, perhaps appropriately, in 1961, the 100th anniversary of the commonwealth's secession from the Union. *The Americans* told the story of the Canfield brothers from Harpers Ferry whose loyalties were divided during the Civil War. The reckless and stubborn younger brother, Jeff, decided to fight for the Confederacy, while older brother Jeff swam across the Potomac to side with the Union. The two brothers were shown, on alternating weeks, fighting for their respective sides. *The Americans* was not high drama, but a sort of southern western, described by *Variety* as a "wholly fictional and unbelievable sequence of events that could just as easily have come out of a *Bonanza* or an *Outlaws*" (Mehling 1962: 69). Viewers were not terribly impressed either, and Virginia's first entry was off the air after just nine months.

Virginia's second entry, which came along a decade later, lasted for nine years. Set in rural (and fictional) Jefferson County during the Great Depression, *The Waltons* was the story of John and Olivia Walton and their seven children. The very definition of a wholesome television family, the Waltons were, despite their humble means, loving, close and loyal. John and his father, Zeb, ran a lumber mill on Walton's Mountain, located in the Blue Ridge region of western Virginia. The stories were related by John's eldest son, John Boy, an aspiring novelist. "Moralistic homilies abounded," wrote Brooks and Marsh, adding that "there was no sex, no violence—just a warm family drama" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,484).

To say that *The Waltons* was a surprise hit would be an understatement. To begin, it was something of an anomaly when it arrived on the CBS fall schedule in 1972. Of the thirty highest-rated shows from the previous season, eight were sitcoms, headed by the likes of *All in the Family*, *Sanford & Son*, and *Mary Tyler Moore*. Another seven were police or detective programs, such as *Hawaii 5-0*, *Ironside*, and *Adam 12*. Most of the rest were either modern urban dramas (*Marcus Welby*, *Medical Center*, *Room 222*) or variety/comedy series with established stars (Flip Wilson, Rowan and Martin, Carol Burnett, and Sonny and Cher). A warm, wholesome family drama certainly did not appear to be in high demand, much less one set in rural Virginia of the 1930s. To find a program like *The Waltons* on CBS was especially surprising, given that the network had, only a year before, eliminated most rural programs from its schedule.

The Waltons, according to television historian Anthony Harkins, had "escaped the network's general purge of all things country because it had the strong backing of CBS founder and chairman William Paley, who saw it as a 'prestige' program" (Harkins 2004: 205). Still, it did not appear that the network had high hopes for the program, placed as it was on Thursday night opposite two big hits, ABC's *The Mod Squad* and NBC's *The Flip Wilson Show*. During

the 1971-1972 season, *The Mod Squad* was ranked twenty-first in the Nielsen ratings, and had been ranked in the top thirty during each of its first four seasons. Even more daunting, *The Flip Wilson Show* had been ranked in the second spot in each of its two seasons, trailing only *Marcus Welby* and then *All in the Family*. To the surprise of everybody, *The Waltons* managed to pull off the upset. When the dust settled after the 1972-1973 season, *The Waltons* had premiered at a respectable nineteenth. *Flip Wilson* had dropped from second to twelfth, and *The Mod Squad* had been cancelled. After the 1973-1974 season, *The Waltons* had rocketed to second place, and *The Flip Wilson Show* was off the air. While it was never a blockbuster in large cities, *The Waltons*, according to Brooks and Marsh, “struck a chord in middle and rural America that guaranteed a long and prosperous run” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,484).

The Waltons was based on Earl Hamner Jr.’s 1961 novel *Spencer’s Mountain*, which had inspired a 1963 theatrical film of the same name starring Henry Fonda. The book was also adapted for a CBS television movie called *The Homecoming*, which became the basis for the television series. Hamner, who served as coexecutive producer and story editor for *The Waltons*, was one of eight children brought up during the Depression in Schuyler, Virginia, a small community about thirty miles from Charlottesville. It was clear that he, the real-life John Boy, loved his hometown. His production notes reveal an intention to create a realistic series, avoiding both the “excessive sentimentality” of previous nostalgic programs such as *Mama*, and pejorative hillbilly stereotypes. “That the Waltons are poor should be obvious,” wrote Hamner, “but there should be no hint of squalor or debased living conditions usually associated with poverty” (Wilson 2010: 1).

Whether or not the show was realistic, Hamner did succeed in creating one of television’s most endearing portraits of the South. *The Waltons*, as noted by television historian Pamela

Wilson, stood in stark contrast to the gritty urban streets and dysfunctional families of New York and California that dominated much of the rest of the television landscape at the time:

The Walton family was portrayed as a cohesive and nearly self-sufficient social world. The family members operated as a team, full of collective wisdom and insight, yet always finding narrative (and physical) space for their individuality. In addition to the continuing narrative development of each regular character and of the family dynamics over the course of the series, each episode frequently dealt with a conflict or tension introduced by an outsider who happened into the community, bringing their own problems which were potentially disruptive influences upon the harmony and equilibrium of the Walton's Mountain community. The narrative of each episode worked through the resolution of these tensions within the household, as well as the healing or spiritual uplift achieved by the outsider characters as they assimilated the values of the family and learned their lessons of love and morality (Wilson 2010: 1).

Each week, *The Waltons* offered emotional, often bittersweet stories, but the central geographic message was that this little mountain community was an environment of dignity, warmth, quiet intelligence, and simple wisdom.

Along with its runaway popularity, *The Waltons* was a critical success, receiving generally positive reviews and, over the course of its run, a dozen Emmy awards. It was not, however, without its critics. Some people contended that *The Waltons* did not look hard enough at rural poverty, and argued that it was “too sweet, sappily sentimental, and exploitative of viewers’ emotions.” One critic wrote that its “homey wisdom and Sunday school platitudes have been known to make me gag,” while another complained about its “intolerable wistfulness,” and still another labeled the Waltons an “obviously corny, totally unreal family” (Wilson 2010: 1).

Today, some detractors remember the show as straightforward, right-wing, family-values propaganda, which is a quite a stretch, but that notion was solidified in 1991 when Pat

Robertson's Christian Coalition obtained exclusive syndication rights for the series. Subsequent television retrospectives have tended to dismiss the show, with one work referring to it as the "sentimental saga about a barefoot-but-happy hick family" (Lewis and Stempel 1996: 229). Another was even more severe, saying of the show's success that "one man's white trash is a network's treasure" (West 2005: 22).

Critic Ken Tucker, not known for his sentimentality, asserted that such assessments were unfair. He acknowledged that *The Waltons* was "lost in many people's memories as a sentimental, preachy show," but argued that it "achieved what it set out to do: make lyrically idealized a group of lives lived in splendid isolation, with the promise of escape to a bigger world for those who yearned for it." More important, Tucker dismissed the notion that *The Waltons* was nostalgic drivel, noting that in its own wholesome way, the show tackled very real, timeless issues. He cited a 1976 episode called "The Quilting" as the "exemplar of everything good about *The Waltons*:"

The theme is all about letting people make their own decisions. The chief plot point turns around a quilting party to be held for eldest daughter Mary Ellen; her mother and grandmother accept this tradition as part of life, since it serves as a "coming-out party" for the budding seventeen-year-old, the signal that boys can come a-courtin' for her. But Mary Ellen is intent on going to nursing school and leading an independent life; she wants no part of quilting—a not-so-subtle metaphor for the fabric of family life—gets angry and runs away. Grandma and Mama Walton think Mary Ellen is just being teenage-typical stubborn, but the clan's wise father, John Walton . . . takes the young woman's reservations seriously, and thinks Mary Ellen should decide for herself what to do Mary Ellen gets a fine, spitting speech about how she resents the quilting for the way it will "put me on the market for marriage I am not a piece of merchandise!" Interestingly, it's John-Boy, who himself wants to leave the mountain to launch his own career, who argues with her that the quilting isn't a slave contract but "it's a gift . . . to remind you of people who were fond of you when you were growing up" (Tucker 2005: 240-242).

Having stunned *Flip Wilson* and *The Mod Squad* in 1972, *The Waltons* went on to anchor CBS's Thursday night line-up until 1981. Thursdays at 8:00 Eastern is a tough television neighborhood, however, and *The Waltons* eventually slipped to eighth during its third season. The show dropped out of the top ten the following year, but managed to rank in the Nielsen top thirty for seven of its nine seasons. It also enjoyed a long run in syndication, and spawned six TV reunion movies, the last of which aired in 1997. The success of *The Waltons* also inspired numerous imitators—most obviously Minnesota's *Little House on the Prairie*—but the same formula was never repeated in Virginia.

All subsequent shows set in the state have had urban, contemporary settings, with all but one of them located in the northern Virginia suburbs of D. C. The state's third entry, *Rituals*, which was set in the fictional suburb of Wingfield, was the polar opposite of the *Waltons*, both in theme and, more markedly, in expectations and results. *Rituals* was a glitzy syndicated soap opera that told the story of three adversarial families: the Chapins, the Gallaghers, and the Robertsons. These groups had much more in common with the Ewings of *Dallas* or the Carringtons of *Dynasty* than they did with the *Waltons*, stocked as they were with avaricious, devious, selfish, and unscrupulous characters. And, while *The Waltons* had been a surprise hit, *Rituals* was a spectacular failure. It cost millions of dollars to produce, but drew few viewers, and barely limped through 1984-1985 season.

Between 1990 and 2005, four more Virginia-based programs appeared, each of them focused on the lives of government employees. Two were family comedies, the first being *Major Dad*, which chronicled the marriage of hard-boiled, Marine Corps officer John MacGillis to Polly Cooper, a liberal journalist and widow with three daughters. The show debuted in 1989,

and was set in San Diego during its first season. MacGillis was then transferred to fictional Camp Hollister in Farlow, Virginia, near Washington, D. C., where the show remained for the rest of its run. *Major Dad*'s warm and optimistic outlook on life was not unlike that of *The Waltons*, even if it lacked that show's gravitas. It was partly a gentle skewering of life in the Corps, reminiscent of *Gomer Pyle*, coupled with a heavy dose of family warmth. The show's story lines were hardly groundbreaking: the family adopted a homeless puppy; the officers organized a talent show, but no one could bear to tell the general he had no talent; Polly tried to get her hard-boiled Marine to show his soft side; and so on.

Major Dad's only substantial departure from the carefree formula came when it dealt with real-life military issues, such as the threat of Camp Hollister's closure due to reduced military spending. It's most sobering moments came during the run-up to the 1991 war in Kuwait and Iraq. The major told Polly that he was anxious to "get over to Saudi," even though that meant leaving his wife and three stepdaughters behind. "I have two families: One of them is here, safe at home," he explained to Polly. "But the other one is overseas and in harm's way, and I want to be with that family, to help them." The major never shipped out, of course, but the war was a major part of the show's story lines for two seasons, and it caused tension between pacifist Polly and her hawkish husband. In one episode, Polly commented, "Looking at my children, I have to believe in a brighter future and hang on to the hope that someday, they'll live in a world of peace, where no one will ever have to fight over a line drawn in the sand" (Tucker 1991a: 1).

Major Dad was never regarded by critics as an artistic masterpiece, but it was popular for a time, ranking twenty-second on the Nielsen charts during its first year based in Virginia and shooting to ninth place the next season. The next year, however, the show was moved from Monday to Friday nights. Ratings plummeted, and *Major Dad* was cancelled.

Virginia's other family comedy was the cartoon *American Dad!*, which premiered in 2005 and continued to air through 2010. It was considerably less syrupy than *Major Dad*, having been created by the same subversive team that produced Rhode Island's *Family Guy*. Like that show, the basic set-up of *American Dad* was nothing out of the ordinary. The title dad was Stan Smith, a feverishly patriotic, ultraconservative CIA agent who was hell-bent on protecting America from all possible threats. Stan lived in the fictional D. C. suburb of Langley Falls with his wife, Francine, a former wild child who was now striving to be a model suburban wife and mother; his daughter, Hayley, a college student who was as liberal as her father was conservative; and his son, Steve, a nerdy weakling who craved, but rarely received, Stan's approval.

Also like *Family Guy*, the well-worn story lines resembled, at least at first, those of dozens of other suburban family sitcoms. On one episode, for example, Steve had a crush on a girl at school, and Stan encouraged him to impress her by running for class president. Steve won the election and the girl's heart, but he eventually discovered that she was only interested in him because of his newly elevated status. So he broke up with her. Such simplicity, however, was only half the story. As was the case on *Family Guy*, the banalities of setting and plot were only cover for some truly bizarre stuff. Stan, as it turned out, was not just a vigilant soldier in the War on Terror, but an obsessive one. He kept a color-coded Homeland Security terror advisory system magnet on his refrigerator and a gun handy in case Osama bin Laden tried to break into the house. And the "threats" to America that concerned Stan included all radical elements, such as gays, feminists, minorities, and Democrats. To make matters a little more surreal, along for the ride was Roger, a cynical, manic-depressive, alcoholic alien who sounded an awful lot like Paul Lynde. Roger had saved Stan's life at Area 51, and was now hiding out from the

government in the Smith's attic. The family pet was Klaus, a goldfish with a crush on Francine who spoke with a thick German accent, the result of a CIA experiment gone awry.

American Dad was, in part, a send-up of suburban conformity, but it was primarily a parody of Bush-era politics, especially in its early years. Stan was a cartoonish embodiment of neoconservatism and right-wing paranoia, and the show was especially pointed about the government's abuse of power. When Steve ran for school president, Stan rigged the election to guarantee his victory, and when a new girlfriend broke Steve's heart, Stan had her family deported. When Stan became jealous of Francine's success as a real estate broker, he hastened the demise of her firm by getting the Federal Reserve to impose a twenty-percent increase in interest rates—and he accomplished that by kidnapping Fed chairman Alan Greenspan's dog. When Stan forgot his anniversary, he took Francine to CIA headquarters and had her memory erased. And when Stan ran for church deacon, he enlisted the help of Bush adviser Karl Rove, portrayed on the show as a cloaked, grim reaper figure who achieved his evil goals by summoning the dark forces of hell.

Despite the heavy dose of family dysfunction and shadowy government plots, *American Dad* did not paint a particularly negative portrait of life in suburban Virginia. Stan was a dedicated employee, Francine taught Sunday school, Steve was a Boy Scout, and Haley was a devoted student. With the exception of a lusty goldfish and an inebriated alien, the Smiths were a normal, solid, middle-class American family, and nearly every episode ended with one of the characters, usually Stan, learning something about the importance of a loving family. As strange as it may sound, the message of *American Dad* was, in essence, that of *The Waltons*.

Most of Virginia's television programs have left the state's reputation relatively unscathed. In the world of trigger-happy Stan Smith, threats to peace and civility came mostly from Stan himself. The only show to truly cast a pall of crime, poverty and violence over the Old Dominion was 2003's *Line of Fire*, a bleak drama set in Richmond. The protagonist was Lisa Cohen, the determined head of the F. B. I.'s local office, and the show followed the efforts of Lisa and her team to bring down the syndicate operated by crime boss Jonah Malloy. "Though he looked like an accountant," wrote Brooks and Marsh, "Jonah could be vicious, as when he whacked a man with a tire iron . . . or took a child as 'collateral' in a drug deal, parking the kid with the call girls in his whore house" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 797). The very first scene of the series, in which an F. B. I. agent chased his quarry through grim back alleys near the James River, set the tone for the series, as described by critic Chris Elliot:

Caught at the archetypal chain link fence (do crooks ever climb these things well?), Carl, a low-life mobster, lies amongst a pile of torn, black plastic garbage bags, which signify you've wandered onto the wrong side of the tracks. FBI agent Bert Somers looks down at him, breathing hard and pleading with Carl to give himself up. But Carl's having none of it; he's got a family and he knows if he squeals, then it's the end of all of them. It's a tense, brief standoff—two men, two guns, followed soon after by two shots, and two dead bodies. Bert and Carl, we hardly knew you (Elliot 2003: 1).

Lucky for the Richmond Convention and Visitors Bureau, *Line of Fire* didn't outlive Bert and Carl by much, airing for just two months of the 2003-2004 season. The more successful, but no more cheery drama, *Criminal Minds* premiered in 2005. Child molesters, rapists and serial killers were the usual target of the F. B. I.'s Behavioral Analysis Unit. Headed by dedicated Special Agent Jason Gideon, the crew was based in Quantico, and charged with profiling and hunting down the country's most perverse criminals. A sort of psychologist's twist on *CSI*,

Criminal Minds had been a mainstay in the Nielsen top thirty when it entered its sixth season in 2010. Despite the show's often grim subject material, it had little impact on the television landscape of Virginia, since the team spent most its time crisscrossing the country in their specially modified jet, seeking out their latest warped prey. If anything, *Criminal Minds* reminded the viewer that evil was everywhere, and that one could rest easy knowing there was a team of bright, motivated individuals somewhere in northern Virginia ready to go out and hunt it down.

MISSISSIPPI

Mississippi's first entry was the sitcom *Private Benjamin*, which made its debut in the spring of 1981 and ran just shy of two seasons. Adapted from the hit 1980 Goldie Hawn film, it told the story of Judy Benjamin, a spoiled New York society girl who had run off to join the U. S. Army. Set at fictional Ft. Bradley, just outside of Biloxi, the show mainly involved the havoc created by Judy and her stereotypical band of platoon mates, which included Rayleen, a streetwise product of a Detroit ghetto; Maria, a wisecracking Italian-American; and Barbara Ann, a bumbling, country-music-wailing hayseed. In the end, they usually got the best of Captain Doreen Lewis, their perpetually frustrated commanding officer. *Private Benjamin* was more of a military spoof and class comedy than any kind of statement about life in Mississippi, although it did, with its fish-out-of-water theme, lend the state the same kind of backwater air as Kansas received from *The Phil Silvers Show*.

A far more forceful statement about life in contemporary Mississippi was made in the state's dramatic entry, *In the Heat of the Night*, which ran from 1988 to 1994. Based on the

award-winning 1967 film, this was the story of a gruff but wise Bill Gillespie, police chief of sleepy little Sparta, Mississippi. Much like Alabama's *Any Day Now*, the show was commended for its intelligent examination of race relations in the South, with *TV Guide*'s Merrill Panitt commenting that "So far as entertainment is concerned, *Heat* scores a B-minus as cop show. As an exercise in tolerance and understanding between races, which all of us—black and white—can use, it warrants an A" (Bogle 2001: 328). As had been the case in the film, the show focused on the relationship between Chief Gillespie, the archetypal cagy southern lawman, and Virgil Tibbs, the department's black detective, who had been forced upon Gillespie by a mayor hoping to court Sparta's African-American vote. While Gillespie was hardly an abhorrent racist, he was a traditionalist, and did not always see eye-to-eye with Tibbs. In a broader sense, Gillespie and Tibbs represent a transition from the Old South to the New. Tibbs had spent many years as a policeman in Philadelphia, and was bent on bringing modern, big-city police methods to his hometown. The New South was also manifested in the person of Harriet DeLong, a black city councilwoman and, thus, another African-American authority figure in Sparta. *In the Heat of the Night* also took a relatively revolutionary step when Harriet and Bill had an affair and, in the final season, were married.

Still, the Old South was alive and well on the show. Things moved as slow as molasses in Sparta, and nearly every crime that Tibbs and Gillespie set out to solve involved someone who was related to one of the show's regulars or who, at the very least, was an old family friend. The familiar southern dramatic devices of substance abuse, violent crimes of passion, and even incest made appearances on *In the Heat of the Night*, and Sparta had a fairly high redneck factor, right down to the fact that Gillespie's top deputy was named Bubba.

As for Sparta's physical location, an unincorporated town by that name exists in northern Mississippi, although the show was filmed elsewhere—first in Hammond, Louisiana, and later in Covington and Conyers, Georgia—and the real Sparta was likely not the inspiration for the fictional one. The town's name had also been used in the 1967 film, and that was probably because much of the principal filming for the movie had taken place in Sparta, Illinois, a small town southeast of St. Louis. Wherever it was, viewers enjoyed travelling there each week. *In the Heat of the Night* ranked eighteenth on the Nielsen charts after its first full season, and remained in the top thirty for four straight years.

GEORGIA

Georgia's first television entry came in 1977, on the heels of Jimmy Carter's inauguration, and was called, not coincidentally, *Carter Country*, set in fictional Clinton Corners, "just down the road the road from Plains," Carter's hometown (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 223). The show was, of all things, a comic take on *In the Heat of the Night*, focusing on the relationship between a white sheriff, Roy Mobey, and his black deputy, Curtis Baker. As in *Heat of the Night*, the sheriff was affable and folksy, and his deputy sharp and urbane, having been trained in the big city police methods of New York City. Despite their differences, they eventually learned to respect one another and to work together. Although *Carter Country* possessed some geographic contrasts common in many southern dramas—black and white, big city and backwoods, Old South and New South—none of this was taken seriously. The show also contained the sorts of characters that would be familiar in Georgia's early rural comedy/adventure series—a redneck deputy named Jasper; a libidinous policewoman named Cloris; and Teddy Burnside, the fat, spineless, wealthy mayor.

While never a major ratings success, *Carter Country* did manage to stay on the air for two seasons, and its very existence was somewhat significant to the South's television geography. It was the first comedy set in the region since ABC and CBS had carried out their purges of rural programming in 1971 and as such served as bridge to an even more extreme southern farce. This new show, 1979's *The Dukes of Hazzard*, was every bit the slice of cornbread that was *Hee Haw* and other programs the networks had fought so desperately to purge just eight years before. Yet, here it was again, and on CBS, no less. The essence of *The Dukes of Hazzard* was perhaps best captured by critic Jeff Alexander:

In the Evel Knievel seventies, it didn't seem at all unusual to tune in every Friday night to see an orange Dodge Charger flying through the air. In hindsight, one realizes that Hazzard County must have been named for the ramp-shaped piles of dirt that dotted the roads every half mile or so. The amazing thing wasn't the extent to which vehicular aviation was commonplace, but the fact they were doing it on purpose. At least once an episode, we'd expect to see the General Lee soaring gracefully into the southern sky, describing a perfect parabolic arc in slow motion while Bo and Luke emitted a tandem rebel yell out the open windows (Alexander 2008: 164).

The Dukes of Hazzard was created by Gy Waldron, and closely resembled his 1975 theatrical comedy, *Moonrunners*, which was about a pair of Georgia cousins eluding the police while running moonshine for their uncle. The protagonists of the television series were Bo and Luke Duke, cousins who were, as the television show's theme song suggested, just good ol' boys. Bo and Luke's family bore a striking resemblance to characters from CBS's previous rural comedies. Wise old Uncle Jesse Duke was played by Denver Pyle, who was essentially reprising his role as Briscoe Darling on *The Andy Griffith Show*, and cousin Daisy Duke, a tomboyish sexpot, was a hell-raising version of *The Beverly Hillbillies*'s Elly May Clampett. Country music

star Waylon Jennings narrated the series. The primary antagonist was the fat, frenetic, white-flannel-suit-clad and memorably named Jefferson Davis Hogg, a local political boss who seemed to own everything in Hazzard County. Hogg had it in for the Dukes, and they spent much of their time eluding him and Sheriff Roscoe P. Coltrane, Hogg's slow-witted brother-in-law. The real star of the show—which reportedly got half the fan mail—was the General Lee, an indestructible Day-Glo orange 1969 Dodge Charger, which sported a rebel flag on the roof and a horn that played “Dixie.” Most of the episodes revolved around the Dukes undoing Hogg's shady schemes, and usually involved a liberal dose of car chases, up-tempo country music, and half-naked young women.

Some question exists about the precise setting of the show, with Hazzard County vaguely identified as being “east of the Mississippi and south of the Ohio” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 397). Based on the landscapes from the program, Hazzard County very well could have been anywhere or, more precisely, everywhere within that large space. *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* described the fictional county as “a land of swamps (complete with alligators!), fertile valleys, pine barrens, and mountains; in short, the fictional county's geography is that of the South as a whole” (Blake 2002: 1). An argument can be made for Kentucky as the location. Series creator Gy Waldron was a Kentucky native, a real Hazard, Kentucky, exists about a hundred miles southeast of Lexington, and some of the show's stars made appearances at festivals in and around that community. For most of the show's run, the bulk of the filming actually took place on a back lot of Warner Brother Studios in Burbank. Before production moved to California, however, the show's abbreviated first season was filmed in and around Covington, Georgia, about thirty-four miles east of Atlanta. That fact, coupled with several scripts that have the Duke boys taking day trips to Atlanta, makes Covington, in the words of

television historian Tim Hollis, “probably as close to the real Hazzard as anyone is likely to find” (Hollis 2008: 240).

The geographic traits of Hazzard County were not unlike those found in scores of southern films and television shows. It was yet another story about a small town and the rural areas around it. The Duke family, while not Kornfield Kounty bumpkins, were not sophisticates. In one episode where the Dukes ventured into Atlanta, narrator Waylon Jennings gravely warned that “The Dukes are a little out of their picture when it comes to breakin’ in the big city (Blake 2002: 1). The boys were not particularly well educated or, for that matter, holders of steady jobs. Neither trait made them out of place in Hazzard, according to critic Ted Blake, who observed that “to find someone whose occupation and speech indicate that they have had the benefit of a college education, viewers must stick to the random background characters that occasionally materialize to fill the support roles that some scripts require” (Blake 2002: 1). Hazzard County was, in true southern form, almost completely lacking a middle class. Boss Hogg owned just about everything, and everyone else was either working class or poor.

As was traditionally the case on southern shows, Hazzard County was depicted as being isolated, and when an outsider did show up—con artists, counterfeiters, hijackers, mobsters, and, in one memorable episode, a space alien—it usually caused quite a ruckus. *The Dukes of Hazzard* also avoided the issue of race relations by the simple expedient of not having many black people in the cast. The most frequently seen black character was Sheriff Little of Chickasaw County, who would occasionally appear standing behind a roadblock, glowering out from behind his sunglasses, and hoping that whatever madness that was going on in the neighboring county would not spill over into his own. While Little was by no means a negative stereotype, it is a little curious that the show’s most prominent black character was a menacing-

looking authority figure, always seen peering in from the outside.

In summary, Hazzard County was a rural, unsophisticated, uneducated, poor, isolated and almost entirely white world—the very demographic that CBS had run away from in 1971. To make matters worse, *The Dukes of Hazzard* was hardly the same sort of “prestige project” that had led the network to green light *The Waltons*. The network was concerned, and had reason to be, as noted by Tim Hollis:

The network was leery of putting the show on at all, especially since several officials still in power remembered smarting from the “Country Broadcasting System” appellation. Their worst fears were realized when the first reviews came out *TV Guide* branded the show “moron heaven,” and a writer for one of the Los Angeles paper spewed his venom in more detail: “The worst thing to happen to the South since Appomattox,” he declared. “Video historians may well study it as an astounding example of how to fill an hour of prime time with no visible signs of acting, writing, or direction” The critics were fond of pointing out that the show embodied every previous stereotype of southern/rural character in existence (Hollis 2008: 238-239).

In defense of CBS, if a defense is necessary, the network did not appear to have much faith in *The Dukes*. Its initial order was for a scant eight episodes, and the show made an unheralded debut as a winter replacement for *Wonder Woman*. The network likely felt compelled to at least make an attempt, even if it was half-hearted, to cash in on the country-flavored car chase craze of the late 1970s, exemplified by the blockbuster Burt Reynolds action comedy film, *Smokey and the Bandit*. Success came immediately. Despite its short initial run, *The Dukes of Hazzard* ranked twentieth in the Nielsen ratings at the conclusion of the 1978-1979 season. It rose to the ninth position during its first full season, and rocketed to the second spot during 1980-1981, trailing only the smash hit *Dallas*, which followed *The Dukes* on CBS’s Friday night

schedule. Ultimately, the show would rank in the Nielsen top ten for three seasons, and in the top thirty five times during its six-year run.

Clearly, viewers saw something in the show that the critics did not. While vilification of the show's writing was certainly warranted—no one would mistake dialogue from a *Dukes* episode for that of an Oscar Wilde play—the characters obviously clicked with the audience. No small part of the show's success was due to actor Sorrell Booke, who played Boss Hogg. Booke and Denver Pyle were the only actors to appear in every single episode, and it is arguable that the show was really about the contrast between the greedy, blustery Hogg and the wise, earthy Uncle Jesse. Booke turned Hogg into a classic comic villain, an impressive waistline reflecting the character's avarice, and a short stature mirroring his pettifoggery. Hogg was truly a nasty guy, cruising about Hazzard County in a chauffeured Cadillac Coupe de Ville, bullying his stooge deputies, and trying to find, in every episode, some way to toss the Dukes in jail or pad his bank account. In varying episodes, he tried to shut down an orphanage and turn it into a shopping center, to appropriate a million dollars that had been slated for destruction by the Treasury Department, to steal Stonewall Jackson's sword and sell it for a profit, and to buy a tank to be used as a war memorial to himself and other, "less important heroic veterans of Hazzard County" (Tropiano 2000: 77).

Critic Leigh H. Edwards argued that the immensity of Hogg's egotism and greed was key to the show's central theme, that of "populist resistance to the Man, or the Boss:"

The first hint is Waylon Jennings's role as balladeer/narrator; his famous theme song was part of the Outlaw country movement. The song tells us the boys are like "modern-day Robin Hoods," fighting bad police and big business, sticking up for the small fry farmer. Like Flannery O'Connor's story, "Good Country People," the series teaches that every time someone assumes the bumpkin is

stupid, he or she will get burned by a little country ingenuity (Edwards 2005a: 1).

Along with this attractively populist message, the show's producers boosted the show's appeal by refusing to use the increasingly objectionable term "hillbilly" and by avoiding the region's more horrific images, such as those on display in the popular 1970s film *Deliverance*. While there is no question that the Dukes were stereotypes of southerners, they were hardly cruel stereotypes. The Duke family was always portrayed as clean, polite, respectful, and proud. As the theme song suggested, they were just "good ole boys, never meaning no harm" (Blake 2002: 1).

Even if *The Dukes of Hazzard* contained elements that southerners might find objectionable, it is important to note that the show was clearly never meant to be taken seriously. The characters on the show were not just caricatures, but caricatures of caricatures. Leigh H. Edwards argued that the "series had such a good time being ridiculous that it was often fun to tag along," and that it provided "raucously escapist entertainment," "cheerfully uncomplicated plotlines and cartoony characters." *The Dukes of Hazzard*, wrote Edwards, "is often great fun precisely because it's so absurd" (Edwards 2005a: 1). This sentiment was echoed by Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman, who wrote that "Hogg's weekly schemes and fulminations against the Duke boys were like Wile E. Coyote's futile attempts to catch the Road Runner" (Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman 1991: 265). In other words, accepting *The Dukes of Hazzard* as a serious attempt to realistically capture the South's geography is akin to accepting the road runner and coyote cartoons as a nature documentary.

The Dukes of Hazzard ended its run in 1985, largely as result of contract dispute between

the network and the show's stars, but its popularity endured. Ben Jones, who played the Duke's fun-loving grease monkey pal Cooter, parlayed his fame from the show into a run as a two-term U. S. Congressman from Georgia. In 1996, when the Nashville Network began airing reruns of the *The Dukes*, it regularly outdrew competition on the far more hip MTV network among the desirable eighteen-to-thirty-four-year-old demographic. In 2005, the series was released on DVD, and a new theatrical version of the show, with a new cast, did well at the box office. A video game based on the General Lee was also released, and cable's CMT network reran episodes of *The Dukes* each weeknight, also offering a promotional sweepstakes where one lucky viewer could become the Vice President of the CMT *Dukes of Hazzard* Institute, a one-year, \$100,000 position.

CBS was not the only network in the 1970s to cash in on the genre popularized by such movies as *Smokey and the Bandit*. Film aficionados will remember that *Bandit* featured not only a fast car, but also a big truck. In February, 1979, two weeks after the debut of *The Dukes*, NBC unveiled *B. J. and the Bear*, the story of a handsome young trucker who travelled around the country with his pet chimp (yes, his pet chimp), Bear. Critic Jeff Alexander described some of the show's peculiarities:

That show's theme song included the line "best of all I don't pay property tax," which indicated that B. J. was, to all intents and purposes, homeless . . . Yet he still somehow managed to get enough loads hauled from one place to another to be able to afford spending long periods of time relaxing and/or brawling in America's one truck stop (Alexander 2008: 156).

The show contained numerous Hazzardesque elements. B. J. was based in rural Georgia, where car chases, corrupt and moronic local sheriffs, and beautiful women abounded. It also

mirrored the populist theme of *The Dukes*, with a morally upright good ol' boy fighting corrupt government. In one episode, B. J. exposed a police captain who was dealing drugs and taking bribes, and on another he exposed a gubernatorial candidate who was running an illegal pornography operation. It is noteworthy that NBC, which had helped precipitate CBS's rural purge by promoting itself as America's erudite and urbane network, chose to air this show, because it was every bit as cornpone and perhaps even more ridiculous than *The Dukes of Hazzard*.

One of the sheriffs that B. J. encountered in his adventures was Elroy P. Lobo of rural Orly County, who proved popular enough to get his own show in the fall of 1979. *Lobo* was, as expected, a goofy comedy/adventure with plenty of car chases and scantily clad women, but with a twist that the bumbling lawman was now the protagonist. That is not to suggest that Lobo was any less corrupt than his Georgia predecessors. Though constantly trying to pull a con or a get-rich-quick scheme, he was never successful. Elroy was essentially a harmless man who always managed, against his better judgment, to do the right thing. Helping out, if that term applies, were his blundering deputies, Perkins and Hawkins. The trio somehow always managed to catch the bad guys and eventually got called up to the big leagues. At the beginning of the second season, they had been assigned to a special police task force in Atlanta. The governor had ordered the move based on Orly County's remarkably low crime rates, not realizing that Lobo had simply neglected to report those statistics to the state. As might be expected, the Atlanta cops resented the presence of these three rubes, but they always managed to get the job done on the mean streets of the big city.

The *Lobo* formula did not change much when the show arrived in Atlanta, but the move did mark a significant shift in Georgia's television landscape. *B. J. and the Bear* departed

Georgia for Los Angeles in 1981, the same year *Lobo* was cancelled, and *The Dukes of Hazzard* left the air in 1985. Thirteen more Georgia-based shows would make their debuts over the next two decades, and all but two of them would be set in Atlanta.

If, in the minds of many television viewers, Georgia was a state dominated by the likes of Bo and Luke Duke, Boss Hogg, and Elroy Lobo, that perception was likely altered by the emergence of the Atlanta's Cable News Network. This twenty-four hour news outlet, founded by Ted Turner, travelled a rocky road to respectability. Dismissed in its early years by the major networks as the "Chicken Noodle Network," CNN did struggle for legitimacy, and at one point had to take legal action in order to gain access to White House press briefings. But as Brooks and Marsh put it, "no one is laughing anymore" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 205). The network gained momentum throughout its first decade and cemented its place as a leading news outlet with its revolutionary, nonstop, frontline coverage of the Gulf War in 1991. CNN is now available in 93 million American homes and in ninety countries around the world, and must be credited, for better or worse, with inspiring the rash of cable news networks that have evolved over the last two decades. It probably must also be credited for changing the image of Atlanta from that of a sleepy, provincial center to a city of national importance.

On the fictional frontlines, just two Atlanta-based programs emerged during the 1980s, but both experienced ratings success and respectably long runs. *Matlock*, a program featuring Andy Griffith as the title lawyer, premiered in 1986 and ran for nine seasons. This show was in the Nielsen top thirty for six of those years, including its first five, peaking in the twelfth spot during its third season. *Designing Women*, a sitcom about Sugarbakers, an Atlanta interior design firm run by four women, premiered a few days after *Matlock* and ran for seven seasons. It was in the Nielsen top thirty for three of those years, peaking in the sixth position during the 1991-1992

season.

