TELEVISING THE SOUTH:

RACE, GENDER, AND REGION IN PRIMETIME, 1955-1980

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation traces the emergence of the U.S. South and the region's role in primetime television, from the post-World War II era through Reagan's election in 1980. These early years defined, as Herman Gray suggests in *Watching Race*, all subsequent representations of blackness on television. This defining moment, I argue, is one inextricably tethered to the South and the region's anxiety ridden and complicated relationship with television. This anxiety was rooted in the progress and increasing visibility of the Civil Rights Movement, concern over growing white southern audiences in the wake of the FCC freeze (ended in 1952), and the fear and threat of a southern backlash against racially progressive programming. From the short-lived drama *Bourbon Street Beat* to the success of *Andy Griffith*, these concerns structured and policed the content of television, producing puzzling and often contradictory visions of the South. The representational maneuvers enacted by these shows attempted to render that threatening South safe for national consumption, while simultaneously invoking southern manners and downhome southern living as emblematic of all that is good about America. That is, the South was both the threat to the democratic nation and the cure for all that ailed a nation in crisis. In returning to the South during the formative years of primetime and at a moment where the region visibly and visually contested narratives of a

democratic nation, my dissertation provides a foundation for thinking through a contemporary landscape saturated in problematically post-racial southern imagery.

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INTRODUCTION

Near the end of 2012, two remarkably different films involving the South opened in theaters: Stephen Spielberg's biopic *Lincoln* (Figure 1) and Quentin Tarantino's violent tribute to spaghetti Westerns and blaxploitation films, *Django Unchained* (Figure 2). Each film presented a very different version of southern history: one championing Lincoln's contribution to United States democracy by freeing the slaves; the other a murderous vengeance plot driven by the violence and horror of slavery.

Both films—now Oscar winners and blockbuster successes—garnered significant criticism as journalists, bloggers, and academics jumped at the opportunity to praise and condemn each film's version of southern history and racial politics. While *Lincoln* ended up on multiple "Best of 2012" lists, so too did bloggers and even *New York Times* contributor Kate Masur call attention to the film's whitewashing of history, especially its omission of the crucial role of slaves in their own liberation: "But it's disappointing that in a movie devoted to explaining the abolition of slavery in the United States, African-American characters do almost nothing but passively wait for white men to liberate them." Even Frederick Douglass, "who in fact attended the White House reception after Lincoln's second inauguration in March 1865, is nowhere to be seen or heard" (ibid.). By comparison, Tarantino's *Django Unchained*, set in the Antebellum South, uses slavery as a setting for the unfolding of a story of a freed-slave (Jamie Foxx) seeking to rescue his wife (Kerri Washington) from a sadistic slave owner (Leonardo DiCaprio).

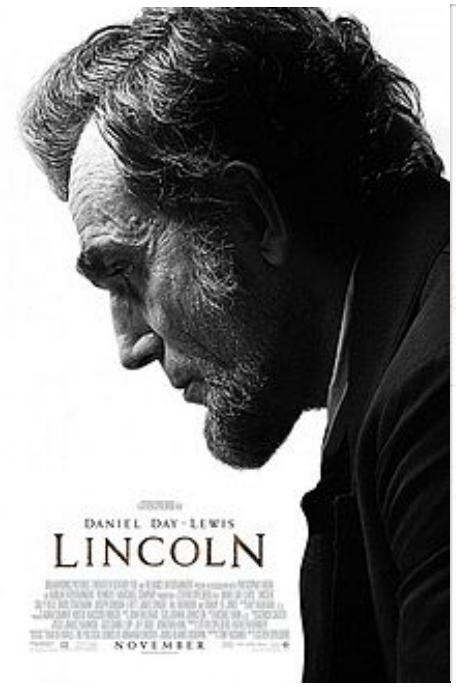

Figure 1 (left): Poster for the film *Lincoln*.
Figure 2 (right): Poster for the film *Django Unchained*. Even the respective film posters reflect their clear differences.

Unlike the whitewashed *Lincoln*, *Django* features a star-studded African American cast. Nevertheless, the film received criticism for its use of racial epithets, lack of historical accuracy—despite no claim to historical truth—and its violence (a trademark of Tarantino films). Refusing to see the film, Spike Lee even called Tarantino's spaghetti Western-blaxploitation mash-up disrespectful to his ancestors ("Spike Lee Slams *Django Unchained*"). This pair of films and the surrounding debates illustrate that the South remains a region not only rife with representational anxiety but a location whose meaning is contested, questioned, and debated in contemporary American pop culture.

Competing and contradictory narratives about the South reveal what Tara McPherson calls in *Reconstructing Dixie*, "our cultural schizophrenia" about the region (3). Yet these struggles over the meaning of region, race, and gender are by no means confined to film, as this project demonstrates. However, in television studies, the South's

role in television history and the region's role—both imagined and real—in policing and framing representations of race and gender on primetime remains understudied and under-theorized. This gap in scholarship also applies to the South's recent rise in televisual popularity. Indeed, the South features prominently in a myriad of television shows across genres: A&E's reality hit about swamp millionaires, *Duck Dynasty* (2012-present); F/X's Kentucky-based violent Western, *Justified* (2010-present), AMC's zombie-apocalypse drama, *The Walking Dead* (2010-present), HBO's southern gothic vampire drama, *True Blood* (2008-present), and the list goes on. To understand this contemporary explosion of shows set in the South, this dissertation argues, we need to return to the early days of network television, to a period in time in which the South's appearances on entertainment TV were both infrequent and fraught with anxiety.

To do this, this project looks at primetime television and the South between 1955, the year of the Montgomery Bus Boycotts, and 1980, the year Ronald Reagan was elected. During this period, the modern Civil Rights Movement made some of its most important strides, the South saw the legal end of segregation, and television ascended to the status of a national mass medium. Despite these and other massive social changes and civil unrest, which early television news covered, entertainment programming on television remained a bastion of the white suburban middle class, in terms of its representations and the audience it sought to address. From the early days of television, both networks and advertisers used the South as justification for the continued segregation of television: whether imagined or real, networks and advertisers feared a southern backlash. This fear served to police the ways in which race and gender were represented on primetime television. These formative years of television laid the

foundation for representations of region, race, and gender in subsequent primetime programming (Gray, *Watching Race* 74).

As a means to create and manage white consensus, African American stories and characters were escorted onto the small screen in two crucial ways. At once, African American characters were imagined, written, and produced by whites. At the level of production then, images of African Americans were escorted onto the small screen through white eyes and from white perspectives. As a result, African American characters were contained within side-roles and in sitcoms, which failed to challenge the expected white middle class gaze. Furthermore, even when African American or other non-white characters appeared on television, the blocking always relegated such characters to the background. African American characters appeared—within the diegesis—literally escorted onto the screen and into the living room by their white counterparts. Within this context, African American characters functioned solely to propel narrative action for white characters and aid in white character development. As African American stories were escorted onto television, so too was African American experience translated, managed, and contained within stereotypic representations unthreatening to the imagined white southern viewer and white supremacy.

Because the South came to function as a visual signifier for violence and racial unrest—thanks to television news coverage—so too did networks struggle with ways in which to represent the region in entertainment programming, when it was represented at all. This project focuses on the history and struggle for African American drama in primetime television—that I connect to TV's relationship to the South—which culminates in the eight-day presentation of *Roots* on ABC in 1977 and its 1979 sequel,

Roots: The Next Generation.[1] These televisual versions of Alex Haley's family biography provide unflinching and unique representations of the South and the extraordinary violence of slavery, emancipation, and racism that were foundational to that region.

Roots' unprecedented success at once reveals the lie the networks told—no southern backlash occurred and audiences across the U.S. were spellbound by the history presented by *Roots*. Yet *Roots* premiered on the eve of what came to be known as the conservative restoration and the intensification of a backlash against civil rights. *Roots*' televisual legacy then remains an economic one: networks in the 1980s, competing with cable and later Fox, subsequently courted African American audiences for primetime dramas through the use of sidekicks like Ricardo Tubbs (Philip Michael Thomas) on *Miami Vice* (1984-1989). While television may be a historically conservative industry, *Roots* revealed the financial benefits of topics formerly deemed unprofitable. However, like earlier glimpses at racially progressive programming—*The Hazel Scott Show* (1950) or Harry Belafonte's explorations of African American culture, for example—so too did major shifts in both the ideological and industrial tides initiated by Reagan's election reinstate the white televisual status quo.

Watching America: TV, Race, and Broadcasting to a Nation, 1950-1968

The post-war period was marked by the rapid rise of television to the status of a national medium, pastime, and news source. Between 1948 and 1955 televisions were installed in two-thirds of American homes (Spigel, *Make Room for TV* 2; *New York*

[1] This bracketing of TV dramas as separate from comedies draws from extensive scholarship on sitcoms as relying on and perpetuating stereotypes, particularly where race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability are concerned. Kristal Brent Zook argues in *Color by Fox* (1999), that African Americans are consistently ghettoized in sitcoms, a genre reliant on and invested in stereotypes. Taking this further and going back farther, Deborah Barker and Kathryn McKee, suggest in their introduction to *American Cinema and the Southern Imaginary*, that "before the Tom shows or their more violent inheritors, music and comedy provided another less obvious way to contain African American culture" (6).

Times, "Figures Attest Television Rise in U.S. Homes" 35).[2] In these early years, ABC, CBS, NBC, and the short-lived DuMont network attempted to court African American audiences with more diverse fare. At CBS, Thomas Cripps argues, "in the three years between 1950 and 1953, the lifespan of the *Amos 'n' Andy* show, network executives embarked on a 'new policy of cultivating the Negro audience'—at least according to trade papers" (29). Of course, *Amos 'n' Andy* proved to be a public relations disaster for the network, inciting protests from the NAACP for its racist content.[3] Meanwhile, between 1950 and 1954, NBC hired Joe Baker, who crafted the Integration without Identification policy, with the goal to create more roles for African Americans in television programs (Forman 129). The policy would integrate African Americans in "roles [in] which they might be found in everyday life,' mailman teacher, parole officer, and other occupations" (ibid.). NBC's new policy would, executives believed, help NBC by "dispelling the lingering impression that CBS was both more sensitive to black interests and more assertive in hiring blacks in a variety of roles" (Forman 126). During this same period, Dumont produced *The Hazel Scott Show*, featuring Scott, already a famous classical pianist, singer, and civil rights activist. However, with the publication of *Red Channels* in June 1950 Scott was blacklisted and her show canceled (Barnouw 124; Bogle 18).[4]

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[2]A *New York Times* report from 1955 on television sales and its prevalence in U.S. homes from 1955, suggests that television spread more quickly than radio with television sets being most popular in "the Northeast, then, in order, North Central, South and West regions." This information is reiterated in Lynn Spigel's *Make Room for TV* and Gary Edgerton's *Columbia History of American Television*.

[3] The sitcom was canceled in 1953 but remained on the air in syndication from 1954 to 1956. For more on *Amos 'n' Andy*'s syndication see Doug Battema's "Pictures of a Bygone Era: The Syndication of Amos 'n' Andy, 1954-1956."

[4] The case of the *Hazel Scott Show* and Scott's blacklisting too provides an early example of the detrimental conflation between communism and the Civil Rights Movement. This collapsing of the two

By 1954, a frustrated Joe Baker had left NBC and these early attempts at integration and courting an African American audience were over, overshadowed by network and advertiser fears of offending and losing an imagined white southern audience—a mounting concern as southern stations grew in the wake of the 1948-1952 FCC licensing freeze (Torres 20). This fear was compounded by the rise of McCarthyism, the terror created by the blacklist, and the conflation of racially progressive programming and Civil Rights with communism.[5] For sure, the policing of race on early television programming was far more complicated than just an attempt to appease an imagined white South. However, network executives and advertisers mobilized an imagined South as a justification for controlling representations of race. This racially coded economic argument can be best illustrated by both Nat King Cole's experience at NBC in 1956 -1967 and Harry Belafonte's at CBS in 1961 (Forman 132; Belafonte, *My Song* 220). Chapter II of this dissertation, "Southern Backlash: Nat King Cole, Harry Belafonte, and Southern Economics," focuses on a discussion of Nat King Cole and Harry Belafonte and the two already famous stars' experience in headlining primetime television. While both Cole and Belafonte appeared regularly on television throughout the 1950s and 1960s, both men remained confined to guest appearances on variety and talk shows and television specials, like Belafonte's 1966 celebration of African American culture *The Strollin' Twenties* for CBS (Belafonte, *My Song* 317). Both

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would become a preferred tactic of discrediting Civil Rights leaders by the FBI. In *Black and White and Red All Over* Carol Stabile writes, that Scott, "already at the margins of cultural production by virtue of her gender and race," her case highlights how "progressive women were especially vulnerable to the blacklist" (63). Progressive women, like Scott, were Stabile argues, "typhoid Marys of the left.' Their presence in the industry was a threat to the androcentric world of anti-communism and its investment in a white nuclear family rooted in female submission" (87).

[5] For more on the role of the Blacklist in television, see Thomas Patrick Doherty's *Cold War, Cool Medium*.

Cole and Belafonte challenged African American stereotypes, which made them unsuitable—sponsors believed—for national broadcasting lest networks be accused by southern affiliates of "overloading the circuits with Negro propaganda" (Classen 43).[6] This anxiety over southern white audiences illustrates the racist underpinnings of advertiser and network executives' decisions about primetime programming—the most expensive real estate on television.

As Civil Rights waged a non-violent war against the dominant and stereotypical signs of blackness, so too did the movement call into question the meanings of the South itself. By 1955, the South had been forced into the national spotlight by news of the Montgomery Bus Boycotts (1955-1956) and photographs of Civil Rights protestors, including the 1955 photo of Emmett Till's brutally beaten body. While visiting family in Mississippi, the Chicago-native and teenaged Till was brutally lynched for reportedly flirting with a white woman. His white assailants were acquitted and the case drew national attention to southern white violence against African Americans. Photographs of Till's unrecognizable body, which circulated in both *Jet* and *The Chicago Defender*, reinforced this vision of a racist, violent, and terrifying white South.

Civil Rights and its subsequent news coverage made visible "our cultural schizophrenia" of the South: "the region remains at once the site of trauma of slavery and also the mythic location of a vast nostalgia industry […] The brutalities of those periods remain dissociated from our representations of the material site of those atrocities, the

[6] Television's maintenance of the color line did not necessarily mean African American invisibility, rather if and when African Americans appeared on national television, they remained confined by stereotypical representations such as those from the earlier *Beulah* (ABC 1950-1952) and *Amos n' Andy* (CBS 1950-1953). In these years, "blacks appeared primarily as maids, cooks, 'mammies,' and other servants, or as con artists and deadbeats. These stereotypes were necessary for a representation and legitimization of a racial order build on racism and white supremacy" (Gray 74).

plantation home" (McPherson 3). The press coverage of the Civil Rights movement revealed the dangers and very real violence of white nostalgia for Tara and Scarlett O'Hara. By 1955, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Gandhi inspired crusade, which always ran the risk of bloodshed began to draw cameramen and tape recorders, sometimes resulting in 2-minute items on newscasts" (Barnouw 207). These now-infamous images of hoses, attack dogs, and brutal police violence juxtaposed with "images of children and young people dressed in their Sunday best" combined with "the careful planning of movement activities conformed to the type of serialization that television news had adopted from print journalism" and revealed the "cultural schizophrenia" to the nation (Stabile, *White Victims, Black Victims* 136; McPherson 3).

For the most part, network entertainment programming steered clear of the region, which could no longer signify the safe and genteel plantation space or stand in "as a panacea for the broken homes and hearts of wartime life"—a way to "restore faith in family togetherness," at least for the white middle class (Spigel 2-3). While television rose to the status of a national medium, the South remained conspicuously absent from those geographies used to signal American values.[7] Other regions could perform this brand of white reassurance: for instance, by the 1960s the Midwest would come to stand in for hearth, home, and American values in shows such as *Petticoat Junction* (1963-1970) and *Green Acres* (1965-1971). As Victoria Johnson writes in *Heartland TV*, many television shows "Positively embraced [the region] as the locus of solid dependability,

[7] The absence of the South becomes even more apparent given the onslaught of Westerns from *Gunsmoke* (1955-1975) to *Cheyenne* (1955-1963) and *Have Gun, Will Travel* (1957-1963) all set in an ambiguous Wild West. Meanwhile, the occasional cop dramas like *Dragnet* (1951-1959) in Los Angeles and *The Lineup* (1954-1960) in San Francisco cleaned up urban centers and sitcoms such as *I Love Lucy* (1951-9157) in Los Angeles or *The Goldbergs* (1949-1956) in New York.

cultural populism, and producerist, 'plain folks' independence, the Midwest as Heartland, in this iteration, symbolizes the ideal nation" (5). If Westerns asserted a brand of post-war manhood, then Heartland shows envisioned a home that the white hero could return to. This whitewashed Midwest of *Father Knows Best* (1954-1960) points to a post-war moment wherein, as both Anna McCarthy and Lynn Spigel argue, television's pedagogical function was to reiterate family togetherness, good citizenship, and the white nuclear family as the basis of the nation.

Amidst contested meanings of the South and the nation, only four dramas set in the South premiered in the late 1950s*:* the Civil War drama *The Gray Ghost* (1957-158), the police procedurals *Bourbon Street Beat* (1959-1960) and *N.O.P.D.* (1956-1957), and the post-Civil War Western *Yancy Derringer* (1958-1959).[8] Chapter III, "Failed Souths: Race, Gender, and Region in *Bourbon Street Beat* and *Yancy Derringer*" examines two of these unsuccessful New Orleans-based shows within the context of Civil Rights and contested meanings of the South. Both crime-of-the-week dramas remain invested in myths of the plantation South even as both envision a ruined, changing, and crumbling region signaled by the decaying plantation home. Yet, both *Yancy Derringer* and *Bourbon Street Beat* suffer from a representational aporia, an inability to represent the changes wrought by the Civil Rights Movement directly. These contradictory representational impulses structured a puzzling vision of the South wherein racial conflict was displaced onto white female bodies, while the rest of the racial order remained intact and upheld by white men. As both dramas proclaim a race-blind South, their narratives and aesthetics articulate and repeat race-based tropes—a racial formulation rooted in

[8] At the time of writing this dissertation copies of *N.O.P.D.* remain unavailable for screening. Further, *The Gray Ghost* has received some scholarly attention while *Bourbon Street Beat* and *Yancy Derringer* are rarely addressed or mentioned in work about television in this period.

what Stuart Hall terms an inferential racism ("Whites of their Eyes" 91). While these primetime Souths thoroughly failed to rehabilitate the image of a region in crisis, they illuminate the difficulties of representing the South and race on television in the late 1950s.

By 1960, the year that *The Andy Griffith Show* premiered, ninety percent of American homes were wired and watching television, oft tuning in to five hours of programming every day (Spigel 1).[9] As Allison Graham notes in *Framing the South*, *Andy Griffith*, which follows the comic exploits of a small-town southern sheriff and cast of eccentric white characters, was not set up for success—particularly given the fact that no other television show with a southern setting had succeeded—premiering as it did at the height of "the media's sheriff-saturation" (156).[10] In the midst of nightly images of Bull Connor, sheriff of Birmingham; Harold Strider, sheriff of Sumner county; and Jim Clark, sheriff of Selma; among many other pro-segregationist law-men "seemingly indistinguishable in manner and diction," the charming and pacifist Sheriff Andy Taylor (Andy Griffith) of Mayberry County must have been a breath of fresh southern air (Graham, *Framing the South* 157). In Andy Taylor, the show suggested a rehabilitated and downhome southern lawman, unlike those sheriffs populating the nightly news. Chapter IV, "Comic Relief: *Andy Griffith*, Southern Sheriffs, and Regional Rehabilitation," looks at *Andy Griffith*'s odd success and the sitcom's politics of race,

[9] And each of the three networks supported a wide array of programming from news segments and documentaries to entertainment programming like anthologies.

[10] American television was filled with odd juxtapositions. Eric Barnouw writes in *Tube of Plenty*, "[t]here were *The Beverly Hillbillies* and other Nielson pacemakers," like *Andy Griffith*, "and then there were news specials that seemed to come from another world. The two worlds often seemed incompatible. They represented the two worlds into which television had fissioned" (314). There was no doubt, Barnouw continues, "which commanded the chief loyalty of audiences:" *Andy Griffith*, *Bonanza*, *Red Skeleton Hour*, to name just a few (ibid.).

class, gender, and southern rehabilitation against the backdrop of the Woolworth's sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina (1960), the March on Washington (1963), the passage of the Civil Rights Act (1964), and the Civil Rights Movement more generally. *Andy Griffith* was a show wildly out of step with its times—Civil Rights, Vietnam War (1955-1975), the assassinations of John F. Kennedy (1963) and Martin Luther King, Jr (1968). Unlike southern shows before it, however, the sitcom dislocated its South from both nostalgia for the plantation and the Civil Rights Movement in order to embrace family togetherness and small town values. This severance from southern history enabled *Andy Griffith* to do what other southern shows had not: champion good citizenship, the nuclear family, and rehabilitate the South.