These two Atlanta programs arrived a little more than a year after *The Dukes of Hazzard* was shut down, and recast Georgia as home to smart and sophisticated professionals. Granted, a few rustic touches persisted. Matlock was regularly seen strumming a banjo on the porch of his old stone farmhouse in Willow Springs, and several times Griffith's old sidekick, Don Knotts, would show up, playing Les Calhoun, Matlock's neighbor. "Mayberry," as Brooks and Marsh put it, "was not far away, in spirit at least" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 867). For the first several seasons, principal interior filming for *Matlock* was done in California, but production of the show eventually moved to Wilmington, North Carolina, largely the result of Griffith's desire to be near his home on Roanoke Island.

Designing Women also possessed a distinct regional flavor. The opening credits featured a traditional rendition of "Georgia on My Mind," and the exterior establishing shots were also authentically southern, although they were filmed in Little Rock, not Atlanta. The show possessed its own rustic touches—one character owned a pet pig named Noel—but neither the four *Designing Women* nor *Matlock* were rubes. Ben Matlock might have been polite and unpretentious, but he was also a shrewd, Harvard-educated defense attorney, one of the best in Atlanta, and he almost never lost a case. Helping Ben out was his daughter, Charlene, who was also a lawyer. Her presence represented a shift in the portrayal of Georgia women who, prior to 1986, had primarily served as set decoration, poured into one skimpy costume or another.

The shift in female portrayals was, of course, even more distinct on *Designing Women*. Sugarbakers was run by a pair of sisters: widowed Julia, the leader of the bunch, and her divorced younger sister, Suzanne. Their partner, Mary Jo Shivley, was an energetic, if somewhat

insecure, divorcee and mother of two. Charlene Frazier, the firm's kind and ingenuous business manager, had never been married. The show signaled the arrival of a New South on television, if for no other reason than it focused on women who were single, accomplished, outspoken, urban professionals. In many ways, *Designing Women* was a southern take on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Just as Mary Richards had balanced the independence and determination of modern womanhood with the courtesy and decency demanded of her small-town Midwestern upbringing, the four *Designing Women* combined intelligence and resolve with the grace and civility of southern culture. It is likely coincidental, but incredibly appropriate, that the first names of the actresses who played the Sugarbaker sisters were Delta and Dixie, as they, in particular, represented the show's sharpest geographic themes. Julia Sugarbaker, played by Dixie Carter, had all the characteristics that one might associate with the aristocracy of the Old South. She was tasteful, graceful, and polite, but no hothouse orchid. She was bright and liberated and could be forceful and sharp-tongued when needed. Her sister, Suzanne, was more the Southern belle archetype, and was played by Delta Burke, who bore more than a slight resemblance to Vivien Leigh's Scarlett O'Hara. A former beauty queen, she was flirtatious, ostentatious, and far more likely to employ physical charms than intellect. Like Scarlett, however, she was no weakling, and she usually got what she wanted, as evidenced by sizable alimony checks she was collecting from three wealthy exhusbands.

Designing Women was also notable for its willingness to tackle current social and political issues, something that even premier southern programs like *The Andy Griffith Show* and *The Waltons* rarely did. Critic Stephen Tropiano credited the show's creator, Linda Bloodworth-Thomason, for this approach and for illustrating in the "daily challenges women face in a patriarchal society:"

Instead of generic plot twists or physical humor that dominated female buddy series like *I Love Lucy* and *Laverne & Shirley*, the characters here express their opinions In “Reservation for Eight,” the women and their respective male companions have plenty to say about the opposite sex The women observe that men don’t listen, aren’t sensitive enough, and are ego-driven; the men say women are manipulative and overanalyze everything. As always, outspoken Julia has the last word. Tired of women being blamed for all of the world’s ills, she reminds the men that they are the ones who “have done the raping and the robbing and the killing and the war-mongering for the last two thousand years So, if the world isn’t quite what you had in mind, you have only yourselves to thank!” The show was also the first sitcom to take on homophobia and AIDS The women are asked by a friend and fellow designer, Kendall Dobbs, who is dying of AIDS, to “design” his funeral When snooty friend, Alma Jean, tells Kendall pointblank that AIDS is “God’s punishment” of gays, Julia responds, without hesitation, “Killing all the right people.” It’s a gut-wrenching moment brought to a satisfactory conclusion when Julia kicks Alma Jean out of her house, but not before calling her a hypocrite and telling her that if “God was giving out sexually transmitted disease to people as punishment for sinning, then you would be at the free clinic all the time! And so would the rest of us!” (Tropiano 2003c: 1).

Both *Matlock* and *Designing Women* were also noteworthy for featuring recurring African-American characters and doing so in a matter-of-fact manner. *Matlock* included a character named Tyler Hudson, a black financial wizard who Matlock occasionally persuaded to do freelance investigating. *Designing Women* featured Anthony Bouvier, a black excon who the Sugarbakers initially employed as an assistant and handyman. Eventually, having worked his way through college, Anthony became a partner in the firm. As had first been the case on *The Phil Silvers Show*, the presence of these African-American characters was not a gimmick, nor was their appearance intended as an extraordinary development. They were simply there.

Beginning in the 1990s, four Atlanta-based programs would feature African-American leads, though none of them lasted especially long. *The Royal Family* was a 1991 sitcom featuring Redd Foxx as Al Royal, a crabby mailman who lived in Atlanta with his equally combative wife, Victoria. His dreams of retirement were upended when his daughter got a divorce and moved in, along with her three children. Unfortunately, Foxx died a few months into production, and so the show limped through its first and only season. The sitcom *Arsenio*, featuring comedian Arsenio Hall, lasted six weeks in 1997. It featured Hall as an Atlanta sports reporter and long-time bachelor who had finally settled down and married Vivian, an over-achieving attorney. The talent/reality series *R U the Girl with T-Boz & Chilli*, which aired for two months during the summer of 2005, chronicled the efforts of the two title members of the hip-hop group TLC to find a replacement for their late band mate, Lisa “Left Eye” Lopes. The finalists were taken to Atlanta where they lived in a mansion in between competitions. *Class of 3000*, a cheerful cartoon that had a brief run on cable’s Cartoon Network in 2006, featured André 3000 (André Benjamin of the Georgia-based hip hop duo Outkast) as Sunny Bridges, a musical superstar who gave up the “money-grubbing music business rat race” to return home to Atlanta (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 259). His biggest fan was Li'l D, who persuaded him to become the band director at Atlanta’s Westley School of Performing Arts.

Ten days after *Matlock* left the air, another Atlanta lawyer hit the airwaves. *John Grisham’s The Client*, which was based on a 1993 novel and 1994 film of the same name, aired for the duration of the 1995-1996 season. The legal cases were considerably more disturbing than those on *Matlock*, and the featured attorney considerably more troubled. Reggie Love was a family lawyer who had just gone through a bitter divorce. She had moved in with her mother, and was struggling to overcome the alcoholism that had cost her custody of her children.

Meanwhile, she and her mother sheltered clients who needed a home while their cases were being resolved. This clientele had lives as messy as hers, including a young boy who had witnessed a murder, a crack addict whose children were being abused in a foster home, and a young African-American man who had been expelled from school for setting fire to the Georgia state flag.

A similarly grim, but more successful crime drama, *Profiler*, premiered in 1996 and survived for four seasons. It was the story of forensic psychologist Samantha Waters, who had retired after a serial killer murdered her husband. She wasn't retired for long, however, and was soon working for the F. B. I.'s Atlanta-based Violent Crimes Task Force. Sam was sent to the scenes of grisly murders, where she proved remarkably adept at visualizing the crime from the point of view of both the killer and the victim. Sam's character had a few rustic touches—like Ben Matlock, she lived on a charming horse farm outside of the city—but her personality was akin to that of Julia Sugarbaker. She was smart, independent, and, in the words of critic Cynthia Fuchs, “she didn't take shit.”

One of my favorite moments comes in the first episode, when she meets her cocky teammate John; he challenges her to come up with a “theory” of the crime at hand. She doesn't miss a beat: “You want a theory? You've got Chinese food in your refrigerator, you like your women in heels, your scotch straight, and yourself definitely on top. But it's just a theory.” This shuts him up. And a couple of scenes later, you see John alone at home, watching a game on TV and eating Chinese food from the carton he had in his fridge (Fuchs 2003: 1).

As for the show's depiction of Atlanta, the occasional serial killer or deranged sniper did roam the city, but Sam's team also spent a lot of time on the road. A maniac, for example, was on the loose in Yosemite National Park, a string of seemingly random murders occurred in both

Boston and St. Louis, bomb blasts were rocking Pittsburgh, and a serial rapist was terrorizing the Florida Panhandle. In other words, *Profiler* characterized Atlanta as no more dangerous than anyplace else. Perhaps the most distinct geographic message of the show was that Atlanta was evolving into a diverse and cosmopolitan city. Sam's team included Nathan, a black detective, and Grace, a Latina forensics expert. As had been the case on *Designing Women* and *Matlock*, Nathan and Grace were presented as unremarkable facts, as was the case with computer expert George, whose "gay partner shows up at the office partway through the season and no one blinks an eye" (Fuchs 2003: 1).

Indeed, most of the characters who populated Atlanta-based programs after 1986—Ben Matlock, Julia Sugarbaker, Sunny Bridges, and Samantha Waters—reflect a city that was progressive, sophisticated, and generally white collar. Georgia, it appeared, had left Orly and Hazzard counties far behind. In recent years, however, a small redneck Renaissance has emanated from the Peach State, as evidenced by the renewed popularity of *The Dukes of Hazzard*. In terms of new programs, the charge was led by stand-up comic and Atlanta native Jeff Foxworthy. Foxworthy was a specialist in redneck humor, known for such pithy observations as, "If someone takes his dog for a walk and they both use the tree by the corner, he might be a redneck" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 694). His sitcom, *The Jeff Foxworthy Show*, had premiered on ABC in 1995 and was initially set in Indiana. When the series moved to NBC for its second season, the entire cast changed, with the exception of Jeff and his son, Matt. He had a new wife and a second son, and the setting was now Atlanta, where Jeff was the loading dock manager for a shipping company. Some of the show's developments might have made Georgia viewers uncomfortable—Brooks and Marsh noted, for example, that young Matt was "somewhat dumber than he had been in Indiana"—but the overall tone was a gentle family humor. The

comedy of the likable Foxworthy, while not exactly eradicating regional stereotypes, could hardly be considered a true cultural assault (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 694).

Foxworthy's next effort raised a few more eyebrows. The sketch and stand-up comedy show *Blue Collar TV*, which featured Foxworthy and fellow comedians Dan "Larry the Cable Guy" Whitney and Bill Engvall, premiered in July 2004 and ran for just over two years. *Blue Collar TV* was something of a latter-day *Hee Haw*, with country music and broad, goofy humor, including regular features such as "The Redneck Dictionary Word of the Day" and "The Redneck Yard of the Week Award." As always, the degree to which this show could be considered offensive corresponded with the degree to which the viewer took it seriously, but critic Terry Sawyer loathed the program, particularly in the way that it co-opted the term "blue collar":

When I watched *Blue Collar TV*, I couldn't help but think of how homogenized images of "working class" folks have become. Now, "blue collar" means white, Southern, alcoholic redneck. *Blue Collar TV* is a comic blight, a bastion of jokes well beyond their expiration date culled from e-mail forwards sent by the least funny of your coworkers. One typical skit involves a mulleted oaf asking his wife for the number to 9-1-1. She tells him to call information. He does. Somewhere the writers of *Hee Haw* sit, feeling literary (Sawyer 2004: 1).

Blue Collar TV was taped at the Alliance Theater in Georgia, and was the second entertainment program to actually emanate from the city. The first had been *Animal Tails*, which premiered in 2003 and aired for three seasons. This show was, in part, educational, informing viewers about animals, especially pets. It was also a sort of talent search, featuring animals with unique abilities, some via tape from around the country, and others who "performed" before a live studio audience in Atlanta.

As noted, *Lobo*'s 1980 arrival in Atlanta began a period in which most Georgia-based programs were set in the city. Two subsequent programs, however, both dramas, were located elsewhere. The first, *I'll Fly Away*, was on location in Georgia and premiered in 1991. While some Georgia-based programs have been nearly devoid of African-American characters, a few, as mentioned, have featured either black supporting characters or predominantly African-American casts. *I'll Fly Away*, however, was unique in this regard—it was the only Georgia-based program to tackle the subject of race relations head on. Set in the fictional small town of Bryland during the 1950s, this well-intentioned drama chronicled the relationship between the white Bedford family and their black housekeeper, Lilly Harper. The head of the family, played by Sam Waterston, was Forrest Bedford, Bryland's quiet and gracious prosecuting attorney. The show often focused on Forrest's legal work, but it was also part family drama, featuring Forrest's relationship with his three young sons and Lilly's role as their surrogate mother. It was also a portrait of small-town southern life, and described a sense of place that can perhaps best be described as Faulknerian. Things moved slowly in Bryland, very slowly. The stories were subtle, the pace was deliberate, the atmosphere hypnotic, and the acting low key. *Newsday* critic Marvin Kitman, despite writing a rave review, admitted that watching Sam Waterston on the show was "like watching water drip" (Bogle 2001: 403). Beneath this sleepy surface, however, lurked the fury, discord, and psychological tumult that often characterized Yoknapatawpha County. The viewer learned that Forrest's wife was absent because she was in a mental institution, and Forrest's case load contained more than a few vicious crimes.

The dominant topic, though, was quite obviously race, a point made clear by the names of Forrest Bedford and his son, Nathan, a not-too-subtle allusion to Ku Klux Klan founder Nathan Bedford Forrest. This is not to suggest that the *I'll Fly Away* characters embodied the spirit of

their infamous namesake, even though they were often disturbed and confused by the Civil Rights movement budding around him. Rather, Forrest has much more in common with Atticus Finch, the principled attorney from *To Kill a Mockingbird* who ultimately does the right thing despite the vehement disapproval of many of his fellow citizens. The Civil Rights movement was most directly examined through the eyes of Lilly. Like Forrest, she possessed a quiet dignity and intelligence, and had the courage to engage in courthouse sit-ins and voter registration drives. She was also able to reshape the perspective of the Bedford family, particularly through her interaction with the youngest boy, John Morgan Bedford, who “asked wide-eyed questions about why the black people were different” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 657). In keeping with the show’s subtle tone, these explorations of racial issues were handled in a thoughtful manner, as noted by critic Donald Bogle:

Lilly always understood her place in Southern culture. Here *I’ll Fly Away* dramatized a fact that most African Americans were aware of but had rarely seen articulated on the primetime series in such thoughtful terms: that while Lilly becomes well aware of the Bedfords’ conflicts and contradictions, their dilemmas and yearnings, they know very little about her, the Black woman in their midst. Lilly also sees the contrast between the Bedfords’ comfortable middle-class way of life and her own. *I’ll Fly Away* never let the viewer forget that once Lilly left the Bedford household, she returned to her modest home in the colored part of town (Bogle 2001: 398).

I’ll Fly Away was one of the most critically acclaimed programs of the 1990s. It won the Peabody Award, three Humanitas Awards, and received twenty-three Emmy nominations. It also had an incredibly loyal following, but not a large enough one, and NBC cancelled the show midway through its second season. In a unique acknowledgment of the strong attachment that

many felt to *I'll Fly Away*, PBS produced a new, two-hour conclusion for the program's fans in 1993.

The second 1990s Georgia-based drama set outside of Atlanta was the over-heated primetime soap opera *Savannah*, which premiered in 1996. This show began when Lane MacKenzie, a sophisticated budding writer moved back home to Savannah from New York. There she rejoined two of her lifelong friends: Reese, a spoiled and childlike Southern belle, and Peyton, an immoral and devious harpy. *Savannah* was not very distant from *Dallas* in tone, and the show contained all the usual soap opera elements: piles of cash, cheating spouses, illegitimate children, con men and scam artists, prostitutes, crooked politicians, thieves, and long-lost identical twins. Fans of quality television who were heartbroken by the cancellation of *I'll Fly Away* might have taken some solace in the fact that *Savannah* was canned after six weeks.

CONCLUSION

Several cities outside of California and New York have contributed to primetime television programming, most notably Washington, Philadelphia, and Chicago, but none of them have been as prolific, at least in recent years, as Nashville. The irony, of course, is that although Nashville is one of television's most prominent urban areas, the images from the city have been decidedly nonurban. Nashville produced scores of country music programs for network broadcast and syndication and even lent its name, for a time, to a prominent cable network. Most of this programming owed a stylistic debt to the long-running country variety program *Hee Haw*. The production value of that show was high and the musical talent remarkable, but it is probably best remembered for its goofy and determinedly unsophisticated humor. Images of the corpulent,

slow-witted Junior Samples, bad jokes told from a cornfield or from haystacks, and a braying cartoon donkey are recalled affectionately by some and with disgust by others, but they were certainly out of step with Nashville's older reputation as the Athens of the South. Such images were, nevertheless, a step up from the images of Tennessee provided by scripted entries set outside of Nashville. Most of these programs were short-lived, detailing life in rural backwaters that were sometimes violent, sometimes impoverished, and nearly always culturally backward.

The sleepy small town has been, without doubt, the most common television image of the South. Mayberry, North Carolina, of *The Andy Griffith Show* is probably television's most famous fictional locale, and it was, in many ways, the epitome of the southern television landscape. The show is undoubtedly the South's most enduringly popular show, and was one of the most positive depictions of the region. Life moved slowly, and the people were generally cheerful, warm, sincere, and friendly. Family, tradition, and community mattered, and although the inhabitants were decidedly unsophisticated, any outsider, whether coming with nefarious motives or simply ruffling feathers with their arrogance, nearly always left with a new appreciation for small-town ingenuity.

The geographic messages of the South's small town programs have not been completely uniform, but the general portrait of an isolated, slow-moving, tradition-bound little town has been surprisingly consistent from state to state and decade to decade. The angles of South Carolina and West Virginia's lone shows were very different, but both programs made heavy use of their settings, with the serene beauty of Trinity, South Carolina, contrasting with the evil powers of *American Gothic's* antagonist, and rural West Virginia lending an air of folksy wisdom to the protagonist of *Hawkins*. Kentucky has been home to four short-lived programs and, for the most part, they have followed the lead of the state's first entry, *The Wonderful John*

Acton, by featuring themes rich in rural nostalgia. Arkansas's most prominent program, *Evening Shade*, was lauded for its spicy and smart humor, but its core geographic element was a sleepy amiability that dripped from the name of the title town. Things were not always so congenial on Mississippi's most successful program, *In the Heat of the Night*, with its emphasis on racial tension, cultural conflict, crime, and violence, but the overall geographic aura of its fictional Sparta was not much different from that of scores of other fictional southern towns—the people were polite, tradition mattered, everything moved slowly, and everyone knew everyone else.

Alabama's prominent entry, *Any Day Now*, was set in the industrial city of Birmingham, but its tone was not much different from its small-town southern counterparts. Poverty, race, and racism were prominent topics, but the defining geographic elements of the show were its leisurely pace and the message that the present was entrenched firmly in the past. Likewise, the television landscape of Louisiana, the most urbanized (on television, at least) of the southern states, also presented the standard view of the South. New Orleans might have more than its share of corruption, but it also was a town rooted in its past and reveling in its colorfully cheerful idiosyncrasies. None of Louisiana's programs were particularly successful, but the critically acclaimed *Frank's Place* epitomized the state's television landscape. Its protagonist, as noted by Donald Bogle (2001), was drawn to New Orleans by its "food, its music, its social clubs, its jazzy seductiveness," and its "romantic, almost dream-like aura."

In the years since *Mayberry* left the air, a number of North Carolina programs have been set in modern urban areas, and even the state's fictional small-town shows became far more modern and turbulent. This shift from the Old South to the New has been chronicled throughout the region, but this transition has been most noticeable in Virginia and Georgia. For years, Virginia's television landscape was dominated by *The Waltons*, an acclaimed drama about a

loving family living in a rural community in 1930s. With its traditional values, bittersweet stories, and dignified, simple, and quietly intelligent characters, *The Waltons* has become synonymous with rural nostalgia and quality family television. Years after *The Waltons* left the air, *Major Dad* would echo these same sweet stories of loving families back, but, on balance, the state's television entries have become more modern and urban. Along with a soap opera and a pair of gritty crime dramas, Virginia has been home to the caustic social and political satire of the adult cartoon, *American Dad*. Although this show ultimately celebrates family love just as *The Waltons* did, *American Dad* is better known for its skewering of government and suburban conformity, and its incredibly bawdy humor.

Georgia's television landscape has similarly followed the track from rural and traditional to urban and modern, but its early entries were more carefree, and considerably greasier than *The Waltons*. On *Carter Country*, *B. J. and the Bear*, and *Lobo*, cops and politicians were usually colorfully corrupt, the women scantily clad, and the heroes cheerfully laidback. The defining entry of Georgia's early years was *The Dukes of Hazzard*, which sent mixed messages about its rural Georgia setting. On one hand, the show featured spectacularly corrupt politicians and cops, and the plots, characters, and dialogue were lambasted for their decidedly low-brow nature. On the other hand, the title cousins were charming and polite, possessed a good deal of country ingenuity and, given their resistance to the devious establishment, were, in a way, populist heroes.

Georgia's sleepy backwaters did not die with *The Dukes of Hazzard*, but remained something a constant among the state's television programs—played for laughs on *The Jeff Foxworthy Show* and *Blue Collar TV*, and earnestly examined on the civil rights drama *I'll Fly Away*. That said, Georgia's television landscape underwent a major transformation in the mid-

1980s. The shows on the cusp between the Old South and the New South were *Designing Women* and *Matlock*. Both contained ingredients that tasted of an old and sleepy region, but they were also set in modern Atlanta, and presented characters far more sophisticated than their country cousins. The title protagonists of *Designing Women* were intelligent, accomplished, and outspoken women, and the title hero of *Matlock* was a respected, Harvard-educated attorney. Both shows were also notable for featuring black supporting characters, not as a comical gimmick or for a tedious examination of racial matters, but simply as a matter of course. Through the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, Atlanta was home to several programs featuring black leads, and, in general, the city was increasingly depicted as a modern metropolis populated by progressive, sophisticated, and white-collar professionals. Georgia's transition from Old South to New was fully realized on *Profiler*, a crime drama that featured a strong female lead, and that depicted Atlanta as a fast-paced, cosmopolitan, and even somewhat dangerous metropolis.

TABLE 7. DEFINING PROGRAMS AND COMMON TRAITS: THE WEST

State	Defining Programs	Key Program Elements	Other Common Traits
Arizona	<i>The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin</i>	The rough and rugged frontier; brave cavalry soldiers facing down outlaws and savage Native Americans	Stern and noble heroes maintaining law and order on the wild frontier; violent action; mixture of pejorative and sympathetic views of Native Americans; Mexican-Americans; tough towns; corrupt land barons; hot, filthy, barren little towns; seedy Phoenix; white, wealthy, materialistic, dissatisfied urbanites
	<i>Alice</i>	Friendly, blue-collar Phoenix; an independent, working single mom; “love, comfort, down-to-earth wisdom, and good humor”; a fresh start out West	
Idaho	<i>The Manhunter</i>	Rural home of title character	
Colorado	<i>Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman</i>	A doctor arrives on the rugged frontier to start a new life; battles ignorance and prejudice; heart-warming family values	A newcomer arrives for a fresh start; a newcomer fights the ignorance and prejudice of natives; an outsider arrives to exploit the local citizens and land; attractive but wild landscapes; toughness of primary characters; the mean streets of Denver; mixture of rustic small towns and modern urban life
	<i>Dynasty</i>	Tumult, betrayal, and greed among Denver’s super rich;	
	<i>Mork & Mindy</i>	An alien arrives on earth to learn lessons about human life; Boulder as a modern, pleasant city	
	<i>South Park</i>	A small, quaint, mountain town with eccentric, provincial, and narrow-minded residents who often meet with disasters; destructive outsiders	

Montana	<i>My Friend Flicka</i>	Adventures of a boy and his horse on a 19 th -century ranch	The wild, lawless, and uncivilized frontier; youthful vigor, optimism, and personal renewal
Nevada	<i>Bonanza</i>	Tales of dignity, wisdom, integrity, reason, honesty, and rugged independence on a prosperous frontier ranch	Las Vegas's gaming and entertainment industry; Money, glitz, glamor, sleaze, romance sex, violence and crime in "Sin City"; lavishly produced variety programs; staring life anew in the West; dusty, isolated little desert towns; eerie loneliness of the desert
	<i>CSI: Crime Scene Investigation</i>	An enigmatic hero leads a team of talented and dedicated forensic scientists; "pithy observations about gambling and fate"; strange and gruesome murders; wild night life	
	<i>Reno 911</i>	Cartoonish portrayal of Reno as "society's flabby underbelly" and as a town of "trailer parks, shabby bungalows, unintelligible perps and victims, sleazy street shots"	
New Mexico	<i>The Rifleman</i>	Rancher on a wild frontier whose skills as a rifleman help maintain law and order	Lawmen maintain order on a wild and lawless frontier; relatively sympathetic portrayals of Native Americans; highly-principled protagonists; Old West values in contemporary settings; Hispanic Americans
	<i>Roswell</i>	Teen angst, government conspiracy, and space aliens	

Oregon	<i>Little People, Big World</i>	A friendly, happy, and successful nuclear family	Friendly, generally normal families with a gimmicky twist; the grim streets of Portland; a beautiful but harsh wilderness;
Utah	<i>Donny & Marie</i>	Clean and good-natured variety show; wholesome family entertainment	Spectacular landscapes; old-timers vs. newcomers
Washington	<i>Frasier</i>	Seattle as a modern metropolis where the sophisticated and pedantic collide with the earthy and crude	Rough and tumble Seattle coming into contact with a civilizing force; dark themes; violence; picturesque but shady small towns; newcomers; conspiracies
	<i>Grey's Anatomy</i>	Seattle as a city of handsome, successful young, hedonistic professionals; ethnic diversity	
	<i>Twin Peaks</i>	A charming, picturesque, and seemingly normal small mountain town that turns out to be an “eddy pool of sadism, Satanism, pornography and drugs”; melancholy atmosphere; spectacular mountain scenery; the supernatural	
Wyoming	<i>Laramie</i>	A struggling ranch on a wild frontier plagued by outlaws, Indian raids, and corrupt land barons	
	<i>The Virginian</i>	A gritty, brusque, enigmatic, and nameless gunfighter maintains law and order on a 19 th -century ranch	

CHAPTER 7 - THE WEST

Programs set in the West have accounted for 6.37% of the American television landscape, although that number comes with a significant qualification. A number of programs in the western genre have not taken place in the states defined here as the West—most notably Kansas’s *Gunsmoke*. Additionally, this study does not include an analysis of programs with a vaguely western setting—that is, programs where the setting’s precise state or territory is not defined. Likewise, programs that might be defined as “roving westerns,” where the setting changed weekly, such as *Have Gun Will Travel*, *Wagon Train*, and *Maverick*, have been excluded from this study. That said, while it is certain that the inclusion of such programs would have boosted the West’s share of the television landscape above seven percent, it is unlikely that they would have put the region’s share substantially higher than that. Images of the West have, of course, played an enormous role in many forms of American art, including film, radio drama, literature, music, and painting, and for a time, the western genre had a remarkable run on American television. That said, this genre was not quite as dominant on the small screen as one might expect. Few television westerns existed before 1957, and almost none after 1975. And despite the spectacular success of the genre in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the mortality rate of most television westerns was notoriously high. Of the 220 television programs to last at least six years, just eight were westerns, and Brooks and Marsh’s list of the top 100 television programs of all time (as measured by both ratings and longevity) includes just five westerns.

Even in the West, the dominant genre in many states has not been the western, a fact most evident in the region’s leading television state, Nevada. It is true that *Bonanza* was the

state's most popular entry, but among its forty other television programs, just one was a western. Nevada's programs have accounted for 1.65% of the American television landscape, a figure that is nearly double the state's current share of the country's population. The state's impressive television exposure is partly due to the longevity of *Bonanza*, but also to the allure of Las Vegas, which has served as the setting for thirty-two programs. The distribution of the West's remaining television programs have, to a degree, approximated population distribution, with the region's three most populous states accounting for next three most successful television landscapes. Washington, Arizona, and Colorado collectively account for 5.8% of the country's population, and they collectively have yielded 3.19% of the country's television images. In proportion to their populations, the West's four least populous states have fared about as well. New Mexico, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming collectively represent 1.59% of the U.S. population, and have shared about 1.06% of the television landscape. Idaho has fared the poorest among these four. Like Delaware, it can lay claim to only one short-lived program. Other busts include Utah, which has accounted for just 0.08% of the television landscape, and Oregon, which, despite its relatively large population, has accounted for just 0.39% of the country's television images.

OREGON

Oregon has served as the backdrop for thirteen television programs—an appropriate number given the state's generally unlucky run on the small screen. Things got off to an inauspicious start. The sitcom *Hello, Larry* is listed in some sources as the flop for which actor McLean Stevenson left the blockbuster series *M*A*S*H*. That is not true—it was the third of four sitcom bombs in Stevenson's post-*M*A*S*H* career—but it was certainly the most notorious. *Hello, Larry* was a midseason replacement series, debuting in January 1979, and it

initially had a relatively simple format. Larry Alder was a recently divorced radio talk-show host who had left Los Angeles for Portland with his two teenage daughters. The show focused on Larry's new job at station KLOW, where his goofy co-workers brought *WKRP in Cincinnati* to mind. Larry's radio show was a success, but *Hello, Larry* was not. Because NBC had high hopes for the show, it was renewed for a full season the next fall, but when ratings did not improve, the producers began pulling out all the stops. The show now focused on Larry's home life, featuring the coming-of-age struggles of daughters Ruthie and Diane, who were helped along by the sage advice of neighbor Leona, played by rhythm-and-blues legend Ruth Brown. Added to the fray that season were sitcom veteran Shelley Fabares, playing Marion, Larry's ex-wife who showed up seeking reconciliation; Henry, Larry's cantankerous father, who moved into the Alder household; and Harlem Globetrotter Meadowlark Lemon, who played himself as a family friend and the owner-operator of a Portland sporting goods store. In a novel move, NBC also tried to make *Hello, Larry* a retroactive spin-off of *Diff'rent Strokes*, the far more popular sitcom that preceded *Hello, Larry* on Friday nights. Larry, it was explained, was Phillip Drummond's old army pal and, when Drummond bought Larry's radio station, several crossover episodes were necessary. None of this worked, and *Hello, Larry*'s infamous run ended in April 1980.

Life in television Oregon did not change much in the years after Larry Alder's departure. Oregon has been depicted, for the most part, as a state of friendly, generally normal families whose lives are tilted off-center by some gimmicky twist. A number of these programs featured actors from once-successful television shows or popular films, but, like McLean Stevenson, none of them managed to hit pay dirt. Despite its legendarily disastrous run, *Hello, Larry* remains the only Oregon entry to air for more than one season on a major network.

Hello, Larry was followed by three more sitcoms, all set in Portland. *Together We Stand* was a 1980s family sitcom featuring 1970s film icon Elliot Gould as David Randall. David had recently retired as a coach for the NBA's Portland Trail Blazers. He remained in town to run a sporting goods store (perhaps purchased from Meadowlark Lemon), but the show's primary focus was on home life. David and his wife, Lori, had adopted their daughter Amy sixteen years before. Two years later, they were surprised by the birth of Jack, the biological son they had been told they couldn't have. Seeing what good adoptive parents the Randalls made, a social worker persuaded them to adopt a Vietnamese orphan named Sam and an African-American orphan named Sally. Episodes revolved around David and Lori's adjustments to a suddenly crowded house, Lori and Jack's adjustments to new siblings, and Sam and Sally's adjustments to family life. Plenty of lessons about cultural differences emerged, but *Together We Stand* was lost in the wash of the decade's "amalgam-family comedies," and the show was put on hiatus after ten weeks in the fall of 1986 (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,400). When the show returned in February, Elliot Gould had departed, and the title had changed to *Nothing is Easy*. David, it seemed, had been killed in a car accident, and Lori was adjusting to life as a single mother. Proving its new title correct, *Nothing is Easy* vanished permanently after nine more weeks.

The 1994 sitcom *The Boys are Back* featured sitcom veterans Hal Linden (*Barney Miller*) and Suzanne Pleshette (*The Bob Newhart Show*) as Fred and Jackie Hansen, a Portland couple who were looking forward to a peaceful retirement after the youngest of their three sons headed off to college. Unfortunately, their older two boys came back. Son Mike had lost his job and moved in with his wife and three precocious kids, while son Rick returned after his wife kicked him out. "There was," according to Brooks and Marsh, "a predictable uproar as these three

generations tried to live together” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 175). It was all a little too predictable, and the show was off the air after four and a half months.

Whereas the Hansens were a little overwhelmed by the sudden influx of family, the title character of the 1998 sitcom *Maggie* couldn't get the time of day from hers. Husband Mark was a workaholic cardiologist and daughter Amanda a self-absorbed brat, so Maggie sought solace in a new career. She studied veterinary medicine and got a job as an intern at the clinic of Dr. Richard Myers. Soon romantic sparks flew between Maggie and Dr. Myers, and she shared her conflicted feelings with her therapist, Dr. Kimberly, and her zany coworkers. Ratings for the show were low, even by the standards of cable's Lifetime network, and *Maggie* was canned after five months.

Like their sitcom counterparts, Oregon's seven dramas often featured fading television stars, depicted chaotic families, and found few viewers. The first was *Blue Skies*, which featured former *Dukes of Hazzard* star Tom Wopat as Frank Cobb, a successful San Francisco advertising man who gave up his career and returned to rural Oregon to rescue his family's struggling sawmill. He was a widower with two daughters, and had just married Annie, a sophisticated New Yorker who had a teen daughter of her own. Annie adjusted to life in tiny Eagle Falls, the kids adjusted to one another, and Frank argued with his father, Henry, who was disappointed that Frank had given up his career. *Blue Skies* lasted just eight weeks in the summer of 1988, a run that was equaled by 1991's *Sons and Daughters*. This second drama featured more family adjustments, and was perhaps most memorable for its slightly strange character names. Bing Hammersmith had recently returned to Portland with his young second wife, Mary Ruth, and their son, Bing, Jr. He moved in with his daughter, Tess, and her adopted Korean daughter, Astrid. Bing's other daughter, Patty, was married to a football coach named Spud Lincoln, and

they had three children—Rocky, a high school dropout and male model, troubled Paulette, and lovable little Ike. Bing's other son was yuppie Gary, who, along with wife Lindy, were adjusting to life with their new daughter, Dakota. Oregon's third dramatic entry, *McKenna*, featured yet more family adjustments. This time around the washed-up television star was Chad Everett, of *Medical Center* fame, who played Jack McKenna, the rough-and-tumble owner of McKenna Wilderness Outfitters. Jack had been in a funk ever since his favorite son, Guy, had plunged to his death in a gorge. He had to adjust to life with son Brick, who had come back home to Oregon after spending a few years as a race car driver. Jack, Brick, and the other members spent most of the series arguing and leading hapless city slickers into the wilderness. The main appeal was the spectacular scenery near Bend, Oregon, but it was not enough to save the show. After a two week run in the fall of 1994, *McKenna* returned to ABC the next summer to burn off its three remaining episodes.

Oregon's only police drama, *Under Suspicion*, was the story of Rose Phillips, the only female detective in her precinct in Portland. Rose battled sexism in the station house, but always found time to solve a series of gruesome murders. *Under Suspicion* was on the CBS schedule for eleven months, part of it in the illustrious 12:35-to-1:40 A.M. slot, but only eighteen episodes were produced. That was, nevertheless, good enough to make this show Oregon's longest-running network drama.

All three of the state's remaining dramatic entries were filmed in Canada and spent most of their runs airing on cut-rate television outlets. The first, *The Fearing Mind*, aired in 2000 on cable's Fox Family Channel. It was the story of a man named, of course, Bill Fearing, a horror writer with a vivid imagination. Bill lived in a small Oregon town, and the gimmick was that a mundane event in Bill's life would inspire a short story, which would then play out before Bill's

eyes. Nobody else, including Bill's grousing wife, daughter, and mother-in-law, saw these events take place. Not many viewers saw them, either, and the show was off the air in six weeks. The drama *Mysterious Ways* sought the same audience that *The Fearing Mind* had failed to reach. It was a cross between a church sermon and *The X-Files*, telling the story of anthropology professor Declan Dunn, who had miraculously survived an avalanche. Like Fox Mulder, Declan was seeking truth, much to the chagrin of his superiors such as the crusty dean at Northern Oregon University. Declan's research partner, a psychiatrist named Peggy, was the program's Dana Scully, playing the role of skeptic. As was the case on *The X-Files*, the physical proof of the miracles always slipped through their fingers. *Mysterious Ways* had a short run on NBC in the summer of 2000 before moving to the Christian-themed PAX network in the fall, where it ran for two full seasons. Oregon's last dramatic entry was *Saved*, which aired on cable's TNT. It was the story of Wyatt Cole, a troubled young paramedic who, against the wishes of his physician-father, had dropped out of medical school. He was also battling a gambling addiction, and his girlfriend had recently ditched him. Otherwise, *Saved* was a "by-the-numbers medical thriller," following Wyatt and his fellow EMTs as they raced around the streets of Portland, dealing with "car wrecks, drug addicts, heart attacks, street crazies, and premature births" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,199).

Oregon was the setting for a pair of reality programs in the 2000s, the first of which was 2005's *Brat Camp*. Considered by some to be educational, and by others as the epitome of reality trash, *Brat Camp* was the story of nine troubled teens, ages fourteen to seventeen, who had been dispatched to a reform school called SageWalk, near Bend. The kids, who had been signed up for the experience by their exasperated parents, were whisked away in something not unlike a kidnapping, and driven, blindfolded, to a sparse camp in the backwoods. If that experience was

not traumatic enough—one girl wept uncontrollably when she arrived—the “students” were then handed forty-pound packs and taken on a forty-day, hundred-mile trek through the woods. Their guides were counselors with quasi-Native American names—“Glacier Mountain Wolf,” “Flying Eagle,” “Stalking Cougar,” “Little Big Bear,” and “Mountain Wind”—who spouted trite proverbs.

That SageWalk’s tactics were a little controversial goes without saying—the school received much unwanted attention four years later when one of their wards died on the walk—but, for many, the most disturbing part of the process was that it was being put on television. “Adults can freely humiliate themselves however they wish on TV,” wrote critic Brian Lowry, “but the scales should tip differently when minors are involved” (Lowry 2005: 1). Brooks and Marsh outlined some of the show’s more controversial elements:

Needless to say, emotions ran high. The show played this to the hilt with teasers such as “up next—Jada freaks out!,” “dark secrets are revealed,” “Lexie reveals her traumatic past” (the 17-year-old sobbingly revealed that she had been sexually abused in the seventh grade, as the camera zoomed in for a close-up of her tears). Brutally honest “impact letters” from the parents added to the trauma. These were deeply troubled kids and some psychologists objected to their “exploitation” for entertainment purposes, the lies they were told to get them to SageWalk, and the glib labels applied to them (onscreen labels such as “angry punk,” “compulsive liar,” and “self-destructive drug-user” were routinely superimposed). Nor was the experiment entirely successful. At least two of the subjects, Jada and Isaiah, were in trouble with the law by the time the series aired (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 178).

Brat Camp ran for one summer and, along with *McKenna*, was as close as Oregon ever got to a western—highlighting both the beauty and harshness of the state’s wilderness. The most common subject of Oregon’s television entries, however, remained family life, and that was the central topic of Oregon’s longest-running program, *Little People, Big World*, which debuted in

the spring of 2006. The show aired on cable's TLC (The Learning Channel), so it never achieved stellar ratings, but it did have a devoted following. The show's fans kept it on the air for four years, making it Oregon's longest-running program.

Like many Oregon television families, the Roloffs were a family with a twist. The dad was Matthew, a successful software engineer, and the mom was energetic Amy, a preschool teacher. They had four kids, including teenage fraternal twins Mark and Zach, daughter Molly, and younger son Jacob. The "catch," as the show's title suggested, was that Matt, Amy, and Zach were little people (Mark, Molly, and Jacob were all of normal height). The show's gentle, cheerful atmosphere—it was a sort of reality show *Waltons*—was a far cry from that of the tawdry *Brat Camp*, as noted by critic Dan Kennedy:

[The show] offers an up-close, unsentimental look at a family headed by a dwarf couple, spreading the positive message that little people can argue over money, coach youth soccer, and shoot tin cans off rocks like anyone else. . . . *Little People, Big World* is not exactly the stuff of high drama. In one episode, Amy and her daughter, Molly, who share a birthday, are dispatched on a hot-air balloon ride while Matt and the boys . . . are joined by family and friends to undertake a frenetic bathroom makeover as a surprise for Amy when she returns home. In another, Matt pushes Zach to pick up girls at a Little People of America gathering. These scenes are interspersed with interviews in which the Roloffs—primarily Matt, Amy, and Zach—expound on what it's like to live in a world built for people at least a foot taller than they are. Everyone is pleasant and articulate (Kennedy 2006: 1).

While the Oregon of *Little People, Big World* was not necessarily action-packed, it was certainly attractive. The Roloffs were friendly, happy, and successful, and their home environment was quite literally the stuff of dreams. Because his dwarfism had required numerous surgeries, Matt spent a good deal of his childhood in a hospital bed, and his success as an adult

afforded him the ability to provide for his children all the experiences he had dreamed about as a child. He created Roloff Farms, a thirty-four acre pumpkin farm near Helvetia, about twenty miles northwest of Portland. The farm included, among other things, a soccer field, a lake (complete with its own pirate ship), a three-story tree house, Molly's full-sized medieval castle, an Old West ghost town, and a catapult for launching pumpkins. The atmosphere created by both the Roloffs and their farm was so inviting that many of the show's fans decided to break off a piece for themselves. After *Little People, Big World* premiered, thousands of fans descended on the farm, creating miles-long traffic jams near Helvetia, and doubtlessly driving up the price of pumpkins.

NEVADA

Nevada's first television entry, *State Trooper*, was one of a trio of popular four-wheeled westerns that were produced for syndication in the late 1950s, running concurrently with *The Sheriff of Cochise*, which was set in Arizona, and *Highway Patrol*, which took place in an unidentified western state. Here, Rod Blake, chief investigator for the Nevada State Police, tore around the state in his cruiser, chasing kidnappers, murderers, and other assorted bad guys. The show debuted in 1957 and remained in production until 1959, the same year that a new western literally burned Nevada onto the television map.

The map in question outlined the territory of the Ponderosa Ranch, situated on the north shore of Lake Tahoe, just south of Carson City, Virginia City, and Reno. The map was a rather dull, sepia-tone affair, but as the dynamic theme song gathered steam, bright yellow letters shot into view, announcing the name of the program—*Bonanza*. The map then burst into flames,

revealing four men on horseback, riding before a spectacular western backdrop. *Bonanza*'s debut on the television landscape was something akin to Dorothy's arrival in Oz, and if such a title sequence seemed a little ostentatious, it was intended to be. *Bonanza* was the first television western broadcast in color, and was developed with the aim of selling the color television sets that NBC's parent company, RCA, manufactured. The network clearly had high hopes for the show, and it did not disappoint.

The four horsemen of *Bonanza*'s credits were the Cartwrights, a family who owned and operated the sprawling Ponderosa ranch during Nevada's silver rush days of the 1860s. The father was Ben Cartwright, a widower of quiet dignity and wisdom, who had had three sons by three different wives. The eldest was Adam, Ben's heir apparent who, like his father, possessed a solemn and thoughtful demeanor. Eric "Hoss" Cartwright, the gentle giant, was kind and trusting, and just a little slow-witted. The youngest son, Little Joe, was rambunctious and quixotic, with a quick temper that often got him into trouble. *Bonanza* was something of a precursor to the "big-money" soap operas of the 1980s, often focusing on the trials and tribulations of running a massive business like the Ponderosa, but the Cartwrights did so with considerably more integrity than the characters of *Dynasty* or *Dallas*. *Bonanza* contained the expected dose of conventional action, but fit squarely into the adult western genre, concentrating as much on interpersonal relationships as it did on brawls and gunfights. Like *Gunsmoke*, *Bonanza* often dealt with serious contemporary issues in an Old West context, with Ben Cartwright ultimately serving as the voice of reason and honesty. As one critic put it, *Bonanza* was "a new kind of thinking person's western, and the three holstered sons were forever being tortured by some ethical conflict that required a fireside chat presided over by Pa Cartwright" (Lewis and Stempel 1996: 120).

Although *Bonanza* offered a fresh take on an old genre, its geographic message was not much different from countless other westerns. The West was a tough place, and it took a tough man to survive and prosper there. Ben was that tough man, according to series creator David Dortort, who believed that the popularity of the show was due to Ben's rugged independence—"He is not led around by the nose by anybody," said Dortort (Lewis and Stempel 1996: 120). One of the show's writers, quoted by critic Steven D. Stark, believed the success owed something to its timing. In the tumultuous 1960s, it wasn't a sense of danger that drew viewers, but a sense of safety. "You know exactly what's going to happen in most *Bonanza* scripts," said the writer, "and in this uncertain world, stability is comfort devoutly to be sought" (Stark 1997: 90). As was the case with *Gunsmoke*, some viewers found that the idealized world of *Bonanza* fit with a politically conservative philosophy of the world, with its focus on individualism, traditional family values, and noble actions of the wealthy. Pernell Roberts, who played Adam Cartwright before leaving the show in 1965, was considerably more cynical:

Look at the setup of the show. Strange, man. The Ponderosa is a little kingdom of very rich people, with Ben Cartwright as absolute monarch. No women to speak of, three of the four men troubled as adolescents (Stark 1997: 90).

Strange or not, viewers were enamored with *Bonanza*'s world. The show put up mediocre numbers during its first year, but climbed to the seventeenth position in the Nielsen ratings its second season. After a move from Saturday to Sunday nights in its third year, the 1961-1962 season, *Bonanza* shot to second place, beginning a remarkable run that placed it in the Nielsen top ten for a full decade, including nine years in the top five. For a three-season stretch beginning in 1964, *Bonanza* was the most-watched program on television, a feat exceeded only by six other shows, and just one drama—*Bonanza*'s Kansas rival, *Gunsmoke*. The show was globally

popular, airing, at its peak, in eighty-six foreign countries and dubbed into twelve different languages. After years at or near the top of the ratings, *Bonanza* slid to the twentieth spot during the 1971-1972 season, and NBC moved it from Sunday to Tuesday nights in 1972, opposite the runaway hits *Maude* and *Hawaii 5-0*. That change, coupled with the unexpected death of series star Dan Blocker (Hoss), caused viewership to plummet. *Bonanza* ended its long run midway through its fourteenth season, ranking second only to *Gunsmoke* in terms of popularity and longevity in the western genre.

Given Nevada's rugged scenery and equally rugged history, it is surprising that the state has been the setting for only two television westerns. That might be explained by Nevada's first entry in the genre being so colossal that there was simply no room for another. In fact, Nevada's only other western was a prequel to *Bonanza*. Set in 1849, when the Cartwright sons were young men, *Ponderosa* chronicled Ben's efforts to build a little 180 acre spread into the cattle empire it would become. Like its predecessor, *Ponderosa* examined serious contemporary themes through the lens of the Old West, but unlike *Bonanza*, not many people watched. The show debuted in 2001, but its viewership was poor even for the little-watched PAX network, and it was cancelled after a one-year run.

With the exception of *Ponderosa*, each of Nevada's thirty-nine post-*Bonanza* entries had contemporary settings. Las Vegas has been the dominant backdrop, serving as setting for thirty-two of those programs. As might be expected, most of the Las Vegas entries have dealt with gaming and entertainment. Just six of the city's thirty-two entries have been sitcoms, and only one of those lasted more than a year. The only Vegas-based sitcom to feature a lead character not connected to the entertainment industry was *The Tortellis*, a spin-off of *Cheers*, in which Carla Tortelli's sleazeball exhusband Nick moved to Vegas to start a television repair business with his

slow-witted son, Anthony. *The Tortellis* was not able to brew the success of *Cheers*, and was off the air after four months in 1987.

Along for the ride on that short-lived sitcom was Nick Tortelli's new wife, the statuesque and unbelievably dumb Loretta, who was trying to break into show business. She was not alone. All of Las Vegas's other sitcoms chronicled the "off-campus" life of the industry's professionals and hopefuls. One early example was *Blansky's Beauties*, which aired for three months in 1977. The title character, Nancy Blansky, produced stage shows at the Oasis Hotel, where her nephew Joey was a choreographer. Nancy, Joey, and all the showgirls from the Oasis lived in the same apartment complex, where Nancy struggled to keep order. Sharing an apartment with Nancy and Joey were two showgirls, Sunshine and Bambi, and Joey's understandably concupiscent little brother, Anthony. The next season brought the similar *Who's Watching the Kids*. The title kids were fifteen-year-old wiseguy Frankie (Scott Baio, who had played Anthony on *Blansky's Beauties*) and his somber little sister, Melissa. They shared an apartment with their older sisters, Angie and Stacy, who were showgirls. While they performed at a Las Vegas dive called the Club Sand Pile, they conned their neighbor, Larry Parnell, into watching the kids. Not many watched the show, however, and like *Blansky's Beauties*, *Who's Watching the Kids* was off the air in three months.

Another showgirl sitcom, 2000's *Nikki*, was not a runaway success either, but its fifteen months on the air were enough to make it Las Vegas's longest-running sitcom. Early episodes featured a garish opening number from the fictional Golden Calf Casino, where Nikki White was a dancer. Her husband Dwight White was an aspiring professional wrestler, and they both were full of ambition. Life brought hurdles, of course. Dwight's wrestling career (where he was known as "The Crybaby") was not going well, and the scuffling Golden Calf was eventually

seized by the I. R. S. and shut down. Nikki was forced to take a job at an auto parts store, and she and Dwight moved into an old bus parked on Dwight's manager's property.

Although a number of sitcoms have featured characters who work, or want to work, in Vegas casinos, only one has focused on the inner workings of a real casino. Comedian and writer Bob Einstein's alter ego, the spectacularly unlucky stuntman "Super" Dave Osborne, had appeared on a number of comedy shows, including his own long-running series on cable's Showtime network. On the sitcom *Super Dave's Vegas Spectacular*, which aired for six weeks in 1994, Dave was the proprietor of the glamorous Rio hotel and casino, a position that he valued mainly for the opportunity to stage outlandish stunts. These, of course, invariably resulted in Dave and his crew being "blown up, flattened, electrocuted or otherwise mangled" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,353).

The closest that any Las Vegas program has come to resembling a conventional family sitcom was the animated comedy *Father of the Pride*. The title father, Larry, was like many other sitcom dads. He was a hard worker with a bossy wife, a wacky best friend, a patronizing father-in-law, an insolent teenage daughter, and an insecure young son. Unlike other sitcom dads, however, Larry was a lion. He and his family were part of the troop of animal performers kept in a private zoo by real-life Las Vegas showmen Siegfried Fischbacher and Roy Horn. Despite a desirable Tuesday night timeslot, an excellent sitcom track record by actors John Goodman and Carl Reiner, and a lavish (and incredibly expensive) production provided by the feature animation hit-maker DreamWorks, *Father of the Pride* became the most notorious fiasco of the 2004-2005 season. The show received mixed reviews, and the fact that Roy Horn had, in real life, been mauled by one of his tigers during a live performance the previous fall did not help the show's chances. *Father of the Pride* was cancelled after four low-rated months.

If the scarcity and unpopularity of Las Vegas-based sitcoms are any indication, then it is not comic relief that viewers expect from this city, but instead money, glamor, sex, and crime. Vegas-based dramas, which outnumber sitcoms nearly two to one, offer plenty of these diversions. The first in a long line of Las Vegas crime fighters was Dan Tanna of *Vega\$*, which debuted in 1978. In the words of one critic, *Vega\$* was “certainly not a thinking-man’s detective show,” but it made up for in style what it lacked in substance (Martindale 1991: 488). Sporting a black leather jacket and blue jeans, the handsome Tanna was as quick with a droll remark as he was with his .44 Magnum. When not tearing up and down the Strip in a red ‘57 Thunderbird convertible, he was at the Desert Inn, the site of his apartment and office. He was assisted by (what else?) two sexy showgirls, the spacey Angie and the seen-it-all Beatrice. Bobby “Binzer” Borso, a bumbling former con man, was Tanna’s man on the street, and the suave Phillip Roth, owner of the Desert Inn and a number of other Vegas establishments, was Dan’s primary employer. Exteriors for the show were shot on location, including scenes at Circus Circus, The Golden Nugget, and Caesar’s Palace. With plenty of car chases, shoot-outs, and beautiful women on display before the neon-soaked backdrop, *Vega\$* became Nevada’s first post-*Bonanza* program to crack the Nielsen top thirty, rising to the twenty-third position in its first season. The show’s all-sizzle-and-no-steak approach wore thin quickly, apparently, and the show was cancelled after its third season.

The Strip, a violent crime drama that debuted in 1999, channeled the spirit of *Vega\$* into a buddy show. Like Dan Tanna, Elvis Ford and Jessie Tanner were private detectives on retainer for a wealthy casino magnate. In this case it was Cameron Greene, the owner of Caesar’s Palace, where much of the show was filmed. African-American Jessie was of the Dan Tanna mold, and his debonair smoothness stood in stark contrast to the slovenly, reckless Elvis, who lived in a

trailer park on a dry-docked sailboat named the *Gonzo*. Jessie and Elvis's investigations, which invariably led to shootouts and car chases, highlighted Vegas's seedier side. They stumbled across kidnappings, high-dollar heists, murders, and even a plot by the Japanese Yakuza mob to sell Vegas showgirls into white slavery. Such lurid goings-on were not enough to keep the show afloat, and *The Strip* was cancelled after nine episodes.

The first Las Vegas-based show to feature crime fighters working in an official capacity was *Crime Story*, which moved to the desert from Chicago midway through its first season in 1987, and returned for the duration of the 1987-1988 season. Having exposed the Windy City's seamier side, *Crime Story* presented an equally disreputable Sin City. The cops of the 1960s period piece had become federal investigators, tracking mobsters in Nevada. They not only examined gangland hits and mafia control of the casinos, but also child molestation, rape, kidnappings, prostitution, drug addiction, extortion, racism, money laundering, drug smuggling, and corrupt lawmen. *Crime Story* even included a memorable first season cliff-hanger where the key antagonist was nearly killed by an atomic bomb test in the Nevada desert.

The city was still in dire need of policing decades later, as indicated by *Nasty Boys*, an action-filled crime drama about a group of vice cops working undercover on the flashy but mean streets of Las Vegas. It was, in many ways, standard cop show fare. Its "typically TV-mixed team" included white Paul, Asian Jimmy, Latino Eduardo, African-American Alex, and grizzled veteran Lt. Krieger. (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 964). The catch? They were ninjas. *Nasty Boys* lasted five months in 1990.

The second drama to feature the Las Vegas police department was far more successful. *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* focused on forensic investigators who worked the graveyard

shift for the department's crime lab. A typical episode began with a gruesome crime followed by a scene in which the dispassionate investigators strolled, flashlights in hand, up to the site. Using the latest technology and their own well-honed instincts, the team would sift through the evidence, usually finding an intriguing bit of minutia that would help them track down the bad guys.

CSI was an interesting mix of old and new. It had a splashy visual style and plenty of “gross-out” special effects that allowed viewers to see, up close and in color, the devastating effects the crime had had on the corpse in question. The show's gimmick was a series of black-and-white cutaways, replaying the crime several times to demonstrate what might have happened based on each new bit of evidence. Like many other postmodern crime dramas, *CSI* often refused to provide closure for the audience—a number of the crimes went unsolved, and a lack of evidence occasionally allowed a suspect to walk, even when the investigators were convinced of his or her guilt. That said, *CSI* included other ingredients that linked it to its crime-fighting predecessors. Like *The Untouchables* or *Dragnet*, little attention was given to the personal lives of the taciturn team of cops. With the exception of a few subtle hints, the focus was always on the crime at hand. Like *Hawaii 5-0* or *Columbo*, shootouts and car chases were rare, and most of the “fun” revolved around watching the cagy detectives slowly put together pieces of the puzzle. Add in a fairly liberal dose of dark humor, and CBS had found, to its surprise, Nevada's biggest hit since *Bonanza*.

CSI premiered in 2000 on CBS's lightly watched Friday night schedule and put up incredibly strong numbers. That prompted a midseason move up against tough competition on Thursday night, where the show did even better. It ranked eleventh in the Nielsen ratings its rookie season, jumped to the second spot in 2001-2002, and began a three-year run as

television's most-watched show the next season. *CSI*'s spectacular success spawned not only the expected onslaught of imitators, but also its own franchise, including *CSI: Miami* and *CSI: New York*. It continued to air through 2010, and has never dropped below eleventh place on the Nielsen top charts.

The *CSI* team included Catherine Willows, a level-headed veteran; Warrick Brown, a street-wise investigator with sharp analytical skills; Sara Sidle and Nick Stokes, ambitious rookies; and Greg Sanders, an eccentric lab technician. Also seen frequently was the department brass, who was, in fact named Jim Brass. Some of the team members had Vegas-appropriate backgrounds—Warrick was struggling to overcome a gambling addiction, Catherine had worked her way through college as a stripper, and Greg was an adrenaline junkie, addicted to surfing, snowboarding, and punk rock. The show's primary character, at least in its early years, was Gil Grissom, the lead investigator. Grissom was a departure from previous Las Vegas television detectives. He was not a splashy lady's man, like Dan Tanna, or a hard-boiled gumshoe like Mike Torello of *Crime Story*. If anything, Grissom most closely resembled the quiet, determined hero of *Gunsmoke*. Like Matt Dillon, Gil Grissom was a strong believer in following the rules and adhering to a proper code of conduct, although Dillon's faith in law and order was replaced here by Grissom's unshakable faith in science. The most striking parallel between the two, though, was Grissom's devotion to his work. His personal life was always a matter of speculation, although the show suggested that he didn't have much of one. Like Dillon, Grissom was enigmatic, and deliberately so. In one episode, he let it slip to Warrick that he had once been a gambler. This surprised Warrick, given the many conversations the two had had about Warrick's own addiction. When he asked Grissom why he had never mentioned this fact before, Grissom replied, "Same reason a good player hides his tells" (Fuchs 2002: 1).

Still, it is doubtful that many viewers mistook *CSI* for a western. Although occasional side trips were taken to scrape a corpse off the desert floor, the show focused on its urban setting. Critic Cynthia Fuchs speculated that the show was set in Las Vegas so that Grissom could “make pithy observations about gambling and fate” (Fuchs 2010a: 1). Certainly, more than a few crimes on the show were tied to the gaming industry and Vegas’s famously wild night life—a world-famous poker player was murdered at the Palms Hotel, for example, and a male stripper was found dead after a particularly exuberant bachelorette party.

The influence of Las Vegas on *CSI* was more, however, than a collection of casino and hotel backdrops. The city also represented a state of mind. In addition to their Vegas-appropriate backgrounds, the characters on the show, who never seemed to sleep, exuded something like a gambler’s high, “addicted,” according to critic Stephen Kelly, “to the adrenalin rush of cracking a case” (Kelly 2003a: 1). For the viewer, *CSI* constantly suggested that Las Vegas was a place where anything goes—where strange occurrences were par for the course. This message was reinforced by the matter-of-fact demeanor of the investigators as they wandered into some perfectly bizarre crime scenes—a man was found dead in the middle of the desert, and the autopsy revealed that he had drowned; a trainer was trampled to death by a horse aboard her private jet; and the corpse of cheerleader was found mutilated on a soccer field, her organs apparently having been eaten by her killer. Such unusual and horrific crimes were likely the result of creative necessity. Unlike many other police procedurals, *CSI* focused almost entirely on crime scenes and dead bodies, and since audiences were drawn to the show for the fun of seeing the team make sense out of something that was seemingly senseless, the crimes had to tend toward the unusual. The effect for the viewer, though, was to establish, or probably reinforce, the notion that Las Vegas was a city entirely deserving of its Sin City reputation.

While bodies piled up on the streets of Vegas, there was plenty of action going on inside. Six hotel/casino dramas aired during the 1990s and 2000s, and none of them took what could be called an unflinching, highly realistic look at life in the resort and gaming industry. Some of these programs had a somewhat downbeat tone, but all have generally depicted their respective casinos and hotels as part of the exciting and romantic Las Vegas of the American popular imagination. The first was *Hearts Are Wild*, a rip-off of *The Love Boat* that aired for two months in 1992. Like its maritime counterpart, it was essentially a lightweight anthology, with most of the action played out by guest stars at the fabulously posh Caesar's Palace. A considerably creepier variation on this theme was *The Watcher*, which aired for three months in 1995. The title voyeur was always in his luxury suite high atop the Desert Flower casino. From there he observed the activities of residents and visitors alike on a huge bank of surveillance monitors, occasionally commenting on their various scrapes.

The premise of 2003's *Lucky* certainly suggested that it would offer a hard and gritty take on the seedier side of local life. The title protagonist, Lucky, was a charismatic gambler who had won a million dollars in the World Poker Championships. A year later, with all the money gone, Lucky's wife had committed suicide, and he was in Gamblers Anonymous. *Lucky* was not, however, a gambling version of *The Lost Weekend*, but rather a dark comedy populated by a parade of "loveable junkies, loan sharks, and crooks" (Brooks 2007: 821). Lucky continued to gamble, and often win, but the show was cancelled after its unlucky thirteenth episode. The even less successful 2004 drama *Dr. Vegas* was an attempt to merge casino drama with medicine. It was the story of Dr. Billy Grant, who had given up life in an emergency room to become house doctor at the up-scale Metro hotel and casino. In addition to the expected Vegas glitz and romance, the show tackled hard issues like drug and alcohol addiction. Viewers apparently

preferred to keep their gambling and health care separate, however, and the show was cancelled after one month. The drama *Tilt*, which aired the following year, was a more conventional sleazy take on the world of Vegas casinos. It was the story of three professional gamblers: Miami, Clark, and Eddie. All three had been taken to the cleaners by a corrupt, arrogant card shark nicknamed the “Matador,” and they were now looking for payback. The show aired on ESPN, the sports programming network that had begun to dabble in drama, and served as a nine-week commercial for the network’s upcoming coverage of the World Series of Poker.

The only genuinely successful industry drama was also its least substantive. Filmed, in part, on location, 2003’s *Las Vegas* was Nevada’s response to *Dallas* and *Dynasty*. Although it was not nearly as successful as its counterparts, it remained on NBC’s schedule for five years, making it the city’s second longest-running scripted entry. The setting was the sprawling, glitzy (and fictional) Montecito Resort and Casino, where a hard-boiled retired CIA agent named Ed Deline was security chief. Others in the cast included the colorful casino staff, Ed’s angry wife, Jillian, and their vampish daughter, Delinda. Something treacherous was always happening at the Montecito, including “robberies, murders, gambling cheats, bomb threats, sex in the elevators, and scams beyond counting” (Brooks 2007: 761). One of the primary antagonists was the domineering and manipulative Monica Mancuso who, having made a fortune by marrying an octogenarian billionaire, purchased the Montecito in 2005 and had it demolished and rebuilt. Monica’s demise served as a clear indication of the overall tone of *Las Vegas*. In what Brooks and Marsh called “one of TV’s more memorable deaths,” a sudden gust of wind lifted her off the roof of the Montecito and carried her down the Strip, where she crashed through the window of a shoe store (Brooks 2007: 761). To honor her memory, the staff flushed her ashes down one of the hotel’s toilets.

Critic Lesley Smith theorized that, “If one sequestered a gang of adolescent males long enough without female company and with only a few word processors for distraction, they’d sooner or later produce a script for *Las Vegas*” (Smith 2003: 1). That a show with such an obviously lowbrow approach would become one of the city’s longest-running entries suggests much about what television viewers, or at least television producers, expect from Las Vegas. Whether they are watching *Vega\$* or *Las Vegas*, viewers are clearly not seeking out an intellectual challenge. As such, the city and state have provided a fertile breeding ground for the reality craze of the 2000s.

A few reality programs have provided behind-the-scenes looks at Vegas’s gaming and entertainment industry. *The Casino*, which aired for three months in the summer of 2004, followed the exploits of Tom Breitling and Tim Poster, a pair of dot-com millionaires who purchased the legendary Golden Nugget Casino in downtown Las Vegas. It had been struggling for years to compete with the new resorts on the Strip, and Tom and Tim were intent on restoring the Golden Nugget’s luster. They were seen dealing with the gaming control board, managing the casino’s 3,000 employees, hiring entertainment, and catering to high rollers and drunken frat boys. The 2005 reality entry *Inked* provided a similar backstage look at the Hart and Huntington Tattoo company, which was housed in the ritzy Palms Casino Resort. The same year, the Palms played host to *Party @ The Palms*, which featured high-spirited *Playboy* pin-up Jenny McCarthy chatting with guests around the pool, as well as hard-hitting looks at sex toys and lap dancing. The title subjects of 2007’s *Taquita and Kauai* were “happy, giggly girls,” both reality-show veterans, who moved into the Happy Inn in Las Vegas, where they “horsed around, laughed, went on auditions, laughed, and took whatever entry-level acting jobs they could get” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,357).

Taquita and Kauai came along a little too late to try their luck on *Ed McMahon's Next Big Star*, which aired during the 2001-2002 season. An updated version of McMahon's long-running *Star Search*, it was a lavish talent show where amateur singers, dancers, comedians, and models competed onstage at the MGM Grand Hotel. More established performers were featured on *Oak Ridge Boys Live from Las Vegas*, broadcast from the Vegas Hilton during the 1988-1989 season on The Nashville Network. Both shows suggested that nothing in Las Vegas is done on a modest scale, with Brooks and Marsh noting that the *Oak Ridge Boys* was "glitzier than most TNN productions, with show girls, flashing strobe lights, [and] a huge audience" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1006). Another extravagant pair of Las Vegas entries featured stunts that would have made Super Dave Osborne envious. *I Dare You! The Ultimate Challenge*, which aired for seven months in 2000, showcased monster truck jumps, sky-diving, and stunt planes, while 2005's *Criss Angel, Mindfreak*, followed the title Las Vegas magician as he prepared for and performed dangerous tricks, including one where he was run over by a Hummer SUV while lying on a bed of nails. Angel was seriously injured in that stunt, but he survived, and his show continued to air through 2010.

Vegas would not be Vegas without a few game shows, the first of which *Dealer's Choice*. It was Nevada's first post-*Bonanza* entry, and actually the first television program based exclusively in Las Vegas. *Dealer's Choice* was taped at the Tropicana Hotel and Casino, with 210 episodes produced for syndication in 1974 and 1975. The show featured variations on standard casino games like blackjack and roulette, and, according to Brooks and Marsh the "garish surroundings and the betting fever prevalent in Las Vegas helped add to the excitement" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 339). A cascade of poker programs washed over American television in the 2000s, many of which included events taped in Las Vegas. Among them was *Celebrity*

Poker Showdown, with stars playing Texas Hold ‘Em for charity. The show premiered in 2003, and was taped at the Palms for three years before the action shifted to New Orleans.

Although a few of Nevada’s game shows strayed from conventional casino fare, even these exuded Vegas-style excitement and/or tastelessness. *Race to the Altar*, which aired for about three months in 2003, featured eight unmarried couples dashing about the city to win challenges, with the grand prize being a Las Vegas dream wedding. They stayed at the Venetian Hotel, where they “bickered, plotted, and formed alliances” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1128). The mercifully short-lived 2004 FOX entry *Playing it Straight* chronicled the efforts of Jackie, a young college student from Appleton, Wisconsin, to find her dream man. She was brought to the Sizzling Saddle Ranch in Elko, Nevada, where she was to choose from fourteen bachelors. Group activities and dates occurred each week, after which Jackie would eliminate two guys, with everything leading up to the big day for the ultimate choice. The catch was that half of the guys were straight and half of them gay. If Jackie picked a straight mate, they would split a million dollars, but if he was gay, he got all the money. The show was pulled after three episodes, but for those dying to know the outcome, leftover episodes were made available on the FOX website for a small fee (she picked a straight guy).

A reality show spun off another reality show, 2007’s *Surreal Life: Fame Games*, featured D-list celebrities living together and humiliating themselves for cash. *Baywatch* actress Traci Bingham narrowly edged out porn actor Ron Jeremy to win the \$100,000 grand prize. The most successful of Nevada’s reality/competition entries was *The Ultimate Fighter*, which debuted in 2005 and continued to air through 2010. This show focused on mixed martial arts bouts and followed sixteen prospective fighters in the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) league. Viewers also saw them train and live together in a large home outside of Las Vegas. One

Nevada-based reality program was neither a game show nor a behind-the-scenes look at the entertainment industry. It did, however, have both a competitive and theatrical air. *King of Cars*, which aired in 2006, followed the inner workings of Towbin Dodge, a large Las Vegas auto dealership whose garrulous owner, Josh “Chop” Towbin, was known for his wild promotional campaigns.

As mentioned, Las Vegas has dominated Nevada’s post-*Bonanza* television landscape, with only six scripted programs being set outside of that city. The first of these was the syndicated sitcom *She’s the Sheriff*, forty-eight episodes of which were produced from 1987 to 1989. It was the story of Hildy Granger, a young widow with two children whose husband had been killed in the line of duty. The commissioner of fictional Lakes County appointed Hildy to her late husband’s post, much to the chagrin of some of the male deputies. Lakes County, situated in the mountains near Lake Tahoe, occasionally hosted serious criminals, including a jewel thief and a mobster, but it was mainly a quiet beat, more reminiscent of Mayberry, North Carolina, than Las Vegas. Like *The Andy Griffith Show*, *She’s the Sheriff* was as much a workplace and family comedy as it was a cop show, dealing with the Granger kids’ growing pains, Hildy’s reentry into the dating world, and the misadventures of her goofy deputies.

While Hildy Granger channeled the spirit of Andy Taylor, 1994’s *Harts of the West* resurrected the spirit of New Mexico’s short-lived 1960 entry *Guestward Ho!* The protagonist, Dave Hart, had spent years selling women’s underwear at a Chicago department store. After suffering a heart attack, he decided to follow in the footsteps of numerous other television protagonists and start a new life out west. Fulfilling his lifelong desire to be cowboy (his kids were named L’Amour, Zane Grey, and John Wayne), Dave bought the Flying Tumbleweed, a dude ranch located just outside fictional Sholo, Nevada. Dave’s wife and kids were not thrilled

about the move to the dusty little town, but a bigger problem was the ranch itself. The Flying Tumbleweed was a complete mess. It seems that Dave had made his purchase based on a brochure from 1957 and its irritable old foreman, Jake, was not much help. Viewers apparently found the plot to be about as fresh as Dave's brochure, and despite the father-son star power of Beau and Lloyd Bridges (who played Dave and Jake, respectively), the show was cancelled after fifteen weeks.

The goofy good nature of *Harts of the West* was an exception to the rule when it came to depicting life in the desert. Rural Nevada possessed the same kind of eerie loneliness that has characterized the television landscape of rural Washington, Kansas, and Maine. The first such indication of strangeness came in the science-fiction drama *Seven Days*, which debuted in 1998 and ran for three seasons. This series chronicled attempts of a team to develop time-travel technology, and although the setting varied from week to week, the base of operations was a top-secret government facility near Las Vegas. Things got stranger still in 2002's *Push, Nevada*, a little town that would have made a fine sister city to Washington's Twin Peaks. Buried deep in the desert, the town's primary employer was the Versailles Casino, which had been making some abnormally large payouts. That fact, coupled with a series of anonymous messages suggesting tax violations at the casino, drew mild-mannered I. R. S. agent Jim Prufrock to the scene. Jim discovered that the casino, and much of the town, was controlled by a shadowy organization called Watermark, L. L. C., which had a possible connection with top-secret government agencies. The locals warned Jim to mind his own business and witnesses started dropping dead, but the agent was determined to get to the bottom of it all. The real threat proved to be Nevada's own *CSI*, which clobbered *Push* in the ratings. It left the air after six weeks.