Television's New Old Souths: *The Waltons* and *Roots*, 1968-1980

By 1968, the year *The Andy Griffith Show* ended, the U.S. had experienced a new brand of collective violence and turmoil through television. The peaceful Civil Rights Movement was over but the nation had witnessed an onslaught of violence via television: from images of extraordinary brutality in the South to the riots at the 1968 Democratic National Convention and the war in Vietnam. Yet the fissures between the two kinds of television—entertainment programming and news—remained; these worlds were still, as they had been in the early 1960s, incompatible. However, small adjustments were occurring: more and more black faces began populating the small screen. African Americans, however, remained confined to sitcoms and side characters invariably written and produced by white men. Herman Gray observes in "Remembering Civil Rights," that the "civil rights and black power movements indirectly helped to reconfigure television" (350). Gray suggests that these movements "created limited but significant 'adjustments'

that eventually resulted in the proliferation of black representations on television in the mid 1970s and again in the late 1980s" (ibid.). To be sure, the new visibility of African Americans on television offered never before seen representations of African American family life in urban locations such as Los Angeles and New York. These representational gains, however, remained geographically bound to regions outside the South.

A whitewashed South appeared for the first time in a successful drama in the shape of a family drama, *The Waltons* (1972-1981). *The Waltons* imagined a safe, tolerant, and peaceful rural South primarily populated by poor but hardworking white families. Narrated by the eldest Walton son, John Boy Walton (Richard Thomas), the series begins during the Depression and traces the family's struggles—including John Boy's attempts to become a writer—through the end of World War II, as the men return home from the war. Like *The Waltons*' comic predecessors, *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962-1971) and *Andy Griffith*, were marginalized white and poor southerners, whose position on the edge of southern culture was signaled by their geographic location in Appalachia.[11] By many standards *The Waltons* was a progressive show, as indicated by its interest in the New Deal and the show's avowed belief in racial tolerance. Espousing family togetherness and hard work, *The Waltons* presented a parallel history to that of *Roots*, a harmonious and interracial southern community severed from the legacies of Jim Crow. This white liberal and progressive vision of the South like *Andy Griffith* presented a restorative image to a nation in crisis even as it represented southern racism in many episodic storylines, a taboo topic for primetime television. Yet, this vision of the South remained one filtered through white eyes and centered upon a white family. A drama that

[11] *The Beverly Hillbillies* followed the comic adventures of the Clampetts, a hillbilly southern family that find oil on their land, strike it rich, and move to Beverly Hills. Like *Andy Griffith*, the sitcom was part of CBS' rural and comic line-up in the 1960s.

dealt with the horrors of slavery and southern history remained unthinkable and too controversial for the networks in the early 1970s. The networks' anxiety about the South and representations of race becomes visible in the surprise and elation over *Roots*' (1977) unprecedented success. In Chapter V, "Tales of Two Souths: *The Waltons*, *Roots*, and Perspectives on Southern History," I argue that *The Waltons* and *Roots* represent two divergent paths for primetime television in the years before the conservative restoration: the progressive white liberalism of *The Waltons* and the inclusion of African American perspectives and complex dramatic representations on *Roots*.

In the 1970s, representations of African Americans on network television entertainment programming remained confined to stereotypes of African Americans created by white media producers—a point made by the 1968 Kerner Commission Report and again in 1979 by *New York Times* writer Roscoe Brown (Classen 47).[12] Brown writes that despite the proliferation of African Americans on television—*Julia* (1969-1979), *The Leslie Uggams Show* (1969), *The Flip Wilson Show* (1970-1974), *The Jeffersons* (1975-1985), *Sanford and Son* (1972-1977), *Good Times* (1974-1979)—that television's relation to African American actors had not really improved: "These programs invariably present a white man's imaginings of what a black man's existence, his life, is like" (D35). Not unlike Bill Cosby in *I Spy* (1965-1968), African Americans either had to be escorted onto television by white characters or contained within the comedic parameters of sitcoms. The Norman Lear produced hits *Sanford & Son* (1972-1977), *The Jeffersons*

[12] Steven Classen elaborates on this notion. He writes, "Troubling patterns of racial representation had emerged during the early years of television, not only in local southern markets but also on the national scene. As the Kerner Commission study summarized in its statement to President Johnson, viewers of network and local television had, among other things, seen a world that was 'almost totally white in both appearance an attitude.' And as the commission went on to note, not only was the visibility of African Americans generally low, but when blacks did appear on the screen they were represented as whites saw them, not as they saw themselves" (47).

(1975-1985), and *Good Times* (1974-1979) conformed to and exemplify these rules: "The television programs involving blacks in the 1970s were largely representations of what white liberal middle-class television program makers assumed (or projected) were 'authentic' accounts of poor black urban ghetto life" (Gray, *Watching Race* 77).

These limited adjustments made to TV programming in the wake of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements are in a sense inheritors of Joe Baker's early plan for NBC: casting African American actors in "roles [in] which they might be found in everyday life" like junk dealers in *Sanford & Son* and laundry business owners in *The Jeffersons* (Forman 126). Of course, these roles—like in Joe Baker's initial plan—placed African Americans in historically ethnic and racialized professions. Even though African Americans populated the 1970s television landscape, the roles available maintained the color line in primetime by containing African American culture through economic and comic stereotypes. That is, the myriad of African American sitcoms of the 1970s took no political risks for the networks: they courted an imagined African American audience by populating shows with black faces, while pandering to a white audience by making those representations unthreatening to white supremacy.

The only dramatic explorations of African American life in the United States remained, as in the earlier days of television, confined to specials or miniseries. For example, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1974), while confined to a one-night run as a made-for-TV movie for CBS, recounted the story of an African American woman's life heretofore unseen on television. *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, based on the Ernest Gaines novel of the same name, represented the life of Miss Jane (Cicely Tyson) from slavery and Emancipation to the Civil Rights Movement. However,

The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman was narrated by a white character thereby reiterating network structures in the very content of the film, wherein African American stories were told and managed by white people as African American characters were "escorted" into dramatic roles by white voices or characters.

Then in early 1976, ABC "launched a project that would have seemed unthinkable a few years before:" *Roots* (Barnouw 466). When *Roots*, based on Alex Haley's bestseller, premiered on ABC in January 1977 it unexpectedly became the most watched dramatic program to date in network history, with 100 million viewers tuning in for the final episode (Brooks & Marsh, "Roots"). The miniseries, which ran for eight consecutive nights, follows Kunta Kinte's (LeVar Burton) family saga from West Africa through the Middle Passage, to slavery in Virginia, the Civil War, and Reconstruction in the South. The miniseries ends with Kunta Kinte's descendants, led by patriarch Chicken George (Ben Vereen), leaving sharecropping behind for freedom and land in Tennessee. While critical of *Roots* because of miniseries' embrace of conservative discourses about race and the American Dream, Herman Gray argues that *Roots* "opened—enabled, really—a discursive space in mass media and popular culture within which contemporary discourses of blackness developed and circulated" (*Watching Race* 78).[13]

At the time, many critics hailed *Roots*' success as progress and indicative of changes in national as well as southern attitudes toward race. Not only did *Roots* greatly exceed ABC's lackluster expectations for the program, the series was the first dramatic

[13] Gray argues that *Roots* "constructed the story of American slavery from the stage of emotional identifications and attachments to individual characters, family struggles, and the realization of the American dream. Consequently, the social organization of racial subordination, the cultural reliance on human degradation, and the economic exploitation of black labor receded almost completely from the story" (*Watching Race* 78). Partially Gray takes the miniseries to task for its melodramatic from, which he concedes made the series a huge success, but took away from its political potential and any systemic critique of race relations in the U.S.

television program to feature a predominantly African American cast and showcase an exploration of African American life and history in the United States. Some journalists rejoiced at the lack of a southern backlash after *Roots* aired, celebrating this as a sure sign of national progress in race relations. In 1979 one *New York Times* staff writer even argued that in the wake of *Roots*, "the black man will never be invisible again" ("At the Root of 'Roots'" A14). Citing Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, he claimed that *Roots* marked "a new phase in this great American awakening" where "the black experience is no longer special and remote," but rather "part of the shared American experience"(ibid.).

However, *Roots* and its sequels' status as miniseries—temporally limited events rather than weekly commitments to an ongoing series—suggested that the networks still envisioned African American stories as unique and separate from the shared American experience. Instead, *Roots* unveiled the ways in which the networks had historically couched their racism in economic terms. Just as Hazel Scott, Nat King Cole, and Harry Belafonte's experiences had shown that there was an audience for black-produced and black-cast television programming in the 1950s and 1960s, so *Roots* demonstrated broader appeal for these programs. Indeed, *Roots*' success overturned the prevailing industry lore that African American drama would be unprofitable.

Roots' success, perhaps because the times had changed, suggested the possibility that it would beget further strides both in terms of representation and also black-authored televisual texts. Sadly, this elation—for instance, a *New York Times* writer suggested, *Roots* marked "a new phase in the great American awakening"—proved premature (ibid.).[14] What *Roots* proved was that programming featuring African Americans in

[14] In addition, after *Roots'* broadcast Les Brown remarked in the *New York Times* that miniseries' success might be seen as a sign of change in the South. Further, in a 1978 article in the *Los Angeles Times*, Dorothy

dramatic and complex roles could be financially successful and that the South would not only not rise up, but the region might even stay tuned.

The 1980s and the Conservative Backlash

In 1980—the year after *Roots: The Next Generations* broadcast on ABC—Ronald Reagan made his first campaign speech at the Neshoba Country Fairgrounds in Mississippi where he championed states' rights. The now-famous speech occurred just miles from where Civil Rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner were murdered in 1964 by the Klu Klux Klan.[15] Reagan's speech was, it seemed, a wink to southern segregationists and a telling moment of what was to come over the next eight years as the Reagan administration mobilized television's full potential to re-criminalize black bodies. Unfortunately, *Roots*' success occurred on the eve of the Reagan restoration and a subsequent conservative backlash where "race and television were at the very core of the new right's largely successful efforts to establish a rightward shift in the political, cultural, and social discourse" (Gray, *Watching Race* 15). As the conservative backlash stifled the contemporary discourses of blackness enabled by *Roots*, the new right's race-neutral yet racially charged rhetoric formed the basis for a post-race rhetoric that would reach maturity in the decades to come.

The conclusion of this dissertation reads *The Cosby Show* (1984-1995) and *Miami Vice* (1984-1989) within and as emblematic of the rapidly changing televisual environment—the breakdown of the three-network system—and as part of the legacy of

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Gilliam writes that "Until 'Roots' there wasn't much for black youths to see on television that could acquaint them with their heritage" (Q16). Further, Gillian expresses both disappointment and dissatisfaction at the void of in African American dramatic representations on television.

[15] At the time, television news outlets followed the search and broadcast James Chaney's funeral at the United Baptist Church in Meridian, Mississippi to the nation (Barnouw 344).

Roots amidst the conservative backlash. If *The Waltons* and *Roots* presented what primetime programming could have become, then *The Cosby Show* and *Miami Vice* articulated two paths primetime television did take in representing region and race. Set in Brooklyn, *The Cosby Show,* which comically followed the Huxtable family as the children dated, grew up, and went to college, was revolutionary in its representation of African American life, where much of the creative control lay with Cosby himself. Distinct from previous representations of African American families in television, the Cosby family was not—neither at the level of production nor diegetically—escorted into living rooms across the nation by whites. Cosby's politically neutral star-text, the family's middle class status, and the show's (almost complete) disavowal of systemic racism, though, articulate and embrace what Gray calls "the civil rights subject."[16] These representations of African Americans—against the prevailing re-criminalization of black bodies as part of the political right's strategy—"reinforce[d] and reaffirm[ed] the openness and equality of contemporary American society" ("Remembering Civil Rights" 353). Even so, *The Cosby Show* makes visible *Roots'* legacy both in its authorship and its progressive representations of African Americans on primetime, a legacy Fox expands on in its early years. However, this brand of representation remained geographically confined—it appears—to urban spaces in the North and West.

By contrast, *Miami Vice* featured a pair of white and African American cops fighting the war on drugs in the South. Where *Roots* "helped to alter, even momentarily interrupt, the gaze of television's idealized white middle-class viewers and subjects,"

[16] My use star-text draws on Richard Dyer's work in *Stars*. In *Stars*, Dyer argues that stars are social constructions created and managed by the press, studios, fans, etc. That is, stars are carefully constructed entities that do not necessarily resemble or even approximate the actor as a person. Yet, Dyer argues that part of audience fascination with stars is a sense of wanting to know the person behind the star and of potentially "capturing … the unique" person (15).

Miami Vice courted African American viewership without disrupting the imagined and idealized white gaze (Gray, *Watching Race* 80). The drama embraces a colorblind vision of racial harmony, while continually privileging the white Crockett (Don Johnson) over the African American Tubbs (Philip Michael Thomas). That is, *Miami Vice* mirrors Reagan-era rhetoric, which dismissed systemic racial inequalities as a contemporary reality. This brand of representational diversity, which was common in 1980s dramas as a means to compete in an expanding and rapidly changing televisual environment, still pandered to and reinforced "television's idealized white middle-class gaze" (ibid.).

My hope is that this history of television, the South, race, and gender provides a lens through which we can begin to make meaning of the New South and its televisual and film counterparts. As Herman Gray argues in *Watching Race*, the 1950s was the formative and "defining discursive and aesthetic moment that enabled and shaped the adjustments that black representations continue to make. It remains the moment against which all other television representations of blackness have reacted" and remain in dialogue with (74). I would add here, to Gray's formulation, that this defining moment is one inextricably tethered to the South and the region's fraught televisual history and a national anxiety about what the region means.

These questions about the South, race, and gender are still central to national discourses about contemporary popular culture, particularly in the contemporary moment, which has seen a proliferation of films and televisions show set in and about the region. From films like the Civil Rights drama *The Help* (2011) to *Lincoln* (2012) and *Django Unchained* (2012) to television dramas like the country-music primetime soap *Nashville* (2012-present), *True Blood* (2008-present), and *Justified* (2010-present), the South

remains both a contested landscape and site of American fascination. If nothing else, together *Lincoln* and *Django Unchained* are symptoms of our ongoing "cultural schizophrenia about the South" and the need to re-open conversations about race and region (McPherson 3). This newfound televisual and filmic interest in the South in a moment too often championed as post-race begs a return to the region's complicated and controversial televisual beginnings.

CHAPTER II

SOUTHERN BACKLASH:

NAT KING COLE, HARRY BELAFONTE, AND SOUTHERN ECONOMICS

"Racial prejudice is more finance than romance."

-Nat King Cole, *Ebony* 1958

In 1961—just a few years after his NBC show was canceled—Nat King Cole remarked, "The trouble is that the people who run these shows do the thinking for the American people before the people get a chance to think for themselves" (Schumach 41). Here, Cole suggested that the behavior of network and advertising executives towards his show, for instance, reflected an imagined audience and its likes and wants, rather than a real one. Cole critiqued the networks and Madison Avenue for preemptively censoring anything deemed potentially controversial. Specifically, potential sponsors refused to support programming that might offend white southern viewers. Advertising and network executives veiled racism in economic terms as they suggested that African Americans on television—in roles that challenged racist stereotypes—would be unprofitable because of a potential white southern backlash.

While blackouts in the South in response to progressive images of African Americans on television gave credence to sponsors' and networks' fears of a regional backlash, preemptive strikes on racially progressive content betrayed both an allegiance to and investment in southern racist sentiments. Ultimately, these economic pressures exerted by the imagined South on the content of entertainment programming created a climate of consensus programming, where African American characters populated the

margins if indeed they appeared at all.[17] This justification not only betrayed a race-based sensibility of who consumers were—read white—but it also displaced the economic justification for African American exclusion onto the South. This championing of white (racist) consumers over African American consumers reveals the racist underpinnings of television economics. In a period when consumer and citizen were virtually exchangeable—as Anna McCarthy shows in *The Citizen Machine*—the nation called into being and buying by television was one that, despite the gains of Civil Rights, was very much delineated by institutionalized white supremacy.[18]

That both Cole and Belafonte were African American men headlining primetime television shows was not the sole problem for the sponsors and networks. Rather, what made each host particularly controversial was that neither man's respective show or persona catered to stereotypical images of African American men: Nat King Cole was "greeted enthusiastically by critics as sophisticated, elegant fare" and Belafonte embraced

[17] Steven Classen elaborates on this notion in *Watching Jim Crow*. He writes, "Troubling patterns of racial representation had emerged during the early years of television, not only in local southern markets but also on the national scene. As the Kerner Commission study summarized in its statement to President Johnson, viewers of network and local television had, among other things, seen a world that was 'almost totally white in both appearance an attitude.' As the commission went on to note, not only was the visibility of African Americans generally low, but when blacks did appear on the screen they were represented as whites saw them, not as they saw themselves" (47). Of course, the South was not the only force policing the television industry during the 1950s. This period is also marked by the height of McCarthyism, a force that had detrimental effects on the television industry. For more on this, see Thomas Doherty's *Cold War, Cool Medium* and Carol Stabile's *Black and White and Red All Over*

[18] In *The Citizen Machine* Anna McCarthy argues that early discourses about television suggested that the new medium "could be used to educate (or reeducate) viewers' attitudes surrounding problems in a range of areas, from industrial relations to the Jim Crow south, while keeping them at a safe distance from the tentacles of the state (24). To this end, "producers and sponsors developed ideas about how TV might bring its audience members into the domain of governance without subjecting them to direct state control" (ibid.). That is, the organizational distinction between the state and television replete with advertising—which could give viewers the assurance that "you haven't got propaganda in the program being thrown at you" – collapsed consumerism onto democratic rhetoric, discourses invigorated by the Cold War (McCarthy 23). Further, as this rhetoric conflated consumerism with citizenship so too did primetime programming draw a diverse nation into being. However, the nation of consumers were imagined—while geographically diverse—as universally white. As television, despite ongoing social unrest in the post-war period, "promised a normalizing nation the good life and sought to represent it in no uncertain terms," this good life was exclusively directed at white viewers and consumers (Hilmes 82).

an interracial and harmonious New York in his *New York 19* (1960) (Bogle 75). In so doing, Cole and Belafonte's televisual productions inherently challenged white supremacist ideology and opened up space, as Cole suggested in 1961, for American audiences to think for themselves. However, Cole and NBC failed to find a national sponsor for his musical variety show. Similarly, Belafonte refused to give into Revlon's demands to do all-African American shows in order to appease imagined white southern viewers who might object to images of interracial solidarity (Belafonte, *My Song* 220).[19] As a result, his series of musical specials was canceled. These cancellations were indebted to advertisers' fear of offending an imagined white South by featuring African American performers, whose star personae challenged race-based stereotypes.

In contrast, Bill Cosby's more neutral star image in *I Spy* (1965-1968)—as we will see—set the television precedent for how the networks imagined and courted African American audiences. These examples reveal how the South circulated both on and off-screen and the ways in which the television industry and its workers internalized the region, thus embedding and encoding an imagined white South in television's very make-up. When read together, Nat King Cole and Harry Belafonte's experiences suggest how racism became ingrained in the economic logic of television, while Cosby and *I Spy* reveal how the networks would negotiate and profit from de-politicized African American representations.

[19] Revlon CEO Charles Revson feared that interracial programming like *New York 19* would offend Southern viewership and so he asked Belafonte to re-segregate the planned musical specials (Belafonte 220).

"Vintage Black Glamor:" Nat King Cole, Harry Belafonte, and Re-Scripting Blackness[20]

In "Black American Cinema" Manthia Diawara writes that D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) "created a fixed image of Blackness that was necessary for racist America's fight against Black people" (3). The infamous film, which President Woodrow Wilson reportedly likened to "history written with lightening," established racial rules of representation in American cinema by "fixing Black people within certain spaces, such as kitchens, and into certain supporting roles, such as criminals, on the screen" (ibid.). Of course, the tropes employed by Griffith and Dixon in service of celebrating the old white South, such as the "black male rapist" and "good negro," were by no means new. In *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South*, Riché Richardson writes, "the inclination to caricature blacks in the post-Civil War era was already well established in journalism through portraits designed to discredit and malign blacks in and beyond politics" (24).