If shadowy government conspiracies were not enough to cast a pall over the Nevada desert, there were always giant, subterranean, man-eating worms. *Tremors* was a low-budget 1990 film that had become a cult favorite, and it had been followed by three straight-to-video sequels. The television series of the same name lasted thirteen weeks in 2003. This series picked up where the movies left off, with residents of the tiny desert town of Perfection dealing not only with mutant creatures called graboids, shriekers, and assblasters, but also with greedy real estate developers and nefarious government officials. The Perfectionites were appropriately odd, including Burt, a heavily armed survivalist; Jodi, a tough-gal owner of the general store; Rosalita, a former Las Vegas showgirl turned rancher; Nancy, an aging hippie who made ceramic figurines of the monsters; and Tyler, a newcomer who wondered why anyone lived there.

Reno's television landscape was not quite as treacherous as Nevada's small towns, but it was every bit as bizarre. In its single television entry, Reno was home to what was perhaps the most inept and unsavory crew of crime fighters ever seen on television. *Reno 911!*, a wild send-up of *Cops*, debuted on Comedy Central in 2003 and ran for seven years, making it Nevada's longest-running comedy by a wide margin. Like its inspiration, *Reno* was shot with hand-held cameras, followed officers around the station house and out in the field, and featured off-the-cuff interviews. The leader was Lt. Jim Dangle, who always wore disturbingly short shorts as part of his uniform. Dangle was about as bad at performing his official duties as he was at masking his bisexuality. Still, he was a better officer than his six subordinates. The men included James Garcia, an angry Mexican-American who hated immigrants; Jonesy, a laconic black man who moonlighted as a stripper; and Travis Junior, a dimwitted redneck who always wore a Kevlar vest on the outside of his uniform. Reno's female deputies included the loud and vain Raineesha

Williams; Clementine Johnson, an unrepentant stoner and nymphomaniac; and Trudy Weigel, whose sweet and innocent disposition masked her racism and profound emotional problems.

To say that *Reno 911* was uncharitable to its setting is an understatement. Travel writer Jayne Clark described the city of the show as “society’s flabby underbelly,” and, after noting that little actual filming took place in Reno itself, added that “if there were, given the skanky locales portrayed, it probably wouldn’t make you want to visit (Clark 2009: 1). Critic Laurel Harris concurred, describing the show’s setting as a “distinctly ratty, unromantic, and dull” being filled with “trailer parks and shabby bungalows,” as well as “unintelligible perps and victims, sleazy street shots, and alternately arrogant and underconfident” police officers (Harris 2003: 1).

Just as *Vega\$* and *CSI* used Las Vegas’s gambling, drugs, and sex to dramatic effect, *Reno 911* played similar offerings for laughs. The officers made many calls to parties, bars, strip clubs, and brothels, but unlike their more serious Las Vegas counterparts, who would shake their heads at society’s ills, the Reno deputies would, as often as not, join right in. That said, the show would not have been the same had it been set in Las Vegas. The geography of *Reno 911* was similar to that of St. Louis’s *The John Larroquette Show*, Scranton’s *The Office*, or *WKRP in Cincinnati*, with the second-banana status of the setting used to underscore the second-banana status of the characters. That formula was evident in an “interview” with Deputy Clementine Johnson, the aging, rock and roll groupie, in the pilot episode:

I love Reno. I’ve got roots here. I’m very popular here . . . I’ve done a lot of RV shows, all the camper shows—they always call me. As it turns out, I’m one of the better-looking women here (Comedy Central 2004).

The combination of the city's moderate size and unusual reputation was integral to *Reno 911*'s artistic success, according to critic Lee Siegel, who argued that the show "could only have been set in Reno, Nevada:"

Big cities are too dangerous for comedies about police incompetence; putting bumbling cops in a small town is disrespectful; and setting them down in a suburb would be just plain boring. Reno is just right: the stuff of small legend; sort of artificial in a vaguely Vegas kind of way. Reno is one of those places you think you know without ever having been there or wanting to go. So the show's creators found a real town with a semi-fabled environment, a setting for a satire on murder and various kinds of violence and crime that wasn't going to stimulate comedy-obstructing thoughts or feelings. In one episode, you see the chalk silhouettes of murder victims drawn in the most improbable positions—sitting against a building, lying on the sidewalk with one arm neatly drawn down the side of the curb and then perpendicularly sticking out onto the street—and you think, this could only happen in this place, and you laugh (Siegel 2007: 27-28).

While many of Reno's residents may not have been laughing, it appears that at least some were. When the show was cancelled by Comedy Central in 2009, local tourism officials launched a crusade to save the show, taking their case to Facebook, Twitter, and even their own website, SaveReno911.com. Michael Thomas, a director for the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority, was one of those spearheading the campaign. He explained the city's unique relationship with *Reno 911*, and his comments were reminiscent of his Kansas counterpart in the wake of *Married to the Kellys*:

Has it been uncomfortable at times for the city? Yes. But there's so much noise going on in the world, it's important to be part of the conversation. Besides, we have a sense of humor here. We don't mind being the brunt of a joke . . . We're a departure from the norm. We think there's a lot of fodder here (Clark 2009: 1).

COLORADO

Colorado's television entries have been relatively balanced in both setting and genre. Of the state's nineteen entries, twelve have been dramas, twelve have had contemporary settings, twelve have been set in small towns, and twelve have taken place in actual Colorado places. Seven of the state's programs have been comedies, seven had been period pieces, seven have been set in urban areas, and seven have taken place in fictional locales. A few distinct thematic patterns connect a number of the programs, a relatively consistent one being that of the newcomer who, in the spirit of Horace Greeley's famous exhortation, headed west to begin life anew. Televised Colorado's relationship with such outsiders has been a contradictory one. Sometimes the outsider has been cast in a positive light, as a noble soul who fought the ignorance and prejudice of natives. Other times, the outsider was the threat, bent on exploiting Colorado's upright citizens and spoiling its natural beauty. One near-constant in Colorado's television programs has been their love affair with the state's famous mountains. These are characterized as beautiful, but rugged and wild. Whether the setting is a frontier village or a contemporary city, a key underlying message has been the idea that one has to be tough to make it out west.

Colorado's first entry was *Hotel de Patee*, a western that ran the 1959-1960 season. Set in Georgetown, Colorado, in the 1870s, the twist was that two of the primary characters were women, sisters Annette and Monique Denver. The Denver sisters did what nearly every gainfully employed female on television westerns did—they owned and operated the town's only hotel. They were attempting to bring Old World charm to the Old West, and the title hotel was a bit of opulence amid a wild and lawless frontier. To help keep things civilized, they enlisted the help of

a gunfighter named Sundance who had just been released from prison after a seventeen-year stretch. Quick with his fists, and even quicker with his pistol, Sundance was trying to get a new lease on life.

Six more Colorado-based period pieces appeared over the next four decades, but few of them followed the standard guns-and-horses formula of other television westerns. *Whispering Smith*, which was set in 1870s Denver, was based loosely on both a 1948 Alan Ladd movie and the actual cases of a real-life police investigator. On television, Audie Murphy played the title character, who was the first to bring modern methods of criminology to the Old West. The novelty of the premise was not enough to draw many viewers, however, and the show was cancelled after four months in 1961. The western situation comedy *Pistols 'n' Petticoats* followed in 1966. Its twist was that the person in the petticoat was also the one doing the shooting. Set in the 1870s, the show featured Henrietta Hanks, her daughter Lucy, and Grandma and Grandpa Hanks. They were a rugged family, so rugged, in fact, that they kept a pet wolf named Bowser. The members of the Hanks family, with the exception of poor Lucy who had grown up in the city, were all crack shots. Strong-willed Henrietta was constantly called on by hapless Sheriff Sikes to help subdue the numerous desperadoes who passed through the appropriately named fictional town of Wretched.

Another appropriately named town, and another strong-willed female protagonist, arrived on the Colorado television landscape with the period drama *Sara*. Set in fictional frontier town of Independence in the 1870s, it was the story of Sara Yarnell, a determined school teacher who had “given up a dull, predictable existence in the East for the challenge of the West” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,194). She was not the shy, retiring, schoolmarm the people of Independence had bargained for, of course, and she fought ignorance and intolerance for six months in 1976. The

sweeping mini-series *Centennial*, based on the James A. Michener novel, dealt with some of these issues, and many more, during its original run during the 1979-1980 season. Taking place from the late 1700s through the modern day, *Centennial* explored the lives of generations of Native Americans, farmers, ranchers, soldiers, and developers who sequentially populated the area that would become Centennial, Colorado. Like *Sara*, *Centennial* explored issues of prejudice, particularly in the relationship between the white men and the area's original Pawnee and Cheyenne inhabitants, but the core theme of the series was environmental. Michener himself was seen at the beginning of each installment, reminding viewers that "their actions (and inactions) have an impact on the quality of life for future generations" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 231).

The combined efforts of Sara Yarnell and James Michener could not measure up to the civilizing force of Dr. Michaela Quinn, the protagonist of 1993's *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*. Just as the people of Independence had been shocked by the assertiveness of their young schoolteacher on *Sara*, so, too, were the people of 1860s Colorado Springs when the doctor they hired turned out to be a woman. Following her father's death, Michaela had left Boston for a new life on the frontier. In addition to becoming surrogate mother to three orphaned children, she dealt with patients who had been bitten by poisonous snakes, attacked by rabid dogs, and mauled by the occasional mountain lion.

Medical cases were not Michaela's only problems. The townspeople of Colorado Springs were wary of anything new, and downright distrustful of anything that smacked of science. In short, they were suspicious of everything Michaela stood for. During an outbreak of influenza, for example, Michaela urged that the sick be isolated from the healthy, patiently explaining that the disease was spread by a germ, to which a man snarled "what the hell is a germ?" The greatest

problem, of course, was that this advice was being given by a woman. Despite her remarkable track record, the Coloradans of *Dr. Quinn* were always apprehensive about being treated. When she offered to examine an old-timer's hernia, he growled, "Don't you go touching me . . . I won't have you messing with my innards!" (O'Connor 1993: 1) In another episode, a prisoner regained consciousness after he was successfully treated by Michaela, and shouted "You let a dang woman work on me? What are you trying to kill me?" (Suarez 2008: 1).

Regularly, Michaela also found the people of Colorado Springs to be unreceptive to her progressive views, particularly when it came to race. One of the more common topics on *Dr. Quinn* was the treatment of Colorado's Native Americans, with a character called Cloud Dancing serving as a sort of microcosm of his people, constantly enduring broken treaties and army massacres. The show's handling of these topics was sincere but occasionally a bit ham-fisted, as noted by *New York Times* critic John J. O'Connor:

One recent episode probably set a record in its opening minutes for multi-cultural sensitivity. Mike informed one of her young 'uns: "We're all immigrants. Some of us just came to America sooner than others." Then the camera panned to the village smithy, who happened to be black. "Robert E. did not come here willingly," Mike added. Then, spotting some American Indians, she conceded: "I was wrong. We are not all immigrants" (O'Connor 1993: 1).

O'Connor, as did most critics, found the show to be a mixture of sickeningly sweet homilies, trite melodrama, and overbearing political correctness. In fact, he argued that *Dr. Quinn* had the feel of a "shampoo commercial in the making:"

One recipe for a successful series: take a contrived concept, sprinkle with homespun truisms updated for political correctness and mix well with tired plot devices. Process and serve. And out comes *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* . . . Possible subtitle: *Little*

Shtick on the Prairie Dr. Quinn is a television construct, its every nuance calculated out of lowest-common-denominator concerns. Art, or even craft, decidedly takes a back seat to commerce Subtlety is not a strong suit. You want local color? Get the store owner to announce to the kids, “We’re still out of jawbreakers.” Or, at a picnic, have someone sit on a gorgeous patchwork quilt and shout gleefully, “Hey, let’s pitch some horseshoes!” Then it’s quickly back to the uninspired business at hand (O’Connor 1993: 1).

To the chagrin of the critics, however, *Dr. Quinn* drew a strong audience, doing particularly well among young women, and single-handedly brought the warm, family-friendly drama back from the dead. The program ranked in the Nielsen top twenty-five during its first two seasons, and remained on the air for more than five years.

Colorado’s final period piece, *Legend*, debuted in 1995 and featured yet another newcomer to the state. This time it was Ernest Platt, a drunken writer who moved to Sheridan, Colorado, in 1876 to assume the identity of Nicodemus Legend, a character he had popularized in a series of dime novels. Platt was played by Richard Dean Anderson, previously seen on *MacGyver*, and *Legend* featured a similar obsession with creative gadgetry. It could not, however muster the audience of the previous series, and departed after four months.

Colorado’s first contemporary drama, 1961’s *Bus Stop*, took the extreme approach of having a newcomer or, rather, a whole busload of newcomers, arrive each week. Based on the successful William Inge play and subsequent film, the title bus stop was a diner in the fictional Rocky Mountain town of Sunrise. Stories revolved around interactions of bus passengers with the show’s four regular characters—the diner’s owner, its only waitress, the town sheriff, and the district attorney. The series is probably best remembered for an episode starring teen idol Fabian Forte called “A Lion Walks Among Us.” Fabian played a young drifter who had been accused of

murder. To win an acquittal, he had an affair with the prosecuting attorney's alcoholic wife and, once free, killed his own lawyers before finally dying at the hands of his former lover. This episode's "sadism-and-smut" message sparked widespread outrage, with critic Jack Gould of *The New York Times* calling it "a disgraceful and contemptible flaunting of decency, an indescribably coarse glorification of vulgarity to win an easy rating" (Mehling 1962: 166). The episode was so controversial, in fact, that it prompted Congressional hearings, and likely forced the the program's cancellation in the spring of 1962.

If anything, *Bus Stop* reinforced the notion that life in Colorado could be dangerous business, and perhaps it was that danger that drew so many doctors to the state. Like Michaela Quinn, the protagonist of *Doc Elliot* was an easterner who wanted to start a new life. Dr. Benjamin Elliot left a lucrative career in New York City to be a general practitioner in rugged Gideon, Colorado. He served patients who were scattered over an enormous swath of wilderness, which Elliot traversed by airplane or in his specially outfitted four-wheel-drive camper. Essentially an excuse to showcase Colorado's spectacular mountain scenery, *Doc Elliot* lasted for seven months in 1974. The state's third contemporary drama, *The Innocent and the Damned*, was a 1979 mini-series about a young lawyer's attempt to free a man who had been wrongfully convicted of the rape and murder of a fifteen-year-old girl. A secondary plot involved attempts by greedy, manipulative developers to transform quiet little Aspen, Colorado, into a major resort town.

Only one Colorado-based program made its debut in the 1980s, but it proved to be not only the state's most successful entry, but also one of the most popular dramas in the history of television. *Dynasty*, which premiered in 1981, revived many familiar themes of Colorado dramas. Like the contemporary *Bus Stop* and *The Innocent and the Damned*, *Dynasty* was full of

psychological tumult, betrayal, greed, and even a few murders. Like Colorado's Old West programs, there was plenty of villainous treachery to go around, and like most of Colorado's entries there was breathtaking mountain scenery. The first shot in the opening credits was a spectacular aerial view of snowcapped mountain peaks, although the subsequent visuals indicated that viewers would see an entirely different version of Colorado. Sleepy mountain villages and frontier towns were replaced by images of limousines, smoked-glass skyscrapers, and an opulent mansion. The cast was seen sipping brandy and champagne, looking aristocratically grim in tuxedos and evening gowns. From the outset, *Dynasty* was clearly not the story of life in Wretched.

Dynasty was ABC's answer to the CBS megahit soap opera *Dallas*, and although the setting was now Denver, the fabulous wealth came similarly from the oil industry. Blake Carrington was the head of Denver-Carrington Oil, which was fighting for its life after a revolution in the Middle East led to the nationalization of many of the company's assets. The real problem was not petroleum politics, of course, but Blake's troubled family and their acquaintances. These people included Krystle, his glamorous yet melancholic wife; Fallon, his spoiled daughter; and Steven, his troubled son. At the deep, black heart of *Dynasty* was Blake's exwife, Alexis, described by one critic as "one of the campiest and most beloved bitch goddesses ever to strut, stagger, skulk, slug, and scheme her way into the family rooms of America" (West 2005: 33).

Dynasty was a mind-bogglingly complex array of characters, plots, and subplots. In their summary of the series, Brooks and Marsh listed sixty-three recurring characters, noting that every last one of them "was either filthy rich and disgusting or not-so-rich and disgusting" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 400). And, if *Dynasty* is to be believed, being rich and disgusting is not

as easy as it looks. Some of the high (or low) points of the series included Blake's trial for the murder of Steven's gay lover; Alexis causing Krystle to lose her baby; Krystle and Alexis engaging in a knock-down, drag-out fight in a lily pond; Steven's injury in an explosion in Indonesia; a deadly fire at Blake's resort hotel; Krystle and Alexis trapped together in a burning cabin; Blake and Alexis running against one another for the state's governorship; and, perhaps most spectacular, the season-ending near-murder of the entire cast by machine gun-wielding revolutionaries at a royal wedding in Moldavia. In the series finale, *Dynasty* exited in appropriate fashion, with Fallon and her sister "trapped together in a collapsing mine shaft with a buried Nazi art collection and a deranged killer" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 401).

Like *Dallas*, *Dynasty* gained momentum quickly. It finished its first season nineteenth in the Nielsen ratings, and climbed into the top seven for the next four years, peaking in the top spot during the 1984-1985 season. *Dynasty* dropped back to seventh in 1986 and to twenty-fourth in 1987, before finally being cancelled in the spring of 1989. In hindsight, the fact that *Dynasty* never made it to the 1990s seems wholly appropriate. Its demise marked the end of a decade-long obsession with lavish prime-time soaps, and although it never quite equaled *Dallas*'s ratings, it was named by *TV Guide* as the best soap opera of the decade. The magazine wrote that its "campy opulence gave it a superb, ironic quality—in other words, it was great trash" (Mazzarella 2010: 1). For some, including critic Todd Ramlow, it was the quintessential 1980s program, despite its decidedly artificial approach:

Even if *Dynasty* never represented any "truth" about the U. S. back then, it did represent a sort of dominant national fantasy of American life and burgeoning neocon ideals. To sum it up: excess, excess, excess. Big shoulder pads, big hair, big jewels, big houses, big oil companies, and the lives of the mostly idle rich: it's all there in *Dynasty*, in big spades (Ramlow 2010: 1).

Dynasty almost certainly altered the viewing public's perception of Colorado. While the state's television landscape had entered the 1980s as a collection of rustic little towns, it had exited it squarely in the lap of luxury. And, for better or worse, the show put Denver on the television map, and there is no indication that Denverites were upset with the avaricious nature of the show. If anything, they appeared upset that some of the *Dynasty*'s opulence was not their own. The home that served as the exterior for Blake's mansion, for example, was actually located in Woodside, California. Coloradans were even more upset that the spectacular snow-covered mountains from the show's credits were also stand-ins from California. In response to volumes of hate mail, *Dynasty*'s producers belatedly began inserting more establishing shots from the city itself, and even filmed a few episodes on location. The most notable was a 1985 episode filmed at Denver's extravagant Carousel Ball, which featured appearances by President and Mrs. Gerald Ford and former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Only two more contemporary Colorado-based dramas would follow *Dynasty*, and both of them possessed a very different perspective on the state. The first was *Promised Land*, which had roamed the country for two years before settling down in Colorado. A heartwarming, family-oriented series, this was the story of Russell Green, an unemployed factory worker who decided to "redefine what it meant to be a good neighbor and recapture the American dream" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,114). Russell, along with his mother, wife, two sons, and nephew roamed the country in a worn-out travel trailer, picking up work where they could, and doing good deeds in the process. They eventually settled in Denver which, by 1998, had lost some of the luster of the Carrington years. The Greens moved into a run-down house in a struggling neighborhood where they befriended a former gang member and a young single mother and where Russell

volunteered at a local teen center. Such good works did not appeal to viewers as much as the Carrington's bad ones, and *Promised Land* was cancelled at the conclusion of its first season in Denver.

Colorado's final dramatic entry to date, 2002's *Everwood*, was, in some ways, a microcosm of the many dramas that had preceded it. A newcomer (yet another doctor) following another death of a loved one, started a new life in yet another fictional small town amid spectacular mountain scenery. He, too, encountered danger, psychological tumult, family issues, and some resistance from the wary locals. This time the doctor was Andy Brown, a successful New York neurosurgeon who, following the death of his wife in an auto accident, moved with his son and daughter to Everwood, Colorado, which was every bit as rustic and beautiful as its name suggests. Andy had more than enough money, so he opened a free clinic in Everwood, where his medical cases were a little more *au courant* than those of his Colorado predecessors, including drug addiction, AIDS, spinal cancer, and a young man in a coma. The kids were not enthusiastic about the move, of course, with his son Ephram referring to it as "Harrison-Ford-in-*Mosquito Coast* crazy" (Razlogova 2002: 1).

Everwood never accumulated tremendous ratings, but they were good enough for the struggling WB network, and the show remained on air for four seasons. Elena Razlogova, like many other television critics, was not impressed by *Everwood*, calling it "a perfect example of Hollywood's assembly-line production and marketing." She took exception to both the show's lack of originality and geographic accuracy:

Apart from gorgeous panoramas of the snowy Rockies, *Everwood* offers little fresh material . . . Executive producers Greg Berlanti and Mickey Liddell seem to have culled the show's main dramatic conventions from other successful dramas about small-town family

and community life Still, the creators of *Everwood* miss any compelling aspects of the storylines they ransack. In interviews, Berlanti has compared *Everwood's* focus—Brown's relationship with Ephram—to that of *Gilmore Girls*, about a mother-daughter relationship in yet another quirky small town. But a single woman who chose to have a daughter at sixteen and raise her on her own while holding a full-time job has little, or rather nothing, in common with a world-famous neurosurgeon who moves to a small town on a whim, having raised his children by proxy, with enough money saved to play doctor for free. *Girls*, in other words, explores a set of class and gender issues that *Everwood* avoids. In crafting this fantasy, the show does a disservice to diverse populations living in small Northwestern towns. And that includes the white middle-class people at the center of *Everwood*, as well as those it leaves out, for example, the seasonal immigrant and tourism industry workers who populate most small Colorado towns (Razlogova 2002: 1).

Although Colorado's television landscape has favored dramas over sitcoms, two of its most successful programs have been comedies. The first was the 1978 slapstick comedy *Mork & Mindy*, which was Colorado's first hit show. Half of the title pair was Mindy McConnell, a journalism student (and eventual television reporter) who clerked part-time, along with her sassy grandmother, at her father's music store. The setting was Boulder, and the opening credits included the usual dose of attractive mountain scenery as Mindy cruised into town in her Jeep. Her counterpart, Mork, was the ultimate newcomer to Colorado. Played by frenetic stand-up comic Robin Williams, Mork was an alien from the planet Ork. The sullen Orkans, who could never quite get a handle on the zany Mork, had an even tougher time understanding the strange habits of earthlings, and so sent Mork off to Boulder to study them. Once there, Mork immediately befriended Mindy, and moved into the attic of her apartment in a quaint Victorian home. Only Mindy knew Mork's secret, and much of the comedy derived from Mork's inevitable misunderstandings of human ways. The general public, of course, thought he was "just some kind of a nut" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 919).

Although *Mork & Mindy* was essentially a vehicle for the manic comedy of Williams, it also showcased the kinds of moralistic lessons that would later be a staple of *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*. Each episode concluded with Mork's report to his unseen Orkan superior, Orson, and each was a little homily about life on earth. Some of the issues on *Mork & Mindy* were timeless, such as life, death, love, and hate, but others were contemporary, ranging from immigration to sexism. One episode dealt with a greedy landlord, and another with black-market babies. In yet another, Mork encountered a hate group similar to the Ku Klux Klan, forcing Mindy to explain racial discrimination to him and, of course, the viewer. "We're all created equal," she told him, adding that "It's easier to put down someone who is different than understand him." In his report to Orson, Mork waxed poetic. "When you mix all earthlings together, you get this incredible rainbow," he said. "Everyone has a pot of gold" (Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman 1991: 259).

One could suggest that *Mork & Mindy*'s emphasis on moral lessons made it something of a modern western, but such morality tales aren't exclusive to programs set in the West, and *Mork & Mindy*'s Boulder setting appears somewhat arbitrary. According to Fran Golden, the show's producers selected the state simply because numerous UFO sightings had been reported in the Colorado Rockies. Boulder, in particular, was chosen because "it seemed likely an alien would end up in the college town" (Golden 1996: 167).

In any case, *Mork & Mindy* was initially a smash hit, placing fourth in the Nielsen ratings in its first season. Just as quickly as success arrived, however, it vanished. Producers meddled with the format of the series, dropping a number of regular characters and adding some episodes with surrealist themes, including the second-season opener where Mork was "dropped into a never-never world filled with caricatures of good and evil" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 919). At

the same time, ABC moved the show from Thursday to Sunday nights, and its audience vanished. The network moved the show back to its original spot in January of its second season, but the damage was done. Ratings dropped every year the show was on the air, and it was ultimately cancelled after season four.

It would be fifteen years before another comedy would arrive on the Colorado television landscape. Then five made their debuts between 1997 and 2003. The Denver-based sitcoms *The Closer* and *House Rules* premiered in 1998, each lasting two months. *The Closer* was the story of a smarmy ad executive, while *House Rules* was a buddy comedy about three young women—a lawyer, a reporter, and a nurse—who shared a Victorian home. The Denver-based comedy *Rock Me Baby*, which aired during the 2003-2004 season, concerned the cohosts of a wild Denver radio show, one of whom had just become a father. Sixty-six episodes of a syndicated television series based on the 1989 film *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*, were produced from 1997 to 2000. Set in Matheson, Colorado, the show followed the exploits of eccentric inventor Wayne Szalinski, whose strange gadgets put the family into fanciful scrapes. None of these programs were terribly successful, but they were notable for their trend toward urban settings, and toward characters whose lifestyles more closely resembled those seen on programs set throughout the country.

Still, the most successful of the Colorado-based comedies of this time period ran counter to the trends, taking place in a small town and containing characters unlike anything seen before on television. *South Park*, a crude-looking cartoon about a group of foul-mouthed children, first appeared in 1997 on the then-lowly cable channel, Comedy Central. Against all conventional wisdom, the show quickly became the most talked-about new series of the year, and eventually transformed Comedy Central into a serious cable outlet on its way to becoming Colorado's longest-running program at fourteen years and counting.

South Park's protagonists were Stan Marsh and Kyle Broflovski, a pair of relatively normal fourth graders living in the small mountain town of South Park along with classmates Kenny McCormick and Eric Cartman. Kenny was the poor kid, whose oversized orange parka reduced his voice to an unintelligible mumble that only his friends could understand. Eric was a fat, spoiled, and self-centered loudmouth who constantly antagonized (and who was constantly antagonized by) his friends. A running gag on the show was the grisly death of Kenny, an event that happened on nearly every episode, always followed by the lines "Oh my God! They killed Kenny! You bastards!" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,277). The repeated bludgeoning death of a fourth-grader was, however, one of the least bizarre things to happen in South Park.

Although a basin called South Park exists in central Colorado, the town itself is fictional. At first glance, it is a relatively typical American small town, featuring a city hall, a library, a courthouse, a town square, the Bijou Theater, a few churches, and a utilitarian elementary school. Houses range from ornate mansions to little bungalows, and the Main Street is lined with small businesses, including Jimbo's Guns and Tom's Rhinoplasty. Fitting into the motif of rural Colorado as a wild and dangerous place, the town is always threatened by one potential disaster or another, including hurricanes, zombies, mutant turkeys and space aliens. In the words of one character, "This is just a small, quiet, mountain community where nothing out of the ordinary ever really happens, except for the occasional complete destruction of the entire town" (Johnson-Woods 2007: 161).

Along with a liberal dose of bizarre plots and gross-out gags, *South Park* also contained storylines similar to any other sitcom, detailing the kids' relationships with one another, their parents and teachers, and chronicling the inevitable joys and pains of growing up. It was also fierce satire. The show tackled consumer culture, religious hypocrisy, sexuality, and political

agendas of every stripe. In its own off-kilter way, *South Park* dealt with Hurricane Katrina, the Iraq war, the Elian Gonzales incident, and the hyperbole surrounding global warming. It lambasted television conventions, having the audacity, for example, to name the only African-American kid at Stan and Kyle's school "Token Black." Favorite targets included Christian fundamentalists, fear-mongering and hype-driven journalists, hippies, incompetent government bureaucrats, and televangelists. The foils of choice, however, were, more often than not, celebrities, as in one episode where all the girls in South Park rushed out to purchase Paris Hilton's Stupid Spoiled Whore Video Playset.

South Park resembled two animated contemporaries, *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*, in having its setting serve as a neutral backdrop before which contemporary American politics, society, and popular culture could be skewered. But it also possessed some themes specific to small towns and small Colorado towns in particular. Showing small-town residents as eccentric, provincial, and narrow-minded is not unusual on television, but what sets *South Park* apart from most other of television's small towns is that its residents seemed to revel in their prejudice and ignorance. They never learned lessons, and were ready, willing, and able to be driven to ecstasy by the latest cultural fad. Critic Toni Johnson-Woods argued that the show's flat, one-dimensional animation style "gestures to the one-dimensionality of town life and the narrowness of small-town mentality" (Johnson-Woods 2007: 156). While that might be a bit of a stretch, there is no doubting her assessment that South Park was depicted as a "redneck twenty-first-century town" (Johnson-Woods 2007: 152). The upper class of the town smacked of nouveau-riche vulgarity and the middle class of thoughtless conformity. The town's lower class, in the form of Kenny and his family, did not shatter any stereotypes, either:

The McCormick house is metonymic for “white trash.” Signifiers of “white trash” are the front yard detritus of car repairs: an empty oilcan, discarded tires, and a car with front wheels on blocks; furthermore, the yard contains a broken refrigerator and a sofa and the garage door is skewed and seemingly broken. The inside completes the “white trash” picture: the living room boasts a neon beer sign, cinder blocks prop up a makeshift coffee table, a car seat stands in for the couch. The kitchen cupboard doors hang off their hinges, and Kenny’s room has a hole in the ceiling, a frameless mattress, and ripped curtains Empty liquor bottles, oilcans, and a car engine litter the living room. The coffee table shows unmopped spills. Kenny’s clothes are scattered on the floor of his bedroom. Rats roam freely (Johnson-Woods 2007: 159).

Still, a few moments on *South Park* reveal an almost affectionate view of small-town life. The episode “Die Hippie, Die,” suggests, in fact, that such life might be something of an ideal. In that episode, hippies invaded the town and proceeded to smoke pot, sit in drum circles, listen to the music, and complain about corporate America. Otherwise, they didn’t do much. While Cartman went on an antihippie crusade to save the town, Kyle and Stan joined the newcomers, and were preparing for the coming revolution:

STAN: So it seems like we have enough people now. When do we start taking down the corporations?

HIPPIE: Yeah man, the corporations. Right now they’re raping the world for money!

KYLE: Yeah, so, where are they? Let's go get ‘em.

HIPPIE: Right now we’re proving we don’t need corporations. We don’t need money. This can become a commune where everyone just helps each other.

OTHER HIPPIE: Yeah, we’ll have one guy who like, makes bread. And one guy who like, looks out for other people’s safety.

STAN: You mean like a baker and a cop?

HIPPIE: No, no. Can't you imagine a place where people live

together and like, provide services for each other in exchange for their services?

KYLE: Yeah, it's called a town (South Park Studios 2005: 1).

Generally, when a population is as disagreeable as the residents of South Park, any outsider is a beneficial force, as was the case in Colorado's *Sara* and *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*. In *South Park*, however, outsiders were often as dense as the locals and far more destructive. Often they were celebrities whose egomaniacal and sanctimonious attitudes created a serious annoyance for the townspeople or, in more extreme cases, mass destruction. In one episode, the townspeople battled a gigantic killer robot called Mecha-Streisand. On another, Robert Redford and a legion of Hollywood movie moguls took over the town and almost destroyed its ecosystem because they were, figuratively and literally, full of shit.

Series creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker are both Colorado natives, and this appears to be the geographic message closest to their hearts—that the residents of small towns can be weak and ignorant, but, then, so can everyone else. That said, it is difficult to peg *South Park* to any particular political or social philosophy. The show has offended just about everyone at one time or another. If there is a unifying theme, it the one reiterated in a thousand television westerns—that civilized behavior is a tenuous thing at best. This sentiment was reflected in a statement by Matt Stone:

There's two competing theories in the world. One is that we're born natural and beautiful and good, and that society corrupts us, which is what I think a lot of people believe. *South Park* is based on completely the opposite notion, that we are born basically gorillas, and that society keeps us just barely in line (O'Neill 2005: 1).

MONTANA

Depictions of the American West, like all American regions, have provided mixed, often contradictory, messages about the region's basic character. As noted before, the most common theme of television Westerns is that of a lone, rugged individual standing up against a tide of violence and greed, attempting to civilize a region that is wild, lawless, and uncivilized. Secondary, but still important regional behaviors suggested by television westerns are those of youthful vigor, optimism, and personal renewal. All of these have been key in Montana's relatively modest television landscape.

Montana's earliest television entries were of the youthful vigor variety, including the state's first entry, *My Friend Flicka*, which ran from 1956 to 1958. An update of the 1943 film, it told of the trials and tribulations of a family trying to scratch out a living on a turn-of-the-century ranch, but the focus was a young boy and his beloved horse, Flicka. Two months after *Flicka's* demise, *Buckskin* premiered, running until the fall of 1959. Set in the frontier town of Buckskin, Montana, in the 1880s, the show focused on the interactions of a ten-year-old boy who lived in his mother's boarding house with townspeople and passers-through. *Lonesome Dove*, a syndicated series that was produced from 1994 to 1996, was based on the Larry McMurtry novel, and was a continuation of two popular miniseries the novel had spawned. Filmed in Alberta and set in Curtis Wells, Montana, in the 1870s, the program focused on a youthful stable hand, Newt Call, and his love interest, Hannah. Newt's chief rival for Hannah's affections was Colonel Mosby, a former Confederate officer who was a gunfighter, bank robber, and saloon owner.

Youthful vigor, however, apparently did not have much drawing power in 1990s, and in its second year *Lonesome Dove* tacked toward the more classic Western theme of a gritty lead

character standing up against the forces of evil. As the second season began, Mosby had taken control of Curtis Wells, which looked, as noted by Brooks and Marsh, “much grimmer” than it had in the first season (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1808). The show’s tone and title also became markedly darker, adopting the name *Lonesome Dove: The Outlaw Years*. Hannah was killed in an explosion, the sheriff had been murdered, the town’s hotel had been sold to a grifter, and Newt, now a bounty hunter, had developed a relationship with Mattie, a rough-and-tumble gunsmith and undertaker.

Just two of Montana’s programs have had contemporary settings. The first, 1993’s *Angel Falls*, was a primetime soap opera, an unusual genre for a small-town western setting, but the show did rehash the common western theme of personal renewal. Rae Dawn Snow had recently moved back home to the title town with her sixteen-year-old son to run the family pool hall. Episodes centered on the son’s new romantic entanglements, and the mother’s renewed ones. *Angel Falls* offered the usual soap opera schemes, promiscuity, and heartache, but viewers were not sure what to make of it, and the show was pulled after six weeks. Montana’s final entry, *Caitlin’s Way*, which ran from 2000 to 2002, was also an odd mixture of twenty-first-century dysfunction and the traditional Western theme of youthful renewal. Caitlin, a troubled fourteen-year-old orphan from the mean streets of inner-city Philadelphia, was given the choice between juvenile hall and going to live with her relatives, a veterinarian and a local sheriff, in rural Montana. She chose the latter, and although she had some early troubles, the relatives were patient with her rebellious ways. As it so often does on television, the West began to heal Caitlin’s emotional wounds. She made a friend at school and developed an interest in photography. Television life in Montana then came full circle when, in Flicka-esque fashion, Caitlin adopted a wild stallion named Bandit, who had saved her from a rabid wolf.