Decades later Louis Armstrong would star in the first *All Colored Program*, produced in 1937 by J. Walter Thompson for Fleischmann's Yeast. In *Radio Voices*, Michelle Hilmes writes that the script insisted Armstrong use minstrel dialect. When he refused and while on-air changed the lines to Standard English, "he gained a reputation for being 'difficult' to work with," and the show was promptly canceled (Hilmes, *Radio Voices* 79). This example "illustrates the pervasive containment of black presence on the airwaves" through the use of stereotypes (ibid.). Patricia Hill Collins echoes this

[20] The title of this section, "Vintage Black Glamor," comes from a Facebook page, Twitter feed, and forthcoming book of the same name. Each day vintage photographs of African Americans are posted to the page and the project functions, I think, to unearth a history of African American glamor as a counter-narrative to old film and televisual depictions of blackness rooted in stereotypes.

sentiment in her discussion of African American women's oppression in the United States in *Black Feminist Thought*. Collins writes that the controlling images of African American women, such as the Mammy caricature most famously played by Hattie McDaniel in *Gone With the Wind* (1939), "originated during the slave era" and "attest to the ideological dimension of U.S. Black women's oppression" (4-5).

Following Diawara, Richardson, Hilmes, and Collins, stereotypes of African Americans in the media have historically been a tool mobilized in struggles to maintain white supremacy, particularly when that order was in crisis as the white southern order was during the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Civil Rights Movement. In *Playing the Race Card* Linda Williams writes that in response to Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "Twenty-seven plantation novels were written between 1852 and 1861" (101). These novels, written by both southerners and northerners, launched defenses of the old southern ways of life, championing the plantation system as a place where slaves lived happily, and "escaped slaves find unhappiness in the North, and pine for the paternalistic care of their former masters" (ibid.). These novels and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* circulated nationally, repetitively re-writing scripts of the South and slavery (like the Tom and Minstrel shows before and after them). The rise and popularity of these novels, including Thomas Dixon's inspiration for *The Clansman*, responded to anxieties over a changing South; Dixon even blamed Stowe's novel for ruining the region (Williams 102). For Dixon particularly, Williams suggests, the fate of the nation was tied to maintaining separation between the races: "The beginning of Negro equality … is the beginning of the end of the nation itself" (Dixon qtd. in Williams 103). This sentiment pervades *Birth of a Nation*, which links white supremacy and its maintenance to national

identity (Williams 100). This narrative and its championing of the slave system provided ideological justification for maintaining both power and profits.[21]

Yet, the early years of television—both before it became a national medium and before the Civil Rights Movement gained national visibility—were marked by a distinct lack of racial anxiety.[22] Stereotypical and controversial fare like *Beulah* (1950-1963), which followed the comic exploits of the maid Beulah, ran alongside early experiments in more liberal programming that explored non-stereotypical representations of African Americans.[23] For instance, appearing on the DuMont network *The Hazel Scott Show* (1950) featured the glamorous Afro-Caribbean pianist Scott: "*The Hazel Scott Show* not only had the temerity to feature a black woman, the black woman in question starred in her own show rather than playing a domestic servant in a program someone else had written" (Stabile, *Black and White and Red All Over* 74). Hazel Scott's show made media history with Scott both at its representational center and at its helm, controlling the ways in which she was represented on-screen: elegant, commanding, and intelligent (Bogle 16). Similarly, CBS's *The Bob Howard Show* (1948-1950) featured Howard singing and playing the piano. In *Primetime Blues*, Donald Bogle argues that, "*The Bob Howard Show* helped transform the American living room. For the first time, audiences could sit in their homes and see a Black man hosting proceedings, calling the shots, and literally

[21] Williams' discussion of the rise of plantation novels in response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* suggests an earlier moment where a narrative threatened the old Southern order, and so initiated a wave of literature in support of slavery and the plantation system.

[22] This is not to say that racially problematic programming didn't exist in the early years of TV. Indeed, *Amos n' Andy* (1951-1953) moved from radio to television, was canceled, and then ran in syndication from 1954-1966 (Battema). However, performers like Hazel Scott and Bob Howard provided alternate visions of blackness during the early days of television.

[23] *Beulah* originated on the radio and after the move to television the title role of Beulah was played by Ethel Waters, Hattie McDaniel, and then Louise Beavers.

running the show" (14). Quite differently than what would happen to Nat King Cole in 1956, CBS appeared unfazed by the notion of an African American performer with his own show (ibid.). In 1949 CBS even aired an African American variety show: *Sugar Hill Times* (ibid.). The initial years of television were more liberal minded perhaps because "television in 1948 was too much of a likable, bumbling kid just learning to walk and talk" (ibid.). However, by 1950 all these experiments in racially progressive television were off the air and the earlier more tolerant climate was replaced by the paranoia of the blacklist, anxieties about race, and a desire to cater to the new white southern viewership (Torres 20).[24]

As television's reach grew and expanded in the South, disputes over racial representation came to the forefront: "when audiences were concentrated in the Northeast, programmers could afford to be somewhat experimental in their deployment of black performance" (Torres 21). As southern viewership grew, however, the networks increasingly courted and pandered to southern segregationist tastes (ibid.). By 1955, as Eric Barnouw suggests in *Tube of Plenty*, "A Negro as a beleaguered protagonist of a television drama was declared unthinkable. It would, they said, appall southern viewers" (165). Echoing this sentiment Steven Classen writes in *Watching Jim Crow* that Fred Beard, head of the NBC affiliate in Jackson, Mississippi, opposed NBC's "decision to present a black actor in a leading role in a dramatic program" (43). Beard complained that the television circuits were being overloaded by "negro propaganda" (ibid.).

[24] In *Black, White, and in Color* Sasha Torres writes that television stations and the number of televisions in homes grew most slowly in the deep South (20). This growth pattern as effected by the "FCC's freeze on the licensing of new stations from 1948 to 1952. […] The freeze left Arkansas, Mississippi, and South Carolina completely without television at least until 1953" (ibid.).

This brand of complaint was by no means exclusive to Beard or Jackson; southern station managers often argued that racially progressive programming was integrationist propaganda (Torres 22; Classen 86).[25] In 1952 a white viewer from Memphis, Tennessee writing to NBC, showcased a similar racist sensibility; he wrote, "Can't we have one program without a bunch of niggers? I like negroes and have employed as many of them as most people but I do not care to have them in my home, as guest or participant with white people" (qtd. in Forman 129). That same year, Georgia Governor Herman Talmadge infamously opposed the "mixing of races on television shows" (Forman 129). The Tennessee viewer and Governor Talmadge voiced opposition to interracial broadcasts and suggested that television programming strictly maintain the color line by programming whites and African Americans separately. At the very least, when read alongside Beard's comments, all three suggest that entertainment programming should keep African American characters confined to fixed spaces such as the kitchen or cast as deviants of one form or another.

In this climate, advertising executives' concerns about a southern backlash were not entirely without merit: white southern station managers and viewers had expressed some opposition to interracial programming. In broadcast television, blackouts were a common response, as Steven Classen illustrates, to primetime fare deemed controversial: "In Jackson [the] omissions of African American images and perspectives was nearly complete, at least in 'mainstream' print and electronic media, and extended well into the sixties" (112). Or, only moments before Harry Belafonte was to appear on the *Steve Allen Show* in 1958, WFSA in Montgomery, AL went off the air ("Belafonte is Cut Off" 59).

[25] Classen writes, "In the South it was not unusual for television stations to simply suppress images or narratives of white-on-black violence and police brutality while citing a concern for public safety and fear of increasing racial tensions" (111).

Station managers were even threatened with violence: an Alabama station manager told *Jet*, "I like Nat Cole, but they told me if he came back on they would bomb my house and my station" (qtd in Bogle 76).[26] As the momentum and visibility of the Civil Rights Movement increased in the mid-1950s, so too did southern affiliates systematically refuse to carry news or documentaries about civil rights or any show that might question segregationist stances (Torres 22).[27] This anxiety was genre specific as casting an African American actor in a dramatic program might re-cast and re-imagine the available scripts of blackness—scripts that, as Diawara, Collins, and Richardson point out, served clear political purposes. A dramatic program might, it seems, present white and African American viewers a chance to view African Americans outside those tropes determined and derived from the southern plantation system.

Behind the screens, the South and television networks and advertisers' assumptions about the region were at the very core of how primetime programming engaged and represented race and nation. While the Civil Rights Movement made the violence of the Jim Crow South visible on a national level, television entertainment programming and its sponsors refused to follow suit. The image of an African American

[26] This brand of Southern censorship was neither new nor exclusive to television. Deemed incendiary and a threat to the status quo, narratives that challenged white supremacy were repeatedly banned in the South. As Riché Richardson points out, as a result of the 1829 publication of David Walker's *Appeal in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to Coloured Citizens of the World* in *Freedom's Journal*, "laws to repress incendiary literature were made in southern state legislation. A bounty was placed on Walker himself by a cohort of white southern slaveholders" (30-31). In addition, Sasha Torres also shows, in *Black, White and In Color*, that the 1957 film *Island in the Sun*, which starred Harry Belafonte and "featured two interracial romances," was "widely banned throughout the South; the legislature throughout the State of Carolina, in fact, considered passing a law that would have fined the owners of theaters showing the film $5,000" (46).

[27] In addition, the same year as the *Island in the Sun* ban, Cole was brutally attacked while performing in Birmingham, AL (Classen 111). The *Los Angeles Times* reports that Cole was attacked in Birmingham in an assault planned by 100 white men. Cole was assaulted on-stage in front of almost 4,000 people. After the attack, Cole canceled three more appearances in the South ("Attack by 100 Planned Against Nat King Cole").

lead in a drama perhaps too closely aligned with those images from news broadcasts of Civil Rights, which presented "African Americans for the first time in the history of mainstream news media as victims worthy of attention" (Stabile, *White Villains, Black Victims* 136). Sponsors feared that by re-imagining blackness, they would court controversy and cause a southern backlash, which would be bad for business. This formulation of audience, of course, excluded African Americans from the imagined consumer base. Within this racially charged climate, Cole and later Belafonte threatened the white televisual order, a "psychological refuge, a fortress" for white Americans (Edgerton 274). Like the news broadcasts of the Civil Rights Movement, the two performers challenged the available scripts of on-screen blackness at a moment when white supremacy was visibly in crisis. Where previous moments of crisis, as Linda Williams argues, initiated a proliferation of literature and images that reified racial hierarchies, in the post-war years television networks and advertisers took a different tactic: erasure, omission, and marginalization—a near total erasure of black bodies.[28]

The *Nat King Cole Show*

In 1956 NBC launched the short-lived *Nat King Cole Show*. In it, Nat King Cole was not a beleaguered protagonist. Nor did he fit within the stereotypical confines fixed by *Birth of a Nation* and then re-imagined for radio and television by shows like *Amos n' Andy*. Instead, Cole was handsome, dapper, and genteel. Always appearing in suits and ties, he was a bona fide matinee star (Figure 3). Reflecting back on Cole's Show in 1989, Douglas Lyons wrote in *Ebony* that, "The dapper and urbane Cole brought a new and refreshing image of Black America to TV" (71). Indeed, Joe Stevenson wrote in the

[28] Bogle reiterates this sensibility in *Primetime Blues*: "if one were to come to a conclusion about the place of African Americans in American society judging by television images, it would be that Black citizens—for the most part—were contented souls. If they existed at all" (58).

Chicago Defender about how he and "17 million other Negroes" were excited and pleased by Nat King Cole's television show (10). When it aired in 1956, the *Nat King Cole Show* was very much in step with the changing times: Brown vs. Board of Education (1954), the Montgomery Bus Boycotts (1955), and even Hollywood films like *No Way Out* (1950) and *Carmen Jones* (1954) presented "more progressive African American images" and so "were reflecting the changes of American life—and also Black America's evolving view of itself" (Bogle 57-58).

Commanding the center of the stage, Cole challenged previous representations of African Americans in film and television while also garnering top ratings—despite the absence of a national sponsor ("Host With the Most").[29] While Cole's show was not a drama, it proved that racially progressive images could be profitable and popular. Yet the show was still canceled. Cole's image—a "decent, well-mannered, highly educated human being"—proved too controversial for sponsors as it did not fit within the historic and racist confines of on-screen blackness (Stevenson 10). It was not just that Cole was an African American performer, since as Stevenson points out "the Amos and Andy television show had no difficulty in obtaining sponsors" (ibid.).[30] Rather, Nat King Cole proved threatening to an imagined southern audience because his show and star persona so clearly challenged stereotypes about African American masculinity.

[29] The *Nat King Cole Show* was the first show to be aired on a cooperative basis: Rheingold Beer sponsored the show only in the East, while two wine companies picked up Cole in the West ("Host with the Most").

[30] Stevenson goes on to ask about *Amos n' Andy*'s success, "Was it because the show low-graded the character of the Negro? As long as Negroes can play parts that tend to be stereotyped everything is all right" "(The People Speak").

Figure 3: Nat King Cole from *The Nat King Cole Show*

It was this very dignified star image, I want to suggest, that was so threatening to the white established order: in Cole, African American viewers found a televisual representation that "made them proud" and gave "them a new sense of dignity" (Cole 30). Cole was not an outcast from the "dominant culture," yet another menacing African American male character, nor was he a marginal character populating the outskirts of a white world (Bogle 59). Instead, Cole embodied a kind of exemplary and polished persona and voice, while his central positioning in the frame commanded the primary focus. Further, Cole's sound—both in song and speech—in perfect and refined English troubled stereotypic aural representations of African Americans, such as those Louis Armstrong was confined to in 1937 (Hilmes, *Radio Voices* 79).

Sasha Torres argues, however, that rather than presenting a positive image of African Americans on television, Nat King Cole represented an "exemplary Negro" (3) and merely reinforced racist depictions. When Torres writes that Cole showcased an "exemplary Negro," she suggests that his televisual personality derives from the lineage of Uncle Tom types: the trope of the deferential slave happily reliant on the white

paternalistic order. While I agree with Torres that Cole was packaged and sold in many ways for a mass audience, this reduction of Cole to an "exemplary Negro" misses how controversial his show actually was, the viewer response, and also the ways in which Cole spoke out—even while his show was still on the air—against Madison Avenue's color line. For instance, in a 1957 *Time* article, Cole remarked, "That street [Madison Avenue] still runs TV, and the reluctance is on its part to sell my show" ("Host with the Most"). If anything Cole's class and courtly attire, which made his show the "most fetching musical offering" of the 1957 summer season, made him look most like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—an image that would have been considered controversial by advertisers and networks anxious about the white South ("Pioneer").

This racial order—with Cole at the center and white guests at the periphery—reversed those previously fixed images of blackness. For instance, Cole's show featured white guests like Peggy Lee and even had a white back-up chorus. That is, Cole escorted whites onto screen, rather than the other way around. Cole was well aware of the potential tension caused by the appearance of a white female guest onscreen with him: "[t]he biggest obsession, it seems is the mixing of the races. … we started out with a Negro vocal group. When we started using a white group some people trembled in their boots. … Then the big test: white women guests" (Cole 29). This caution is apparent in the blonde Peggy Lee's appearance on Cole's show with fellow white guest Julius LeRosa: LeRosa often stands in between Peggy Lee and Cole and Cole never touches Lee, while La Rosa frequently places his hand on her back. Further, Lee and Cole rarely, if ever, appear together in the same shot without LaRosa. Quite differently, when Cole performed with Mahalia Jackson, the two held hands and stood shoulder to shoulder in a

tight embrace, displaying a comfort and ease at being on-screen together. Cole's restrained and debonair demeanor with Lee and his analysis of how the show treated white female guests betrayed an awareness of tropes which figure the African American male body as a threat to white womanhood. His performance with Peggy Lee and other white women more generally then troubled southern scripts of dangerous African American masculinity. However, as Cole guessed, and as Harry Belafonte's experience with CBS, Revlon, and Petula Clark shows, integration—especially black men and white women on-screen together—was a major Madison Avenue worry (ibid.).[31]

In a primetime Tuesday spot (7:30pm), Nat King Cole threatened to upend the strict primetime color line by disrupting those limited spaces and roles through which racial identity had previously been fixed.[32] Indeed, Nat King Cole's show re-imagined blackness outside stereotypical confines and constraints during peak primetime hours, generally a citadel of whiteness.[33] Yet, as Joe Stevenson reported in *The Chicago Defender*, sponsors avoided Cole's show "for fear that they would suffer in the sales of their product in the southern part of the United States" (10). When Cole's show was moved from Tuesday to Saturday evening after failing to pick up a national sponsor

[31] Speaking of his own experience on NBC, Nat King Cole's analysis of interracial programming in *Ebony* discloses how featuring white women and African American men on-stage was a big challenge for him, though one he believed his show surmounted: "We proved that a Negro star could play host to whites, including women, and proved it in such good taste that no one was offended" (Cole 33).

[32] Susan Courtney also frames race this way in *Picturizing Race*. In *Pinky* (1949)—a film about a young African American nurse passing for white—Pinky's (Jeanne Crain) blackness is conjured through her association with specific places: "While Pinky's spatial profiling by police and white rapists points to dominant racial practices well beyond the field of cinematic representation, the film exposes its own unique investments in the equation between where you live and who you are as a racial subject. … Pinky's blackness is generated through her placement in a particular space but further demonstrates cinema's ability to construct from that spatial relation an ensuing psychic identity" (185).

[33] In *Tube of Plenty* Barnouw writes of the Civil Rights news broadcasts that, "These issues were discussed on Sunday-ghetto talk programs, but seldom penetrated to the citadel of the peak hours. The commercials remained purest white, and the surrounding dramas were kept in harmony" (207-208).

despite top ratings, Cole decided to quit his show. Reflecting on his experience at NBC in *Ebony*, Cole wrote, "The Saturday slot was a TV horse of another color. At that hour (6pm in the Midwest and 5pm in some areas) most people are eating or shopping" (30). The scheduling move would have re-segregated the primetime line-up by placing Cole in a less powerful, less profitable, and so less threatening time slot—something he certainly recognized. Madison Avenue, as Cole would famously say, appeared to be "scared of the dark" but even more afraid of losing revenue by supporting Cole and therefore offending an imagined white and racist southern audience and consumer (Ross 16).

Harry Belafonte, Revlon, and Petula Clark

Only a couple years after Cole left his NBC show, Revlon approached Harry Belafonte to do a special for CBS (Belafonte, *My Song* 208). For the program, *Tonight With Belafonte* (1959), Belafonte envisioned "a portrait of Negro life in America told through music," for which he won an Emmy (Belafonte, *My Song* 209-210). The initial special's successes led to CBS and Revlon signing Belafonte for five more specials—over which he would have complete creative control. In 1960, Belafonte's second special *New York 19* premiered on CBS, reflecting "the musical heritage of the inhabitants of this multi-racial, midtown Manhattan area" (Salmaggi A12). The series garnered critical acclaim yet again, however, Revlon canceled the next four Belafonte installments. Publicly, Revlon claimed that a change in their advertising policy had led to the show's cancellation (Adams 61). Years later in his autobiography *My Song*, Belafonte provided a different reason: he wrote that Charles Revson, founder and CEO of Revlon, told Belafonte that the next four series would need to have an "all-black cast:" "Some of our stations in the South are having a problem,' Revson explained. 'They're okay with an all-

black cast. They just don't want to see white singers and dancers on the stage together with them'" (Belafonte, *My Song* 220).[34] Belafonte's celebration of black life was palatable and marketable, Revlon believed, so long as the show itself remained segregated. Like Cole before him, Belafonte presented a harmonious and integrated New York world through African American eyes and experience. Belafonte was not only the star but also the producer and so while he occupied the center of the screen and framed the production, whites remained on the periphery sharing the screen equally with African Americans, Latinos, Jews, and the other inhabitants of the New York 19 postal zone. Revlon's anxiety about integrated programming was by no means specific to the company, but rather as Nat King Cole feared was for Madison Avenue a crucial and determining anxiety.