WASHINGTON

Like other western states, Washington's first television entry was set in a nineteenth-century boomtown, but 1968's *Here Come the Brides* was hardly a conventional western. It was the story of Jason Bolt and his brothers, who ran a logging camp on Bridal Veil Mountain near Seattle. This camp was nearing a state of mutiny, however, the problem being that nearly all of Seattle's 152 residents were men, and the love-starved lumberjacks were getting desperate. So, Jason sailed off to Massachusetts and convinced a hundred potential brides to return west with him. There was, of course, a catch. In order to finance his enterprise, Jason had borrowed money with the understanding that if any of the prospective brides left before the end of a year, the Bolt family would forfeit their land. In the end, he convinced them all to stick around, and *Here Come the Brides* managed to remain on the air for two seasons. A few of the show's basic traits would reappear on subsequent Washington-based programs. Many have featured recently arrived (or recently returned) characters, and a few would borrow *Brides*'s central theme of a rough and tumble Seattle coming into contact with a civilizing force. Some also gave a nod to the timber industry, but *Here Come the Brides* would be Washington's last period piece, and its last show for more than a decade.

Washington returned with a pair of situation comedies in the mid-1980s. The state eventually served as the setting for eight sitcoms, but only five of them appeared on a major network, and just one of those lasted at least a full season. CBS was responsible for three of the network duds, the first being *Domestic Life*, which aired for six months in 1984. It was the story of Martin Crane, who, like so many of Seattle's television residents, had recently moved to the city. He had taken a job at a local television station, where he delivered human interest stories. The action was divided between Martin's lives at the station and at home with his wife and two

children. The Cranes would be one of the few traditional nuclear families to appear on Washington's television landscape, but the public never got excited and *Domestic Life* lasted just six months.

The Boys, another sitcom, was the story of Doug Kirkfield, a New York author recently arrived in a small town outside of Seattle to work on his second novel. The show centered on the relationship between sophisticated Doug and a trio of grouchy blue-collar pals who met for a weekly poker game next door—Burt, a retired fireman; Harlan, who owned an antique shop; and Al, who had “worked his entire career in a tar factory and was euphoric when talking about tar” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 175). After *The Boys* lasted just five weeks in 1993, CBS made just one more attempt at a Seattle sitcom. The area's famously successful software industry has not often served as comic fodder, and perhaps 1995's *Dweebs* explains why. It was the story of a young but legendary software designer named Warren Moseby. Like all of the programmers at his Seattle company, Cyberbyte, Warren was brilliant, but also incredibly shy and socially awkward. Into the mix came sexy new office administrator Carey, who taught Warren and the other dweebs the ways of the world, at least for six weeks.

Seattle's sitcom landscape has included a pair of syndicated programs, the first of which was *One Big Family*. Danny Thomas, who had been a New York nightclub comedian in a previous sitcom life, played a semiretired nightclub comedian who moved to Seattle to take care of five orphaned grandchildren after his son and daughter-in-law were killed in a car accident. This multigeneration comedy never caught on, and the program ceased production after five months. Seattle's second syndicated sitcom, *Harry and the Hendersons*, based on a 1987 movie of the same name, featured another blended family. This time, the newcomer was not Grandpa but a seven foot tall Sasquatch, also known as Bigfoot or, in this case, Harry. The Hendersons

had accidentally hit Harry with their car, and they brought him to their Seattle home to nurse him back to health. The show followed the personal and professional lives of the Hendersons, including a story arc in which the dad, George, quit his job at a sporting goods company to start a magazine called *The Better Life*, which dealt with ecological issues. Most of the stories, however, revolved around the family's efforts to keep their big house guest a secret. The show was released in 1991, and seventy-two episodes of the program were produced between 1991 and 1993.

Seattle's last off-network comedy, and its last sitcom to date, was *Romeo!*, which aired on the youth-oriented Nickelodeon cable outlet. It was the story of the Millers, a black Seattle family headed by Percy, a widowed record producer, who was played by rap mogul Master P. His son (both on the show and in real life) was Romeo, an aspiring rapper and basketball star who headed the family band, Pieces of the Puzzle. Also seen were Romeo's sister Jodi, his brother Gary, and, in a significant step forward in race relations on family sitcoms, his adopted white brother, Louis. It was a bright, happy sitcom, typical for its cable home, and ran for fifty-three episodes from 2003 to 2006.

Down on the major network end of the dial, NBC launched two Seattle-based sitcoms in 1993. The first was a salvage effort called *Almost Home*, which appeared in February. After an unsuccessful season in Oklahoma, the title family of *The Torkelsons* followed the lead of a number of their television cohort and moved to Seattle, with the show taking on a new name. It featured working-class mom Millicent Torkelson, who had just taken a job as live-in nanny for Brian Morgan, the owner of a successful mail-order business. Millicent's rambunctious brood was not greeted warmly by Brian's snooty kids, but it didn't matter much, as the second life for *The Torkelsons* lasted just five months.

The title character of NBC's other 1993 entry was, like Millicent Torkelson, a holdover from a previous sitcom, and was also looking to start a new life in Seattle. The difference, of course, was that Frasier Crane came with a much more reputable sitcom pedigree. Kelsey Grammer had played the pompous psychologist on the wildly successful *Cheers* for nine of the show's eleven years. A number of television's more successful sitcoms have been spin-offs, including *The Facts of Life*, *Family Matters*, *Gomer Pyle, U. S. M. C.*, *Good Times*, and *The Jeffersons*. For each one of these successes, however, there have been a number of disasters, such as *Joanie Loves Chachi*, *AfterMASH*, *the Ropers*, *Fish, Flo, Gloria*, and *Grady*. To the relief of NBC, *Frasier* not only survived, but went on to equal *Cheers* in longevity and popularity.

As the show began, Frasier had left Boston and his icy wife, Lillith, behind, moving back to his hometown of Seattle. He was now dispensing advice on the radio, where his coworkers included Bob "Bulldog" Briscoe, the loud-mouth host of KACL's sports program, and Gil Chesterston, the station's pompous food critic. He developed a close, if somewhat contentious, friendship with his producer, the salty Roz Doyle. Frasier also reconnected with his brother Niles, a fellow psychiatrist who was somehow even more pretentious than Frasier. Niles lived in a ludicrously opulent mansion with his tyrannical wife, Maris, who was so far removed from the unwashed masses of humanity that she was never actually seen on the show. When not sipping coffee with Niles or Roz at the modish Café Nervosa, Frasier could usually be found in his stylish luxury apartment, which featured a spectacular view of the Seattle skyline. Just when the star-crossed Frasier seemed to have his life in order, along came his estranged father, Martin Crane. A former Seattle police detective, Martin had been shot in the line of duty, resulting in a debilitating hip injury that forced him to walk with a cane, and which made it difficult for him to

live alone. A reluctant Frasier invited Martin in, realizing too late that along with Martin came a bubbly English home-care therapist named Daphne, a mischievous terrier named Eddie, and Seattle's ugliest easy chair.

Like *Cheers*, *Frasier*'s hallmark was sharp, witty, rapid-fire dialogue reminiscent of 1930s screwball comedies. A classic example of this was found in a 1998 episode, "Merry Christmas Mrs. Moskowitz," in which the Crane family pretended to be Jewish on Christmas Eve in order to fool Frasier's girlfriend's mother. When Martin worried that he wouldn't be able to pull it off, he was coached by Niles:

MARTIN: I don't know how to be Jewish.

NILES: Well, just answer questions with a question.

MARTIN: Like what?

NILES: What, I have to explain everything?

MARTIN: Can't you give me an example?

NILES: What, I should give you an example?

MARTIN: Are you going to help me or not?

NILES: You're saying I'm not being helpful?

MARTIN: Oh, forget it! (Abernethy 2003: 1)

Frasier also adhered to a time-honored comic philosophy that closely resembled that of Jack Benny, in which the protagonist is the exasperated straight man. Frasier Crane, like Benny's on-air alter ego, was vain and self-centered, but somehow likable, probably because he was forever being hoisted on his own pompous petard. A common gag on *Frasier* was the call-in segment of the radio show, which would begin with Frasier's placid, self-assured, catch phrase,

“I’m listening.” The caller (often voiced by an uncredited celebrity, such as Mel Brooks, Art Garfunkel, or Timothy Leary), then would present Frasier with a problem that was often so trivial, unsolvable, or downright bizarre that it ultimately would lead to the host’s undoing. This comic formula—the deflating of the pompous—permeated the show, as in one episode where Frasier, hesitant to admit a mistake, told Daphne, “You don’t understand. It’s not the same as Dad being wrong, or you being wrong. I have a degree from Harvard. Whenever I’m wrong, the world makes a little less sense” (West 2005: 44).

Just as *Cheers* had done for Boston, *Frasier* depicted Seattle as being the collision of two cultures, with the sophisticated and often pedantic world of Frasier, Niles, Maris, and Gil conflicting with the earthy and sometimes crude world of Martin, Daphne, Roz, and Bulldog. Critic Stephen Tropiano described *Frasier* as “essentially the story of one man who appreciates the finer things in life, yet feels trapped in what he regards as an inferior, uncultured, and unsophisticated world” (Tropiano 2003b: 1). Frasier and Niles reveled in their sophistication, and the show was often lauded as one of the most erudite on television, with frequent references to classical music, fine wines, literature, and philosophy. An appreciation for life’s finer things was never belittled, but the cachet and self-importance often associated with such things nearly always was. Whenever Frasier or Niles sought out something strictly for its exclusivity—tickets to a sold-out show, an invitation to a posh dinner party, membership in an elite club—that is when they met their undoing. A good many of *Frasier*’s episodes involved Frasier desperately seeking something for all the wrong reasons, not getting it, throwing a tantrum, and learning a lesson.

Martin, the man’s-man counterpoint to the effete snobbery of Niles and Frasier, was usually the one who dispensed the lessons. The show often took jabs at Martin’s blue collar

sensibilities, as in one episode where Frasier commented that “by tonight my dad will be safely back in his beer-stained, flea-infested, duct-taped recliner, adjusting his shorts with one hand and cheering on Jean-Claude Van Damme with the other” (West 2005: 44). Stephen Tropiano wrote that the episodes pitting Frasier and Martin against one another were “by far the most entertaining and touching:”

Frasier and Martin butt heads over everything from privacy to restaurants to dad’s recliner. In “Give Him the Chair,” Frasier (with a little help from Niles) convinces himself that it would be in his father’s best interest to go behind his back to dispose of the chair. As Niles explains, the chair is like a baby’s blanket and “There comes a time when it’s the healthy thing to do to put these security objects aside.” Frasier’s scheme not only puts him in the doghouse, but also, in a truly hilarious scene, his attempt to retrieve it lands him on stage performing in a high school production of *Ten Little Indians*. As always, in the end Frasier grows a little wiser and closer to his father, who explains his chair’s sentimental value: it’s where he was sitting when he watched Neil Armstrong walk on the moon and heard the news that he was a grandfather (Tropiano 2003b: 1).

Such personal moments were not only at the heart of the show’s comic and dramatic formula, but also its clearest geographic message. The show’s creators had, of course, worked on *Cheers*, which had been created by writers from *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. None of these programs were exterior shows—just as *Mary Tyler Moore* focused on Mary’s apartment and the WJM office, and *Cheers* spent most of its time in the bar, *Frasier*’s universe was restricted primarily to the radio station, the coffee shop, and Frasier’s apartment. Because of this, viewers had to learn most of their geography from the primary characters. So, while *Frasier* frequently referenced Seattle’s obsession with caffeine, its dreary climate, and the woeful fate of its professional sports franchises, the central geographic message was that the city’s style and sophistication, as embodied by Frasier, was superimposed upon a rough-and-tumble working-

class town, as embodied by Martin. All told, the geography of *Frasier* was not inappropriate for a lumber-town-turned-technopole.

According to *Frasier*'s creators, the decision to relocate Frasier Crane to Seattle was consciously geographic, but not one based on the physical or cultural geography of the city. It was chosen, quite simply, because it was 4,000 miles from Boston. Producer David Lee recalled that "the first thing NBC said to us when we pitched the show was, 'How often will Norm, Cliff, and Woody stop by?' We said never." As it happened, a few members from the *Cheers* gang did eventually make it on the show, but Lee and coproducer David Angell were able to limit such occurrences by their choice of setting. "We wanted to avoid that constant breathing down our neck from the network every three weeks to get a *Cheers* person to stop by," said Angell. "If we were in Seattle, it wouldn't be as easy for them to get there" (Graham 1996: 19-20).

Like its parent program, *Frasier* aired for eleven years. Only five sitcoms have had longer runs, and none have aired longer than the remarkable two decades that Kelsey Grammar played Frasier Crane, a lifespan for a fictional, live-action television character exceeded only by that of *Gunsmoke*'s Matt Dillon. Unlike *Cheers*, *Frasier* never made it to the top spot on the Nielsen charts, but it was ranked in the top thirty each of its eleven seasons, including four years in the top ten. The show peaked in third place during the 1998-1999 season, and was a force when it came to industry awards. *Frasier* won a record-smashing thirty-seven Emmy awards, including five consecutive wins for Outstanding Comedy Series.

While *Frasier* is clearly Washington's defining television program, the landscape of the state, in terms of total shows, has not been dominated by comedies. After *Frasier*'s 1994 debut, only two more sitcoms—*Dweebs* and *Romeo!*—appeared. They were joined by Washington's

only reality entry in 1998, when the seventh installment of MTV's long-running *The Real World* checked into a Seattle waterfront apartment. All eighteen of Washington's dramatic entries have debuted since 1990, and they eventually outnumbered the state's comic entries by a nearly two-to-one ratio.

Like its sitcoms, most of Washington's dramas have proven to be lemons, including three short-lived family dramas. *Under One Roof*, a gritty portrayal of an African-American family sharing a home in Seattle, aired for a month in 1995. The lighter, but no more successful *Cold Feet*, which ran for a month in 1999, was a story of dating, marriage, and parenthood among six self-absorbed yuppies. *Citizen Baines*, which aired for six weeks in 2001, was the story of a divorced U. S. senator who, having lost his bid for a fourth term, returned home to Seattle and attempted to repair damaged relationships with his three adult daughters.

Although a few lawyers and police officers have passed across Washington's television landscape, the state is almost completely absent of programs entirely devoted to either profession. The only exception was *Traps*, the story of a retired homicide detective named Joe Trapchek who still consulted on some cases, and who occasionally worked with his grandson, Chris, a rebellious young detective on the Seattle force. *Traps* was about as successful as most other conventional Seattle dramas, lasting just a month in 1994.

The third element of television's iron triangle of policemen, lawyers, and medical professionals met a similar fate in Washington during the 1990s. First appearing in 1994, the syndicated, sex-drenched medical soap opera *University Hospital*, about four student nurses in fictional Seaside, Washington, lasted for less than six months. *Medicine Ball*, which was pulled

after six weeks, was a similarly soapy tale of a five young medical interns at Seattle's fictional Bayview Medical Center.

Another Seattle-based medical drama, *Grey's Anatomy*, appeared in 2005, and its basic description read like a photocopy of *Medicine Ball*—the professional and personal lives of five young doctors, in this case surgical residents at Seattle Grace Hospital. Proving that the Nielsen gods are a fairly capricious bunch, however, *Grey's Anatomy* was not just a success, but a smash hit, checking in at fifth place during its first full season. Like its fast-paced medical counterpart, *ER*, everybody yelled and ran around, and medical crises and professional dilemmas abounded. But while *ER* had left the impression that Chicago was a frosty warzone where dedicated young professionals constantly battled their inner demons, *Grey's Anatomy* left the impression that, after hours, at least, Seattle was a nearly constant bacchanal—something suggested by the nicknames of two of the handsome male doctors, “McDreamy” and “McSteamy.”

That the show's two fundamental elements were work and sex was made clear in the opening credits—a scalpel morphed into a tube of red lipstick, an I.V. bag dripped into a martini glass—but most critics agreed that the emphasis was on the sex. “Those people switch partners more often than square dancers,” observed critic Jeff Alexander. “I started putting together a little diagram outlining who all has slept with whom, but it quickly started looking like an M. C. Escher drawing” (Alexander 2008: 122-123). Critic Samantha Bornemann agreed that *Grey's Anatomy* was “a soap, not a hospital procedural,” arguing that this fact was made clear in the series' first two scenes:

The pilot opens with Meredith Grey waking naked but not alone on the den floor of her mother's vacant home. She's late for her first day of work, and she can't remember the name of the man who just woke bare-ass-up beside her. “Derek,” he says, proffering a handshake and a smile that says he's ready for another go.

“Goodbye, Derek,” she grins, rushing off to the shower. Next stop: Seattle Grace Hospital. Meredith slips in just in time for chief of surgery Richard Webber’s dispassionate welcome to the interns. “The seven years you spend here as a surgical resident will be the best and worst of your life,” he says. “Look around you. Say hello to your competition Eight of you will switch to an easier specialty. Five of you will crack under the pressure. Two of you will be asked to leave. This is your starting line. This is your arena. How well you play. That’s up to you.” Melodramatic? Sure, but in a rousing, manipulating, on-with-the-show kind of way. This is television, not a trip to the doctor, after all. Let’s have some fun. And *Grey’s Anatomy* provides it (so long as you check any real-life medical knowledge at the door) (Bornemann 2005b: 1).

As odd as it may sound, *Grey’s Anatomy* shared a structural similarity with *Frasier*. As mentioned, the action on *Frasier* primarily centered on just three locations. Likewise, the *Grey’s Anatomy*’s characters would put in their long, arduous hours at Seattle Grace, pop across the street to the Emerald City Bar for a cocktail, then head off to one bedroom or another. Like *ER*, life in the city was manifested by the patients who entered the hospital. Unlike *ER*, where the patients’ stories often drove an episode, on *Grey’s Anatomy*, according to Bornemann, the patients were simply “wheeled in as excuses to get the leads into the OR or as metaphors for something Meredith and her newbie cohorts need to learn” (Bornemann 2005c: 1). Because of this, as was the case on *Frasier*, viewers of *Grey’s Anatomy* learned about Seattle primarily from the action and words of the primary characters. The central geographic message, then, was that Seattle is populated primarily by good-looking, young, smart, ambitious professionals who were sexually liberated, and who were always happy to take advantage of that fact.

Another notable trait of *Grey’s Anatomy* was its ethnic diversity. This show, wrote critic Matthew Fogel, “has differentiated itself by creating a diverse world of doctors—almost half the cast are men and women of color.”

The series creator, Shonda Rhimes, has conceived Seattle Grace as a frenetic, multicultural hub where racial issues take a back seat to the more pressing problems of hospital life. . . .As one of television's few black showrunners, [Rhimes] has created a show around her vision of diversity—one in which color is more description than definition Ms. Rhimes has also worked hard to extend diversity to her show's smallest roles. Determined not to have a program in which "all the extras are white, except the lone janitor," she has created one of the most colorful backgrounds in television, a hospital in which punked-out bike messengers and suffering Hasidim roam the corridors. "Shonda's only rule is drug dealers and pimps cannot be black," said Dr. Zoanne Clack, a black writer for the show (Fogel 2005: 1).

Although a number of critics praised the show for its diversity, many found fault with its failure to tackle racial issues on a consistent basis. "Cultural distinctions still exist, even if we don't feel that there is blatant racism in the workplace the way there once was," said critic Donald Bogle. "We don't want to see a racial or cultural problem every week, but at some point if you ignore them it becomes dishonest." Other writers, such as Fogel, found the show's tendency to accept its cultural diversity as fact of life "defiantly fresh for network television." Whether *Grey's Anatomy's* treatment of racial issues was a problem or an asset, it did represent a marked departure from Chicago's *ER* and Boston's *St. Elsewhere*, where such themes were examined frequently. This represents an important, albeit subtle, geographic message—that Seattle is a youthful city with a fresh perspective. "I'm in my early 30's, and my friends and I don't sit around and discuss race," said Shonda Rhimes. "We're post-civil rights, post-feminist babies, and we take it for granted we live in a diverse world" (Fogel 2005: 1).

Grey's Anatomy continued to be produced through 2010, and has been a perennial Nielsen favorite, making it Washington's most durable and popular drama. It was not, however, representative of the pervasive tone of most of the state's other dramatic entries. Few other

states' television landscapes have been so thoroughly dominated by a single genre as has Washington's. Eleven—more than forty percent—of the state's entries have been thrillers. With its large quantity of murder mystery, science fiction, and supernatural genres, Washington's television landscape of the 1990s and 2000s was crowded with corpses, murderers, clairvoyants, evil twins, eerie small towns, werewolves, space aliens, mysterious amnesiacs, and post-apocalyptic bicycle messengers.

The first, and most influential of Washington's darkly themed dramas was the 1990 murder mystery, *Twin Peaks*. At first glance, the little mountain town of Twin Peaks was charming, picturesque, and normal as could be. Its principal industries were timber, controlled by the Packard Sawmill, and tourism, which focused on the imposing Great Northern lodge that overlooked majestic White Tail Falls. The town was noteworthy for hosting the Twin Peaks Passion Play and the Packard Timber Games, having the highest per capita doughnut consumption in the world, and for producing an undefeated high school football team in 1968. Local small businesses included Big Ed's Gas Farm, a bar called the Roadhouse, Horne's Department Store, and the Double R Diner, which served up some of the world's best pie and coffee. Beneath the picture postcard exterior, however, was what one critic called an "eddy pool of sadism, Satanism, pornography and drugs" (Lewis and Stempel 1996: 113).

The series began with the murder of Laura Palmer, a beautiful seventeen-year-old prom queen, whose body was found wrapped in plastic on the shores of Black Lake. The town's solemn sheriff, Harry S. Truman, called in the F. B. I., and Special Agent Dale Cooper was soon on the scene. Laura had last been seen at One-Eyed Jack's, a combination casino-whorehouse-drug den located just across the Canadian border. Agent Cooper soon discovered that seemingly

wholesome Laura led a double life, and that this was just one of a twisted maze of dark secrets that haunted the town.

The primary storyline of the show, however, always took a backseat to style. The question of who killed Laura Palmer was merely a framing device for what critic Robert J. Thompson called “the strangest goings-on ever portrayed on American entertainment television” (Thompson 1996: 155). The show’s trademark was the incongruous coupling of an archetypal small town with dreamlike photography, a haunting musical score, absurdist dialogue, melancholy mood, and surreal plot twists. It was *The Andy Griffith Show* by Samuel Beckett. To begin, Agent Dale Cooper was not a typical fish-out-water character, but a sort of microcosm of the town itself. He was ludicrously straight-laced, constantly clad in a Bureau-issue black business suit, and his greatest lusts seemed to revolve around coffee and pie. His catch phrases, which became “virtual mantras” among the shows rabid fans, were “This must be where pies go when they die,” and “Damn fine coffee. And hot!” (Lewis 1996: 113). He was also, like the town, just plain strange, a mystic whose detecting methods involved meditation and ESP. He narrated the show with sometimes cryptic messages delivered into a microcassette recorder, which he always addressed to “Diane.” Over time, the viewer began to wonder whether Diane was an unseen secretary or, in fact, the name of his tape recorder. Whenever Cooper reached a dead end in the Laura Palmer case, he was always helped out by his dreams. These provided mysterious clues via a dancing midget in what appeared to be the garishly decorated waiting room to Hell. The show’s other characters were, in the words of Brooks and Marsh “hardly relatable, unless you happened to reside in an asylum” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1441). These included, to name just a few, Benjamin Horne, a local businessman who recreated Civil War battles in his office; Nadine Hurley, a one-eyed, middle-aged woman who, thinking she was still

a teenager, became the star of the high school wrestling team; and Dr. Lawrence Jacoby, a spaced-out hippie and Laura's former psychiatrist, who might have been the craziest man in town. The most memorable of the supporting cast was Margaret Lanterman, better known as the Log Lady, who never left her house without her beloved Ponderosa pine log, which she spoke to and carried like a baby. The log, of course, had psychic powers. In the end, the search for Laura's killer led Cooper to Killer Bob, a "malleable and apparently supernatural entity inhabiting the deep woods of the Pacific Northwest" (Sconce 2010: 1).

While *Twin Peaks* shocked and fascinated millions of American viewers (initially, at least), fans of the show's cocreator, avant-garde filmmaker David Lynch, could hardly have been surprised. Lynch had been behind some of the strangest art-house favorites of the late 1970s and 1980s, including *Eraserhead*, *Blue Velvet*, and the Oscar-winning *The Elephant Man*. He was also the director of 1984's *Dune*, a big-budget, three-hour adaptation of the science fiction novel by Frank Herbert, which proved to be one of the biggest box office disasters of the year. Encouraged by Lynch's critical esteem, cult following, and partnership with *Hill Street Blues* veteran writer Mark Frost, but tempered by the limited appeal of Lynch's work, ABC originally scheduled *Twin Peaks* for a limited run in the spring of 1990, ordering a two-hour pilot and seven additional episodes. Despite this handicap, the show was nominated for fourteen Emmys that first season. It was also named the year's best show by the Television Critic Association, and took home the esteemed Peabody Award. The pilot was the highest-rated TV movie of the year, and *Time* magazine called *Twin Peaks* "the most hauntingly original work ever done for American TV" (Thompson 1996: 155).

Twin Peaks's success was helped along by a considerable critical buzz that was heard even before the show premiered. Dale Cooper and his cohort graced scores of magazine covers

and soon the show developed a fanatical following, and spawned a franchise that included three books—an *Access Guide to Twin Peaks*, *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer*, and *The Autobiography of F. B. I. Special Agent Dale Cooper*—an audio recording of Cooper’s messages to Diane, and a best-selling soundtrack album. “Who killed Laura Palmer?” became, in the words of Robert J. Thompson, “the biggest TV-inspired question since ‘Who Shot J. R.?’” (Thompson 1996: 156).

Surprisingly, the general viewing audience’s fascination with *Twin Peaks* faded as quickly as it had emerged. This decline might have been the result of what television historian Jeffrey Sconce called “the series’ obstinate refusal to move toward a traditional resolution, coupled with its escalating sense of the bizarre.” It might also have been the fault of its network. After the stunning numbers from the pilot, which had aired on a Sunday night, ABC, in a move reeking of hubris, moved the show to Thursday nights, opposite *Cheers* and *Beverly Hills 90210*. While critical praise for the show continued to ring loudly, *Twin Peaks* was pulverized in the ratings. ABC renewed the show for a second season, but moved it to Saturday night, in vain hopes of attracting “the program’s quality demographics to a night usually abandoned by such audiences” (Sconce 2010: 1). It didn’t work. ABC then shifted the show back to Thursdays, but the results were even worse. The final episode of *Twin Peaks* aired in June 1991, fourteen months and just thirty episodes after its stellar premiere.

The show remained a cult favorite even after its demise. David Lynch released a film prequel, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, in 1993 to the delight of the television show’s loyal fans, who were evidently still talking about the series. Critic David Bianculli wrote that “never before, in the history of television, had a program inspired so many millions of people to debate and analyze it so deeply and excitedly for so long a period” (Thompson 1996: 156). Libby

Gelman-Waxner, one of the few critics who was not a fan of the show, grudgingly acknowledged its cult following. She wrote that “every time someone on the screen eats a piece of apple pie, you can hear a thousand students start typing their doctoral dissertations on ‘Twin Peaks: David Lynch and the Semiotics of Cobbler’” (Lavery 1995: 14). This program also developed an international following, particularly in Japan, where the series was once aired, uninterrupted, in its entirety, and where package travel deals to the show’s filming locations remain popular.

When the Japanese fans of the show arrived in Washington, they may have noticed a few errors in the show’s geography. A shot from the opening credits announced “Welcome to Twin Peaks, population 51,201,” an inflated number given the apparent size of the town on the show (its producers later jokingly acknowledged that the sign was an error, stating that the real population was, in fact, 5,120.1). An even more glaring error was the fictional town’s location, said by Agent Cooper to be five miles south of the Canadian border and twelve miles west of the state line—coordinates at serious odds with the town’s apparent Cascade Mountains backdrop. That said, the exteriors on the show were authentic Washington. Much of the filming was done in Snoqualmie, with Snoqualmie Falls serving as the stand-in for White Tail Falls, and the Salish Lodge filling in for the Great Northern. The towns of Fall City, North Bend, and Preston also appeared on the show. The fictional town’s famous title peaks are located near North Bend, and belong to Washington’s Mount Si.

Twin Peaks’s central geographic theme, other than its moody visual love affair with the Cascades, was quite simple, and not very different from Grace Metalious’s view of New England as reflected in *Peyton Place*. The defining element of *Twin Peaks*, in the words of critics Jon E. Lewis and Penny Stempel, was David Lynch’s “fascination with the dark life behind the white

picket fences of smalltown America” (Lewis 1996: 113). This notion was supported by Lynch himself, who suggested that this look at the world was shaped by experience:

My childhood was elegant homes, tree-lined streets, the milkman, building backyard forts, droning airplanes, blue skies, picket fences, green grass, cherry trees. Middle America as it’s supposed to be. But on the cherry tree there’s this pitch oozing out—some black, some yellow, and millions of red ants crawling all over it. I discovered that if one looks a little closer at this beautiful world, there are *always* red ants underneath. (Lynch 2005: 10-11).

Whether or not *Twin Peaks* had anything to do with the deluge of darkly themed, Washington-based thrillers that began to hit the airwaves in the mid-1990s is a matter of speculation, but its influence was plainly evident in a number of shows set across the country, including *American Gothic*, *Picket Fences*, *Northern Exposure*, and *Push, Nevada*. Dale Cooper also had a kindred spirit in *The X-Files*’s Fox Mulder, another seemingly mild-mannered F. B. I. agent with a penchant for employing unusual methods to investigate strange cases. Although *The X-Files* was a D.C.-based show, a number of episodes were set in Washington state and a 1996 spin-off of the show was among the first of the state’s moody thrillers.

Millennium was the story of Frank Black (an appropriate name given the show’s bluntly dark tone), who had moved back to his hometown of Seattle after a decade with the F. B. I. Frank did freelance work for the local police, helping to solve gruesome local murders, but he was also part of the secretive Millennium Group, which was preparing for the ultimate battle between the forces of good and evil that was believed to be coming at the turn of the century. After two seasons in Seattle, Frank’s work took him back to Washington, D. C., but there was no shortage of shadowy thrills in his absence. Another 1996 entry, *The Sentinel*, was the story of Jim Ellison, a former army officer who had spent eighteen months in the Peruvian wilderness

following a helicopter crash. During this time, Jim had developed into what the natives called a Sentinel—a spirit medium and clairvoyant with superhuman senses of hearing, vision, and smell—which he put to use as a detective for the Cascade, Washington, police department. Joined by sidekick Blair Sandburg, a graduate student in anthropology who had been studying the Sentinel mythology, Jim became a walking crime lab. The crimes in Cascade went on for three seasons. The less successful but similarly dark thriller *Two* also appeared in 1996. It was the story of Gus McClain, an English professor at a college in Seattle, whose life was turned upside down after the murder of his wife, Sara. As it happened, Gus had an evil twin named Booth (they had been adopted separately at birth), who was a homicidal maniac. He had murdered Sara as part of a killing spree and framed Gus for the crime. Gus therefore had to go on the run, searching for evidence to exonerate himself, all the while harassed by Booth and chased by a zealous F. B. I. agent named Terry Carter. A twisted twist on *The Fugitive*, the syndicated *Two* couldn't live up to its inspiration, lasting just twenty-four episodes.

The mood of Washington-based dramas did not lighten in the 2000s. The supernaturally themed drama *Wolf Lake* was the story of a sullen cop named John Kanin, whose girlfriend Ruby had mysteriously disappeared. John tracked her to the picturesque little town of Wolf Lake, where nothing was quite as it seemed. The twist was that Ruby, her family, and nearly everyone else in town were werewolves. CBS pulled the show after five low-rated weeks. These episodes showed up on UPN the following spring, along with four previously unaired installments. The similarly unsuccessful *Glory Days*, which aired for two months in 2002, was something of a cross between *Twin Peaks* and *Murder, She Wrote*. It was the story of washed-up mystery novelist Mike Dolan, who had recently returned to his picturesque hometown of Glory Island, Washington. His sister, Sara, who ran the local newspaper, gave Mike a job, and he spent his

spare time helping Sheriff Rudy Dunlop solve mysterious murders and other strange crimes, of which little Glory Island seemed to have more than its share.

As mentioned, a number of Washington-based programs, from *Here Come the Brides* to *Twin Peaks* to *Wolf Lake*, have featured protagonists who were new in town. That theme was repeated on the thrillers *John Doe*, *The 4400*, and *Kyle XY*. The new wrinkle was that, unlike previous Washington newcomers, these protagonists had no idea where they had been. That was the case on 2002's *John Doe*, in which the title character awoke naked on Seattle's Horseshoe Island with no knowledge of who he was. He seemed to know just about everything else, however, possessing a superhuman intelligence that he soon put to good use. He made a killing on the stock market and befriended Frank, a Seattle cop, who found John's skills useful in solving crimes. In a cliffhanger season finale, John came close to discovering his true identity, but FOX left the show's few viewers in a lurch by failing to pick up *John Doe* for a second season.

A similarly themed sci-fi mystery series, *Kyle XY*, premiered in 2006 and lasted for three seasons. It was the story of a young man who was found wandering the streets of Seattle (naked, of course) with no knowledge of who he was or how he got there. He was taken in by Nicole Trager, a psychologist, and her husband Stephen, a software developer, who soon discovered that shy Kyle possessed superhuman physical abilities. Many of the early stories examined everyday human dramas through Kyle's wide eyes, while later shows focused on Kyle's search for his true identity which, as one might expect, led back to a series of shady experiments conducted by a covert organization.

The science fiction drama *The 4400*, which premiered in 2004, upped the ante of amnesiacs to 4,400. In the pilot episode, a huge glowing sphere quietly deposited the title bunch in the foothills of Mt. Rainier. Unlike John Doe and Kyle, they knew who they were (and were fully clothed, for a change), but they did not know how they had gotten there. Eventually, they discovered that they were all U. F. O. abductees who had disappeared, one by one, over the previous six decades. None of them had aged, and they did not remember their abductions. The series, which aired for three seasons, followed this group as they attempted to return to their lives, all the while searching for truth about their time away. Inevitably the abductees began developing superhuman powers and a secretive government organization called NTAC (the National Threat Assessment Command) was charged with controlling them.

Although amnesia was not involved, similar themes could be found in *Dark Angel*, a science-fiction series that premiered in 2000 and aired for two seasons. Set in 2019 in post-apocalyptic Seattle, it was the story of a young woman, Max Guevara. Max was a bicycle messenger for Jam Pony X-Press and, like so many of her Washington television peers, was also a genetically enhanced mutant with extraordinary powers. She had escaped from a mysterious government program, Project Manticore, and Max and was relentlessly pursued by an evil government agent named Michael Lydecker. Another science-fiction entry, *Level 9*, cast a secretive government organization in a positive light for a change. It was the story of Annie Price, a former F. B. I. agent who had formed the title team of supernerds. Based in Seattle, Annie and her colleagues used high-tech equipment and computer knowledge to combat all manner of cybercrime. The “geeks with guns” premise was unique, but it failed to attract an audience, lasting just three months of the 2000-2001 season (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 784).