This worry becomes particularly visible in a later example, where while filming a song for Chrysler in 1968, Petula Clark touched Belafonte's arm (Figure 4). After shooting, the Chrysler advertising manager demanded that the pair re-film the song without the controversial touch, which he believed "would offend viewers" (Belafonte, *My Song* 25; Bogle 134). Belafonte, Clark, and their producer (who happened to be Clark's husband) refused to reshoot the song and the show aired with the controversial touch (Belafonte, *My Song* 326). What this example and *New York 19*'s cancellation reveal is that advertising executives remained even in the late 1960s not only "scared of the dark" but scared of interracial mixing, perhaps a fear determined in part by many

[34] Strangely a 1961 *Chicago Defender* article reports that for the third (never aired) installment, "Dixie stations that did not come in for the telecasts last year and year before had agreed to carry the spectacular this year" ("Sponsors Troubles to Delay Belafonte TV"). When read in conjunction with Belafonte's description of Revson's proposal, this article perhaps points to deals made with southern stations to re-segregate the programs as a means to court a white southern audience.

southern states' legal ban on interracial marriage.[35] In 1989, *Ebony* even declared the Clark-Belafonte touch one of TV's most memorable moments alongside television's first interracial kiss in the same year on *Star Trek* (1966-1969) and the premier of *Julia* (1968-1971).

Figure 4: Petula Clark touching Harry Belafonte's Arm in "On the Path of Glory"

The controversy surrounding the arm touch—not even a kiss—stemmed, arguably, from tropes of African American masculinity that figure "the black male body as pathological and bestial" and an ever-present threat to white womanhood (Richardson 5). This logic, which had long been used to justify lynching in the South, presumed that the white female body is always and already under threat from African American men (ibid.).[36] If as Nat King Cole pointed out, the "mixing of races" was the primary concern

[35] The Clark-Belafonte example is particularly odd, given that Belafonte as a public figure was at the time married to a white woman, Julie Robinson in 1957. Belafonte had even discussed marrying a white women in an *Ebony* article, "Why I married Julie," that same year. However, until 1967—the year of Loving v. Virginia—16 states, many of which were in the South, still had laws against interracial marriage (*The Loving Story*).

[36] This script, of white men protecting white women from brown or black men, Carol Stabile suggests, derives from the captivity myth: "White male protection of white female victims, or, to adapt a phrase from Gayatri Spivak (1988), white men protecting white women from brown men, was a theme that came to

of Madison Avenue, Belafonte's Revlon special and his Petula Clark touch illustrated that the major concern was specific to African American men mixing with white women. Clark touching Belafonte on television signaled a fissure in those oppressive racial scripts. Where Cole was an old school classy idol, Belafonte was young, sexy, outspoken, and active in the Civil Rights Movement.[37] Belafonte presented a different kind of African American masculinity: he writes, "I was a lighter-skinned Negro … and an angry one. I didn't want to tone down my sexuality either" (Belafonte, *My Song* 209). Further, Clark voluntarily touching Belafonte reversed the entrenched raced and sexual logic: it simultaneously suggested white women as active agents and the young and handsome African American singer as unthreatening to the white Clark.

Unlike Cole in the 1950s, Belafonte was not interested in 'being careful' or avoiding offense as demonstrated by his and Clark's refusal to re-shoot the song without the arm touch. Yet the handsome and outspoken singer also understood the potential controversy the arm touch might cause, especially for the white Clark: "I felt Pet's dilemma profoundly. The larger ramifications of this incident could have serious consequences for her career" (Belafonte, *My Song* 326). In refusing to re-shoot the song, both Belafonte and Clark publicly challenged the invisible color line that separated white

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predominate in the Americas" (Stabile, *White Victims, Black Villains* 33). It is, a founding myth of the Americas, as Richard Slotkin shows in *Regeneration through Violence*; captivity narratives were perhaps the first American bestseller: "Sermons, histories, anti-emigration tracts, and personal narratives all centered around the theme of captivity; between 1682 and 1716 captivities were the only narratives about the frontier published in America" (144). These narratives functioned to justify violence against the other—Native Americans—quite like the rise of plantation novels functioned to uphold the plantation system and justify white on black violence during Reconstruction.

[37] Further, Belafonte was already controversial as a famous Civil Rights activist—in 1968 CBS would pull his 8 minute "Don't Stop the Carnival" superimposed over images of the riots at the 1968 DNC, set to air during a *Smothers Brothers* episode. Also, NBC would offer Belafonte the chance to host the *Tonight Show* for a week (Belafonte 338, 323). Belafonte's star-text and experiences in television challenged the "familiar and foundational myth of the happy Negro living in a world shut off from white experience and privilege" (Classen 94).

women and black men and those oppressive scripts of African American masculinity, which originated in the South (Richardson 36).[38] Further, the following week Belafonte hosted the *Tonight Show* and, according to the *Chicago Defender*, gave "big kisses theatrical-style to every woman star, white or black who appeared on it" ("Firm Mad as White Girl Star 'Touches' Belafonte" 20). The kissing, *The Defender* reported, like the arm touch, was received without incident. Where Revson had blamed the South for maintaining the color line in 1961, the Chrysler ad executive's reaction reveals once again Madison Avenue's own anxieties about interracial programming.[39] That is, Belafonte's experience discloses the ways in which discourses about the South circulated off-screen were internalized by the television industry and even determined primetime content.

Veiled Racism and the Southern Excuse

While the threat of a southern backlash was not a vacant one, advertisers and networks used it as a mask for their own racism. In a 1957 *Time Magazine* interview, Cole lambasted Madison Avenue for its hesitance in selling his show: "Madison Avenue is in the North, and that's where the resistance is. Sometimes the South is used as a football to take some of the stain of us in the North" ("Host With the Most"). A year later Cole repeated this argument in *Ebony*: "These people [Madison Avenue] use the South as a whipping boy to get themselves off the hook. It gives them an excuse for not doing

[38] In *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South*, Riché Richardson writes that the roots of the "black rapist myth" and the "bad Negro are traceable to the South" (36). He continues, that the myth of the black male rapist is one of the earliest and most concrete examples of how a stereotype germinating in the South instated a national discourse on black masculinity and propagated a view of the black male body as intrinsically pathological" (ibid.)

[39] The director of the Chrysler spot Steve Binder reiterates this point of view in *The Defender*: "I still don't think it has anything to do with the policy of the company. I think it's the problem of the middle-man" ("Firm Mad as White Girl Star 'Touches' Belafonte").

what they ought to do" (31). By 1960, Belafonte was equally frustrated with the Madison Avenue giants. Just before *New York 19*'s premier, he told the *Los Angeles Times*, "Madison Avenue is the greatest difficulty facing TV" (Salmaggi A12). Belafonte goes on to accuse advertisers of thinking they know the public and its wants, but he argued, "they don't even know the public" (ibid.). Quite in line with Cole's assertion that advertising agencies refused to let viewers think for themselves, Belafonte suggested that despite the southern excuse, it was the sponsors and advertising agencies who were responsible for censoring racially progressive material. Both Cole and Belafonte pointed to Madison Avenue's use of the South as a "whipping boy" and as a veil for its own racism (Cole 31). Put another way, the South came to stand in for the racism of an entire industry and consequentially a racism that was projected through primetime television onto the United States.

Ultimately, Madison Avenue reasoned that replicating southern racism on television would be the most profitable and the best way to maintain southern viewership, implicitly understood as white. The *Nat King Cole Show*'s inability to pick-up a national sponsor, for example, reveals the ways in which advertisers mobilized the South as an excuse for national racism. In a 1958 *Ebony* article, "Why I Quit My TV Show," Cole explained the absurdity of the southern excuse:

> Madison Avenue said I couldn't be sold, that no national advertiser would take a chance on offending Southerners. Well, when we went into the co-op deal, when the show was offered local sponsors, businesses snapped it up in a few days. We had Regal beer in New Orleans and no one stopped drinking Regal beer. In

> Houston, Texas, we were sponsored by Coca Cola, a southern company; and nobody stopped drinking Coca Cola (30).[40]

As Cole pointed out, regional sponsors jumped at the opportunity to sponsor his popular show but no national sponsor emerged for fear, Madison Avenue argued, of offending a southern audience. That Cole couldn't find a sponsor becomes even more absurd in light of his overwhelming financial successes nationwide: "They tell me that 50 million of my records have been sold. In the South, North, East, and West people pay hard cash to hear me sing" (Cole 31). The notion that Cole's sponsorship of a product, like Coca Cola, at a national level would generate a backlash against the company revealed that the ideal consumer was white and racist. Further, Cole suggested—rightly so—that his inability to find a national sponsor was grounded in the belief that African Americans could not market products to white people. Conversely, this position also highlighted the belief that whites could be used to market products to anyone and everyone. Madison Avenue's fear of offending the South then reveals more about the ad agencies controlling television than about the South itself. This is not to say, of course, that there were not southern backlashes, as Classen shows, but rather that the white southern audience's racism was a primary concern of sponsors—a peculiar tendency when broadcasting to an entire nation.

This logic—which blames the South for controlling programming—betrayed a racist understanding of the consumer market, where a specific set of white consumers were more valued than their African American counterparts. In a 1957 *New York Times* article, Cole noted the absurdity of such belief systems, given that "Negroes, after all,

[40] Indeed, in the 1940s Walter S. Mack, then head of Pepsi-Cola, created an African American marketing group that at one point helped Pepsi outsell "all its rivals in some Northern cities" (Capparell xiii). This experience became "an object lesson for other companies that were ignoring the African-American consumer and standing on the sidelines when it came to integrating their professional staffs" (ibid.).

constitute a very large buying market" (Godbout 35). Later in a 1961 *New York Times* article, Cole recalls "the comment of a cosmetic manufacturer when approached to sponsor his show on television. The cosmetic executive remarked: 'Negroes can't sell cosmetics'" (Schumach 41). This remark, by a cosmetic executive, is of course absurd since African American women too buy cosmetics and African Americans in general constituted a huge consumer base. Given that a 1945 survey of the "Negro Market" revealed that African Americans "were the largest buyers of cosmetics and toiletries," the cosmetic executive's statement could only mean that African Americans couldn't, he believed, sell cosmetics to white viewers (Weems 34).[41] The *Chicago Defender* reiterated this sensibility: "One of the major fears of companies today,' says Gibson, 'is that if they go after the Negro market they will lose white customers […] Even in the South there is evidence that white people do not care what companies do to cultivate Negro business" ("More Companies Eyeing Negro Buying Power" 9). As the *Defender* report showcases, the way in which the South circulated off-screen and was internalized by the industry consequentially reproduced racist policies and politics.

Southern Economics and Consumer Citizens

The insistence on bowing to southern pressures, however, remains odd, given both an increased understanding of the power of the "Negro Market" in the post-war period and that the South was only one regional market among many. This understanding of the consumer market privileged white consumers and revealed that, southern backlash or not, the economics of television were delineated along race-based lines. Cole

[41] By 1962 *The Chicago Defender* reported that the "U.S. Negro population, which now stands at 19 million, is increasing 57 per cent faster than the rest of the nation" ("More Companies Eyeing Negro Buying Power").

understood this sense quite clearly when he called for "Negroes, above all, to become financially independent" (Cole 30). For all things, he reasoned—quite rightly—came down to money. Cole suggested that African Americans needed to leverage buying power in the war against mainstream media. This rhetoric, which identified consumerism with citizenship and power, reflected the rhetoric of the Civil Rights movement. In *Desegregating the Dollar*, Robert Weems writes that economic boycotts and disruptions to white businesses, like the sit-ins, "quickly captured the imagination of the black community" as a way to effect change (63). Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, focused on economic empowerment as a means to political empowerment, from bus boycotts to creating a community bank (Weems 62). Applying pressure through economics became a cornerstone of the modern Civil Rights Movement and direct-action campaigns showcased the power of leveraging consumerism for citizenship. This consumer-rights rhetoric was also shaped by emerging discourses of the 1950s and 1960s, which linked citizen and consumer as fundamental parts of a democratic capitalist society, as opposed to a communist one.[42]

By placing blame on the South, sponsors and networks masked a racist justification for African American exclusion. Both Cole and Belafonte's experiences in television made this racism visible: advertisers valued white southern viewers it appears,

[42] As Weems points out though, organized consumer action did not originate in with the Civil Rights Movement nor were the most famous examples—Montgomery bus boycotts and Greensboro Sit-ins—the only moments of consumer boycotts. For example, in the case of Emmett Till's brutal lynching and after his murderers, Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, were acquitted by an all white jury, "local blacks [in the Mississippi Delta], without the benefit and direction of a charismatic leader such as King, quietly yet resolutely stopped doing business with the Milam-Bryant stores. Consequently, by early 1957, the family's lucrative business had been all but destroyed" (63). While Till's murderers were acquitted by the legal system, "black Mississippians ultimately meted out punishment in the 'court' of consumer choices" (ibid.). Simultaneously, the focus on individualism and consumer rights was very much produced by the Cold War moment, but was also embraced by the Civil Rights Movement, which linked the movement to American discourses about consumerism and individualism. This sensibility pushes back on rhetoric, which conflated Civil Rights and communism as a means to discredit the movement.

more than African American viewers. Despite reports of a powerful "Negro Market," African American consumers were neither the imagined nor the ideal television consumers. Advertisers clearly and contradictorily saw the financial value of the African American consumer base, although they preferred segregated means of reaching that base, using African American newspapers and magazines as a means to reach them (Weems 35). These advertisements targeted African Americans outside the confines of a mainstream culture defined as white; these advertising practices then reproduced the spatial logic of segregation. Within this framework, African American consumers were not integrated into the middle class market targeted and imagined by television sponsors in the post-war period. This segmenting of the "Negro Market" as separate from the mainstream white audience presumed that white bodies were universal and so could sell products to everyone, while African Americans could only sell products to people of color. This formulation universalized and normalized whiteness, while excluding and rendering invisible African Americans from the mainstream culture and consumer marketplace.

As television became a national medium imagining and calling the nation into being, so too did that nation of televisual consumers mirror the marginalization and exclusion of African Americans from full citizenship. The new medium of television was a way in which to educate the populace about what it meant to be a citizen in the post-war period. In *The Citizen Machine* Anna McCarthy argues that television was imbricated in constructing and modeling post-war democratic citizenship.[43] Corporations, McCarthy

[43] Anna McCarthy expands on this notion connecting consumerism to nationalism; she writes, "This was also the moment when it became commonplace to describe economic entities as citizens—the corporation, the consumer, and even organized labor—in a conceptual move that transformed production, exchange, and accumulation of goods into a moral and patriotic act" (11).

writes, sponsored economic education as part of the "business community's moral obligation, a way of serving those whose actions as consumers guaranteed the strength of the economy" and thereby the wellbeing of the nation (13). Television, as the new national medium and one built on the very principle of consumerism, could educate viewers about how to be good consumers and therefore good citizens. Yet, at the moment that African Americans were fighting for full inclusion in the nation and mobilizing consumer power in that process, television upheld the white status quo both in advertising and in entertainment programming. The ways in which sponsors imagined the African American consumer base—like those who believed that "Negroes could not sell cosmetics"—consistently marginalized and excluded African Americans from the imagined white consumer nation. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, this consumer exclusion continually reflected, rather than challenged, racist fantasies of who was allowed to fully participate in the nation. If television was pedagogical, as McCarthy suggests, then entertainment programming reinforced the belief that the most valuable consumers and citizens were white and racist.[44]

Even as news broadcasts of the Civil Rights Movement and white violence against African Americans made visible the cracks in the national democratic script, the tightly controlled television landscape continued to suggest that African Americans were second-class citizens. Nat King Cole and Harry Belafonte publicly challenged tropes of the "happy negro" living in a world cut off from and un-desiring of economic and

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[44] Sasha Torres develops this idea further. She writes, that in the late 1950s and early 1960s television contested understandings of race "threatened television's self-constitution as a properly national form addressing an audience assumed to share certain core ideological assumptions about the privileges of citizenship and the rule of law" (23). This conflict, Torres argues, "threatened the profits to be garnered from selling such an audience to advertisers" and producing national consensus (ibid.).

cultural privilege. However, their efforts were thwarted by the southern excuse, which made visible the racism embedded in television economics: white consumers were most valued by advertisers and included in this racist assumption was that white consumers would not buy goods marketed by African Americans. When Nat King Cole remarked in 1960 that, "racism is more finance than romance," he suggested that racism would only end once it ceased to be financially profitable. However, in the post-war period, racism remained profitable as a means of courting white southern and national viewership. These efforts though could have been even more profitable had advertisement agencies and sponsors courted the growing African American consumer base.

As the South publicly took the fall for race-based discrimination on television, the region was reiterated as the toxic wasteland of a nation's racist ideologies, in line with its *Birth of a Nation* image. Not only did Griffith's master text define the ways in which Hollywood and later television would represent African Americans on-screen, but so too did *Birth of Nation*, like the Thomas Dixon novel *The Clansman* on which it was based, solidify and determine the ways in which the South would be imagined, internalized, and circulated in its wake.

Conclusion: Small Shifts in *I Spy* and *Julia*

By the mid-1960s—after the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964—small changes in television programming were afoot, including the 1965 premier of *I Spy*, starring Bill Cosby alongside Robert Culp as spies—disguised as a tennis coach and world class tennis player respectively—travelling the world and protecting the United States. The series made history as the first dramatic television program to feature an African American actor in a lead role. While a few southern stations refused to carry the

program, "good ratings and public opinions forced the holdout stations to air the show. It has had no trouble since" (Shayne C1). While Barnouw calls *I Spy* "the vanguard of racial shifts in television drama," *New York Times* writer Bob Shayne called Cosby's character the "television version of Sydney Poitier's screen image—Superspade. It had no relevance to the state of being a negro" (372; C1)[45] Cosby's "seemingly neutral" star text further reflected this sensibility: he was "the coolest of the cool, the most laid-back of comedians. His monologues were explicitly *nonracial*" as opposed to satiric and more political comics like Dick Gregory or Richard Pryor (Bogle 117). A few years later, the sitcom *Julia* (1968-1971), which starred Diahann Carroll as a nurse and single mother, was "TV's first hit sitcom to have a Black woman star in a 'prestige' role (i.e., not playing a maid such as Ethel Waters' role as Beulah)" (Lyons, "Blacks and 50 Years of TV" 76). However, the series received significant criticism: star Diahann Carroll was derided by Harry Belafonte and in 1970 and Jeanne A. Taylor criticized *Julia*'s portrait of black life in America, pointing out that it was a vision conceived by white writers (79). Even so, both *I Spy* and *Julia* were revolutionary shows.

Cosby and Carroll's starring roles on *I Spy* and *Julia* respectively represented the minimal changes wrought by the Civil Rights movement: there were beginning to be more African Americans on television, however, these roles were conceived of by white writers and producers and policed by an imagined white South. For instance, "questions arose at NBC as to what could and could not be shown on *I Spy*. When Cosby and white star Robert Culp were traveling together, would the two men ride together in the front

[45] Cosby's performance in *I Spy* represents an early version of what Herman Gray calls the "civil rights subject:" the "civil rights subject" refers to those "representations of those black, largely middle-class benefactors who gained the most visibility as well as material and status rewards from the struggles and opportunities generated by the civil rights movement" ("Remembering Civil Rights"353).

seat of the car? If so would Southern audiences object to seeing a Black man sitting right next to a white one?" (Bogle 119). Cosby's full citizenship was made possible by the show's focus on international travel, which meant that the interracial duo could avoid encountering U.S. racism on American soil.

Further, Cosby embodied the "complex codes of behavior and propriety that make [him] an exemplar of citizenship and responsibility—success, mobility, hard work, sacrifice, individualism" (Gray, "Remembering Civil Rights" 353). Recalling Sasha Torres' argument that Nat King Cole represented the "Good Negro," Cosby's characterization, while progressive, remained in line with that exemplary citizen fighting the Cold War for his country. Following Torres then, Cosby's very model democratic citizen characterization, which made him palatable to a mass audience, also conformed to tropes of blackness that were just as insidious. Where Nat King Cole's exemplarity made him controversial, by 1965 the non-descript African American sidekick seemed oddly out of step with the times. Put another way, Cosby did not challenge those available scripts of African American masculinity laid out by *Birth of a Nation* and *Gone With the Wind*.[46]

Unlike Cole and Belafonte's entertainment ventures, *I Spy* imagined African American life through white eyes. It revealed that even in light of the changes wrought by Civil Rights, while television might showcase more diversity, whiteness would still occupy the center. Celebrations and representations of the specificity of African American life in the United States remained sequestered in specials, like Belafonte's *The Strollin' 20s'* (1966) for CBS, and comfortably removed from both the South and the turmoil of the Civil Rights Movement. Meanwhile, myths of a southern backlash would

[46] However, it is worth noting here I think, that while I'm reading *I Spy* from an industry perspective, this reading does not negate differing ways viewers interpreted and interacted with the show.

haunt and inform televisual depictions of African Americans through the broadcast of *Roots* (1977) as odd and competing visions of the South circulated both on and off the small screen. In *I Spy* and the Cosby-Culp partnership, network television planted the seeds for how entertainment programs would begin to deal with race in dramas: representations of race would be determined by the logic of colorblindness and attempts to court an African American audience, while still privileging a white one. That is, *I Spy* represented what Cole and Belafonte could not: a new kind of consensus programming, which, just like its earlier consensus counterparts, did not allow or encourage audiences to think for themselves.

CHAPTER III

FAILED SOUTHS:

RACE, GENDER, AND REGION IN *YANCY DERRINGER* AND *BOURBON STREET BEAT*

When *Yancy Derringer* premiered on CBS in 1958, Westerns filled a significant number of primetime spots: *Gunsmoke* (1955-1975), *Have Gun, Will Travel* (1957-1963), and other similar genre fare topped the Nielsen charts during the late 1950s. In this climate, *Yancy Derringer*—a WB produced telefilm—was primed for success, with its southern spin on the Western formula.[47] *Yancy Derringer* followed the exploits of its eponymous main character, a former confederate soldier and plantation owner, who returned home to Reconstruction-era New Orleans becoming a secret spy for the city's northern-born administrator. As Yancy (Jock Mahoney) meddles in the underworld and restores his plantation, he is never without the help of Pahoo (X Brands), his silent Native American protector, and his servant Obadiah (Bill Walker).[48] *New York Times* critic John Shanley found *Yancy Derringer* only "distinctive in its silliness," "nonsensical," and "too quaint to be entertaining" and it appears others agreed: the series was canceled after only one season (58).[49] A year later, *Bourbon Street Beat* premiered on ABC. The New

[47] This novel, yet exactly the same strategy dominated network programming through the 1960s: "'completely new…. exactly like' syndrome dominated the telefilm field—at all networks through the 1960s" (Barnouw 281).

[48] Pahoo's position as Yancy's violent protector reiterates stereotypes of the noble savage but also argues for Pahoo's own complicity in reasserting the white order. Pahoo appears to happily serve Yancy without any desire to leave, countering narratives of white violence against Native Americans. I think Pahoo's role in *Yancy Derringer* deserves significant attention. However, it is outside the scope of this chapter.

[49] While *Yancy Derringer* was canceled after only one season, according to TV schedule published by *The Chicago Defender* the Southern-set Western was syndicated until the 1970s.

Orleans-based crime drama followed the Randolph & Calhoun detective agency as they encountered haunted plantations, jazz musicians, and of course murder. However, *Bourbon Street Beat* proved "too imitative of *77 Sunset Strip* to succeed" and it too was canceled (Baughman 289).[50] While I can only speculate as to why *Yancy Derringer* and *Bourbon Street Beat* were canceled—there is very little written about either short-lived series in the popular or academic presses—their brief runs, in the midst of Civil Rights news featuring the region, reveal much about what Tara McPherson describes as our "cultural schizophrenia" about the South.

In *Yancy Derringer* and *Bourbon Street Beat*, this schizophrenia is betrayed by a positive investment in and nostalgia for those old myths of the South, even as these dramas envision crumbling plantations inhabited by ruined white residents. As I argue in Chapter III, the cause of the ruin and the problems facing the heroes of *Yancy Derringer* and *Bourbon Street Beat*—racial unrest and Civil Rights—would have been impossible to represent on network television. By 1955 networks and sponsors, buying into and reproducing the lore of a southern backlash, mostly avoided representations of African Americans in primetime. Thus, representing a region synonymous with both African Americans and racial unrest in 1958 and 1959 would beget a series of peculiar representational maneuvers.

The white male heroes of these programs —Yancy, Cal, and Rex—emerged as mediating and redemptive forces of a South in the midst of this un-representable transition. Because of television's reluctance to directly address these shifting social

[50] Rex Randolph's (Richard Long) character moved to *77 Sunset Strip* (1958-1964) after *Bourbon Street Beat*'s cancellation and Kenny (Van Williams) moved to the new and little more successful *Surfside 6* (1960-1962). Both police procedurals featured similar private detective agencies and crime-of-the-week storylines in Los Angeles and Miami respectively.

structures in entertainment programming, roles for African Americans replicated and remained confined by old racist tropes: African Americans appeared exclusively as servants, voodoo practitioners, and jazz musicians who were happy and content to remain remote from white privilege—a racist mythology in the very midst of breaking down on the national news. In order to maintain the televisual illusion of harmonious African American-white relations, civil rights strife manifested in a myriad of indirect ways: as intraracial strife, as white-Native American racism, and in the figure of the white southern belle, who became both the victim and aggressor of the new southern order.

Racial conflict and the South's ruin were represented by the tragic yet just fall of white female characters no longer protected by the chivalric ethos of the plantation and the racial system it upheld. Like Scarlett O'Hara or even Tennessee Williams' Blanche Dubois, however, these white women proved ruinous to the South and southern masculinity. These failed dramatic representations of the South, coupled with the racial restrictions—blamed on the region—produced puzzling, troubling, and competing visions of the South within each drama's diegesis. Although neither of these dramas would be successful in rehabilitating the South's image—it would take the comedic maneuvers of *The Andy Griffith Show* and a complete erasure of racial difference to do that—together these dramas provide insights into the difficulty of representing the South in network entertainment programming in the late 1950s.

Southern Cops and Cultural Contexts

Yancy Derringer was not the first failed southern drama for CBS. Just a year earlier CBS had launched the one-hour Civil War adventure drama *The Gray Ghost* (1957-1958), which "proved so troublesome to national advertisers that CBS initially

offered it only in syndication, and then, fearing backlash from northern viewers over the weekly spectacle of Confederate heroism, canceled the series altogether" (Graham, "Remapping Dogpatch" 337). CBS' timing for *The Gray Ghost* could not have been worse: the series premiered during the same month as the integration of Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas (ibid.). The news footage from Central High even provided "the lead-in to unintentionally ironic programming" whose hero was the Confederate general John Mosby (Tod Andrews) also known as the Gray Ghost (ibid.). Sasha Torres suggests that *The Gray Ghost* was a concession aimed at pleasing southern white audiences, affiliates, and station managers (21-22). These same station managers routinely blacked out programming about the Civil Rights movement or containing images, voices, or perspectives of African Americans (Classen 109; Torres 22). *The Gray Ghost*'s creation and its subsequent cancellation reflected the many "competing factors" and constraints that informed both representations of race and the South on primetime television (Torres 23).

Twilight Zone producer Rod Serling's two attempts to "dramatize aspects of the Till case on the small screen" and Reginald Rose's *Thunder on Sycaomore Street* (1955) make these competing and controlling forces even more apparent. Rose presented CBS with a drama derived from a real-life case of housing discrimination against an African American family in a Chicago suburb (Barnouw 164). The network and sponsor approved the drama but with one non-negotiable alteration: "The black family would have to be changed to 'something else'" (Barnouw 165). Despite the drama's northern setting, the sponsors and networks feared that featuring African American victims of white racism would offend southern (white) viewers. Then, in 1956 and again in 1958

Serling attempted to tell Emmett Till's story on television (Graham and Monteith 17). However, in both instances "sponsors censored his teleplays until they were no longer recognizably about Till. […] In the end U.S. steel demanded that Serling alter the venue to New England, make the victim a nonspecified 'foreigner,' and remove all references to the South—even bottles of Coca Cola" (ibid.). For sponsors and networks, both dramatizing the contemporary South and issues of race in primetime television was "fraught with problems," as Serling and Rose's experiences show (Graham and Monteith 18).

Mounting anxiety about the South and the alleged desire to acquiesce to white southern audiences coincided with the increasing visibility of Civil Rights violence. By 1958 southern institutions of law and order had been shown to be "visibly and vigorously resisting the law of the land" (Graham, *Framing the South* 154). For instance, in 1955, "obese, tobacco-chewing sheriff of Sumner County, Mississippi" Harold Strider appeared on television during the murder trial of Emmett Till. Strider "virtually assaulted the television audience when he pointed to a camera lens and vowed that if people who were sending him critical letters 'ever come down here, the same thing's gonna happen to them that happened to Emmett Till'" (Graham and Monteith 17). Arkansas Governer Orval Faubus—*Time Magazine* described Faubus as a "slightly sophisticated hillbilly" who "belched 'gustily' in front of his interviewers"—similarly looked and played the part of a southern racist as he defied the federal government by barring the integration of Central High (qtd in Graham and Monteith 18). Both Faubus and Strider were among many southern lawmen and government officials vigorously resisting the laws of the nation. Mobilizing the rhetoric of states' rights, anti-communism, and anti-federal intervention,

southern white lawmen preached and violently maintained segregation as the nation watched, read, and listened to reports about the region. That is, even though television news was in its infancy, tropes of a virulent, violent, and racist South were already in circulation in the popular press and northern imaginations.[51]

In this volatile climate, a primetime southern hero visibly aligned with the one-time confederacy was untenable, as the case of *The Gray Ghost* demonstrates. As such, *Yancy Derringer* and *Bourbon Street Beat* offered spies and private eyes as mediating forces between the untrustworthy southern officials and the populace. In these Souths, the police no longer served to represent a social or moral order. In contrast, as Jason Mittell suggests of the 1950s, "The police were part of [the] social order, and that was not to be questioned—at least not on mainstream television"—a representational order both dramas avoided (141). Instead, as Mittell further contends, primetime television police procedurals like *Dragnet* reproduced and upheld a social order that featured police officers as the moral center. For instance, on *Dragnet* Sergeant Friday could police Los Angeles ethics intact, offering "clear dualities of right and wrong and unwavering systemic faith" (Mittell 143). The heroes of these police procedurals and later Westerns were of the same stock and certainly always white, handsome, and on the right side of the law. With shifting understandings of the police, the police genre adapted, even if the heroes looked like their predecessors: Mittell writes, "[w]hereas in the 1950s, the police were culturally represented—if not broadly accepted—as agents of social order and

[51] Here, I am drawing from Graham and Monteith's argument that magazines, novels, and newspapers—long before television—circulated tropes of a racist South and the figures that embodied that racism like the redneck or Harold Strider lookalikes. They suggest that television newscasts "tended to follow the rhetorical trail blazed by print journalists" embracing and employing these same tropes (18). Further, these tropes have provided "durable cinematic image[s]" of a racist South, still visible in film and television shows.

harmony, their status as 'good guys' had been publicly questioned by the mid-1960s" (ibid.).

The changing perception of a racist and ethically corrupt police force came earlier in the South as the nation watched white southern lawmen abuse their power and violently flout democracy in the name of segregation. Neither *Yancy Derringer* nor *Bourbon Street Beat* endorsed—indeed both rejected—southern institutions of law and order. Instead, both dramas employed extra-legal white heroes, who functioned outside the confines of the law. This strategy merely masked, or at least attempted to, both dramas' racial politics, which replicated a benign white patriarchal system in order to convey visions of a racially harmonious South. These Souths marked their difference from the racist South visually through their handsome, benevolent white male heroes, even as both dramas' politics often closely aligned with segregationist stances.

Yancy Derringer and Reviving Rhett Butler

At a moment when the white South's order was in crisis, Yancy in particular represented a nostalgic and celebratory look back at Reconstruction-era masculinity that differed from *Bourbon Street Beat*—as the next section shows—and appeared nothing like the southerners populating the news. *Yancy Derringer* establishes Yancy's extra-legal position from the beginning: he is a gambler, a ladies' man, and a criminal, but also the product of the old plantation South (Figure 5). That is, he is a high-class spy comfortable in lower-class spaces like gambling dens, the jail, and the streets. Indeed, the pilot introduces Yancy amidst a poker game on a riverboat, which he is promptly thrown off. He is, from the outset, a rogue and a criminal. Yet by the end of the pilot, he reclaims his family home Waverly and restores its honor, which marks him as part of an older

southern society, rooted in familial lands and honor. This combination of high and low class, according to the northern administrator Mr. Colton (Kevin Haven), makes Yancy the perfect undercover and unpaid spy. Yancy's role as mediator and rescuer of the South relies upon his visual allegiance with a Rhett Butler-esque southern masculinity and his cowboy-like style.

Unlike the more modern men of *Bourbon Street Beat*, Yancy's small screen image—including his luck with ladies—unmistakably replicates *Gone With the Wind*'s Rhett Butler (Clark Gable) with slicked back hair, a mustache, and plantation hat. In *Southern Masculinity*, Craig Thompson Friend argues that "Rhett Butler became the masculine ideal for many white southern men because he represented a new form of individualized honor, one that revered drinking, hunting, swearing, cunning, physical pleasure with women, and even fighting as a powerful remedy for weakened southern masculinity" (Friend xviii). Week after week and woman after woman, Yancy proves his strength, virility, and masculinity via his sexual prowess and charm. Plus, he has a secret sword tucked in a cane lest he encounter any duels. This brand of masculinity not only aligns Yancy with Rhett Butler but also positions him in a lineage of white southern masculinity rooted in Lost Cause mythology, which celebrated the former Confederacy and "extolled the gallantry of Confederate soldiers" (Gallagher 4).[52] In this framework, Yancy's nostalgia-ridden characterization inevitably mourns the loss of the confederacy, conjures nostalgia for the old South, and suggests Yancy as the cure for a region in crisis.

[52] Gallagher provides a more comprehensive description; he writes, "Lost Cause advocates consciously sought to establish a retrospectively favorable account of the Confederate people and their short-lived nation. Among other points, these ex-Confederates denied the importance of slavery in triggering secession, blamed section tensions on abolitionists, celebrated antebellum Southern slaveholding society, portrayed Confederates as united in waging their war for independence, extolled the gallantry of Confederate soldiers, and attributed Northern victory to sheer weight of numbers and resources" (4). Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* is once such novel that fostered the Lost Cause mythos.

Figure 5: Yancy (Jock Mahoney) meets the northern administrator in secret at the New Orleans docks.

In addition, Yancy Derringer's characterization combines and conflates the southern gentlemen with the Western cowboy. Characterized as a Western at the time it premiered, *Yancy Derringer*'s genre suggests another brand of popular white masculinity at play: by "the late 1950s, the most watched televisual lawmen were found on another genre typified by its strict adherence to dualistic logic—the western" (Mittell 141). Like the cowboy, Yancy operates in a legally and morally ambiguous framework, but adheres to a clear dualistic logic aimed at protecting New Orleans and often its white women from harm. A lone individual, the cowboy was unhindered by the rules and regulations of society and so he was free to roam and enact violence as he pleased in the name of justice. In this framework, cowboys merely enact and help along the natural order, which is guided by essential masculine qualities such as aggression, competitiveness, and territoriality (Connell 46-47). [53] Yancy's violence is aristocratic, with duels and

[53] In *White,* Richard Dyer writes that the violence of Westerns "resonate[s] with the sense that an act of violence can sort things out, can raze the world of mess and encumbrances, can regenerate the land, often by making of the desert a tabula rasa for the establishment of white society" (34). Allison Graham echoes this sensibility in *Framing the South*. She writes, "most fictional frontiersmen of the 1950s and 1960s had stalked the plains on a mission of racial and ideological purification" (152).

swordplay; it is never brute and it is always, like the cowboy, directed at those the narrative leads us to believe deserve punishment. His all-white costuming enhances and reveals his heroic position on the side of good and morality (at least within the world of the show), despite the fact that he works outside the confines of the law, something his frequent trips to jail remind us.[54]

However, Yancy's characterization and costuming provide a legitimate and unthreatening face to the very southern order under threat. Yancy presents a benign model of older white southern masculinity and his new South—still built around the plantation home and the confederate flag—betrays an allegiance to older models of the region. In this context, figuring Yancy as an "an angel" for New Orleans, a man who loves the South, and a former rebel turned unpaid southern hero working outside the law and bent on restoring the region discloses an allegiance to segregationist politics (Season 1, Episode 1, "Return to New Orleans," 2 October 1958). Yancy's all-white costuming and position outside the law further enhances his alignment with segregationist groups like the Klan or its legal and more respectable face, the White Citizens' Council. The Council's strategy, as Stephen Classen writes, was "to guard powerful communication outlets and to reproduce 'respectability' for its race-based politics" (37). Medgar Evers, a prominent Civil Rights activists, sometimes referred to the Citizens' Council as "the Klan in suits," a description which points to the clothes of the Citizens' Council as merely costumes to make racism appear respectable and legitimate (qtd. in Classen 37).

[54] Other outlaws of the 1950s, like Paladin of *Have Gun, Will Travel*, were more morally ambiguous. For example, Paladin also worked outside the law as a gunman for hire. To signal the moral ambiguity of his position, Paladin wore black out on the plains but white when he rested in his hotel home in San Francisco.

Even though carefully distanced from the 1950s South, *Yancy Derringer* aligns reconstruction-era New Orleans with the contemporary South in crisis. In Yancy's work to re-build his plantation, the show rejects those challenges to the "social structures in the America of television viewers in the 1950s and 60s" and instead reaffirms the fantasy of a benign white patriarchal order (Newcomb 296).[55] Where *The Gray Ghost*'s version of the South openly championed the Confederacy—hence CBS' anxiety over airing the series—Yancy's efforts to rebuild an old southern order, grounded in restoring family homes and rooted in the codes of honor reminiscent of the Confederacy, cloaks the series' racist politics in white nostalgia.[56]

Rex Randolph and Cal Calhoun

Like *Yancy Derringer*, *Bourbon Street Beat* immediately establishes the outsider status of detectives Rex Randolph (Figure 6) and Cal Calhoun (Figure 7).[57] For instance, the pilot episode of *Bourbon Street Beat*, "Taste of Ashes" (5 October 1959), features a corrupt cop plot, a move that pushes the good cop-turned private eye Cal Calhoun into the private detective business.[58] This distinction between corrupt police and morally upright detectives distinguishes both Cal and later Rex from the corrupt southern law

[55] In "From Old Frontier, to New Frontier" Horace Newcomb writes of cowboys, "They stood against the unruly, irrational, immoral, excessively and illegally violent villains, outlaws, and psychotics who threatened life on the fictional frontier—and the social structures in the America of television viewers in the 1950s and 60s" (296). Following Newcomb, Yancy stands against integrationists as he champions a benign patriarchal order centered on the plantation. The violent potential of Yancy's seemingly benign world is even more disturbing given the re-invigoration of Klan in the wake of Brown vs. Board (1954) (Cunningham 31-32).

[56] Further, *Yancy Derringer* displaces discussions of race onto the Native American character Pahoo, as I discuss in a later section of this chapter.

[57] Brooks and Marsh also point to Yancy's outsider status: Yancy and Pahoo together formed a "team that was not the police, not detective, and not secret agent, but a little bit of all three" (1550).

[58] This trend of police becoming detectives becomes more popular in the 1970s with dramas like *Rockford Files* (1974-1980), *Columbo* (1971-2003), and *McMillan and Wife* (1971-1977).

enforcement that they encounter; Cal even suggests that he is of an older breed of policemen who were ethically sound. The younger generation, he implies during his first encounter with Rex, are on the take. The first scene of the pilot features Calhoun at the crime scene of a murdered private investigator outside New Orleans in the small town of Pelican Bay. While Calhoun's superior suggests that the man's death is a suicide, Calhoun—dressed all in white including a white plantation hat—argues that a suicide seems unlikely given that the gun is halfway across the room. The next shot reveals the gun and then with a swift kick the officer in charge sends the gun over to the dead body, leaving Calhoun looking confused and stunned. From this first encounter, Calhoun questions the tactics of his fellow police and much of the pilot showcases his ethical posture, which viewers are led to believe is unimpeachable. By the end of the pilot, frustrated with working for the police, Calhoun leaves the boys in blue and joins Rex in his private detective business.

Figure 6: Rex Randolph in his suit and tie.

Figure 7: Cal Calhoun in white and looking serious, as usual.

Looking sharp, each male character—Rex and Cal—represents brands of southern masculinity distinct from emerging images of southern police as rednecks and illiterate bullies. Rex, for one, is refined and always dressed to the nines in a suit jacket and slacks. He is also a master chef and bartender, and his exploits in cooking and eating fine food punctuate and provide humor throughout the series' first and only season. *Bourbon Street Beat* emphasizes his cultural capital and class through the way Rex orders and discusses food, from drinking Sazeracs to preparing mint juleps, bouillabaisse, and lobster soufflé. Rex's position as a scion of an old New Orleans family, a point that the show returns to time and again, further enhances his high class and cultured characterization. Many of Rex's storylines place him amidst old New Orleans families in wealthy homes and run-down plantations.