Why should dramas greatly outnumber sitcoms among Washington's entries? Perhaps Seattle's reputation for long, dark winters and overcast skies lent a gloomy atmosphere that drama writers found intriguing, or perhaps these people were influenced by the melancholy nature of Seattle's much-hyped grunge music of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In her review of *Wolf Lake*, critic Cynthia Fuchs definitely saw the show's dark atmosphere as an extension of the regional culture. She wrote that "*Wolf Lake* is seriously disturbed and disturbing, conjuring up the visual fragmentation and guitar-driven raging for which its Pacific Northwest setting is, indeed, rather famous—you know, the home of serial killing, grunge rock, Starbucks" (Fuchs 2010c: 1). The nihilistic, melancholic musings of *Dark Angel*'s protagonist Max Guevara appeared to be torn directly from the Seattle grunge rock playbook. In one episode, she said:

They used to say that one nuclear bomb could ruin your whole day. That was sort of a joke before those terrorist bozos whacked us with an electromagnetic pulse from eighty miles up. You always hear people yapping here about how it was all different before the pulse, the land of milk and honey, blah blah blah blah, with plenty of food and jobs, things actually worked. I was too young to remember, so, whatever America really thought they had it dialed in, money hangin' out the butt. But it was all just a bunch of ones and zeroes in a computer someplace. So when that bomb went kablooeey and turned all those ones and zeroes into plain old zeroes, everyone's like no way! America's just another broke ex-super-power looking for a handout and wondering why" (Fuchs 2010d).

A more immediate explanation for Washington's dark television mood was the influence of *Twin Peaks* and *The X-Files*. A number of the later thrillers drew direct comparison to these two standard bearers. Fuchs wrote that "it's clear that *Wolf Lake* has visions of *Twin Peaks* . . . dancing in its head," adding that the lead character, John Kanin, had "moments where he sounds a lot like . . . much-missed Agent Dale Cooper" (Fuchs 2010b: 1). Critic Tobias Peterson observed that although "the titular character of *John Doe* may not work for the FBI, his story and

the rest of the show owe a lot to the marginalized-protagonist-on-a-quest-for-answers model made popular by *The X-Files*' Fox Mulder" (Peterson 2002: 1). As for the show that started it all, *Twin Peaks* cocreator David Lynch has suggested that the Washington setting was not incidental, but chosen for the mood created by the physical landscape of the Cascades. "Just sort of picture this kind of darkness," said Lynch, "and this wind going through the needles of the Douglas firs, and you start getting a little bit of a mood coming along" (Golden 1996: 320).

Still a third explanation for the dark tone of so many Washington entries is simple economics. Programs from the science fiction, supernatural, and thriller genres often generate an intensely loyal but rather narrow fan base, a fact exemplified by the mediocre ratings for such iconic programs as *The Twilight Zone*, *Star Trek*, and *Twin Peaks*. Even the paranormal/sci-fi juggernaut *The X-Files* never ranked higher than nineteenth in the Nielsen ratings during its long run. Increasingly, programs of this nature fill the same niche as shows with predominantly black casts. Both types of programs, though shunned by the major networks because of their often limited appeal, are embraced by struggling networks because they can guarantee a dedicated following. The television landscape of Washington provides a good example. Most of the state's conventional dramas appeared on one of the Big Three networks—*Under One Roof*, *Citizen Baines*, and *Traps* on CBS, *Cold Feet* on NBC, and *Grey's Anatomy* on ABC. Nearly all of the "thriller" entries, however, appeared elsewhere. FOX broadcast *Millennium*, *Dark Angel*, and *John Doe*. *Wolf Lake* started on CBS, but finished on UPN, which was also the home of *Sentinel* and *Level 9*. *Glory Days* aired on the WB network, *The 4400* on cable's USA network, and *Kyle XY* on cable's ABC Family, while *Two* was produced for syndication. Only one Washington-based drama from the thriller category, *Twin Peaks*, appeared on a Big Three network.

Because these thriller programs appeared on networks with lower ratings and, therefore, lower advertising revenues, they were forced to film on tighter budgets. Numerous ways exist to trim a program's production budget, of course, but beginning in the 1990s, one of the most popular was to head north. By 1996, numerous American film and television companies were shooting in Canada, taking advantage of both cheap labor and the weak Canadian dollar. That year, Hollywood "maquila" productions spent \$320 million in Canada, accounting for nearly sixty percent of the entire \$542 million Canadian film and television industry. The next year, the Canadian government introduced the Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit, which offered companies a tax credit of eleven percent of wages paid to Canadian employees of productions filmed in the country. By 1998, Hollywood maquila production in Canada had jumped to \$834 million, accounting for seventy percent of the Canadian film and video industry (McIntosh 2008: 1).

The X-Files was a relatively early arrival in Canada. Filming for the show's pilot was scheduled for March of 1993 and, according to series creator Chris Carter, he had originally intended to shoot in Los Angeles. Production was shifted to British Columbia, however, because the episode was set in the wilds of the Pacific Northwest, and Carter wanted to "go where the good forests are." Ultimately, the first several seasons of *The X-Files* were filmed almost exclusively in the Vancouver area, and Carter and his team were not alone. When *The X-Files* set up shop at the studios of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in Vancouver, twenty other American television programs already were shooting in the city. Fifty-one percent of all foreign productions in Canada are filmed in British Columbia, partly because of the city's proximity to Hollywood and, according to Carter, because Vancouver "has the advantage of being able to visually approximate almost any city in North America" (Lowry 1995: 17). Of course, the most

easily approximated area of the United States for a Vancouver production is the Pacific Northwest. As long as the Canadian film maquiladoras are cost-effective, it is likely that Washington will be well represented on the American television landscape, particularly in shows that feature gruesome murders, eerie lights in the night sky, and genetically enhanced humans running from shadowy government agencies.

IDAHO

Although it avoided the dubious distinction of being the only state not to serve as the setting for a primetime television program, Idaho's lone entry might well deserve an asterisk. *The Manhunter*, which aired during the 1974-1975 season, spent much of its run with the lead character out of the state. Set in the 1930s, it was the story of Dave Barrett, a farmer and former marine whose friends had been killed by bank robbers. He pursued the culprits, and other infamous gangsters, around the country, only occasionally returning to visit his family in Idaho.

WYOMING

The geographic message of Wyoming's television landscape is thoroughly unambiguous. Its three successful entries were gimmick-free, straightforward, nineteenth-century westerns where the motif of a strong, ruggedly independent man taming a wild land was fired right down the middle of the plate. *The Lawman* premiered in 1958, and was the story of Marshal Dan Troop and his deputy, Johnny McKay. In the second season, Lily Merrill was added for a bit of flavor, but *The Lawman* was as uncomplicated as a Western could get, with Brooks and Marsh noting that there were "no tricks or gimmicks . . . just simple stories of desperadoes brought to justice by the long, stern arm of the law" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 774). The show was mildly

successful, peaking in the fifteenth spot in the Nielsen ratings during its second season, and charting in the top thirty for the first three of its four seasons.

Wyoming's second entry, *Laramie*, arrived in 1959 and was similarly straightforward. Set in the 1870s, *Laramie* told about the young Sherman brothers, who had been running the family's struggling ranch since their father had been shot and killed by a land-grabber. *Laramie's* Sherman brothers were joined by Jonesy, an old family friend, and Jess, a drifter who the boys persuaded to help run the ranch. When the actor playing the younger Sherman brother left the series, he was replaced by Mike Williams, a young man who had been orphaned in an Indian raid. The Sherman Ranch raised cattle and served as a way station on the stagecoach line out of Laramie, which permitted more than a few outlaws and distressed travellers to pass through the series. The sheriff of Laramie eventually became a regular, as did Daisy Cooper, who arrived to serve as a housekeeper and stand-in mom for the boys. While never a hit, *Laramie* had a respectable run, ending after four seasons in 1963.

The sorts of characteristics that viewers expected of a 1960s television western hero were clearly indicated in the creative history of Wyoming's most successful series. By 1946, the classic 1902 Owen Wister novel, *The Virginian*, had been adapted for the big screen four times. The first, in 1914, was directed by D. W. Griffith, and the last two featured the likes of Gary Cooper and Joel McCrea in the lead roles. An attempt to bring the story to the small screen in the late 1950s, however, was a flop. Brooks and Marsh note that the initial pilot portrayed the title character as "a Western dandy replete with shiny hunting boots, skintight pants, lace cuffs, and a tiny pistol" (Brooks and Marsh 2001: 1,473). The series did not test well, and was not picked up. A second attempt, in 1962, was made without the preening and dandyish affectations, and this second *Virginian* became a classic. This time around the title character was gritty, brusque,

enigmatic, and nameless, and kept the peace on the Shiloh Ranch in the 1890s. This spread had a succession of owners, but the one constant was the *Virginian's* sidekick, Trampas, a rowdy young ranch hand. A literate, gimmick-free program, *The Virginian* was a part of the adult western movement that had also given rise to *Gunsmoke* and *Bonanza*. The ninety-minute program was Wyoming's longest-running entry, and a staple of NBC's Wednesday night line-up for nine years. It charted in the Nielsen top thirty during its first seven seasons, peaking in the tenth spot during its fifth year.

Just as *The Virginian* exemplified what made a western successful, Wyoming's final entry exemplified what could kill one. *The Monroes*, which was filmed on location in the Grand Teton National Park, told the story of six orphaned children struggling to make a living in the rugged 1870s. The parents of the title orphans, who ranged in age from six to eighteen, had drowned en route to their new ranch. The kids' chief ally was a renegade Indian named Dirty Jim, while their chief adversary was Major Mapoy, an evil English cattle baron who was trying to steal their land. Lacking a conventionally rugged, masculine lead, this Western never caught on, and was cancelled after running the 1966-1967 season.

UTAH

Utah has served as the backdrop for three television programs. Just one of them lasted more than a year, but the state does have the distinction of having all of its programs filmed on location. Television came to Utah, quite literally, with *Donny & Marie*, a squeaky-clean variety show featuring the title brother-and-sister duo and, at one point, twenty-six other members of the Osmond family. The Osmonds had been mainstays of the variety show circuit for years, and their

own show debuted from Hollywood in January 1976. It was a minor hit, checking in at twenty-sixth on the Nielsen charts during the 1975-1976 season, but the Osmonds were homesick, and in 1977 moved the show to their hometown of Orem, Utah. To accommodate production, the Osmonds built a \$2.5 million studio facility and the show actually became more lavish than it had been in California. It remained, however, an odd mixture of Hollywood schmaltz and wholesome family entertainment. The first Orem broadcast, for example, found room for both the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and bawdy comedian Paul Lynde. In the end, the show never drew huge audiences, and production ended in May of 1979. It remains, however, the defining television image for Utah, with the good-natured, toothy-grinned, teeny-bopping Osmonds leaving an impression distinctly different from the state's rough-and-tumble, cow-punching neighbors. And Orem has not been entirely shorn of its celebrity status, as the old *Donny & Marie* production facility now serves as a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center catering, in part, to Hollywood stars.

Utah returned to television for a pair of short-lived entries in the 1990s. The title of *The Boys of Twilight* was a double entendre (a clean one), referring both to the show's setting and the age of its two stars, Hollywood veterans Richard Farnsworth and Wilford Brimley. They played Cody McPherson and Bill Huntoon, a long-tenured sheriff and his chief deputy, in the quiet mountain town of Twilight. A contemporary cop show with Old West elements, the program's running theme was conflict between the town's long-time residents and jet-setting city slickers who were trying to turn Twilight into a playground for the wealthy. Ratings for the show were dismal, and CBS pulled the plug after four weeks in 1992. With age and wisdom having failed in Utah, ABC returned in 1995 with youth and beauty. *Extreme*, which ran for seven weeks in 1995, focused on Reese Wheeler, the leader of the courageous Steep Mountain Rescue Group of

Park City. This show was essentially a high-altitude version of *Baywatch*, with most of the episodes focusing on daring rescues and the romantic entanglements of the handsome young crew. *Extreme* did have one thing in common with *The Boys of Twilight*. The chief recurring villain on the show, as is often the case on contemporary westerns, was a conniving developer bent on destroying Utah's unspoiled beauty.

NEW MEXICO

Of the eleven programs representing New Mexico, six were set in the days of the Old West. Some offered twists on the familiar formula, but, in general, they stuck with the central theme of a righteous man standing up to injustice on a wild and harsh frontier. Of the state's five contemporary entries, four had a distinctly western flavor, while a fifth took advantage of the state's reputation for being a favorite destination for extraterrestrials.

The state's first entry was also its most successful, and by a wide margin. Entering the television landscape with a tidal wave of westerns in 1958, *The Rifleman* was the story of homesteader and crack shot Lucas McCann, a widower who lived with his son on a struggling ranch near North Fork in the 1880s. North Fork was plagued, as might be expected, by outlaws, and the town marshal often called on Lucas and his modified Winchester rifle to help out when things got dicey. *The Rifleman* entered the television schedule like a shot, ranking fourth on the Nielsen charts in its first year. It maintained respectable numbers for three more seasons, but gradually sank down the charts and into oblivion after its sixth and final year, the 1962-1963 season. It remains the longest-running show set in New Mexico, and the only one to break into the Nielsen top thirty.

Four more New Mexico-based traditional Westerns appeared during *The Rifleman*'s run, but none were especially successful. *Black Saddle* and *Law of the Plainsman* premiered in 1959, but both were off the air in 1960. Set in the territorial days shortly after the Civil War, *Black Saddle* concerned a former gunfighter who was trying to stay on the right side of the law. To that end, he became an attorney, slung law books over his saddle, and roamed about the territory helping those in need. *Law of the Plainsman*, a *Rifleman* spin-off, told the story of Deputy U. S. Marshal Sam Buckhart. The twist here was that Sam was an Apache who had gone off to Harvard, where he acquired a "tremendous respect for the white man's laws and the U. S. Constitution" (Brooks and Marsh, 2007: 773). Returning to the wild territory of his birth, Sam attempted to balance his desire to help his fellow Native Americans with his duties as a lawman.

The Tall Man, which debuted in 1960 and aired for two years, was a fictionalized account of two very real western characters. Sheriff Pat Garrett, whose fairness and integrity had earned him the title nickname, was struggling to maintain law and order in 1870s New Mexico. His best friend was a troubled young gunfighter named William H. "Billy the Kid" Bonney. Although their respective career paths occasionally put them at odds, they remained close friends, and Billy often helped out Pat when he knew it was the right thing to do. That show was followed in 1961 by a paint-by-numbers western called *Gunslinger*, which aired for seven months. Also set in 1870s, it chronicled the efforts of the title hero to maintain the peace from his base in Fort Scott. The last New Mexico entry with an Old West flavor was the teenage western *The Cowboys*, another show set in the 1870s. Airing for just under six months in 1974, it chronicled the efforts of seven young men to help a widow run a ranch.

New Mexico's first program with a contemporary setting was also its only sitcom. *Guestward Ho!*, which premiered in 1960 and lasted for one year, was a fish-out-water story

with a western flavor. It seemed that the Hooten family, fed up with life in New York City, decided to buy the title New Mexico dude ranch, sight unseen. The ranch turned out to be, as might be expected, a complete wreck, and the show chronicled their attempts at rehabilitation and adjustment to life out west. A memorable supporting character from the series was Hawkeye, who owned the only store near the ranch. A Native American, Hawkeye was considerably less menacing and much less earnest than most of his television counterparts. An indigenous Ernie Bilko, Hawkeye read the *Wall Street Journal*, sold “authentic” Indian knickknacks that had been made in Japan, and was willing to do almost anything to make a quick buck. Still, unlike many of television’s other “civilized” Indians, Hawkeye was more than a little dubious about the white man’s presence in New Mexico. In the words of one critic, he was “bound and determined to find a way to return the country to its rightful owners, *his* people” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 568).

Another contemporary entry, *Empire*, aired for two seasons beginning in 1962. Its main character was Jim Redigo, foreman of the half-million acre Garret Ranch, which was a sort of updated version of *Bonanza*’s Ponderosa. In addition to managing the ranch’s vast livestock, crop, mining, oil, and timber interests, Redigo seemingly served as the area’s lone representative for truth and justice, making him a kindred spirit to many other highly principled loners on television’s westerns. On one episode, for example, Redigo stood up for a ranch hand who had been falsely accused of murder. When the jury returned an unpopular verdict of not guilty, businessmen cancelled contracts with the Garret Ranch, and all of the other employees threatened to walk out rather than work with a murderer. Redigo stuck to his guns, however, and offered his resignation, saying that “integrity and principles fall in the category of luxury items. If you can’t afford them yourself, don’t expect anyone else to foot the bill” (Lichter, Lichter, and

Rothman 1991: 119). Eventually the supposed murderer was exonerated, life returned to normal, and Redigo held no grudges against those who had challenged him. Such actions suggested that, unlike the contemporary Colorado of *Dynasty* or Texas of *Dallas*, the values of the Old West still mattered in New Mexico.

Empire was followed in 1971 by *The Man and the City*. Filmed on location in Albuquerque, the show aired for a season and a half, and was New Mexico's first entry with a modern urban setting. It was also one of the first television dramas to feature a Mexican-American lead actor and protagonist, with Anthony Quinn playing Mayor Thomas Jefferson Alcala. In the words of one critic, "Anthony Quinn played Alcala as a kind of Zorba the Hispanic, exuding charismatic vitality from every pore as he rushed around governing and empathizing" (Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman 1991: 239). Much like *Empire*, this political drama infused Old West ideals into its contemporary setting, featuring a character whose sense of moral righteousness was not far removed from that of *Empire*'s Jim Redigo or, for that matter, *Gunsmoke*'s Matt Dillon or *Bonanza*'s Ben Cartwright. This meant that Mayor Alcala often found himself fighting lonely crusades. On one 1971 episode, a police officer was shot and killed in a predominantly Hispanic section of the city. Subsequently, Alcala discovered that the police were holding suspects, most of them Hispanic and without any demonstrable connection to the shooting, without charge or the aid of legal counsel. Our hero immediately ordered their release, angrily reprimanding his police chief, Wheeler, with the line, "You can't suspend the law In my city we go by the rules." Chief Wheeler then ordered a curfew for the barrio, prompting the following exchange:

ALCALA: Doesn't the curfew restrain freedom?

WHEELER: It's good for the community.

ALCALA: Do they willingly give up the freedom and really have a choice?

WHEELER: The curfew is inconvenient but necessary.

ALCALA: Isn't law and order without justice meaningless? (Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman 1991: 264).

In the end, Alcala himself helped track down the cop killer. As had been the case with Jim Redigo a decade earlier, Tom Alcala was vindicated, justice was served, and New Mexico's Old West virtues survived.

Also filmed on location in Albuquerque, the 1974 action series *Nakia* was a modern-day version of *Law of the Plainsman*. This show focused on Nakia Parker, who was trying to reconcile his responsibilities as a deputy sheriff with loyalty to his fellow Native Americans. That dilemma often arose, of course, as he dealt with scheming white politicians and frequent violence on the reservation. As was the case with *Law of the Plainsman*, the show failed to catch on with viewers. It was cancelled after three months, and marked, at least for now, the end of the New Mexico western.

Nearly a quarter century passed before New Mexico reemerged on American television. The new entry, *Roswell*, which debuted in 1999, was quite different in tone from the state's western-flavored entries. It mixed the science fiction and government-conspiracy elements of *The X-Files* with the teen soap of shows such as *Dawson's Creek*. The protagonists were three teenage aliens—Max, Isabel, and Michael—who had been abandoned on earth in 1959. They had remained in incubation for three decades, emerging as seemingly normal, six-year-old earthlings in 1989. Mixed in with the usual youth-soap elements of identity crises, love triangles, and familial conflicts were the teens' search for truth. They tried to discover why they had been left

on earth, all the time dodging evil alien bounty hunters and shadowy government figures bent on tracking them down.

Roswell appeared on the lowly WB network before moving to the even lowlier UPN, so it never garnered big ratings. It did, nevertheless, remain on the air for three seasons, the first New Mexico-based program to do so since *The Rifleman*. Roswell, an actual city of about 40,000 in the southeastern part of the state, was made famous by a series of UFO sightings in 1947. These sightings, and the supposed crash of an alien craft, have made the area a favorite with UFO enthusiasts.

ARIZONA

Eleven of Arizona's twenty-three entries were set in the Old West, and the western genre dominated the state's television landscape during the 1950s and 1960s. Another two programs were contemporary spins on the western, including the state's first entry, *Sky King*, which debuted in 1953 and aired for one season. The title hero, who apparently had no other name, was a rancher who opted for a twin-engine Cessna instead of a horse to have adventures, solve crises, and fight the bad guys. Arizona's second modern-day Western was the syndicated program *The Sheriff of Cochise*, which produced 156 episodes from 1956 to 1960. This program bore a strong resemblance to its syndicated contemporary, *Highway Patrol*, a straightforward mixture of car chases and brawls with criminals. The hero was blunt tough guy Frank Morgan, sheriff of the title (and actual) county in southeastern Arizona. Not enough crime existed in and around Bisbee, however, so in 1958 Morgan became a U. S. Marshal, allowing him to chase criminals all over the state.

The first of Arizona's Old West entries was *The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin*, which premiered in 1954. The setting was the real Fort Apache, Arizona, near the fictional town of Mesa Grande. Its two primary characters were a young orphan named Rusty, whose parents had been killed in an Indian raid, and his faithful German shepherd. The two had been taken in by soldiers at the fort, and their adventures revolved around attempts to maintain law and order in the wild territory. The title pooch was first seen on film in the 1920s, and was heard on occasional radio serials from 1930 to 1955. The television version ran five seasons and was the first Arizona program to break into the Nielsen top thirty, checking in at the twenty-third position during its first year on the air. Unlike *Lassie*, its more peaceful counterpart, *Rin Tin Tin* was full of violent action, including gun battles with outlaws, raging rivers, and ravenous wolves. The most common threat, and the most perilous, were the Apaches, generally depicted here as primitive, bloodthirsty savages.

Broken Arrow, which premiered in 1956 and aired for two seasons, took a markedly different view of Native Americans. The protagonist was army officer Tom Jeffords, who was charged with keeping the peace in the Apache country of Arizona, and who had adopted the "novel approach of making friends with the Indians instead of shooting at them" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 186). Jeffords was soon welcomed into the native community, and became blood brother to the Apache Chief, Cochise. They then worked together to combat renegade Indians and treacherous white men alike.

Seventy-eight episodes of the syndicated series *26 Men* were produced from 1957 to 1959. Although it was a fairly standard action series, the show possessed some measure of authenticity. It was filmed on location in Arizona, and residents of Tucson and Phoenix appeared in small roles. It was also inspired by real events, chronicling the adventures of a twenty-six man

militia that had been recruited in 1901 to establish law and order on the frontier. Years later, one of the members of this force recounted that “the reason there was only twenty-six of us was because the Territory couldn’t afford no more” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,438). Another set of heroes tried to tame the Wild West in *Tombstone Territory*, which aired intermittently from 1957 to 1959. They were lawman Clay Hollister and crusading newspaper editor Harris Claiborne, and the show was set, as its title suggests, in Tombstone, “the town too tough to die” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,402).

Even after *Tombstone Territory* left the air, the town hung around. Having spent the previous four seasons in Dodge City, Kansas, the title lawman of *The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp* moved to Arizona at the start of the 1959-1960 season. Once in Tombstone, Earp encountered Old Man Clanton, a local strongman who had built an empire bilking money from townspeople and running guns across the Mexican border. Clanton had the town sheriff in his pocket, and a gang of gun-slinging thugs to enforce his will. Earp took on the whole gang. Adding a feminine touch was Nellie Cashman, who, as was apparently required in television westerns, operated the local saloon, the Birdcage. *Wyatt Earp* aired for two seasons after its move to Arizona, with the final five episodes leading up to the famous gun battle at the O. K. Corral.

Like its counterpart, *Gunsmoke*, *Wyatt Earp* signaled a shift in the Western genre toward more complex characters and themes, and, theoretically at least, a more realistic depiction of the West. That shift was certainly evident in Arizona’s next four entries. *Johnny Ringo*, which aired during the 1959-1960 season, was set in Velardi, and was based, albeit very loosely, on an actual outlaw-turned-lawman. *The Deputy* was set in Silver City during the 1880s, with the title character being a young shopkeeper named Clay McCord. Clay was a crack shot, but he

abhorred violence, and avoided using gunplay whenever possible. He was, nevertheless, often called to service, as the town's aging U. S. Marshal, Herk Lamson, had trouble upholding the law on his own. *The Deputy* premiered in 1959 and aired for two seasons, helped along by the star power of Henry Fonda, who served as narrator, and who occasionally appeared as Chief Marshal Simon Fry. Common themes included the conflict between the pacifist Clay and the more aggressive Fry, who believed that violence was an unfortunate necessity in the fight for order. *The Deputy* also highlighted conflicts between the town's younger and older generations, who had different perspectives on Silver City's future development.

The two Arizona Westerns that appeared in 1967 were similarly complex. Based on a Louis L'Amour story and the 1953 John Wayne movie of the same name, *Hondo*, which aired for four months, was the story of Hondo Lane, a former Confederate captain turned cavalry officer. He served at Fort Lowell in the 1870s. While all the usual western elements were there—corrupt land barons, outlaws, and treacherous Indians—Hondo was not the typical strong-armed and straight-laced western hero. Having witnessed the death of his Apache bride in an army massacre, Hondo had become a bitter loner, joining the cavalry with the aim of preventing further violence. *The High Chaparral*, which aired for four seasons, was set on the title ranch in 1870s Arizona. The spread was owned and operated by the Cannon brothers, who were a study in contrasts. John, the older, was stolid, industrious, and ambitious, determined to carve an empire out the wild landscape. His brother Buck was an easygoing hell-raiser, who could “outdrink, outshoot, outfight, and when properly motivated outwork any man alive” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 610). Threats came from natural disasters, outlaws, cattle rustlers, and Native Americans, but *High Chaparral* was not a typical shoot-'em-up Western. Like *Bonanza*, it was what some critics called a “saddle soap,” focusing as much on interpersonal relationships as it

did on adventure. What made *The High Chaparral* even more distinctive is its handling of ethnic issues. Although it was set in what one critic called “Indian-infested” Arizona (John Cannon’s first wife was, in fact, killed by Apaches in the pilot episode), *High Chaparral* generally adopted a sympathetic view of Native Americans (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 610). It was also one of the first television Westerns to feature Hispanic characters in significant, recurring roles. John’s second wife was Victoria Montoya, daughter and heiress of cattle baron Don Sebastian Montoya, and the relationship between the two families was used as a vehicle for examining cultural differences and conflicts between Americans and Mexicans.

Television’s fascination with the traditional western began to wane considerably in the 1970s, and that is reflected in Arizona’s entries. Just two Westerns followed *The High Chaparral*, both featuring James Garner, and neither especially successful. The nature of Garner’s characters in these series, and their poor performance, suggests much about what viewers look for in a western television hero. The title of 1971’s *Nichols* referred to both its setting—fictional Nichols, Arizona, in 1914—and its lead character, who was never given a first name. Having retired after eighteen years in the Army, Nichols returned to the small town that had been founded by his family. Nichols (the town) was in the grip of Ma Ketcham, head of a formidable and greedy clan, and she soon had Nichols (the man) in her grip as well. She coerced him into serving as the town sheriff so that she could keep him in view. That he was likely to be shot dead in the process was an added bonus, and in the season finale Nichols was, indeed, gunned down. Nichols had not been a conventional western hero. He abhorred violence, refused to carry a gun, and spent most of his time cooking up various money-making schemes. After his untimely demise, an identical twin brother (also played by Garner) rode into town to avenge the death. This represented a last-ditch effort to salvage the show. “By replacing the avaricious

Nichols with his stronger, more traditionally heroic twin brother,” wrote Brooks and Marsh, “it was felt that next season’s program would be more successful” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 984). Whether or not it would have worked will never be known, as NBC chose not to renew the show.

A decade later, James Garner returned in Arizona’s final Western to date, *Bret Maverick*. Set in the 1880s in the town of Sweetwater, this program was an update of *Maverick*, the popular satirical western that ran from 1957 to 1962. In the earlier version, Garner’s Bret Maverick had been a breezy, wisecracking cardsharp who roamed the frontier looking for poker games and getting into scrapes in rough little western towns with names like Apocalypse and Oblivion. In the 1981 version, both the lead character and the setting were more polished. Bret had now settled down on his own ranch, and was part owner of a saloon. The town was working to “shed its untamed rural western image” and Bret Maverick had become a “solid citizen” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 181). Perhaps he was a little too solid. Viewers failed to warm to this new, more reputable Maverick, and the show was cancelled after one season. If these two failed Garner entries are any indication, viewers want their western heroes to be respectable, unlike *Nichols*, but not too respectable, like the new *Bret Maverick*.

Arizona’s first sitcom was an attempt to put old wine in new bottles. In the fall of 1971, five years after *The Dick Van Dyke Show* left the air, Rob and Laura Petry experienced something of a reunion on CBS’s Saturday night line-up. *The New Dick Van Dyke Show* shared the 9:00 Eastern hour with *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and followed a blueprint remarkably similar to Mary’s in Minneapolis. Filmed on location in Carefree, Arizona, Van Dyke’s character was Dick Preston, host of a local talk show on a Phoenix television station, and the action chronicled both station and home life. Despite its plum time slot, wedged among *All in the Family*, *Funny Face*, and *Mary Tyler Moore* (all top ten shows), Van Dyke’s program garnered a

tepid reception, placing eighteenth. The show was moved to Sunday nights for its second season opposite NBC's popular rotating selection of *Columbo*, *McCloud*, and *McMillan and Wife*. Its ratings plummeted and so the setting of the show (and its production) limped west to Hollywood where it remained on the air for one more year.

Arizona's second sitcom was far more successful. Based on the 1974 film *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, television's *Alice* debuted in 1976, and placed a respectable thirtieth in the Nielsen ratings. It rose to eighth place during its second season and continued to thrive for the next four years, peaking in the fourth position during the 1979-1980 season. The title character was Alice Hyatt, a widowed mother who left her native New Jersey to pursue a singing career in Hollywood. Fate intervened, however, when her Buick broke down in Phoenix. Alice and her twelve-year-old son, Tommy, got an apartment and took a temporary job at Mel's Diner. Although the show did occasionally tackle serious, contemporary issues such as sexuality and substance abuse, the people who populated the Phoenix of *Alice* were every bit as traditional and down-to-earth as the characters seen on any western. Alice's coworkers included Vera, a shy, naïve, and somewhat slow-witted waitress, and Flo, a salty and opinionated, but ultimately warmhearted Texan whose catchphrase was "kiss my grits" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 31). The diner was owned by Mel Sharples who, despite a crotchety attitude, did a booming business largely because he made a spectacular pot of chili.

The premise of *Alice*—a single woman reinventing her life in a new city—invites comparison to *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and, consequently, comparison of Alice Hyatt's Phoenix to Mary Richards's Minneapolis. With its greasy-spoon atmosphere, Alice's Phoenix certainly is not as urbane as Mary Richards's Minneapolis. More important, whereas Mary went to Minneapolis by choice, making it the city of opportunity, Alice wound up in Phoenix by

accident, making it the city of inopportune circumstance. Nevertheless, *Alice* was not really a disparaging portrait of the local inhabitants. Mel's Diner was, in the glowing words of one critic, a place where "love, comfort, down-to-earth wisdom, and good humor are always on the menu," and Phoenix surely cannot be held in too-low regard if someone whose car breaks down there decides to stick around for nine years (West 2005: 73). The fresh start that Phoenix provided *Alice* was evident in the show's opening theme song, "There's a New Girl in Town," which was every bit as buoyantly optimistic as *Mary Tyler Moore's* "Love is All Around," containing the lines:

There's a new girl in town 'cause I'm feelin' good. Get a smile, get a song, for the neighborhood. There's a new girl in town on her own two feet, and this girl's here to say, "with some luck and love, life's gonna be so sweet!" (Warner Home Video, 2006).

Alice ended its nine-year run in 1985, one of the most durable sitcoms in television history. It was also Arizona's longest-running entry by a wide margin, and something of a geographic anomaly. In the two decades following the departure of *Alice*, just six Arizona-based programs found their way to television. This is a surprisingly low number given the state's proximity to the television production center of Los Angeles and the ease of recreating an Arizona setting in southern California. The lack of programming is even more surprising in light of the impressive population growth of the state, nearly 400% from 1960 to 2000. It seems unlikely that so many Americans would have moved to the state if they didn't find it at least a little bit interesting.

Still, Arizona's post-*Alice* television landscape remained relatively sparse. Only two such programs made their debuts in the 1980s. *Coming of Age* was the story of a sixty-year-old

commercial pilot named Dick Hale, who had been forced into early retirement by his airline. He moved to a retirement community called the Dunes, and while his wife Ginny exuded an Alice Hyatt-like enthusiasm for her new home, grouchy Dick detested the place. He spent most of his time grousing about retirement, the Arizona climate, and his fellow residents. Although the show was given three different chances from March 1988 to July 1989, none of those runs lasted more than a month. Arizona's other 1980s comedy, *Hey Dude*, was a bright sitcom about the young staff of a dude ranch. Filmed in Tucson, the program premiered in 1989 on the youth-oriented Nickelodeon cable network. It lasted just two years, but that was good enough to make it the longest-running, Arizona-based program to appear between 1985 and 2005. That the state's only successful program for two decades was a safe throwback to the western genre suggests that television producers and audiences are perhaps not yet sure what to make of contemporary Arizona.

The possibility also exists that Americans today do know what to make of Arizona, and that what they make of it is not very positive. On the first episode of the California-based sitcom *Arrested Development*, the main character, Michael Bluth, who was the only smart, responsible adult member of an otherwise slothful and dim-witted upper-class family, threatened to leave them and take a job in Phoenix. Upon his exit, he told his family, "I'll see you when the first parent dies," to which his mother, Lucille, responded, "Well, I'd rather be dead in California than alive in Arizona" (20th Century Fox: 2004).

Given Arizona's recent television landscape, Lucille Bluth might not be alone in her convictions. The state has had its fair share of image problems. In 1986, Arizona Governor Evan Mecham chose to ignore the newly minted federal holiday memorializing Dr. Martin Luther King. In 1990, Arizona voters narrowly sustained that position in a referendum, precipitating an

intense backlash. Organizations refused to hold conventions in Phoenix, top entertainment acts vowed not to perform in the state, and the National Football League moved Super Bowl XXVII, scheduled to be played in Tempe, to Pasadena, California. “For years Arizona has suffered from an image of being a center of right-wing extremism and fast-buck operators,” wrote Robert Reinhold of the *New York Times*. “Once again Arizona has been plunged into political and racial turmoil, its leaders forced to protest that the state is not as narrow-minded and backward as it might seem to some outsiders” (Reinhold 1990: 1).

Twenty years later, Arizona was back in an unwanted spotlight. When President Barack Obama spoke at the Phoenix Convention Center, he was greeted by a dozen armed protestors, including one who gave interviews to the press with an AR-15 assault rifle strapped to his back. It was a publicity stunt carried out by progun activists, intended to highlight the state’s very permissive gun laws, but the brazen display stunned many across the nation. “It is hard to know what is more shocking,” wrote the *New York Times*, “the sight of a dozen Americans showing up to flaunt guns outside the venue for President Obama’s speech in Phoenix on Monday, or the fact that the swaggering display was completely legal” (Wong 2009: 1). Arizona’s image took another hit the following spring when the state legislature passed Senate Bill 1070, creating the most far-reaching immigration control measures in the country. *Saturday Night Live* said of Arizona, “It’s a dry fascism;” TV humorist Jon Stewart referred to the state as “the meth lab of democracy;” and a parody of an Arizona tourism commercial by Chicago’s Second City comedy troupe became an internet classic. The skit featured a Latino man gushing about the wonders of Arizona. That is, until he heard police sirens in the background, after which he fled the scene. The tag line of the video was “Arizona. Come for the barren desert wasteland, stay for the hospitality” (Rose 2010: 1).