In contrast, Calhoun handles the working class cases on the seedier side of town, like solving a murder and busting a smuggling operation in a dive bar. Calhoun is not a college man—as he describes himself in the pilot—but just a good old boy southern policeman. His upbringing, unlike Rex, happened at the cinema and he even notes early on that when times were rough he slept in movie theaters. While Rex spends his time

cooking fancy food, Calhoun adores the movies and their leading ladies whose pictures adorn the walls of the private eye office. As both Rex and Calhoun are bachelors, these starlets serve to visually assert Cal's heterosexuality while Rex's consistent encounters with fallen southern belles demonstrate his interest in women.

Rex and Cal mediate the role of police, at the same time standing in for a new southern order. Unlike *Yancy Derringer, Bourbon Street Beat* differentiates this southern order from the old plantation system even as it envisions an almost completely white New Orleans. This becomes clear in "The Mourning Cloak" (Season 1, Episode 2, 12 October 1959), when Rex and his secretary Melody Lee (Arlene Howell) set out to investigate trouble afoot at Grey Oaks, an old plantation outside of New Orleans. Grey Oaks, like other plantations encountered in *Bourbon Street Beat*, is decrepit; it is a crumbling shadow of its former self where it once was "the finest estate in the whole South," according to Della, one of Grey Oaks' few inhabitants. Della yearns for the plantation's greatness and she wears her "mourning cloak" until that time comes. However, she does not sit idly by waiting and instead enlists her evil brother to take over the plantation, which sits on oil. Della's drive to restore the plantation coupled with her brother's henchmen-like skills turn murderous: in order to maintain control over the plantation the duo murders their African American servant Alexander (Roy Glenn), who was about to reveal their treacherous plans to Rex and Cal—a move geared at protecting the plantation's rightful residents and owners.

The detective duo then turn to investigate Alexander's mysterious murder, doing so free of charge—an investigative move that sets them apart from images of the southern police or White Citizens' Council. Nevertheless, in what appears a final and

uncomfortable wink to white segregationist southern viewers, Rex suggests that were Della to stand trial with all male jurors she just might get off. This exchange betrays something far more insidious than harmless flirtation: that white women can get away with killing African American men by virtue of their sexuality. Perhaps even worse, this resolution assumes that white on black violence will be inoffensive to viewers. Here, like in *Yancy Derringer*, the violence of the racial order remains unquestioned and veiled by the white heroes' "race-blindness" or colorblind ethics (Classen 9).

Inferential and Overt Racism

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, both dramas reproduce a southern order rooted in white patriarchy and structural racism. The dramas' treatment of African American and Native American characters repeats racist "premises and propositions" that have inscribed in them, as Stuart Hall argues, "a set of *unquestioned assumptions*" that "enable racist sentiments to be formulated without ever bringing into awareness the racist predicates on which the statements are grounded" ("Whites of Their Eyes" 91). That is, the racism remains covert or "un-signed," couched in "claims of neutrality, equality, or race blindness" (Classen 8-9). This brand of racism, Hall argues, is more insidious than its overt counterparts. For instance, Rex and Della's final exchange in "The Mourning Coat" suggests an underlying assumption—and agreement—that white violence against African Americans does not necessarily deserve punishment. Further, both dramas contain characters of color from Yancy's servant Obadiah (Bill Walker) to Pahoo (X Brands) and The Baron (Eddie Cole) in stereotypical roles: servant, sidekick, and jazz musician respectively. These roles serve to inform and propel action in the white world alone and bolster narratives of a happy racial hierarchy. On *Yancy Derringer*, Yancy as

representative of this new (old) South suggests that the new South is centered on a benevolent and paternalistic racial order built on African American and Native American labor. *Bourbon Street Beat* also re-imagines a southern order that betrays an inferentially white supremacist politics: white men are at the helm of the new South, white belles crumble, and African Americans characters either happily labor in the production of a white world or remain off screen.[59]

Yancy Derringer

On the surface *Yancy Derringer* suggests that racial hierarchies produce a peaceful southern climate wherein African Americans contentedly labor—like the trope of the "good Negro"—in service of whites. In *Yancy Derringer*, even after the end of the Civil War, Obadiah, for instance, happily remains at the Waverly plantation to serve Yancy: in "Old Dixie" (Season 1, Episode 12, 25 December 1958) Obadiah attends to Yancy, brings him drinks, decorates the Christmas tree, and even puts his life at risk when a fallen southern belle arrives and tries to steal a treasure buried at Waverly. In the final sequence of the episode, Obadiah—along with a variety of Yancy's friends—toasts to the "good days that are gone and the better days to come" as the group contemplates a portrait of Yancy's father clad in a confederate uniform that hangs over the mantle. Yancy's toast posits no break between past and future, a sense echoed by Obadiah's loyal and continued servitude. Obadiah's (and Pahoo's) participation in the toast erases the racial violence of the past and present plantation system and reimagines racial hierarchies as both benign and natural. The implication, then, is that Obadiah's servitude is both

[59] Tara McPherson writes that this trope is lodged in postbellum era culture: "the plantation mythologies of the early twentieth century were almost always populated by the requisite 'happy darkies,' content to labor in the cotton fields and big houses of dear 'ole' Dixie … Slaves were figured as natural (and content) elements of the landscape, key props in the production of southern mise-en-scene" (45).

assumed and taken for granted as just another facet of plantation life (re)imagined as mutually beneficial. Consistently representing Yancy as benevolent employer and master, the series neither questions nor challenges what it envisions as the given racial structure.

Yancy Derringer, however, relies on stereotypes of African Americans even in the production of a racially harmonious New Orleans. For example, in "V as in Voodoo" (Season 1, Episode 31, 14 May 1959) African American characters figure as voodoo priests and priestesses. When Yancy and Pahoo arrive at a voodoo ceremony, African Americans fill the screen for the first time in the series (Figure 8). This encounter with a group of African American worshippers occurs through Yancy's determining and racist gaze, portraying these characters as irrational and primal (Figure 9). They are unthinking and possessed as they dance and chant in a circle performing a mystical ritual. This sequence is grounded in and reproduces racist "unquestioned assumptions" without overtly calling attention to that racism (Hall, "White of Their Eyes" 91). Even the voodoo ceremony denies the African American characters agency: initiated by a white woman, the ceremony enables the plot to unfold in the white world. In this way, the series consistently frames African American experience through white perspectives and African American characters primarily function as devices that dramatize and provoke action in the white world. Similarly, Pahoo never speaks and instead uses his hands to sign—signs which Yancy must translate both for the characters on-screen and the viewers at home. Within this context, characters of color like these function to reassure and reinstate the dominance of whiteness even as both dramas disavow racial strife (Gray 75).[60]

[60] For example, in the *Yancy Derringer* pilot "Return to New Orleans" Yancy's servant Obadiah is overjoyed and relieved at Yancy's return.

Figure 8: The voodoo ceremony that Yancy, Mr. Colton, and Pahoo watch.

Figure 9: Yancy, Mr. Colton, and Pahoo watching the voodoo ceremony.

In the absence of overt African American and white racial strife, racial conflict appears on *Yancy Derringer* via Pahoo's experience in New Orleans. Here, the Western genre enabled the "retelling of civil rights stories" in a less politically volatile form, at least for a white southern audience (Graham 152).[61] Even though African American characters never encounter overt racism, Pahoo remains the consistent target of overtly racist remarks. For example, on a journey from New Orleans to Washington, D.C. in

[61] Graham goes on to assert that "most fictional frontiersmen of the 1950s and 1960s had stalked the plains on a mission of racial and ideological purification" (152). By the 1980s, "the gunfighters of the South had long since shed their racism and political conservatism, claiming only righteous wrath as their frontier heritage" (152).

"Fire on the Frontier" (Season 1, Episode 26, 2 April 1959), Yancy and Pahoo sit together on the train. When the conductor arrives, he calls Pahoo a "redskin" and then demands that Pahoo sit in the cargo car. As Pahoo sits in silence, Yancy vehemently defends Pahoo's right to sit in first class. As a result—and as the next shot shows—the duo and their other white travelling companion wind up together with the chickens in the cargo car. Later in the same episode, a hotel clerk refuses Pahoo entry into the hotel, causing Yancy to punch a man. After a scuffle in the hotel, the travelers find new accommodations in a horse stable. Yancy's commitment to Pahoo juxtaposed against the racist conductor or hotel clerk assures his good and unbiased nature. The episode later extends the anti-racist label to the Federal government: Pahoo speaks—via Yancy—to the senate and convinces the Federal government to uphold a treaty with the Pawnee people in the wake of an unprovoked attack on the group by renegades. Pahoo's triumph suggests a systemic benign white patriarchy and that racism is merely the fault of a few rogue individuals from the racists he encounters to the group that attacked the peaceful Pawnee villagers.

This episode, however, contains contradictory political stances: it both champions Yancy as the good white southerner but also alludes to southern racism, in what appears a direct reference to segregation, the bus boycotts, and unprovoked violent attacks against African Americans in the South. The latter, as Rod Serling and Reginald Rose's experiences show, were not representable in primetime entertainment television. Rather, Civil Rights violence was mapped onto "something else" (Barnouw 165). Thus, "Fire on the Frontier" circuitously betrays an allegiance to anti-segregationist stances through Pahoo's experience—even as it distances that racial conflict from the South. Strangely,

too, this episode and Yancy's continued work with Mr. Colton, who hails from the North, suggests a commitment to Federal intervention in the South, a politics that differentiates *Yancy Derringer* from Lost Cause mythology and the states' rights rhetoric espoused by southern segregationists.

Even as the series narratively presents Yancy's race-blindness and a more racially progressive—if not, conflicted—politics, so too does *Yancy Derringer* rely on un-signed racism to replicate racist structures. Yancy becomes a mediating force between Pahoo and the racists they encounter, a narrative move that both assures Yancy's goodness and implicates Yancy as part of a new racially neutral South. From Yancy translating for Pahoo to Pahoo's stereotypical construction as a "noble savage" happily serving Yancy for the remainder of his life, the series remains rooted in racist tropes couched in narratives about race-neutrality or colorblindness. This brand of racial representation, Hall argues, is particularly insidious as it represents an awareness of racial inequality, yet uses those moments to argue for the good nature and natural dominance of a white character like Yancy.

Bourbon Street Beat

Likewise, *Bourbon Street Beat* imagines a race-blind and racially harmonious New Orleans—perhaps particularly strange given the series' 1950s setting. Even Alexander's murder in "The Mourning Cloak" does not incite racial tension. Rather, his murder, while solved, becomes a means of uncovering the true horror of Grey Oaks: the old white patriarch who has been brainwashed and locked away in his own home while his daughter suffers at the hands of her crazy aunt and uncle. At the same time, the series replicates racial tropes, particularly visible as episodes delineate white and African

American spaces through the mise-en-scène. Unlike *Yancy Derringer*, the series completely disavows racial strife and instead racial tension is displaced onto intraracial relations.

Bourbon Street Beat features a voodoo-themed plot in "Knock on Any Tombstone" (Season 1, Episode 17, 25 January 1960). As in *Yancy Derringer*, voodoo is understood through the white gaze of Rex Randolph (Figure 10). Rex watches a voodoo ceremony from the outskirts as African American characters drum, chant, and dance as he awaits a revelation from the voodoo priestess, Mrs. Johnson (Paulene Meyers) (Figure 11). The sequence practically mimics the one from *Yancy Derringer*: it replicates all its racist assumptions of African Americans as unthinking and tethered to the body, as it presents a white imagining of African Americans and uses African American characters in order to resolve white narratives. Rex's skepticism in voodoo practices coupled with shots of the ceremony from his perspective—which also become the viewer's perspective—instantiates his racist perspective as that of the imagined white viewer. At the same time, the voodoo ceremony helps reveal a murderer in time to save a young white woman from becoming the next victim.

As the voodoo example suggests, the drama clearly delineates African American spaces from white spaces. This sensibility is particularly clear during the investigation of Alexander's murder in "The Mourning Cloak" when Rex and Cal visit Alexander's family in a small shack. In Alexander's home the two well-dressed white men are visually out of place. Here, race, also conflated with class, is signaled through the mise-en-scène of the small one-room wooden shack, which conjures and conflates blackness

with poverty, particularly in opposition to the space of wealthy whiteness, the plantation home.

Figure 10: Like Yancy, Rex watches the voodoo ceremony from a hidden location.

Figure 11: The voodoo ceremony that Rex watches is nearly identical to the voodoo sequence in *Yancy Derringer*.

Despite the clear visual distinctions used to connote racial difference, the series suggests that the New Orleans of *Bourbon Street Beat* is free of interracial strife. Instead, racial tension—which was both unrepresentable but also irreconcilable with the drama's race-neutral politics—becomes intraracial strife rooted in class and gender differences. In *Bourbon Street Beat* the fight for the new white southern frontier champions the white workingman, while critiquing the families of the old plantation system from the inhabitants of Grey Oaks to the Dellastones of Pelican Bay. Allison Graham suggests that in the late 1950s, "the new frontier of the South became an intraracial battleground as

white fought white in a struggle for social supremacy" (*Framing the South* 146).[62] The heroes of *Bourbon Street Beat*, for example, help out the wrongly accused Kip Kiley (Richard Rust) in "Torch Song for Trumpet" (Season 1, Episode 1, 19 October 1959). Kiley is a newly released felon—perhaps wrongly convicted—and trumpet player, who finds work at a local dive bar. When Kiley is wrongly accused of murdering the bar's owner, Cal Calhoun comes to his aid and uncovers an international racketeering ring in the process. Here Kiley's class makes him susceptible to punishment by the police, for he cannot defend himself nor is he protected by the system of law and order, which has already sent him to prison once. In fact, his distrust of the law almost leads him to run away so as to avoid yet another conviction. In *Bourbon Street Beat*, Rex and Cal protect those who are most vulnerable: white working class men and white women. Even though Rex and Cal investigate Alexander's death, he is still—unlike Kip Kiley—expendable, as Rex's final comment to Della in "The Mourning Coat" indicates.

The "un-signed" racial representation of both dramas enabled, as Hall suggests, these dramas to disavow racism even as both shows remained grounded in and predicated on racist assumptions and tropes. At a moment when Civil Rights activists were protesting repressive and violent racial structures, these dramas revealed the insidious and inferential nature of white supremacy encoded in primetime television. Networks' reluctance to represent the South as a region riven by racial strife and the impossibility of conveying an image of an overtly happy plantation South, structured both dramas' evasive representational strategies for representing the region. As detailed above, these strategies entailed re-routing interracial strife onto class differences on *Bourbon Street*

[62] In films, Graham suggests this battle was between the newly redeemed white Southern lawman and the new white Southern villain, the redneck.

Beat and onto Native American-white relations in *Yancy Derringer*, while asserting that African American and white relations remained happily compliant with existing racial hierarchies. Put another way, both dramas employed raced and gendered tropes as a means to re-figure the region as largely devoid of racial strife. Within this universe with its strange visions of social harmony, the new white southern belle emerged as the victim, aggressor, and most unstable character of a new southern order. Only in the unraveling of the white southern belle did these dramas truly manifest any social crisis.

The Plantation Home and the Southern Belle

According to Tara McPherson, the southern lady "was the key image around which the South constructed (and still constructs) its postbellum identity, and this lady was situated within a particular southern landscape" (39). But, as Allison Graham asks, "who, exactly, was a southern woman?" She was, "the loveliest and purest of God's creatures, the nearest thing to an angelic being that treads this terrestrial ball is a well-bred, cultured, Southern white woman or her blue-eyed, golden-haired little girl" (qtd. in Graham, *Framing the South* 19). The lady and the southern land, McPherson additionally suggests, were conflated in southern literature and culture. Crucial to portrayals of the land was the plantation home, "a place that continues to be central to representations of the South as the lady itself" (ibid.). That is, the southern white belle—her high-class status is particularly important—cultivated by the plantation system was not only the pride and joy of the South, but also interchangeable with and emblematic of the region.

In both *Yancy Derringer* and *Bourbon Street Beat,* the old system is rotten and in despair, quite in line with Tennessee Williams' crumbling and decrepit depictions of the region. Yet, unlike Williams' characters, the characters on television sympathetically

mourn the loss of the supposed good old days. The southern mise-en-scène of the plantation on both dramas is cracked and falling apart and the identities fixed within these spaces reflect the decrepit nature of the homes (McPherson 54). That is, the plantation homes—particularly in *Bourbon Street Beat*—metonymically reflect the changes, shifts, and violence written onto white women. Within this context, the southern belle is ruined as she becomes "both victim and aggressor" within this new southern order (McKee and Barker 9).

In *Yancy Derringer*, the doubling of belle as victim and aggressor is most apparent in an episode entitled "Old Dixie," when a southern belle arrives at Waverly, claiming to be the wife of Yancy's dead brother. However, the belle is an imposter who plans to steal a treasure buried on the Derringer property. While trouble inevitably ensues, the real wife—the imposter's twin—arrives just in time to save the day and everyone celebrates a merry Christmas at Waverly. This theme is repeated throughout *Yancy Derringer*'s one-season run. In the pilot episode, for example, Miss Amanda (Julie Adams), Yancy's former lover and southern belle, summons Yancy back to New Orleans. Unfortunately for Yancy, Miss Amanda plans to kill him and steal his plantation, which she has turned into a gambling den. The casino is, according to Yancy, an affront to the legacy of his home and he immediately kicks out all the gamblers. Miss Amanda is both victim and aggressor, having both restored and caused the ruin of the Waverly plantation. By the pilot's end, Waverly appears restored to its former and respectable glory and Miss Amanda is forcefully cast out. Like Williams' destructive southern belle Blanche Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Miss Amanda's fall is "both tragic and just" (ibid.).[63]

[63] These depictions of the South, and the fallen Southern belle, appear adapted form Hollywood's post-*Gone With the Wind* (1939) love-affair with the region: "The southern cinematic 1950s and 1960s were

In *Yancy Derringer*, the fallen belle is cast out of the plantation home by the Civil War into a new and vulnerable environment. These white woman are most at "risk' in this new integrated society," yet at the same time, their avarice and lust pose a threat to the new southern society (Graham, *Framing the South* 21). Disconnected from the belle, the southern plantations remain revered institutions withstanding the "ravages of time" in *Yancy Derringer* ("The Loot from Richmond," Season 1, Episode 7, 20 November 1958). However, while the plantation stands, the belle appears lost in the new southern society—quite literally a Mississippi riverboat named the "Southern Belle" is sabotaged and sinks in "Thunder on the River" (Season 1, Episode 23, 12 March 1959). In place of the belle, the primary recurring female characters on *Yancy Derringer* are madams, prostitutes, and restaurant owners like Miss Francine (Frances Bergen) or Miss Mandarin (Lisa Lu). These women, by virtue of their class and profession are utterly disarticulated from the plantation system. These women, though, are included in the drama's vision of a new South, which incorporates them both as industrious business-minded women and as Yancy's love interests. This new interracial and intraclass South becomes most apparent as a diverse group of characters including Miss Francine, Miss Mandarin, Pahoo, and Obadiah gather around Yancy to toast to the new interracial South in "Old Dixie."

If white southern women "*are* Southern culture," then the fallen and tragic women of *Bourbon Street Beat* more directly evoke the decrepit nature of that very culture (McPherson 19). In *Bourbon Street Beat,* the belle as both victim and aggressor is nowhere more apparent than in Evelyn/Rose Dumont (Roxane Berard) in "The Tiger Moth" (Season 1, Episode 6, 9 November 1959). In "The Tiger Moth" as Rex

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dominated by Tennessee Williams's impotent men, sex-starved women, and dominating patriarchs and matriarchs" (Barker and McKee 9).

investigates the mysterious death of his musician friend he encounters Evelyn, a timid southern belle, whose father keeps her locked in their old and decrepit New Orleans home. The Dumonts once were, according to Rex, "royalty" of New Orleans and their home, as he describes it, used to be filled with life and parties. Yet, upon arriving at the Dumont estate, Rex encounters a life fossilized and cut off from the changing outside world: vines grow over the house, the fountain in the courtyard (formerly described as dancing) barely runs, and the house is littered with preserved butterflies and moths, collected by the Dumont patriarch. Amidst this decaying and frozen life, Rex encounters Evelyn: she wears white, works diligently, and is soft-spoken—the image of the innocent southern belle.