Whether or not Arizona's image problems have had an impact on the state's television geography is anyone's guess, but it is notable that, following the state's referendum upholding the Martin Luther King Day boycott, no new Arizona-based programs debuted for more than a decade. And when Arizona did return in the 2000s, it did so with a string of programs that cast the state in a less-than-positive light. That was especially true of *Manhattan, AZ*, which aired for two months in the summer of 2000. It was the story of Daniel Henderson, a former Los Angeles vice cop who had left the force after his wife, a Greenpeace activist, died while attempting to rescue a dolphin from Japanese fishermen. The off-kilter tone of the show was set at her funeral when, in place of a casket, several cases of recalled tuna were lowered into a grave. Heartbroken, Daniel and his twelve-year-old son, Atticus Finch Henderson, relocated to Manhattan, Arizona, where Daniel took a job as sheriff.

Manhattan was named for, and essentially owned by, Mayor Jake Manhattan, an aging former television star who seemed oblivious to the fact that nobody remembered him. Jake had conned Daniel into the move with promises of a luxury home, a world-class golf course, and Arizona's largest man-made lake. It turned out, however, that Manhattan was a hot, filthy, barren little town, where the sheriff's office and civic center were located in an old gas station. Buzzards circled overhead. There was no lake, no golf course, and Daniel's luxury home turned out to be a pile of lumber. Daniel made the best of it, though, parking a Winnebago next to the lumber pile and starting a new life among the town's bizarre residents. His neighbors, the Gundersons, were an aging couple who lived in a bomb shelter stocked with hand grenades and assault rifles. The Gundersons wiled away the empty hours having sex atop their Humvee near Area 61, a secret air force base where government scientists conducted shadowy experiments.

Daniel's first case involved finding out who was responsible for secretly removing the right rear legs of all the town's pets. By comparison, Mel's Diner seemed downright genteel.

The wave of reality programs that hit television in the 2000s rippled through Arizona, and while these shows did cast Arizona in a much more urbane light, they did not do much for Arizona's self-image. One was the relatively benign, if somewhat materialistic, *House Wars*. It featured four families rushing to finish the interiors of newly constructed Phoenix houses, with the winners getting to keep the home. The show ran in the fall of 2003, and was essentially an eight-week commercial for Home Depot, the hardware chain that sponsored the programs and supplied the contestants' building materials. Another reality entry, the documentary series *State V.*, aired for five weeks in 2002. If some Arizonans were concerned about Phoenix's violent reputation, they were evidently not members of the state's Supreme Court, which granted special permission for ABC's cameras to follow court cases in Maricopa County. Each of these involved murder, and episodes included preparations by prosecuting and defense attorneys, conferences with the accused, the trial itself, and even jury deliberations.

If a painstaking examination of homicides did not paint an adequately unappealing portrait of contemporary Arizona, then *Tuesday Night Book Club*, a Scottsdale-based reality series that premiered in 2006, certainly picked up the slack. This show followed seven women who met weekly, even though none of them, according to Brooks and Marsh, "seemed particularly interested in reading" (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,429). The women—all white, wealthy, and dissatisfied with their lives—were each assigned a title. There was the "trophy wife," the "conflicted wife," the "doctor's wife," the "divorced mom," the "loyal wife," the "newlywed," and the "party girl." They discussed family problems, career aspirations, self-esteem, money, cosmetic surgery, and most of all sex. The doctor's wife wished her husband was

more intimate, the trophy wife's husband wanted to engage in wife swapping, and the conflicted wife was having an affair. Critics were horrified, referring to the show as "tawdry" and "soft porn," and, to their credit, viewers were uninterested (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 1,429). The show was cancelled after just two episodes.

Arizonans unsettled by such unsavory portrayals of their state can take some solace in the fact that the state's two most successful entries of the 2000s were also the most sympathetic. *Greeting from Tucson* and *Medium* were neither totally positive portrayals, but both shows avoided the crude rustic stereotypes of *Manhattan, AZ* and the lusty nouveau-riche shallowness of *Tuesday Night Book Club*. *Greetings from Tucson*, which aired during the 2002-2003 season, is notable for being the only contemporary Arizona program to prominently feature Latino characters. Because the show appeared on the WB network, *Greetings from Tucson* did not attract a large number of viewers, but it was the first Arizona-based network sitcom since *Alice* to survive a full season.

The protagonist was fifteen-year-old David Tiant, whose family had moved from an impoverished section of Tucson to an upscale neighborhood following his father's promotion at the copper mine where he worked. The show played on familiar sitcom contrasts. Dad Joaquin was Mexican-American and conservative, while mom Elizabeth was Irish-American and liberal. Joaquin was straight-laced, responsible, and middle class, while his brother, Ernesto, who lived with family, was a freewheeling dog catcher who had been divorced three times. David's cheerful sincerity contrasted with his sister Maria's self-absorbed petulance. Other characters included David's affectionate grandmother, Magdalena, and the pretty girl next door, Sarah.

Greetings from Tucson injected ethnic themes along with the standard chatter, including a few playful jabs at Mexican-American stereotypes. In one episode, for example, David quipped, “You know, of all the parts of my Mexican heritage that I’m most proud of, taking the extended family to the mall in one car to buy one item is probably my favorite.” In another episode, the Tiants’ neighbor saw Joaquin and Ernesto working in the yard and assumed they were day laborers. She was horrified upon realizing her mistake, and spent the rest of the day apologizing. *Greeting from Tucson* also featured more nuanced examinations of cultural tensions experienced by an upwardly mobile Latino family. Self-conscious Maria, for example, told her friends that she was not Mexican, but Spanish. When Joaquin agreed to buy David a new suit, David selected a shiny sharkskin model, while his father argued for something brown and conservative. For David, the brown suit represented assimilation, while, for Joaquin, the flashy one represented the worst stereotypes of working-class Mexican-Americans.

Greetings from Tucson was a pretty straightforward family sitcom, but for critic Tracy McLoone, its most extraordinary feature was how ordinary it was:

Greetings from Tucson is standard family-based sitcom fare, with generally low-budget production values, an overactive laugh track, and passable humor. But if it’s not going to win any awards for breaking generic sitcom molds, it does present non-whiteness as a fact of life, rather than a remarkable event. The only difference between this new series and, say, *Growing Pains*, is that the family is Mexican American It can’t decide if it’s comedy because of being Mexican American or in spite of Mexican American—and that’s one thing working in its favor. We’ve come a long way from laughing at Cuban Ricky Ricardo for being hyper-Hispanic. Now we have a comedy both for and about ethnicity, and about race without too much stereotyping David isn’t identified as stereotypical Mexican American, or as stereotypical Anglo American David refuses categorization; he can’t be neatly fit into one niche or the other, expanding what it means to be “Mexican American”—or “American” for that matter (McLoone 2002: 1).

Medium, which premiered in 2005, has sent similarly mixed signals about life in contemporary Arizona. The title referred to Allison DuBois, who used her abilities as a clairvoyant to help solve murders and other crimes in Phoenix. While the focus of the show was on these crimes, the show was also, in part, a family drama, showing day-to-day life in the DuBois household. Allison was a calm, intelligent law student and loving mother of three. Joe, an aerospace engineer, was her “calm, loving, and very supportive husband” (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 879). Like the Tians of Tucson, the DuBois family represented a mode of existence conspicuously absent in previous Arizona entries—a stable family living a middle-class lifestyle in a contemporary city. There were, however, the dreams.

As the show began, Allison wasn’t aware of her psychic abilities, but she was having incredibly vivid dreams, all of which involved murder or some other horrific activity. Sometimes she dreamt of the victims, other times of the perpetrators, as in one incident where a killer was caressing her hands. “Your skin is so white,” he said. “If I took my blade and ran it from the bottom of your neck to the top of your crotch, the way the blood would slowly seep out and cover your white skin would be quite a sight” (Fuchs 2005a: 1). Understandably disturbed, Allison began to wonder if the events and people in her dreams might be real. When Joe began sending descriptions to law enforcement agencies, he found that this was indeed the case. And so the show rolled on, with Allison helping solve a string of crimes. Cases included a six-year-old boy’s molestation and murder, a boy who claimed an alternate personality had made him kill his parents, a woman who committed suicide because her husband was abusing their infant daughter, and a serial killer who murdered six women and then slept with their dead bodies.

Such gruesome events contrasted with Allison's generally happy family life, making it difficult to say whether *Medium* should be considered a positive or a negative portrayal of Phoenix. In either case, the series represented a step in the right direction, at least in terms of success. It was the first contemporary Arizona drama to debut since *The Sheriff of Cochise* in 1956, ending a drought of nearly half a century. *Medium* continued to air through 2010, making it the longest-lasting Arizona program of any genre since *Alice*. The popularity of *Medium* may represent a willingness of television producers and viewers to reexamine their perceptions of the state, but whether or not life in Arizona is preferable to death in California remains to be seen.

CONCLUSION

The most thoroughly “western” of the western states has been Wyoming. All of that state's entries have been conventional westerns—shows that were, in fact, about as conventional as a western could get. The moderately successful *Laramie* was set on a struggling frontier ranch plagued by outlaws, Indian raids, and corrupt land barons. *The Virginian*, one of television's most popular westerns, was the story of a gritty, brusque, enigmatic, and nameless gunfighter fighting to maintain law and order on another frontier ranch. Although several of Montana's programs have had contemporary settings, they've been mostly rural, and, in general, have followed the familiar western themes of youthful vigor, optimism, and personal renewal played out on a wild, lawless, and uncivilized frontier. New Mexico was home to a number of conventional westerns, most notably *The Rifleman*, and that show's theme of a righteous man struggling to maintain law and order on a wild frontier continued in all of the state's other period pieces. New Mexico is unique for being the setting for a number of shows that provided relatively sympathetic portrayals of Native Americans, for hosting some of the first shows to

prominently feature Hispanic characters, and for serving as the backdrop of several programs—*Guestward Ho!*, *Empire*, *The Man and the City*, and *Nakia*—that translated western themes into contemporary settings. The only New Mexico series not laden with traditional western themes was *Roswell*, a contemporary teen soap opera and thriller that played on the title city's reputation as a favorite destination of UFOs.

While the television landscapes of several western states have been dominated by the western genre, a few have been almost devoid of it. Several Oregon entries, for example, have featured rugged protagonists in a beautiful but harsh wilderness, but none of these programs could be considered westerns. A pair of short-lived programs chronicled life on the grim streets of Portland, but the life of friendly, generally normal families has been the most common topic of the state's entries. With the exception of the family-oriented cable reality series *Little People, Big World*, the most common link among Oregon's television programs has been a short lifespan. Utah's television landscape has been similarly sparse, and, like Oregon, it has not been the setting of conventional westerns. Two short-lived Utah entries featured spectacular landscapes, but the most memorable state program was Orem's squeaky-clean family variety show, *Donny & Marie*, which placed Utah in a television no-man's land between the region's rugged small towns and its gritty and/or urbane cities.

Washington's only period piece was the comedy/adventure series *Here Come the Brides*, but that program could hardly be considered a western. Like *Brides*, a number of Washington's programs have employed the familiar western theme of a newcomer rediscovering himself or herself in the West, but most of the traditional themes stop there. The majority of Washington's programs have been set in Seattle, and these frequently feature that city's transition from a working-class, blue-collar city to a stylish, white-collar metropolis. The clash between the

sophisticated and the earthy was the central theme of the city's most popular series, *Frasier*, and if the city's most recent hit, the medical soap opera *Grey's Anatomy*, is any indication, the transition is near completion. Seattle's blue-collar past has faded from view, and it has become a city of handsome, successful, young, ethnically diverse, and hedonistic young professionals. Other common traits of Washington's recent programs, both those set in Seattle and in the state's small towns, have been melancholy moods, shadowy conspiracies, and often violent and supernatural themes. The plot devices of these programs have varied from werewolves to serial killers and from aliens to heroes with supernatural abilities, but all of them owe a stylistic debt to the groundbreaking mystery drama *Twin Peaks*, the story of a seemingly normal mountain town that turned out to be, in the words of Jon Lewis and Penny Stempel (1996), an "eddy pool of sadism, Satanism, pornography and drugs."

The television landscapes of Arizona, Colorado, and Nevada have had a foot in both the Old West and the New, each featuring both conventional westerns and contemporary programs, and both rural and urban landscapes. Arizona was home to a number of conventional westerns, the most successful being *The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin*, which was the story of brave cavalry soldiers facing down outlaws and savage Native Americans on the rugged frontier. Arizona's subsequent westerns were fairly standard, with the usual stern and noble heroes, wild environments, violent action, corrupt land barons, tough towns, and characterizations of Native-Americans that were sometimes pejorative, sometimes sympathetic. Beginning in the 1970s, Arizona began to feature programs with contemporary, urban settings, the most popular of which was the sitcom *Alice*, which depicted Phoenix as a friendly, earthy, if not especially upscale metropolis. Since the departure of *Alice*, the population of Arizona has boomed, but the growth of the state's television landscape has been modest by comparison. This may be in response to

some image problems that have plagued the state, and the state's recent entries have not been especially kind, mixing barren little towns with seedy urban areas, and including depictions of the state's urbanites as wealthy, materialistic, and dissatisfied.

The Colorado television landscape has been relatively balanced between period pieces and contemporary settings, and between small towns and urban areas. Common traits linking many of Colorado's entries have been affection for the state's famously attractive vistas, and the message that these landscapes were wild, requiring a tough protagonist to tackle them. The most consistent device linking a number of the state's entries has been an examination of the role of the newcomer. On television, a good number of Coloradans have recently made their way to the state. Occasionally they were the villains, arriving to exploit the people and the land, but just as often the newcomer was the hero, arriving to do battle with the ignorance and prejudice of the natives. The ultimate newcomer was the title alien of *Mork & Mindy*, who arrived in Colorado in 1978 to study the ways of human society. That show, however, tended to deal with universal issues, rather than regional themes, and the show's most prominent geographic legacy was to depict Boulder as an attractive, pleasant, modern city. Denver, in contrast, has been occasionally portrayed as a seedy place, but that city's most successful program went to the other extreme. The characters of *Dynasty* might not have been very admirable—they were the very model of 1980s arrogance and avarice—but the city came off well, depicted as an extravagant playground for the wealthy and powerful. The state's longest-running entry, *South Park*, returned to the state's roots, with a small, quaint, mountain town playing host to eccentric and provincial locals and destructive outsiders. The show flayed just about every conceivable political, religious, philosophical and cultural perspective and, likewise, was both a condemnation and celebration of small-town life in the West.

Nevada has been the home to surprisingly few conventional westerns, but one of them, *Bonanza*, is rivaled only by *Gunsmoke* in terms of popularity and longevity in the genre. For many viewers, Nevada's television landscape is synonymous with the tales of wisdom, reason, honesty, and rugged independence on the prosperous Ponderosa Ranch. A few other Nevada programs were set in rural areas or small towns, but most of these had more in common with *Twin Peaks* than *Bonanza*, telling tales of eerie loneliness in the Nevada desert. The state's subsequent programs, however, were set mostly in urban areas. Reno was home to one show, but the vast majority of Nevada's television landscape has been dominated by Las Vegas. Many shows have focused on the city's famous gaming and entertainment industries, and the central geographic message of most Las Vegas entries, including the very popular crime drama, *CSI*, is that the city is a bubbling cauldron of money, glitz, glamor, and sleaze, where gruesome and even bizarre murders are par for the course.

CHAPTER 8 – CONCLUSION

As noted in chapter one, I initially considered analyzing the television landscape by comparing the medium's images to existing works concerning regional identity. I ultimately decided that it would be best to approach television with a blank slate, to allow the possibility of identifying geographic themes not found in the existing regional literature. In hindsight, that decision proved to be, I believe, the correct one. That said, I think it is appropriate to conclude this study with a comparison of the geographic themes and images I have uncovered to those contained in other regional studies. Of course, an exhaustive review of the literature concerning regional identity in the United States would represent a dissertation unto itself, so I have selected a single work for each region. These five books come from different periods—the earliest from 1972, and the latest from 2001—and represent diverse approaches to regional study, including the fields of journalism, American studies, sociology, geography, and history. Still, an examination of these books says much about the regional images and identities that television has reinforced, contradicted, and ignored.

THE MID-ATLANTIC AND GARREAU'S *NINE NATIONS*

The states in this study were assigned to regions based loosely on those from Wilbur Zelinsky's 1980 article "North America's Vernacular Regions," in which he constructed regions based on the names of businesses in North American cities. From this base I modified the boundaries somewhat so as to fit the demands of my data set (as described in the first chapter), and that was certainly the case in the one defined here as the Mid-Atlantic. Zelinsky noted that

part of this region—the southern sections of Maryland and Delaware—were on the periphery of the South, and that western Pennsylvania had a similar relationship to the Midwest. Further, he identified parts of Pennsylvania and New Jersey as being in the Northeast—a designation shared with some of New York and all six New England states. With all these ties to other places, Zelinsky actually could identify only one state—Pennsylvania, and a small section of it, at that—with the term Mid-Atlantic. Still, this seemed to be the best available label for the general area and so is employed here.

Because the Mid-Atlantic's regional identity is more nebulous than other regions in this study, I was unable to identify a single work that addressed this area alone. An evocative analysis of the region exists, however, within journalist Joel Garreau's 1981 book, *The Nine Nations of North America*. Garreau's designation for this region is the "Foundry," which he bluntly defined as the "gritty cities of North America's industrial Northeast" (Garreau 1981: 50). In this usage, the Foundry is somewhat larger than my Mid-Atlantic, but the core is the same. Garreau excludes the District of Columbia, however, which, he says "is so consumed with itself that it is dealt with separately" (Garreau 1981: 67).

Garreau's description of the Foundry includes interesting parallels to the Mid-Atlantic's television landscape, including a statement that appeared to predict the iconic opening credits of *The Sopranos*. "The view along the New Jersey Turnpike," wrote Garreau, "is so appalling that Dixie planners specifically mention that state as what they don't want to see their world become" (Garreau 1981: 66). While this assessment of the Jersey Turnpike was verified on television, it is notable that another of Garreau's descriptions of the Mid-Atlantic's landscape was not. "The largest stretch of wilderness," he wrote, "in the East is in New Jersey—the Pine Barrens of the southern part of the state. The Delaware River, along its west, is the biggest wild river in the

East. The rural scenery twenty minutes north of Trenton is breathtaking (Garreau 1981: 65-66). The author acknowledges, however, that the wild and beautiful landscapes of the Mid-Atlantic are not central to the region's identity:

The Foundry . . . is a place that is thoroughly described by man and what he's done to the mountains and rivers and plains in the course of trying to get ahead, more than it is by the mountains or rivers themselves Cities are the Foundry's dominant physical characteristic. There are lots of them. They're not terribly far apart, by the standards of most of the continent, and they are crowded places. As a result, there is no trouble pointing to the Foundry's heartland—its megalopolises (Garreau 1981: 66).

The Mid-Atlantic's television programs have confirmed the centrality of cities to the region's identity. Urban and suburban settings are an important part of the entire country's television landscape, but the other regions analyzed in this study tend to showcase small towns and rural areas far more often. The Mid-Atlantic is, on television, a long string of large industrial cities separated only by their suburbs. With the exception of *Joan of Arcadia*, Maryland's television landscape is nearly synonymous with Baltimore and its suburbs. New Jersey's television landscape is also highly urbanized. Although the state lacks a dominant city, television's New Jersey is a long series of blighted industrial landscapes, apartment buildings, and pleasant suburban homes extending from New York to Philadelphia. The existence of the New Jersey wilderness described by Garreau would likely surprise those whose knowledge of the state has been informed only by the small screen. The television landscape of Pennsylvania has also been almost exclusively urban and suburban, with the three hundred miles that separate Philadelphia and Pittsburgh nearly invisible. The one major exception is Scranton of *The Office*, and that is a setting that could hardly be considered rustic. It is notable that Delaware—the one

Mid-Atlantic state that lacks a large metropolitan area—has been almost completely absent from television.

Garreau argued that, along with urbanism, the defining trait of the region is economic struggle. In his opening essay, he quoted a business owner in a struggling Baltimore neighborhood who provided the secret of success in such an economic climate—“You just gotta be tough.” Garreau wrote:

And tough is what defines North America’s nation of northeastern gritty cities in a multitude of ways . . . Pittsburgh. Bethlehem. Harrisburg. Wilkes-Barre. Wilmington. Camden. Trenton. Newark. The litany of names bring clear associations even to the most insulated of residents of other regions. These names mean one thing: heavy work with heavy machines. Hard work for those with jobs; hard times for those without. When columnists speak of managing decline, this is the region they mean. (Garreau 1981: 57-58).

And Garreau was not particularly optimistic about the region’s prospects. “The problem with the Foundry,” he wrote, “is that it is failing. Its cities are old and creaking, as is much of its industry (Garreau 1981: 65).

The Mid-Atlantic’s television landscape both confirms and refutes Garreau’s gloomy portrait of the region. Programs that depict the Mid-Atlantic as a troubled place are many. Whether set in Philadelphia (*Strong Medicine*, *Philly*, *Ryan Caufield*, *Hack*, and *Cold Case*), Pittsburgh (*Equal Justice* and *Sirens*), New Jersey (*Toma*, *The Street*, and *Matt Waters*) or Baltimore (*In the Beginning*, *Roc*, and *Homicide*), they all demonstrate that the region has more than its fair share of poverty and crime. That said, most of these programs focus on individuals—doctors, lawyers, cops, a teacher, a priest, a social worker, and community activists—who have dedicated their lives to combating the ills that plague their city, rather than on those who are

actually suffering financial trouble. Programs that take a direct look at lives plagued by economic decay, such as *Big House*, *Skag*, and *Dream Street*, have been relatively rare and short-lived. Even *The Sopranos*, which frequently depicted New Jersey as a garbage-strewn industrial wasteland plagued by crime and violence, featured a protagonist who drove a Cadillac and lived in a very nice house. More important, for every gritty comedy and drama set in the Mid-Atlantic, several more shows have featured characters who are relatively wealthy or, at the least, economically secure and who live in pleasant urban and suburban environments—shows including *Amen*, *thirtysomething*, *Mr. Belvedere*, *Hope & Gloria*, *Max Bickford*, *One of the Boys*, *House*, and *One on One*.

Whether television or Joel Garreau has come closer to capturing the reality of the Mid-Atlantic is, of course, a matter of speculation. There is no denying that a good many of the region's residents live above the poverty line—a fact largely ignored by Garreau. To be fair, 1981 was not a particularly opportune time to write a glowing account of the Mid-Atlantic's economic fortunes, but it is possible that Garreau and other journalists have been somewhat obsessed with the region's pathology—focusing on its economic and social struggles rather than on the region's success stories. In contrast, audiences have been far more receptive to stories about the Mid-Atlantic's fortunate residents. For example, *Skag*, an unflinching and critically acclaimed look at the economic struggles of a Pittsburgh steel worker, lasted less than two months. *Mr. Belvedere*, a sunny story of a middle-class Pittsburgh family that could somehow afford a top-notch, live-in English butler, lasted five years.

Garreau's assessment of Washington, D.C. chronicled the rapid growth of the city during the mid-twentieth century, and noted the explosive real estate prices and household incomes in the D.C. suburbs:

It's not the paychecks of the bureaucrats that caused Washington real estate prices to double in five years. While hardly what you'd call niggardly, they don't pay for castles on Foxhall Road. It's the subsidiary private industries spawned by the existence of the bureaucrats The three biggest industries in the Washington area, after government and tourism, are the government codebreakers: lawyers, communicators, and consultants. Depending on how you define consultant, that industry may actually be bigger than the federal government that spawned it (Garreau 1981: 101).

Washington journalists, one part of Garreau's trio of "codebreakers," have received a fair amount of attention on television, including *Murphy Brown*, one of D.C.'s most successful programs. It is notable, however, that Washington's lawyers and consultants, most of whom, according to Garreau, work for private political action and lobby groups, are nearly absent from the city's television landscape. While lobbyists, activists, and their ilk have been part of the milieu of some political programs, just one show—the short-lived 1975 sitcom *Karen*—focused on this activist element of Washington politics. That is one show (and the title character of *Karen* was certainly not the sort of person that Garreau was describing when spoke of D.C.'s wealthy and powerful codebreakers) compared to more than forty programs about government employees. If the "codebreaker" industry is, as Garreau suggested, larger than the federal bureaucracy in D.C., then it is easy to argue that the city's television programs have created a misunderstanding of how Washington politics actually work.

CONFORTI'S *IMAGINING NEW ENGLAND*

Joseph Conforti's 2001 book, *Imagining New England*, is an analysis of the region's identity as it evolved from the early seventeenth century to 1940. Those dates, of course, exclude the television era, but some interesting parallels can be found among the images and ideas

explored by Conforti and those found on New England's television landscape. Some of those parallels are minor, but amusing, such as a description of Maine from John Smith's 1616 *Description of New England*, in which the New England patriarch described the future setting of so many tales of murder and terror as a "country rather to affright than delight" (Conforti 2001: 14). Conforti also quoted a 1793 caution from the usually boosterish New England geographer Jedidiah Morse to the effect that "freedom, without virtue or honor, is licentiousness," adding that a "restless, litigious, complaining spirit" betokened "a dark shade in the character of New Englandmen"—an observation that seems to have predicted the emergence of the hedonistic, morally directionless attorneys of *Ally McBeal*, *The Practice*, and *Boston Legal* (Conforti 2001: 93). Conforti also noted that, during the eighteenth century, Rhode Island was "perceived in other corners of New England as a licentious republic where feeble or non-existent institutions allowed liberty to degenerate into unbridled individualism and disorder," a comment that seems wholly appropriate to the behavior chronicled on *Family Guy* (Conforti 2001: 100).

Conforti spent much time analyzing the Puritan legacy and the Pilgrim narrative of New England, and while these have rarely been dealt with on television, save for a short-lived parody of the Pilgrim experience in *Thanks*, some of the core elements of traditional New England culture can be found on the television landscape. One example is the "Puritan commitment to literacy" that "placed New England in the forefront of American education, newspaper publishing, and lyceum founding" (Conforti 2001: 4). He also cited Morse's *American Geography*, which stated that "In New England, learning is more generally diffused among all ranks of people . . . than in any other part of the globe" (Conforti 2001: 97). While it may be a coincidence, the diffusion of learning observed by Morse in 1793 was evident on the region's television landscape two centuries later. Television's New England is home to a relatively large

number of writers and artists, including Maine's Jessica Fletcher and Vermont's Dick Loudon, and to devotees of art, literature, and other prestigious forms of culture, such as the remarkably erudite private detectives from Boston. Many other New England television characters, from the sophisticated family dog and infant on *Family Guy* to the incredibly astute teenagers of *James at 15*, *Dawson's Creek*, and *Gilmore Girls*, also reflect the region's intellectual tendencies.

Another core New England trait identified by Conforti was a belief in social equality. Once again, Conforti quoted Morse, who observed that New England was a place where “every man thinks himself at least as good as his neighbour, and believes all mankind are, or ought to be equal” (Conforti 2001: 97). At first glance, this notion seems at odds with a region where many shows, most notably *Cheers*, *Gilmore Girls*, and *Family Guy*, have revolved around a theme of class warfare. This theme is, indeed, quite common in television's New England, and far more common than in the Midwest, South, and West. There is a tendency among western programs, such as *Dynasty* and *Bonanza*, to glorify the wealthy, and a tendency in midwestern and southern programs, such as *Roseanne*, *Married with Children*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, and *The Dukes of Hazzard*, to adopt a fatalistic attitude toward the class system—that is, the notion that the rich are rich, the poor are poor, and that is that. It might be a bit of a stretch, but it is arguable that the topic of class differences comes up so often in New England television programs precisely because New Englanders find class disparity to be so objectionable. This tendency also suggests a third core New England trait identified by Conforti—the region's traditional sense of itself as the moral and political compass of the nation. This trait can be seen on some shows, such as *The Young Lawyers* and *Boston Legal*, but it is not a particularly strong characteristic of the region's television landscape. In fact, other than the occasional examinations of class, some of New

England's iconic shows, such as *Cheers*, *Newhart*, *St. Elsewhere*, and *Ally McBeal*, seemed deliberately apolitical.

By analyzing popular and scholarly writings from the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Conforti also addressed the ways in which New England's sense of identity was tied to its sense of place. According to him, the writings of geographer Jedidiah Morse, author Harriet Beecher Stowe, and a Congregationalist pastor and Yale president Timothy Dwight "signaled the rise of the most recognizable visual marker of New England regional identity: the central village, comprised of a cluster of houses and businesses encircling a white-steepled church" (Conforti 2001: 124). Conforti noted that Stowe's New England novels "dwelled on the 'smallness, isolation, cohesiveness, innocence, and unchangingness' of village-centered New England," and that Dwight's informal geographies tied such villages to the region's temperament (Conforti 2001: 149). "For Dwight, the New England character was etched into the regional landscape. Republican New England, 'the numerous, cheerful, and beautiful towns and villages,' derived from the enterprise and diligence of an 'extraordinary people'" (Conforti 2001: 114). One does not need to dig very deep into New England's television landscape to confirm that "numerous, cheerful, and beautiful towns and villages" have been central to the region's identity. Pleasant small-town life was a key theme of such iconic shows as *Wings* and *Dawson's Creek*, and quaint New England villages were absolutely central to *Gilmore Girls*, *Newhart*, and *Murder, She Wrote*.

Conforti noted that, in the twentieth century, the leading artistic source of traditional New England images was poet Robert Frost. Frost's breakthrough book, published in 1914, was appropriately titled *North of Boston*. It should be noted that, while villages have been important to the television identity of southern New England, they have totally dominated television's

depiction of life in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. As noted in chapter three, just one of northern New England's television programs was set in a city—all the rest featured a small town or village. Conforti's study confirms that the tendency to depict the northern states as the more traditional part of the region—as the *real* New England, predated the television era:

With the urban, industrial, and ethnic transformation of southern New England, the regional heartland seemed to shift northward. Old New England acquired an increasingly fixed geographical location; it endured in the Yankee towns and villages of Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. The regional periphery was reimagined as the new center of New England identity (Conforti 2001: 263-264).

As important as the New England village is to the region's identity, television programs about village life certainly do not tell the story of those living in Portland, Burlington, Manchester, Boston, Providence, or Bridgeport. Conforti acknowledged this issue, but also argued that the village's iconic status was actually a reaction to—or, more appropriately *against*—urbanization, immigration, and industrialization. The consecration of the New England village in the eighteenth century, wrote Conforti, “reassuringly imaged the region as a pastoral, stable Yankee world precisely at a time when factories and mills were propelling New England to the forefront of the industrial revolution and when Irish immigrants were initiating changes that would, in less than two generations, bring about the ethnic transformation of the region” (Conforti 2001: 124). Idealized visions of the “real” New England, such as those found in artist John Barber's engravings, continued to dominate regional identity in the works of other artists and writers long after the region had been transformed by industrialization. Conforti wrote:

In the decades after he published *Historical Collections of Connecticut and Massachusetts*, Barber's New England became increasingly urban and ethnic, peopled by growing numbers of Irish immigrants. Yet visual representations of the “real” New

England continued to invest the regional landscape with pastoral conventions similar to Barber's More than any other mid-nineteenth-century writer, Harriet Beecher Stowe elevated the emergent compact New England village into a literary icon that paralleled the visual representation of the regional landscape that descended from Barber's engravings. Stowe limned the pastoral world of the New England village, slighting its incubating commercialism to create a region of the literary imagination that erased urbanism, industry, and the Irish from the changing landscape (Conforti 2001: 144).

Conforti noted that the village remained at the center of regional identity well into the twentieth century, and for the same reasons. He wrote that “nostalgia for Old New England registered Yankee reaction to disquieting alterations in the texture of life: the acceleration of ethnic, urban, industrial, and technological change” (Conforti 2001: 204).

Conforti's analysis raises the question of whether or not the emerging regional traits to which village celebrants were reacting—ethnic diversity, urbanization, and industrialization—have been evident on the television landscape as well. The answer is certainly yes, with many programs featuring numerous characters who were the descendants of the “Catholic hordes” described by Conforti (Conforti 2001: 209). Ethnic flavor has been an important element of several programs, including *Banacek*, which was lauded for its positive portrayal of a successful Polish-American, and on a handful of other Boston programs that highlighted Irish-American culture, some of which were derided by critics for their tendency to stereotype. Cultural conflict between New England's old-guard WASP population and its working class Catholics also has been a recurring, although subtle, part of the region's television landscape. On *Family Guy*, Irish Catholic Peter Griffin was viewed as an unsuitable son-in-law by wife Lois's aristocratic WASP parents, the Pewterschmidts. On *Who's the Boss*, Italian-American Tony Micelli was a fish out of water in a WASPish, upper-class Connecticut suburb. A similar culture clash could be found

on the region's most important program. Ethnic differences were rarely dealt with in an overt way on *Cheers*, but it is notable that the line dividing the two camps in the Boston bar's war of words was, among other things, an ethnic one. In the cultural and intellectual middle ground were Cliff Clavin and Norm Peterson, both of whom had surnames that suggest British origin (although Cliff once claimed to be the rightful heir to the Russian throne). More important, with the exception of the Jewish psychiatrist Lilith Sternin, most of the intellectually, culturally, or economically elitist characters of the show were those with English, or seemingly English, surnames—Diane Chambers, Frasier Crane, Rebecca Howe, Kelly Gaines, Evan Drake, and Robin Colcord. Most of those from the blue-collar, earthy end of the bar had names that suggested New England's "Catholic hordes"—Ernie Pantusso, Carla Tortelli, and Sam Malone. The primary exception was Woody Boyd, but, of course, Woody was a midwesterner.

As for the two other processes that precipitated New England's village nostalgia—urbanization and industrialization—the former has been present on television, but the latter has not. Urbanization, without question, has been an important part of the region's television landscape. While many programs have taken place in small towns and villages, many more have been set in the region's cities and suburbs. For the most part, however, television's version of New England jumps from idealized village life straight to clean, appealing post-industrial cities and suburbs. Grim stories of industrialization and deindustrialization have largely been absent. Some shows have dealt with the detritus of urban decay, such as *St. Elsewhere* and Boston's occasional detective and legal shows, but the region has lacked conventional crime procedurals and successful working-class or inner-city dramas. When seediness—crime, poverty, ethnic strife—made a rare appearance, it was seen through the eyes of white-collar professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, and teachers, rather than from the perspective of the impoverished.

Conforti is a native of Fall River, Massachusetts, which he described as a “gritty New England textile city, a charter member of the Rust Belt long before that term was coined.”

My New England, then, was a gray ethnic city of mills, hills, and dinner pails. From their classroom windows teachers could easily point to half-abandoned factories and warn indifferent students that they would end up in a “sweatshop” Fabled Plymouth was only forty-five minutes away. Thanksgiving acquired a special aura because of Fall River’s proximity to the place where the “Spirit of New England,” and of America, was born The real New England seemed at once geographically proximate and culturally remote (Conforti 2001: xi-xii).

If television’s version of New England is substantially lacking any key element of the region’s geography, it is the “gray ethnic” cities of “mills, hills, and dinner pails.” Conforti’s book confirms that television is not alone in its elimination of New England’s industrial history. “We need a new narrative,” he wrote, “of how New England developed not only as a Puritan-Yankee city on a hill but also as an ethnic city by the mill” (Conforti 2001: 316).