However, this house and Evelyn are not all that they seem, a sense further impacted by the melancholic soundtrack: Evelyn has two personalities, her own and that of the wild and modern Rose. If white female identity was once fixed by the plantation's particular mise-en-scène, then when that plantation crumbles so too, *Bourbon Street Beat* suggests, does the identity tethered to it.[64] As Rose, the demure Evelyn becomes the kind of woman who frequents "gin joints" and "dens of iniquity" and takes up with men, even killing Rex's friend. She is the kind of woman, Rex's assistant asserts, who wears red—a sure sign of her promiscuous nature, particularly in contrast to Evelyn's white clothing and innocent disposition. While Evelyn is a relic of the past, like the moths she so diligently crystalizes, Rose is a terrifying vision of a modern and sexually free white

[64] *Bourbon Street Beat*'s pilot "Taste of Ashes" also deals with a fallen southern belle plotline as an old and overbearing matriarch is blackmailed because her daughter is a "beauty but willful and wanton." Later episodes also take up the concern of the plantation and the tragic belle Della like "The Mourning Cloak" wherein the decrepit plantation, full of cracks and overgrown vines reflects Della's disturbed state. In all these episodes, the problems of a decrepit South are resolved in a crime-of-the-week fashion, where whatever ails the region is contained within an episode.

woman unmoored from the plantation. Since southern white women are southern culture, then Evelyn/Rose presents both the ideal—Evelyn as victim—and the dangers—Rose as murderer—of this new regional order, quite like the twins in *Yancy Derringer*.

Evelyn/Rose is both victim and aggressor and her fall, like Blanche Dubois', is simultaneously tragic and fair. Evelyn, a vestige of old southern femininity, it appears is the victim of this old system mired in the past, which has turned her into Rose. By the end of the episode, Rose emerges and blames her father for his "quaint and old fashioned ideas," which by constraining Evelyn produced in her the need to escape restrictive gender expectations and the boredom of her life alone in a no-longer-functioning plantation. It is then the southern patriarch's inability to adapt to the changing times that leads to his daughter's self-destruction—an event mirrored in the decrepit plantation house full of dead and frozen butterflies. His dominance over his daughter and desire to protect her has turned her into a threat to white men: Rose has killed two men by the time the episode ends and Evelyn even seduces Rex. However, by the end of the episode Evelyn/Rose is revealed as Evelyn triumphs over her worse half, and runs up the stairs of her decaying home to be treated and taken care of by her parents. Similarly, in "Melody in Diamonds" (Season 1, Episode 20, 15 February 1960), a wealthy New Orleans woman Magda Lazar (Gale Robbins) falsely accuses Melody Lee of stealing her diamonds. However, Magda has used Melody Lee—lending her fake diamonds under false pretenses—and thus ensnared the unsuspecting beauty queen in her insurance fraud scam. Or, at the end of "The Mourning Cloak," Della is overrun by her desire to restore the plantation and her old life—a drive that compels her to commit murder, lock up her brother, and torment her niece. Lacking the former trappings of high society—

symbolized by the plantation—the white belle becomes, these examples suggest, destructive and a threat to the new South.

Conclusion: Southern Schizophrenia and the Nation's Region[65]

In Tennessee Williams's work, the men and the family unit, of which they are the head, suffer. They are as Barker and McKee note, often impotent but also dominating patriarchs, they appear cruel and hold onto a past they believed to be glamorous, while their corrupt world crumbles. This is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,* set during one evening at a plantation home on the Mississippi delta, amidst a birthday party for patriarch Big Daddy Pollitt. The dinner at the family's plantation becomes a macabre celebration revealing a web of interconnected lies and a family of unfulfilled and unhappy characters like Maggie the Cat and her seemingly impotent husband Brick. There are neither saviors nor redemption in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*: the play ends with fights over inheritance and yet another lie as Maggie the Cat pretends to be pregnant in order to secure Brick's inheritance. The men in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, like in much of Williams's work, are as dysfunctional, decaying, and unsalvageable as the plantations they inhabit. The white South emerges here as unfixable and lodged in a destructive past.

While similar images of a decaying older South remain visible both on *Yancy Derringer* and *Bourbon Street Beat*, the televisual versions of this shifting South rescue the region by employing a mediating white masculinity as redemptive and at the head of a new southern order that looks remarkably like the old plantation one. These visions of the South are inflected by the changes and anxieties wrought by the Civil Rights

[65] I am borrowing the tile of this section and the notion of the South as the "nation's region" from Leigh Anne Duck's book, *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism*.

movement and its news coverage, yet they fail to imagine African Americans outside the confines of white supremacy embodied by new white southern men. African Americans are neither beleaguered protagonists nor even complex characters, rather *Yancy Derringer* and *Bourbon Street Beat* contain African Americans within stereotypical roles—a regime of racial representation that neither questions nor threatens the white southern order in crisis. Instead, racial conflict becomes visible in *Yancy Derringer* through Pahoo, while on *Bourbon Street Beat* interracial strife becomes intraracial. Most clearly though, the shifting social structures are displaced onto the white southern belle, whose position as paragon of the old social and racial order has collapsed. These bizarre representational maneuvers—results of these dramas' avoidance and erasure of racial tension—point to complex and contradictory impulses governing the metonymic representations of the South and race.

Within their diegesis, these texts replicate contradictory, confused, and rupturing visions of the South, incompatible with television's promise of restoring the post-war white nation—as contrasting representations of the Midwest make particularly visible. Unlike the South, the Midwest was the location of downhome white American and family values, as depicted on the domestic sitcom *Father Knows Best* (1954-1960), which celebrated the comic mishaps of the Anderson family. Among those values represented on *Father Knows Best* were good citizenship, family and traditional gender roles, community, and the centrality of hearth and home. This whitewashed Midwest of *Father Knows Best* is indicative of the post-war moment wherein, as both Anna McCarthy and Lynn Spigel argue, television's pedagogical function was to reiterate family togetherness, good citizenship, and the white nuclear family as the basis of the nation. Within this

framework, the bliss of the domestic sphere and family togetherness as located in the Midwest are envisioned as part of the post-war restoration of the national and social order.[66] Unlike the South, where narratives of exclusion were being visibly contested through the televising of the Civil Rights Movement, the Midwest appeared conflict free—a location in line with white middle class visions of the 1950s nation.

While television rose to the status of a national medium, the South, unlike the Midwest, could not safely become a geography used to signal American values, as the Civil Rights movement made visible the cracks in American rhetoric of freedom and democracy.[67] If television in this period was to function "as a panacea for the broken homes and hearts of wartime life" and as a way to "restore faith in family togetherness," then the South in dramatic form presented a threat to this very white fantasy (Spigel 2-3). In the midst of news coverage of the Civil Rights Movement, both *Yancy Derringer* and *Bourbon Street Beat* reflect the unhappy fissures in narrating and restoring the South. As dramas, these programs could neither separate themselves from the nostalgia of the past nor did they poke fun at the region as a means to make it palatable and rehabilitate it for a national audience. While primetime entertainment programming desperately attempted to hold and align two opposing ideas in a single dramatic text, what becomes apparent in both the failure of these programs and the lack of positive critical response, is that westerns and crime dramas alike were not suited to the rehabilitative work needed to represent the region. Rather, what the *Andy Griffith Show* would reveal in 1960 was that

[66] The all-white Heartland shows "actively [rewrote] the physical and imagined borders of the region through the elision of urbanity, people of color, and non-agrarian industry" **(**Johnson 19**)**.

[67] The absence of the South becomes even more apparent given the onslaught of Westerns from *Gunsmoke* (1955-1975) to *Cheyenne* (1955-1963) and *Have Gun, Will Travel* (1957-1963) all set in an ambiguous Wild West. Meanwhile, urban locations were featured on the occasional cop dramas like *Dragnet* (1951-1959) in Los Angeles and *The Lineup* (1954-1960) in San Francisco and on sitcoms such as *I Love Lucy* (1951-9157) set in Los Angeles or *The Goldbergs* (1949-1956) set in New York.

the southern sitcom—in the vein of *The Real McCoys* (1957-1963) and later *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962-1971)—was far better suited to the task of representing, rehabilitating, and profiting from the region.

CHAPTER IV

COMIC RELIEF:

ANDY GRIFFITH, SOUTHERN SHERIFFS, AND REGIONAL REHABILITATION

"Mayberry, whistling cheerfully under the radioactive radar of the 1960s, was the decade's Brigadoon, a pocket of southern mystification tucked into a Culver City back lot: peaceful, isolated, and entirely white."

-Allison Graham, "Andy Griffith"

In "Andy Discovers America" (Season 3, Episode 23, 4 March 1963), Sherriff Andy (Andy Griffith) jokingly asks his deputy Barney Fife (Don Knotts), "what was the Emancipation Proclamation?" Barney, who has been bragging about his command of history—"it was one of my best subjects"—avoids the question as he giggles nervously, suggests that everyone knows that proclamation, and then turns the question back to Opie (Ron Howard), who "has never heard of it." Barney then tests out Aunt Bee's (Frances Bavier) knowledge, but to no avail. As Andy presses Barney to answer the question, Barney conveniently discovers a spot on his uniform. Finally after much stalling, Barney responds that the Emancipation Proclamation was about "Emancipation, what do you think it was about? … There was these folks and how else was they going to get emancipated unless there was a proclamation. So they got themselves a proclamation and they called it the Emancipation Proclamation." Nobody at the breakfast table appears to know what the Emancipation Proclamation is, perhaps save for Andy, but he is not telling. This question frames the entire episode, both opening and concluding it with the

crucial question still unanswered. At once, the humor diminishes the relevance of the question and the lack of an answer evacuates it of political impact and importance: the Emancipation Proclamation becomes just another joke at Barney's expense. At the same time, Andy's reference to the legal act that ended slavery in a show that features no African American characters—the first and only African American character appears in 1966-1967 season—reveals the inferentially racist discourses that construct Mayberry and *Andy Griffith*'s version of America: a white town irreconcilable with racial strife, the history of the slavery, and ongoing and violent civil rights protests in the sitcom's home state of North Carolina.[68]

The question about the Emancipation Proclamation in "Andy Discovers America," remains unanswerable because an answer would necessarily invoke slavery and the oppression of African Americans—an off-limits topic for network television, as previous chapters have shown. Yet the mere mention of the Emancipation Proclamation discloses the tensions of permissible and profitable southern and racial imagery. Even in the almost complete absence of black bodies, jokes about the Emancipation Proclamation make visible the racist premises of *Andy Griffith*'s white world.[69] The humorous re-formulation of the region—drawing on comic rural imagery like *The Real McCoys* and Griffith's star-text—distanced Mayberry from the news and made the South safe once again for televisual representations and for an imagined white audience understood to be

[68] Allison Graham writes in *Framing the South* that the "Not only did the show premiere the same year as the first student sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, but its setting, the fictional Mayberry, was based on Griffith's own hometown of Mt. Airy, North Carolina—sixty miles north of Greensboro" (158).

[69] In *Critiquing the Sitcom*, Joanne Morreale writes, "Sitcoms both incorporate and contain change; they both address and prevent political action, and they may be read as both conservative and progressive forms, sometimes simultaneously" (xii). That is, sitcoms allow for contradictory readings so they provide "ideal sites for critical examination of tensions and contradictions involving gender, the family, race, social class, and the dynamics of postmodern culture" (ibid.).

easily alienated by "controversial" fare. Crucial to the representation of the South on *The Andy Griffith Show* is the rehabilitated image of the southern sheriff, whose violent and racist image was by 1960 in desperate need of a makeover. If by the early 1960s racism could be conjured by a set of physical attributes—the "red neck" or the burly southern sheriff—then trim, handsome, and pacifist Andy Taylor as sheriff presented a new more tolerant South.

In "Remapping Dogpatch," Allison Graham argues that Madison Avenue was "obsessed with the issue of permissible (i.e., profitable) southern and racial imagery" (337). Sponsors and networks seemingly sought to balance an imagined segregationist South and its violent emblem, the southern sheriff—visible on the nightly news—with an imagined racially tolerant North. To attract a national audience, both imagined audiences would need to be appeased. Within the context of seemingly competing demands, the only southerners on television to survive more than a season were comic ones—*The Real McCoys* (1957-1963), *Andy Griffith*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962-1971)—until *The Waltons* (1971-1981). Indeed, *Andy Griffith*'s comedy soothed and "assuage[d] widespread fears concerning changing American values" (O'Leary and Worland 73, 75). As James Flanagan notes in "Deconstructing Mayberry," *Andy Griffith* appears cut off from the hard news of the period: "Everything that is troubling or volatile about America in the 1960s is not present in *Andy*. Even its fans would have to agree, given the show's era and geographical location, Mayberry is a charming, folksy picture of pleasant patriarchy and benign whiteness" (308).[70] If television could mend the nation—become a "panacea for the broken homes and hearts of wartime life" and Civil Rights strife—then

[70] Don Rodney Vaughn argues something similar in "Why *The Andy Griffith Show* Is Important to Popular Cultural Studies."

through comedy perhaps so too could television rehabilitate the South, provide a salve for the violence, and profit from a region that posed consistent problems and challenges to the networks (Spigel 2-3).

Andy Griffith's strange importance to television history cannot be overstated. From 1960-1968, the sitcom was top-ranked in the Nielsen reports and in its final season it was the top-ranked show on television (Graham, *Framing the South* 157; Hankins 104). Even its first episode—a spin-off of the hit sitcom *The Danny Thomas Show* (1953-1965), "Danny Meets Andy" (15 February 1960)—garnered a massive audience and immediately landed the show a sponsor: General Foods (Vaughn 399). Since its premier in 1960 on CBS, the show has never been off the air—it remains "one of the most successful shows in television history" (O'Leary and Worland 73; Hankins 104). Because of its incredible success, *Andy Griffith* provides a sustained example of how race and region became uncontroversial and profitable at the most unlikely time. Furthermore, *Andy Griffith*'s focus on the comic white rural (and eccentric) South provides a template for televisual versions of the region thereafter (ibid.).[71]

Bad Press: Civil Rights and Southern Sheriffs

By 1960 television's version of a violent and racist South was visible on nightly news broadcasts as television reporters following the Civil Rights Movement captured, alongside newspapers and magazines, images of white on black violence. While African

[71] I am thinking here of the current rise of southern-themed reality television that focuses on all-white rural families from *Duck Dynasty* and *Cajun Justice*, and even *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*. Animal Planet Vice President Marjorie Kaplan suggests that reality shows like *Cajun Justice* and *Duck Dynasty* represent "the desire to connect back to something that's a little more raw and a little bit more real. And hillbillies are the epitome of that — no artifice, living in the moment, the real deal." Kaplan's' description of a hillbilly ridden South romanticizes the region's violent past as a kind of survivalist fantasy where people still live off the land and are adverse to change. These versions of the South, figured as a cure to the modern world, draw from tropes set-up and made famous on television by *Andy Griffith*.

American organizations welcomed the press, white segregationists—at least initially—failed to understand both the power and scope of television broadcasting. As a result, national and international viewers could catch "glimpses of the brutality black citizens had lived with for over a century" (Graham and Monteith 21). Horace Newcomb echoes this sense in "From Old Frontier to New Frontier" when he writes,

> Watching television in the late 1950s and early 1960s required no special analytical talent to be made aware of shift and change, of trouble on the horizon and at the dinner table. That the world was coming apart was no secret then, certainly not in the Deep South, where I grew up, and most likely nowhere else (295).

Network television and photojournalism made visible and visceral the violence of the world as it came apart, while also cordoning off that transition, violence, and racism within the borders of the South.[72] By 1960, southern mise-en-scène as depicted by journalists, filmmakers, and news reporters appeared, in James Baldwin's words, a landscape "designed for violence" (189).[73]

At the center of white southern stories about integration were a series of look-alike sheriffs, beginning with Harold Strider, "the obese tobacco-chewing" sheriff of

[72] In *The Nation's Region* Leigh Anne Duck writes, "when national discourse has acknowledged the conflict between southern conservatism and national democracy, it has typically done so in ways that localize this conflict—a 'backward South' and a modern or 'enlightened nation'" (3). That is, Duck argues that television's disavowal of the South as part of the nation and the ways in which media localized the "race-problem" as a southern problem, rather than a national one relies on a long lineage of southern representations. During the Depression, Duck suggests, "the trope of the backward South began to comprise an image of what the United States could become" (7). The "backward South" with its anti-federal and racist ways became a threat to the imagined democratic nation, a feat television depictions of the region simultaneously embraced in Civil Rights news coverage.

[73] In "Nobody Knows My Name," James Baldwin writes of his experience of Atlanta and the South: "It was on the outskirts of Atlanta that I first felt how the Southern landscape—the trees, the silence, the liquid heat, and the fact that one always seems to be traveling great distances—seems designed for violence, seems, almost, to demand it" (189).

Sumner County (Graham, *Framing the South* 154). Unintentionally, Strider provided the archetype of the racist southern sheriff when he aggressively addressed the television audience and threatened viewers: he promised his critics that if they ever came to Sumner county that they too, like the teenaged Till, would be lynched (Graham and Monteith 17). Similarly, in 1965, Alabama sheriff Jim Clark, during a confrontation with Reverend C.T. Vivian at a voting-rights demonstration, charged a news camera "gesturing and looking into the camera lens. … Not realizing, or not caring, that television viewers would see his attack on a cameraman as an attack upon *them*" (Graham and Monteith 20-21). Both the white and African American presses along with television captured and reiterated these images of the violent white redneck southern lawmen.

As this specific image of the white racist was replicated time and again in the national press, it gave racism a style and look that was gendered and classed (Figure 12). Racists were, news outlets suggested, easily identifiable as overweight, sloppily dressed, sweaty, and poorly spoken white men. The *Chicago Defender*, for example, described Selma Sheriff Jim Clark in 1965 along the lines set up by Strider; Clark was the "burly law enforcement officer" who called for "outside agitators to leave" Alabama alone ("Evict Outsiders Says Jim Clark" 10). By 1963, "nationally and internationally circulated images of city police commissioner Bull Connor worked as cultural shorthand, communicating within seconds the reasons for black protests and the kind of violent resistance that would meet them" (Graham and Monteith 21-22). Bull Connor, Harold Strider, Jim Clark and their counterparts became the paragons of white supremacy and emblematic of a corrupt and violent southern order (Higgins 18).[74] As Allison Graham

[74] Further, in 1963 a "Special to the Defender" detailed a "Portrait of an Ala. Racist:" Bull Connor. The article described Connor experiencing joy while watching policemen under his command turn hoses on

argues in "Remapping Dogpatch," the "contours of "the southern" assumed predictable patterns confusing southern fact and fiction, which repeatedly marked the region as different, separate, and degenerate (336).[75]

In response to these increasingly negative representations of the region, southern state agencies like the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission set out on campaigns to revise Mississippi's poor national image (Graham, *Framing the South* 159). For instance, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission "sent public relations emissaries north to give free lectures to civic groups about the virtues of 'the most state lied-about state in the union" (ibid.). The Mississippi Sovereignty Commission even invited a group of New England reporters to the state in order to present the "South's side" of the segregation story to a national audience (Lewis 165). Some segregationists groups also took out advertisements in national newspapers touting the segregationist cause: "In 1956, Rainach and the JLC [Joint Legislative Commission to Maintain Segregation] secured northern coverage by paying for a full-page advertisement in the *New York Herald Tribune*" (ibid.). Even before the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission's efforts, Robert Patterson, founder of the Citizens' Council of Mississippi, circulated newsletters that "raged against the 'Paper Curtain' of biased journalism that divided North and South" (Graham and Monteith 16). Patterson's efforts even resulted in signs posted along the highway proclaiming Mississippi's innocence; they too touted Mississippi as

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peaceful African Americans protestors and then watched amused by the violence and then quoted saying, of Civil Rights Leader Fred Shuttlesworth, "they carried him away in an ambulance. I wish they had carried him away in a hearse."

[75] Graham provides examples such as *The Nation*'s Dan Wakefield, who covered the Emmett Till murder trial: he recalled "Mississippi, as an 'eerie place …. The air is heavy, dusty, and hot, and even the silence has a thickness about it—like a kind of taut skin—that is suddenly broken with a shock by the crack and fizz of a Coke being opened" (336). Wakefield goes to suggest, according to Graham, that Faulkner was merely a documentarian of the South, finding the region populated by his characters and other stereotypes.