SHORTTRIDGE’S *MIDDLE WEST*

In his 1989 book *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture*, geographer James R. Shortridge examined the origin and evolution of the midwestern regional label. Shortridge acknowledged that images of the Midwest have been diverse and even contradictory, but cited L. Frank Baum’s *The Wizard of Oz* as one of the popular works that best encapsulated the region’s identity:

Baum provides a useful point of departure . . . because his imagery, first written in 1900, is typical of much of the twentieth-century literature and raises some issues and dilemmas that are basic to Middle-western identity. Consider Dorothy, for example: polite, friendly, and bright-eyed, she wears her hair in braids, is a little

naïve, and lives on a farm. Her Aunt Em and Uncle Henry are simple, hardworking religious folk. They wear practical clothing, raise chickens and pigs, and are so trusting of authority that they give up Toto when a fussy schoolteacher claims it is the law. The farmstead also is stereotypical: it sits amidst a flat, nearly treeless plain; Kansas is vast and fertile but also bleak. This Middle-western scene contrasts vividly with Oz, the land “over the rainbow.” Oz is lush and wondrous in all ways, a point made graphically in the 1939 Judy Garland version of the tale by a switch from black-and-white to color photography. Still, for all its fascination, Oz is as full of danger and deceit as it is opportunity and Dorothy eventually opts to return home (Shortridge 1989: 1-2).

Shortridge’s selection of *The Wizard of Oz* as an iconic Midwestern story is connected to the fact that Dorothy’s story begins and ends on a farm. “Farming is the dominant image in Baum’s Middle West,” wrote Shortridge, “as it has been in the accounts of journalists throughout this century” (Shortridge 1989: 2). Such images are central to Shortridge’s argument “for a close and continuing association between the Middle-western identity and the concept of pastoralism” (Shortridge 1989: 2). There has certainly been no shortage of pastoral images associated with the television Midwest. As noted in chapters four and five, relatively few midwestern programs have had a truly agrarian focus, but a number of the region’s programs, such as *Little House on the Prairie* and *Smallville*, and a large number of midwestern characters, most notably Radar O’Reilly and Woody Boyd, have been tied to the farm.

Shortridge acknowledged that the centrality of pastoralism to midwestern identity contradicted the “predominantly urban reality of the modern Middle West.” That urban reality is especially true on television. Most of the region’s television images came along after 1970—about a half-century after the region’s farm population peaked. For all the television stories of the region’s farmers, there have been many more about urban and suburban midwesterners. That said, even though pastoral images have been outnumbered by urban ones on midwestern

television programs, the *values* associated with pastoralism have been integral to the region's television identity. Some of the terms that Shortridge used to describe Dorothy and her family—polite, friendly, bright-eyed, naïve, simple, hardworking, religious, practical and trusting—could be used to describe many of television's midwesterners, even those living in urban environments. These traits are not exclusive to the region and are not appropriate for all characters on the Midwest's television landscape, but they are far more apparent in the Midwest than any other television region, and some of the region's iconic television characters—Radar O'Reilly, Richie Cunningham, Woody Boyd, Tim Taylor, Laverne De Fazio, Shirley Feeney, Mary Hartman, and Jed Clampett—possess nearly all of these characteristics. Perhaps the closest television parallel to the *Wizard of Oz* was *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Mary Richards did not grow up on a farm, but she was from the small town of Roseburg, Minnesota, and she possessed all the key pastoral traits—she was polite, optimistic, a little naïve, hardworking, religious, practical, and trusting. While Mary was very intelligent and not quite as innocent as Dorothy, her look of wide-eyed amazement, seen each week in the opening credits as she twirled in the busy streets of Minneapolis, was not much different from Dorothy's initial reaction to Oz (and, it can be added, Mary's interaction with Lou, Murray, and Ted brought to mind Dorothy's friendships with the lion, tin man, and scarecrow). Of course, not every midwestern television character would be mistaken for Dorothy Gale, but the values that Shortridge associated with pastoralism can be found in many of them—in Dave Garroway's sincerity, Ann Romano's industriousness, Drew Carey's egalitarianism, Bob Hartley's humility, Alex P. Keaton's self-reliance, Roseanne Conner's pragmatism, and Arthur Fonzarelli's honesty.

Shortridge also argued that the Midwest's identity had strong temporal and spatial elements. In both time and space, the Midwest was lodged between the established East and the

untamed West, and the region's identity began to assume this middle ground, forming an "ideal middle kingdom" between the "uncivilized wilderness" of the West and the "urban-industrial evils" of the East (Shortridge 1989: 6). Shortridge likened this level of maturity to stages in the human life cycle, writing that "whereas the West was seen as brash and youthful, and the East was viewed as stodgy and old, the Middle West escaped the problems of both extremes. It was still young enough to have ideals and energy, yet it was not so old as to be ossified by decay, class stratification, and overcrowding" (Shortridge 1989: 8).

This maturity model can certainly be seen on the television landscape. The frontier wildness of the West could be seen on a few programs, but mostly on "midwestern westerns" like *Gunsmoke* and *Little House on the Prairie*, and even those shows were not nearly as "brash and youthful" as many similar programs set in the West. The television Midwest has also had its fair share of urban decay, particularly in Chicago, but when compared to New Jersey or to Baltimore, Washington, New York, and Philadelphia, the cities of the Midwest have escaped relatively unscathed. It is perhaps appropriate that Minneapolis has been characterized as being nearly crime free, but the relative lack of poverty, decay, and crime on the television landscapes of Kansas City, Milwaukee, Cincinnati, and, particularly, Detroit and Cleveland, seems at odds with reality. But it is not at odds with the midwestern identity described by Shortridge. It is possible that these cities have been free of crime and poverty on television because they are in the Midwest, and they are *supposed* to be free of crime and poverty. In other words, television's version of many of the Midwest's cities, particularly its eastern ones, conforms to regional values far more easily than the real cities do.

Television's version of Chicago has an odd relationship with midwestern identity. In some ways, it squares nicely with the pastoral values described above. This is particularly true of

its family sitcoms, nearly all of which possessed an air of friendliness, industriousness, cheerfulness, sincerity, and optimism. On the other hand, the snide attitude of programs such as *Married with Children* undercut these values, while the bloodbath on Chicago's television streets and the attendant images of urban decay place the city far away from the "ideal middle kingdom" that the Midwest is supposed to represent. If nothing else, the sheer size of the city, which is quite evident on television, place it more comfortably in the East than in the Midwest.

Still, television's Chicago fits, if a little oddly, into Shortridge's maturity model of the Midwest. Rather than being midwestern because it eliminates the wildness of the West and the ossification of the East, television's Chicago is midwestern because it embraces both wildness and ossification. Like eastern cities, Chicago is the home of great wealth and great poverty, and its television landscape contains the "urban-industrial evils" of the hardened East. That said, Chicago's television programs suggest that it still, for better or worse, has some youthfulness left. A sense of wildness has been far more evident on Chicago's television landscape than on those of eastern cities—it closely resembles the stormy, husky, brawling city described by Carl Sandburg. Viewers of early Chicago television might have discovered the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, but they were just as likely to have witnessed stock car races, meat-carving demonstrations, or a live cattle drive. This wild streak can best be seen on the city's crime and medical dramas. Chicago's shoot-first cops, such as Eliot Ness, Frank Ballinger, Katy Mahoney, and Mike Torello, have more in common with television's rugged, taciturn western sheriffs than with the philosophical cops and private eyes of eastern crime shows like *Law & Order*, *Spenser: for Hire*, and *Homicide*. The medical drama *ER*, despite its frequent depiction of the calamitous results of urban decay, also reflected the youthful vigor of the city. When compared to the doctors of Boston's *St. Elsewhere*, the staff of *ER* was less fatalistic, less resigned to the despair

of the urban environment. Perhaps the strongest indication of Chicago's youthfulness can be found in its lack of legal dramas. It is on such shows that characters can be philosophical about crime and, by extension, the social issues that cause crime. If a tendency to be philosophical is a sign of old age, then television's Chicago has yet to reach that stage. Chicago's television characters are far more likely to kill the criminal than to ponder the crime.

Of all the midwestern character traits identified by Shortridge, the one that cuts to the core of the region's television identity is the idea that midwestern life acts "as a deterrent to ostentation and arrogance" (Shortridge 1989: 30). Whether a wide-eyed innocent like Radar O'Reilly, or a bitter realist like Roseanne Conner, nearly every important midwestern television character and personality has represented a rejection of pretension and self-importance—Drew Carey, Bob Hartley, Woody Boyd, Al Bundy, Grace Kelly, Sherman Potter, Jed Clampett, Red Foley, Dave Garroway, and Studs Terkel are among the many examples of this. It would be difficult to imagine a number of programs from other regions, particularly those that featured status-conscious, self-absorbed yuppies, being set in the Midwest. In reality, the traits and values of characters from *Grey's Anatomy*, *Ally McBeal*, *Sex and the City*, and *thirtysomething* might well be found among the populations of Minneapolis, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, St. Louis, or Kansas City, but that has not been the case on television. Although it is true that numerous attempts have been made to place self-absorbed yuppies in Chicago, viewers have apparently found them to be an invasive species, and have killed them off quickly. As noted in chapter four, only one of Chicago's many yuppie sitcoms lasted long, and that was the beer, sports, and poker-filled universe of *My Boys*, a show whose tomboy protagonist was conceived as a midwestern response to *Sex and the City*. It is perhaps because of the Midwest's egalitarian streak that, in the words of Shortridge, the region came "to symbolize the nation and to be seen as the most

American part of America” (Shortridge 1989: 33). This idea is also at the heart of the Midwest’s television landscape—the region has often been characterized as a sort of microcosm of America—and can be seen most plainly on a number of Ohio programs, such as *Family Ties*, *3rd Rock from the Sun*, *Ed*, and *Normal, Ohio*.

Television’s assessment of midwestern character, however, has not been entirely positive. Shortridge wrote that the peak of Midwestern self-confidence occurred in the 1910s. This self-confidence began to be replaced by self-doubt in the 1920s, and a number of the region’s television programs and characters reflect that loss of confidence. Some observers, according to Shortridge, began to argue that “conservatism had begun to replace progressive idealism, a sign perhaps that the yeoman society was aging. Old-fashioned, even culturally backward, ideas were often seen to exist along with the traditional pastoral friendliness and honesty” (Shortridge 1989: 9). A prime example of this could be found on the Korean War comedy *M*A*S*H*. Nearly all of the region’s midwestern characters—Iowa’s Radar O’Reilly, Illinois’s Henry Blake, and Missouri’s Sherman Potter—exhibited the traditional pastoral traits of friendliness and honesty, but they were also, to a degree, old-fashioned and culturally backward. O’Reilly was kind and trustworthy, but also somewhat unenlightened. Potter was friendly and earnest, but also obstinately old-fashioned and stodgy. Blake was a likable goofball and a competent surgeon but, like all of the 4077th’s midwesterners, he did not possess the wit and sophistication of Maine’s Hawkeye Pierce, California’s B.J. Honeycutt, or Boston’s Trapper John MacIntyre and Charles Emerson Winchester. The primary example of negative midwestern stereotypes, however, was Frank Burns, *M*A*S*H*’s incompetent, self-righteous, sycophantic, hypocritical, conservative, and avaricious Indiana native. Burns, perhaps more than any other television character, exemplified what Shortridge described as the “air of smug self-righteousness” that began to

characterize the Midwest in the 1920s. During that period, the Midwest came to be viewed as a region of “business-minded, narrowly conservative people.” Shortridge described the conventions of the period:

A siege mentality, similar to that found throughout the South, developed there, whereby people blindly protected the old traditions against corrupting influences that were perceived to be coming in from outside Being conventional gradually changed into being reactionary. Movements by the Non-Partisan League to create state-owned grain elevators, banks, and other socialistic reforms were regularly opposed by the mainstream society with little or no debate. Church attendance became a requisite for social acceptance instead of an individual option, and similar allegiance was required for Prohibition and other moral issues of the time (Shortridge 1989: 52-53).

This was clearly the kind of society that had produced Frank Burns, and a residue of its conventions could be found in other midwestern television characters and programs. Alex P. Keaton represented a far more friendly and benign embodiment of these reactionary values than did Frank Burns, but he was no less conservative. The Midwest’s parochial and provincial attitudes were effectively skewered on *Mary Hartman* and *Fernwood 2-Night*, and, somewhat less effectively, on *Normal, Ohio*, *Harper Valley PTA*, and *Married to the Kellys*. And although *Happy Days* and *Laverne & Shirley* represented a positive spin on life in the Midwest, conservative values were essentially inherent in both shows. They could even be found, to a degree, in the Presbyterian militancy of Mary Richards.

Despite such images, it is important to note that Archie Bunker, for example, lived in New York, not the Midwest. For the most part, television has been relatively kind to the Midwest, with objectionably reactionary characters kept to a minimum. This is likely because the Midwest’s fall from grace occurred around 1920 and, of course, television did not come to the

Midwest until much later, when the region's image was experiencing a rebound. Shortidge noted that the Midwest's esteem and self-confidence bottomed out in the years prior to 1950, but that they began to recover in the second half of the twentieth century. This renewed faith in midwestern values was connected with nostalgia, which itself, according to Shortridge, arose "slowly and uncertainly during the 1950s" as a "vague sense of loss seems to have developed among city dwellers."

Instead of generating wholesale condemnation by writers, small towns and traditional farms, indeed the entire Middle-western culture, began to be labeled as quaint. Support for this viewpoint quickened in the mid 1960s, and by the early 1970s it was perhaps the dominant image that outsiders held of the region. From this perspective, the Middle West had become a museum of sorts. No up-and-coming citizen wanted to live there, but it had importance as a repository for traditional values. The Middle West was a nice place to visit occasionally and to reflect upon one's heritage. It was America's collective "hometown," a place with good air, picturesque farm buildings, and unpretentious "simple" people (Shortridge 1989: 67-68).

To a great degree, the Midwest's television identity resides in the notion that the region is "America's collective hometown." The region's television landscape is filled with small towns, and that landscape is often populated by people who, for the most part, possessed the admirable traits long associated with the region's pastoral character.

What is unusual about the Midwest's television landscape, as noted above, is that that these pastoral values are also usually attributable to the Midwest's population in large metropolitan areas. This is the most significant departure of the television Midwest from the region described by Shortridge. The result is that the television map of the Midwest sometimes corresponds, and sometimes differs, from Shortridge's analysis of the cognitive map of the region:

Despite the results of perceptual surveys that show a Kansas-Nebraska focus for today's Middle West, the defining cultural traits actually describe Iowa better. Small towns dominate in both places, but the extent of rural prosperity differs considerably. A demanding yet rewarding physical environment is quintessentially Middle Western, but in the western plains, demand often exceeds reward Missouri is a great mixing ground, a place that was initially Southern in culture but that is not totally at ease with any regional label today The pastoral definition of the Middle West has long created identity problems for people in the Great Lakes states. In Michigan, the most extreme case, the label Middle West is almost never used as a descriptor Wisconsin and Minnesota share Michigan's heritage of lumbering, mining, and tourism; and Ohio, Wisconsin, and Illinois mirror its heavy industrial side. Well-developed agricultural images, however, make all of these other states fit the pastoral Middle West better than does Michigan. Wisconsin owes much of its Middle-western identification to its self-proclaimed status as "America's Dairyland." Minnesota, with its combination of rich agriculture and large cities that have escaped urban decay, is the epitome of the old Middle-western utopian dream of the 1910s before the industrial portion of the cultural definition was excised (Shortridge 1989: 10-11).

Most Iowa-based shows conform to midwestern themes, but they have largely been unsuccessful. Still, given that pastoral character traits are so strongly associated with two of Iowa's favorite television sons, James T. Kirk and Radar O'Reilly, it is arguable that the television version of the state is, as Shortridge suggested, the epitome of the Midwest. As for the other trans-Mississippi states, the Dakotas appear to be more western than midwestern but, like Nebraska, these states' programs have not been very successful, so it is unlikely that viewers' geographic perceptions have been affected one way or the other. Television's version of Kansas has an interesting relationship with its midwestern identity. In many ways it is quintessentially midwestern, given its lack of urban areas, its preponderance of friendly, earthy people, and the fact that several shows have taken place in small towns and on farms. But television's Kansas has also been the sort of place where, as Shortridge put it, "demand often exceeds reward," as

evidenced on the tumultuousness of *Jericho* and *Courage the Cowardly Dog* and in the geography-induced malaise of *Tom* and *The Phil Silvers Show*. Missouri's schizophrenic television history, with its mixture of seedy urban areas, downhome rural backwaters, and wholesome and not-so-wholesome small towns reflects Shortridge's assertion that the state resists any concrete regional label. The pleasantness of *Mary Tyler Moore*, *Little House on the Prairie*, and *Coach* certainly confirms the description of Minnesota as the "epitome of the old Middle-western utopian dream."

Among the Great Lakes states, as Shortridge suggested, Wisconsin has the least trouble with its midwestern identity—the state's television programs radiate all of the love and wholesomeness one might expect from "America's Dairyland." The other Great Lakes states contain some of the more interesting identity issues in the Midwest. Illinois is home to gritty streets of Chicago, but has also played host to shows that adhere to pastoral character traits—from the squareness of *Bob Newhart*, to the unabashed wholesomeness of *According to Jim*, to the earthy genuineness of *Roseanne*. Indiana's television landscape has been surprisingly urban and often violent, but it is hard to ignore the industriousness of Ann Romano, and impossible to overlook the television legacy of Woody Boyd, who is arguably television's most typical (or stereotypical) midwestern character.

As Shortridge noted, it is somewhat difficult to label Michigan as midwestern. The state's television landscape, with its lack of small towns and emphasis on shows that feature African-Americans or blue-collar gearheads, does indeed suggest an identity shaped by lumberjacks, miners, and factory workers rather than one forged on the farm. Still, *Home Improvement* was, without doubt, the state's defining program, and it was a thoroughly midwestern show. As noted earlier, the show's protagonist, Tim Taylor was an embodiment of the region's pastoral values—

described by one critic being emblematic of “the white-bread heartland” (Stark 1997: 383). In a 1996 *Midwest Today* article about series star Tim Allen, journalist Larry Jordan wrote that “with his white-bread commonality and a face as wide open as the Great Plains, Allen seems just like your average Joe” (Jordan 1996: 1).

Shortridge also noted the problems of assigning a midwestern label to Ohio. The state’s television landscape, however, contradicts this. In fact, Ohio’s television programs could serve as a microcosm for the evolving images of the Midwest described in Shortridge’s book. The fact that Ohio’s television programs have favored small towns over the state’s cities reflects the region’s pastoral roots, as did the images of Cincinnati’s *Midwestern Hayride* and Charley Weaver’s Mount Idy. The mediocrity of 3rd *Rock from the Sun*’s Rutherford, the narrow-minded conservatism of Harper Valley, and the downright cultural backwardness of *Mary Hartman* and *Fernwood 2-Night*’s fictional small town reflected the region’s self-doubt and loss of confidence. And there is no doubt that *Family Ties* and *Ed* reflected the search for the integrity of family and community that became associated with the Midwest during the subsequent nostalgia movement. Even Cleveland, a city whose image is clearly at odds with a midwestern label, became midwestern on television. Drew Carey, the star of that city’s defining program, wrote in his 2000 autobiography:

The only thing that ever really got to me back when *The Drew Carey Show* premiered was when they would compare my show to *Friends* Now, normally a guy wouldn’t bitch about having his show compared to a super-popular mega-hit, except that they were comparing us to the wrong show. We thought our show was closer in tone to [Illinois’s] *Roseanne* or [Missouri’s] *Grace Under Fire* It’s set in the Midwest. *Gilligan’s Island* was more like *Friends* than we were (Carey 2000: 69).

Sociologist John Shelton Reed's 1972 book *The Enduring South* was, like the works of Conforti and Shortridge, an attempt to identify key traits related to a region's identity, but it differed from those two in that it relied primarily on public opinion surveys and a variety of statistical data. Among other things, Reed determined that northerners' (a term used to describe any American not from the South) "attitude toward Southerners may be slightly less favorable than Southerners' attitudes toward them. *Extremely* negative responses, however, may be more frequent among Southerners" (Reed 1972: 21). Reed's use of the phrase "may be" indicated his reluctance to make a definitive statement about this matter, and the region's television shows are even vaguer on the subject. The occasional snobbery of outsiders found on such programs as *The Simple Life*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, and *Hawkins* was perhaps an indication that northerners held the South in low regard, but that appeared to be as much an urban prejudice as a northern one. The same can be said for shows like *Carter Country*, *Lobo*, and *In the Heat of the Night*, where the tension was between big city and backwoods, rather than between North and South. An extremely negative attitude toward northerners among southerners is even less apparent and, in fact, the tendency among television's southerners—as evidenced on *Andy Griffith* and *The Simple Life*—is to approach outsiders with a sense of bemusement rather than hostility.

Reed also examined some commonly held beliefs about southern culture, among them the notion that southerners have a greater tendency toward violence than other Americans:

"Southerners," someone once remarked, "will be polite until they're angry enough to kill you." He might have added that this flashpoint seems to be lower for Southerners than for other Americans. Beneath the image of a gracious, hospitable, leisurely folk has lurked that of a hot-tempered, violent, even sadistic

people, an image “so pervasive that it compels the attention of anyone interested in understanding the South” (Reed 1972: 45).

Reed verified that the South suffered from more violence than other sections of the country, but the region’s television programs do not reflect this. Given television’s preoccupation with violence, it is arguable that every region of the country’s television landscape is a violent one. A few iconic southern shows did contain violence, or the aftermath of it, including *In the Heat of the Night* and *I’ll Fly Away*, but the television landscape of the South, when compared to that of the West or to several cities of the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic, seems quite placid. Serious violence was practically unheard of on *The Andy Griffith Show*, where the sheriff did not carry a gun and the deputy had only one bullet, and the same was true of *The Dukes of Hazzard*, where the protagonists carried only bows and arrows, which they never fired at another person. New Orleans has long been a violent television city, but it is also rarely considered to be a typical southern city. If anything, violence is most strongly associated with those southern shows that are more urban and less provincial, like *Profiler*, *Line of Fire*, and even *American Dad*. In other words, the less “southern” the region’s shows are, the more violent they become.

Reed confirmed another commonly held belief about the South—that religion was more pervasive there than any other part of the country—but this trait is also not common on the region’s television landscape. There is, of course, no evidence on television to suggest that southerners are likely to be irreligious, and the region’s programs did contain some religious elements. On *Andy Griffith*, for example, Andy and Barney attended church regularly, and even sang in the choir. The Nashville Network had an entire program dedicated to southern gospel music, and the title of *I’ll Fly Away* certainly had a religious connotation. Fewer shows in the South also have tested the bounds of American social taboos—it is difficult to imagine, for

example, *Will & Grace* having been set in Jackson, Mississippi. That said, when compared to programming from the rest of the country—for example, California’s 7th *Heaven*, Connecticut’s *Book of Daniel*, Illinois’s *Have Faith*, Pennsylvania’s *Amen*, Maryland’s *In the Beginning* and *Joan of Arcadia*, and Massachusetts’s *Miracles*—there has been a relative lack of overtly religious programs set in the South.

Of all the traits attributed to the region, Shelton noted that the “paramount characteristic of Southerners, in the view of twentieth-century Americans, seems to be their relative (if only relative) lack of ambition, energy, and industry” (Reed 1972: 30). With few exceptions, such as the hillbillies lazing about on *Hee Haw*’s porches and haystacks, very few southern television characters could be described as being absolutely shiftless. It is true, however, that television’s southerners do seem to be lacking in ambition and industry, at least when compared to characters in other regions. Few of the region’s television personalities have been terribly wealthy, and relatively few could be described as upwardly mobile. As often as not, though, such traits were given an air of nobility. The southerners seen on *The Waltons*, *B. J. and the Bear*, *The Dukes of Hazzard*, and *The Andy Griffith Show* were rarely depicted as being lazy, but rather as people who had embraced the gift of simplicity. As for the South’s perceived lack of energy, some of the region’s iconic shows did indeed have a sleepy pace, such as *In the Heat of the Night*, *Andy Griffith*, and *Evening Shade*. In a few, such as *Any Day Now*, *I’ll Fly Away*, and *Frank’s Place*, the pace was positively languid.

Included in Reed’s study was a discussion of whether or not southern identity was fading. He began by acknowledging that the South was undergoing profound changes:

The South, runs the refrain, is disappearing: the region is well on its way to becoming “almost indistinguishable from any other

region in the country” Certainly there have been phenomenal changes in the lives of most Southerners during the decades just past. In economic and demographic terms, the South *has* undergone a considerable demographic transformation Although pockets of poverty and ignorance remain, the industrialization for which generations of “New South” thinkers worked has largely taken hold, with dramatic effects on regional differences in education, income, and style of life. For changes of such magnitude in the material conditions of life in the South *not* to affect the attitudes and values which have distinguished Southerners in the past would be virtually inconceivable Add to the impact of industrialization and urbanization the effects of mass society and mass communications—the whole logic of which, it seems, must be to reduce sectional differences—and there appears to be little reason to suppose that the South . . . will not be exorcised shortly (Reed 1972: 2).

Some evidence exists that regional identity is fading on the South’s television landscape. There is, of course, no way of saying definitively which programs are “more southern” than others, but it is possible to get a sense of this by asking whether or not a particular program could have been set elsewhere. It would be difficult to imagine, for example, North Carolina’s first program, *The Andy Griffith Show*, taking place outside of the South. It is less difficult, however, to imagine one of the state’s more recent programs, Charlotte’s *My Brother and Me*, taking place in a different city. Likewise, Georgia’s 1970s entries, *The Dukes of Hazzard*, *Lobo*, *B. J. and the Bear*, and *Carter Country*, were inexorably tied to their southern setting. A pair of Georgia’s 1980s entries, *Designing Women* and *Matlock*, were less cartoonish in their depiction of the South, but their regional identity was no less integral. However, Georgia’s most popular 1990s program, *Profler*, probably could have been set in any major city.

Reed also examined suggestions that the reduction in regional uniqueness was occurring primarily in southern cities, while the rural South remained relatively unchanged. “There has been some speculation,” wrote Reed, “that city people are pretty much alike, and the bulk of

regional differences will be found among rural populations” (Reed 1972: 5). This is, to a degree, true of the television South. The least “southern” shows tend to be set in urban or suburban areas (*Profiler, Line of Fire, American Dad*), and the more southern ones in small towns or rural areas (*Andy Griffith, The Dukes of Hazzard, The Waltons*). That said, *One Tree Hill* contained few conventional southern stereotypes despite being set in a small town.

As the title of his book suggests, Reed uncovered plenty of evidence that the South, while undoubtedly changing, was not necessarily shedding its regional identity. Ultimately, Reed argued, the South, both urban and rural, would continue to be a distinctive region:

For a long time to come, we can expect that the South will be something more than simply the lower right-hand part of the country. Although the region is, in some respects, rejoining the Union at last, the accommodation is a tentative one. Southerners continue to see themselves as *different*—and, in some ways, they are different (Reed 1972: 90).

Reed’s enduring South is evident, to a degree, on television. It can be seen in the remarkable staying power of *The Andy Griffith Show*. That program was deeply rooted in its geography, and probably would not be so enduring if it was not still somehow relevant to current southern values. The endurance can also be seen in Jeff Foxworthy’s redneck revival and in the recent theatrical remake of *The Dukes of Hazzard*, which suggested that the South had not changed much since the General Lee had last been taken out of the barn in 1985. The staying power of southern identity is also subtly evident in such relatively recent programs as *Evening Shade, The Client, Savannah, State of Grace*, and *American Gothic*. Although these programs dispensed with some of the more stereotypical traits of southern culture, it would be somewhat difficult to imagine any of them taking place in Vermont, Iowa, or Oregon.

Many Wests is a 1997 collection of essays, edited by historian David M. Wrobel and American Studies scholar Michael C. Steiner, concerning regional identity in the West. A few of those essays provide interesting parallels to the television landscape, including historian John M. Findlay's examination of regional identity in the Pacific Northwest. Findlay noted that the region "has generally not been a place people come from Rather, it has been a destination to which other Americans have gone. This fact looms large for explaining regional identity" (Findlay 1997: 45). Although Findlay was speaking for only one section of the West, he observed one of the most common traits found on western television programs. The story of a recent arrival to the West has been told many times on television, in every era and, in fact, in nearly every state.

Whereas Findlay's observation reveals a part of western identity that television got right, historian Anne F. Hyde's essay concerning the extractive industry in the Rocky Mountains reveals much about what television has missed or, at least, misrepresented. Hyde included in her essay a series of descriptions of the Rocky Mountains that both celebrated its stunning natural scenery and decried the environmental and social destruction that has accompanied the region's extractive industries. Hyde wrote:

What seems oddly combined in these scenes—stunning beauty, hideous destruction, and human pain—characterized much of the culture and landscape that has developed in the Rocky Mountain region Two major features make [this region] distinctive: the inhospitable but spectacular nature of mountains and high plains, and the overwhelming presence of extractive industries Certainly the beauty of the landscape is significant in the way people have come to define the region, but this chapter focuses on extractive industries because they are crucial in understanding the "place" that has developed here. The reality of this place stands in stark opposition to the "Rocky Mountain High" imagined by

wannabe Westerners and Westerners themselves, largely because of the shaping power of extractive industries (Hyde 1997: 95).

Of the extractive industries analyzed by Hyde—furs, mining, ranching, water sales, and skiing—only ranching has received much exposure on television. There have been occasional references to mining and skiing on western television programs, but practically no mention of the fur trade or water sales. More important, although there has been no shortage of “stunning beauty” and “human pain,” few depictions exist of the hideous social and environmental destruction described by Hyde. The topic was dealt with earnestly on *Centennial* and sarcastically on *South Park*, but the story of the extractive industry in the television West has largely been one of triumph, rather than devastation.

As noted in chapter seven, one of the most common characteristics of the television western is the story of an aloof individual taming a chaotic and lawless frontier. Hyde confirmed that this was a common and very real western story, and provided insight into its origin:

The landscape—scraped, uprooted, excavated, deforested, and eaten—became a testament to the junk-heap mentality encouraged by extractive industries. The rapidity of development and the calamity of decline, characterized by the boom-bust cycle of these industries, affected families, communities, and landscapes, creating, in journalist Ed Marston’s words, a world “without social glue.” The lack of social glue had serious implications. Without it, communities and cultures cannot hope to weather storms of instability and social change, and few places show much success at this in the Rocky Mountain region. Community in general in the West does not have a high profile. Our most famous western characters . . . celebrate their disconnectedness to place and community. Whether or not we take seriously the utterly dysfunctional sorts like Jeremiah Johnson or any of Clint Eastwood’s characters, this personality type represents reality (Hyde 1997: 101).

If Hyde is correct, then the television western has not necessarily misrepresented the personalities and situations of the frontier West. Instead, it has misrepresented or at least omitted the forces that created them. Western television shows imply that chaos and lawlessness were endemic to the frontier—that these characteristics should be expected from such a youthful culture—and suggest that, over time, they would be overcome by civilizing forces. The notion that tempestuous places and rugged individuals were byproducts of extractive industries has been nearly absent from the region's television programs.

One of the central questions posed by *Many Wests* is whether or not a western identity still exists. American regional literature suggests that such regional identity is tied up in that which has been lost. From this perspective, many American places could be likened to an individual mourning for lost youth—the Mid-Atlantic for its passing industrial might, New England for its Yankee villages, the Midwest for its prosperous farms and pleasant small towns, and the South for antebellum grace. This is especially true, it appears, of the West. In the arts, including television, the term “western” is strongly associated with a bygone era. Contemporary or modern television westerns exist, of course, such as New Mexico's *Empire*, but the term has almost always been applied to programs set in the nineteenth century. *Bonanza*, *The Virginian*, *The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin*, *Dr. Quinn*, *Medicine Woman*, *The Rifleman*, and *Laramie* are emblematic series.

Wrobel and Steiner noted that the Old West depicted on these programs was being mourned as early as 1902, when Owen Wister wrote of a “vanished world” of “the horseman, the cowpuncher, the last romantic figure upon our soil” (Wrobel and Steiner 1997: 4). They added:

The once rugged West is dead. Crushed between corporate glaciers from the coasts—from Wall Street and from Silicon Valley, from

Houston and from Hollywood—the true West as a wide-open place of promise is gone. All that remains are commercialized travesties of the real thing—manufactured moccasins and kachina dolls, franchised Santa Fe cuisine, packaged dude ranches, and other regional kitsch for bored urbanites craving tokens of authenticity (Wrobel and Steiner 1997: 2).

Television bears out Wrobel and Steiner. Only a few characteristics associated with conventional westerns—rugged and attractive vistas, the newcomer, the transition from a rugged past to a more polished and sophisticated present, and tough characters in rough situations—remain as standard fare in the region’s modern programs. Moreover, since 1970, only a few of the region’s contemporary programs, such as *Caitlin’s Way*, *Nakia*, *Harts of the West*, and *Hey Dude*, could be called westerns, and even that is a bit of a stretch.

The question, then, is whether or not a broad, cohesive sense of regional identity exists in television’s modern West. The same litmus test applied to the South can be used here—asking if the West’s contemporary television shows could have been set elsewhere. Some of the region’s television programs do not have particularly strong thematic connections to their setting. *Mork & Mindy*, for example, probably would not have played differently if the title alien had, after his debut on *Happy Days*, simply headed up the road to Madison, Wisconsin, rather than west to Boulder, Colorado. Similarly, although *Dynasty* did concern a natural resource empire and had some Denver touches, the show probably would not have changed much if the Carrington mansion had been located in Scarsdale, New York.

Many contemporary western programs, however, do return a relatively strong sense of place. It is difficult to imagine *Reno 911* or *Roswell* taking place anywhere but their title cities, and the same can be said for most Las Vegas programs, although that city’s most iconic show, *CSI*, has been successfully franchised in Miami and New York. *Frasier*, *Grey’s Anatomy*, and

Twin Peaks are also firmly entrenched in their settings, and it would be difficult to imagine *Alice* if her car had broken down in Cincinnati, rather than Phoenix, or to imagine *South Park* taking place anywhere but the Colorado Rockies. Still, while these programs have much to say about their particular settings, it is impossible to argue that any of them speak for the entire West. This idea parallels a statement by Wrobel and Steiner, who observed, “The West probably does have certain defining characteristics, but they are not readily and evenly applicable to all parts of the West” (Wrobel and Steiner 1997: 11).

It is not a sense of place that is lacking in the television West, but a sense of regional cohesiveness. In their search for regional identity in the contemporary West, Wrobel and Steiner asked:

Is state identification more important than regional identification in the West or in some parts of the West? . . . Or does locality overshadow state, subregion, and broader region as a foundation of regional consciousness? . . . Have scholars slighted the regional consciousness of western urban dwellers—the bulk of the West’s present population—by emphasizing the relationship between sense of place and attachment to the land? (Wrobel and Steiner 1997: 15-16).

Television’s answer to the last question is that critics are, indeed, far more likely to discuss regional identity in the West’s small-town and rural programs than they are when writing about urban shows. The critical literature does not suggest that Phoenix’s *Alice*, Las Vegas’s *CSI*, Seattle’s *Frasier*, or *Reno 911* lacked a sense of place, but critics analyzing *Everwood*, *South Park*, or *Twin Peaks* were far more likely to write about those show’s western identity than critics reviewing their urban counterparts.

What is far more apparent on television, however, is that, on programs with a contemporary setting, locality and subregion tend to overshadow broader identifications. In other

words, the West seems, both in reality and in television's version of it, to be incredibly nebulous. It is arguable that this was true even on traditional westerns. *Bonanza*, *The Virginian*, and *The Rifleman* were westerns to be sure, but more important, they were frontier programs. Robbed of the frontier, the television West lost regional cohesiveness. Again, a strong sense of place can be found on many contemporary western television programs, but it is a collection of Las Vegas, Pacific Northwest, Colorado, Sun Belt, and other senses of place, but not wholly "western." In other words, it is not inaccurate to suggest that *Alice*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *CSI*, and *South Park* are representative of the West, but these shows represent the West in the same way that *Roseanne*, *The Sopranos*, *Miami Vice*, *The Dukes of Hazzard* and *Cheers* represent the East. In this way, the television landscape confirms a statement by Carey McWilliams and Wallace Stegner, who wrote that the West's subregions are "all so different in their history and ethnic compositions, that . . . trying to make a unanimous culture out of them would be a hopeless job. It would be like wrapping five watermelons" (Wrobel and Steiner 1997: 9).

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