"The Most Lied about State in the Union" (ibid.).[76] Even as segregationist southerners waged campaigns against both integration and bad press, so too did groups like the Louisiana-based Monitor South and Jackson, Mississippi station head Fred Beard work to eliminate anti-segregationist news programs from the southern airwaves (Graham, *Framing the South* 159; Classen 43).[77]

Each of these instances worked to rehabilitate the white South's image but also discredit news reports about the region. These public relations campaigns featured the South and white southerners as victims of unfair and biased northern news outlets. *New York Times* writer Jack Gould attested to this sensibility in 1957 when he wrote, "It is no secret that many responsible Southerners feel that some elements of the Northern press and television go below the Mason-Dixon line with ready-made prejudices of their own" (X13). Similarly, in a 1965 article in the *Chicago Defender*, Jim Clark blamed journalists for the agitation in Selma: "I think that they realize that by slanting the news and the pictures that they can sell more copy and more pictures all over the country" and so he argues that the "outside agitators" must leave ("Evict Outsiders Says Jim Clark" 10). Clark's discourse was part of a larger rhetorical strategy, as Allison Graham shows, wherein segregationists launched "rhetorical appeals to the spirit of American independence and individualism, insisting that they and they alone were mustering

[76] Additionally, proponents of segregation controlled the southern airwaves, presses, and television networks. Fred Beard, for example, not only blacked out Civil Rights programming but "repeated announcements urging viewers to join the Citizen's Council" (Lewis 166). The Mississippi Sovereignty Commission also released its own propaganda film in 1960 (Lewis 165). Further, as Lewis suggests, "southern newspapers provided crucial forums for the development of segregationist ideology" (164). That is, despite bad national press—or perhaps in the wake of it—southern segregationists actively worked to ameliorate the image of the South and segregation.

[77] In 1959 one Mississippi state Senator, James Eastland, even called for "a constitutional amendment to give states the authority to decide for itself what should be censored in movies: states' rights, in other words for moviegoers" (Graham, *Framing the South* 159).

resistance to a communist inspired 'invasion' and 'takeover' of the country" (*Framing the South* 154). This rhetoric collapsed Civil Rights with a purported communist threat, suggesting that southern resistance was indeed patriotic and democratic.

This brand of southern patriotism extended—in Jim Clark's case at least—to the protection of the white nuclear family. The *Chicago Defender* reported in "Evict Outsiders Says Jim Clark," how Jim Clark fearing for his family's safety, moved them into the jail for protection. This narrative extended the victimization of the South to the white nuclear family, figuring African Americans as aggressors whose protests made white families unsafe. However, this discourse of fear, individualism, and freedom emerging out of southern white segregationists like Jim Clark did not square with the apparent violence and aggression enacted against African Americans in the region. From Harold Strider's on-camera threat in the wake of Emmett Till's murder to Bull Connor's sadistic excitement over using fire hoses on peaceful protestors—"As Negro men, women and children skidded along under the water pressure, 'Bull' Connor was amused: 'Look at them Nigras run!! Look, look at them! he chortled"—the apparent white victimization looked unmistakably like aggression ("Portrait of an Ala. Racist" 9).

In this volatile and violent context, a primetime family sitcom about a small-town southern sheriff seemed ill fated, particularly given the failure of previous southern-set shows.[78] Formerly, CBS had launched *The Gray Ghost* (1957), a one-hour Civil War drama, but as we saw in the preceding chapter, the series caused tremendous anxiety for the network and so CBS initially only offered the drama in syndication on local affiliates

[78] Allison Graham echoes this sensibility in *Framing the South*. She writes, "In this climate, it seemed a prime-time series about a modern-day Southern sheriff wouldn't have a chance" (159).

(Graham, "Remapping Dogpatch" 337).[79] CBS then canceled the series altogether for fear of a northern backlash against the weekly celebration of the Confederate South airing during the integration of Central High (ibid.). Over the next two years CBS and ABC explored bland and seemingly inoffensive southern representations in *Yancy Derringer* and *Bourbon Street Beat* yet neither was successful. These examples disclose sponsors and networks' concern with the South both on and off-screen, as well as their conflicting goals: courting both southern and northern audiences, which were imagined as dramatically different in viewpoint yet unified in their universal whiteness. In order to make the South safe at the height of southern violence, the region needed to be rehabilitated in the national imagination—something southern public relations campaigns actively worked to do. *Andy Griffith*, its unlikely southern sheriff hero, and its comic tendencies proved the first primetime show capable of such a balancing act.[80]

Comic Revisions to the Southern Lawman

In Sheriff Andy Taylor, the show presented a southern lawman distinctly unlike those sheriffs populating the nightly news. This contrast becomes apparent in an episode like "The Manhunt" (Season 1, Episode 2, 10 October 1960), when state troopers storm the quaint and quiet Mayberry in search of an escaped prisoner. Juxtaposed with Andy, the State Police resemble the pro-segregationist southern sheriffs of Civil Rights news broadcasts: they are gruff and dismissive. Dressed in crisp uniforms, they have a military

[79] Brooks and Marsh agree with this notion in their assessment of *The Gray Ghost* in *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows*: "advertisers were extremely nervous about portraying a Confederate hero at a time of civil-rights strife, when Federal troops were in Little Rock" (557). However, the series "failed to stir up regional animosities and was a bit hit in all parts of the country, especially with younger viewers" (ibid.).

[80] In *The Andy Griffith Show* Richard Michael Kelly suggests that the show was especially successful with Southerners and people living in rural areas in the United States (5).

bearing and use superior technology (like magnets that stick to maps) (Figure 12). Andy and sidekick Barney's appearance signify their difference from the state police and other outside authorities. Early in the episode, the State Police walk single file into the Mayberry Sheriff's station after entering the town via motorcade, and they do not return Sheriff Andy and Deputy Barney's friendly greetings. Despite their fancy technology and discipline, the state police prove to be incompetent in catching the escaped prisoner. The ineptness of outside authorities is repeated time and again throughout the eight seasons of *Andy Griffith.* For example, in "The Cow Thief" (Season 3, Episode 5, 29 October 1962), the pushy new Mayberry mayor (Figure 13) insists on bringing in a special crime solver to help stop a supposed band of thieves stealing cows from a Mayberry farmer. While Barney is seemingly seduced by the outsider's expertise, Andy is the one to solve the crime: he surmises that there is only one thief who puts shoes on the cows so as to give the appearance of a whole band of thieves. That Andy solves the crime and catches the criminal asserts that his common sense and low-tech ways of crime solving are more reliable than the high tech policing of urban forces.

Other episodes also draw their conflict from this juxtaposition between Andy and external, more bureaucratic forces, such as "Jailbreak" (Season 2, Episode 18, 5 February 1962) and "Andy and the New Mayor" (Season 3, Episode 3, 15 October 1962). For instance, in "Jailbreak" Andy and Barney are pitted against the FBI during a manhunt, while in "Andy and the New Mayor," Andy pushes back on the mayor's bureaucratic tendencies. O'Leary and Worland make a similar point in "Against the Organization Man:" "On *The Andy Griffith Show* urban con men and bank robbers frequently landed in Mayberry, fruitlessly pursued by state policemen, city detectives, or FBI agents" (79).

Each time, the "unassuming local lawman" shows that the outsiders are "foolish and corrupt" (ibid.). In each encounter with the outside, Andy becomes the mediating force between Mayberry and the rest of the world, bent on corrupting the small town's culture and crime-free nature—a sensibility seemingly sympathetic to segregationists' discourses blaming "outside agitators" for allegedly creating racial conflict.

Figure 12: Andy in the foreground looks on as the State Policeman explains the plan to capture an escaped convict using a magnetic map (in "The Manhunt").

If the series of Bull Connor look-alike sheriffs (Figure 14) on the news came to embody violent southern racism, the whitewashed Mayberry employed a comparable visual shorthand. In Civil Rights news coverage, Herman Gray writes, "Good and evil were easily translated into clearly discernible television stories and characters—Martin Luther King vs. Bull Connor; Freedom Riders vs. white racists; Black Panther Party vs. FBI." ("Remembering Civil Rights" 355). This brand of representation, Gray continues,

functioned to heighten the drama and focus conflict (ibid.).[81] Strangely, in the all-white Mayberry, these divisions remained intact, which correspondingly focused the conflict between Mayberry—represented by Andy—and the outside. Within this formulation, which is visually signaled, Andy always and easily remained the hero. For instance, while Andy's appearance marked his difference from racist southern masculinities, other interloping figures—like the new Mayor—evoked images of segregationist southern sheriffs. Within the diegesis of the show, Andy's difference is made visible by comparison to the state troopers and the town's mayor, who, dressed in a suit, overweight, and with an almost permanent scowl, appeared much more like one of the southern lawmen from the news. However, the Mayor's crime-solving efforts often lead to ridiculous encounters as he meddles in Andy's police business.

Figures 13: The New Mayberry Mayor

[81] In "Remembering Civil Rights," Herman Gray writes, "In the 1960s, the major struggles for social justice and equality by black radical and reform movements for social change made for compelling television because they heightened drama and focused conflict" (355).

Figure 14: Bull Connor (PBS).

"Andy and the New Mayor" and other episodes with the Mayor poke fun at the Mayor's overbearing nature and bureaucratic tendencies, which render him, despite his appearance of authority, a useless and comic force in Mayberry. For example, in "Andy and the New Mayor," the Mayor gets angry at Andy when the Sheriff releases a white prisoner in the middle of his sentence so that the prisoner can work his farm. When the prisoner doesn't return to the Mayberry prison at the scheduled time, the Mayor blames Andy and argues that his lax law enforcement is dysfunctional. Angered and determined to recapture the prisoner, the mayor, Barney, and Andy trek out to the prisoner's farm. When the trio arrives, they discover the prisoner stuck up a tree having escaped a black bear. The bear, it appears, is the only reason the prisoner did not return to the Mayberry jail on time. Unfortunately for the mayor, he winds up attacked by the bear—in a hilarious encounter—and so too does the episode affirm Andy's brand of law enforcement over the Mayor's. The violence signaled by his appearance ceases to be threatening as he becomes a parody of violent southern law enforcement, while each episode champions Andy's gentle, laid back triumphs over the Mayor's ways. In this way, Mayberry offered Andy as a weekly antidote to CBS's news programming and images of the violent southern sheriffs.

Juxtaposed thusly with other symbols of law and order, Sheriff Andy comes off as a nostalgic and safe brand of southern lawman: clever, non-violent, and lacking both the technology and hubris of the state police. This sensibility is made visible in Andy's appearance, as he does not resemble the southern sheriffs populating the nightly news. Andy is slight, handsome, and speaks with a soft and slow southern drawl, punctuated by long silences. As such, "[s]heriff Andy Taylor posed a moral (and visual) challenge each week to the pot-bellied, violent southern sheriffs on the evening news" (Graham, "Andy Griffith" 265). Andy's masculinity drew from a long lineage of the "good southerner," whose good nature becomes visible via his juxtaposition against bad southerners like Bull Connor. In addition, *Andy Griffith* "features a crucial western convention:" "small-town sheriff tries to maintain order in the face of corrupting outside influences" (O'Leary and Worland 76).[82] By comparison to the likes of Bull Connor, Andy's good southerner cum western sheriff becomes the "repository of the nation's virtues," emblematic in appearance and action of all that is good about American values (Watts 4). He is a "Sensitive, widower, wise father, tolerant—and unarmed—law enforcer, good-humored neighbor, reasonable citizen and unpretentious friend" (Graham, "Andy Griffith" 265).[83]

Andy's softened southerner—with origins in the good old boy southern trope and the western hero coupled with Griffith's own authentic southern roots—suggests a reformed and loveable southern lawman who represents the very best of the South and by

[82] In this formulation, Andy's masculinity draws from a lineage of western heroes that upheld American values "in the face of wealth and corruption" (O'Leary and Worland 76-77).

[83] Trent Watts echoes this sensibility in *White Masculinity in the Recent South*. He writes, "The good old boy type has several variants: a comic sort, such as the lovable rustic, Andy Griffith, and the more serious patriotic, blue-collar (or blue-collar wannabe) redneck. The tendency to stereotype southern white men as either particularly good or particularly bad follows an American tendency since the Civil War, as many scholars have noted, to see the (white) South variously as the repository of the nation's virtues, its aberrant backwater, or its pathological doppelganger" (4).

extension the nation.[84] Griffith's previous roles aided in this image: he was made famous by playing the yokel Private Will Stockdale in *No Time for Sergeants* (1958) in television, film, and theater and his hit comedy record "What is was, was Football" (1953). Further, Griffith's southern origins lent an air of authenticity to Sheriff Andy Taylor and Mayberry, based on Griffith's own hometown of Mt. Airy, North Carolina. In the context of the nightly news, which showcased a series of look-alike sheriffs as the aberrant and particularly bad southern white man, the good looking and pacifistic Sheriff Andy Taylor presented a salve to that image during the bloodiest years of the Civil Rights struggle.[85] In addition, Andy Taylor's ethical and measured ways are highlighted by his comparison to the clumsy Deputy Barney Fife (Figure 15), the comic relief of the show.

Barney Fife: Hillbillies, Rednecks, and Comic Relief

Barney Fife may possess the same pedigree as the southern redneck or hillbilly, but in him any and all potential for violence is erased. Barney carries an unloaded gun with one bullet in his pocket to avoid shooting someone, a point of recurring humor throughout the show. Barney and the mountain family the Darlings drew on hillbilly imagery, which would have already been familiar to television audiences from films and radio shows.[86] Barney, like the "harmless hillbilly," is "almost completely innocent:

[84] Don Knotts suggests that his and Griffith's rural and southern upbringing provide "much of the material and tempo" for the show and lent it an air of Southern authenticity (Kelly 4).

[85] While Mayberry is a rather peaceful town, Andy's pacifist ways are emphasized via refusal to carry a gun. Quite differently, Barney insists on carrying a weapon (even if he keeps his singular bullet in his shirt pocket).

[86] The hillbilly type was not new to popular culture as both Hankins and Allison Graham show. The hillbilly represented in many ways by Tennessee Ernie Ford, was repackaged and sold in CBS' *The Real McCoys* (1957-1962), which followed the McCoy family as they left their farm in West Virginia to move to California and then again in the *Beverly Hillbillies* (1962-1971) also created for CBS. As Graham argues, these "harmless hillbillies" represented both permissible and bankable "southern and racial imagery. […] With the politically loaded Deep South now off bounds, the region came to be represented" by comic

unschooled, naïve, practically asexual" (Graham, "Remapping Dogpatch" 337). While early seasons of *Andy Griffith* tapped into American fascination with the hillbilly, according to Anthony Hankins in "The Hillbilly in the American Living room," later seasons "began to feature recurring characters who exemplified separate but related strands of the mythic mountaineer persona" (106).[87] Hankins writes, "[t]elevision comedies like *The Andy Griffith Show* and *The Beverly Hillbillies* that featured mountaineer characters reflected the national media's fascination with this 'white other'—an isolated population outside mainstream American society" (108). These images he argues, "served as a palliative" and alternative for those disturbing images originating in the South, but also celebrated the fantasy of an unchanging and older southern culture. The hillbilly seemingly serves as an alternate white other to the southern redneck, whose otherness is indicated by the red mark on the back of his neck: "the raw mark of social exclusion, the stigmata of class" (Graham, *Framing the South* 154).[88]

While Hankins primarily reads the mountaineer or hillbilly trope onto those characters directly emerging from the hills of Mayberry, the show mobilizes parts of the harmless hillbilly trope on a regular basis in Barney Fife, which eases and eradicates Barney's redneck lineage. Barney's lack of an education makes him innocent, well

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characters such as Grandpa McCoy and the Clampetts, who were relocated to California (Graham, *Framing the South* 5).

[87] Hankins writes that the "Appalachia first appeared on the national radar during the West Virginia Democratic Presidential primary in 1960 when Senator John Kennedy made poverty and hunger in that state major themes of his campaign" (107). Then, in 1962 "three influential books" and a CBS special about the region were published; these publications and programming refigured the "whole of the southeastern mountains as 'Appalachia,' a homogenous 'problem region' within a prosperous nation" (ibid.).

[88] Graham argues that Hollywood films mobilized the redneck in opposition to the "southern man of law" who removes the redneck from society and "reclaims his homeland and redeems his race, eradicating racial tension as a social problem" (*Framing the South* 154).

meaning, and easily fooled rather than threatening; he may carry a gun but it is never loaded (at least in time to do any shooting). Knott's slapstick-like and over-exaggerated performance, replete with clumsiness, a thick southern accent, and a penchant for misunderstandings insure Barney's safe image. In this formulation, Barney deflates the very real violence and threat of the white rural southerner through humor, helping to render the South palatable and profitable to a national audience.

Figure 15: Barney worries about the state police judging the Mayberry law enforcement as their jail is empty ("The Manhunt").

Oddly though, Barney Fife remains the character most interested in the outside world, while Andy represents a kind of small town isolationism.[89] It is Barney, for example, who is most intrigued by and anxious about the state troopers that arrive in "The Manhunt" and he also embraces the city crime solver, who arrives to help out during the "The Cow Thief." While Hankins argues that hillbillies represented an investment in a people "imbued with a strong cultural tradition" and crucially cut off

[89] Late in the series, Barney even moves to Raleigh, North Carolina leaving Mayberry for the big city.

from modernity, Barney represents a modern hillbilly who continually attempts to access not only modern technology—like the intercom he installs in "The Great Filling Station Robbery" (Season 3, Episode 22, 25 February 1963)—but also craves upward mobility (108). Of course, Barney's investment in modernity and the world beyond Mayberry almost always ends in comic failure: he fails to install an intercom, puts his trust in the city crime solver, and mistakenly embraces bank robbers, whom he believes to be TV executives ("TV or not TV," Season 5, Episode 23, 1 March 1965). In the end, Andy's common sense solutions always win out without the use of fancy gadgets like the state trooper's magnets in the "The Manhunt" or the intercom in "The Great Filling Station Robbery." In this way, *Andy Griffith* preserves Mayberry as a bastion of white eccentric characters, who are often misjudged by outsiders who wander into the small southern town. Andy remains wary of outsiders and modern technology and his worries always prove—within the course of an episode—reasonable. Indeed, the only violence that happens upon Mayberry comes from characters that enter in from the outside: petty criminals, escaped prisoners, and the bank robbers posing as television executives in "TV or not TV."[90]

Preserving (a White) Mayberry

Andy's triumph over outside forces mirrors southern states' rights rhetoric, which accused the Federal government and northern journalists of agitating and provoking violence. Indeed, those from outside Mayberry do not understand the small town and its inner workings—that the benign white patriarch has the best interests of his children in

[90] O'Leary and Worland reiterate this sensibility: "Crime in Mayberry would almost invariable come from the outside, its source a generalized modern city" (79). In repeatedly juxtaposing rural Mayberry against the urban city, *Andy Griffith* suggests the corruption of modern life and the gentle and downhome values of Mayberry.

mind at all times. Andy works to preserve the sanctity of this southern space from undue influence and change and to protect his charges. In this way, through repeated storylines, the series hinted that Mayberry (and by extension the South) were better if left alone. This was the kinder, gentler face of states' rights, in which Sheriff Andy Taylor's gentle southern masculinity illustrated his enduring benevolence. In ways that no other southern-show had before, *Andy Griffith* made the rural South a "welcoming space" that championed the common white man and small-town values in the face of radical social, political, and technological upheaval (O'Leary and Worland 78). Allison Graham perhaps best sums up this sense; she writes, "Mayberry, whistling cheerfully under the radioactive radar of the 1960s, was the decade's Brigadoon, a pocket of southern mystification tucked into a Culver City back lot: peaceful, isolated, and entirely white" ("Andy Griffith" 265).

In many ways, this welcoming world was made possible by the absence of African Americans in Mayberry. Until season seven, the world Andy preserves is an entirely white working class one, crucially detached from both the plantation images of *Yancy Derringer* and *Bourbon Street Beat*, as well as the violent news coverage of the Civil Rights protests. This new southern mise-en-scène, minus the symbols of racial hierarchy or any bodies of color, is structured by invisibility and scrupulous omission.

Integrating Mayberry: Mr. Carp, Flip Conroy, and the "Civil Rights Subject"

Long before Mayberry officially integrated with Flip Conroy (Rodney Tarkington), the sitcom betrayed a strange awareness of racial conflict occurring outside its televisual borders. For instance, Andy's unanswered question regarding the Emancipation Proclamation potentially points to the limits of topics network television

willingly engaged. To leave the question unanswered, addresses the audience with the very same question and alludes to a history of slavery heretofore untold on television. The question also, in this reading, might betray sympathy for ongoing Civil Rights struggles by making visible what could not be said on television. Yet during the most violent years of the Civil Rights struggle and in North Carolina—a state with the highest levels of Klan activity during the 1950s and 1960s—the humor derived from the Emancipation Proclamation question diminishes the proclamation's importance as it also implies its irrelevance to Mayberry specifically and white people generally.[91]

This dim recognition of Civil Rights struggles and the racial limits of Mayberry occurs throughout the sitcom, however, an example from season two is particularly troubling: a female reporter mistakes Andy's conversation about fishing for a conversation about lynching. This particular exchange and the eventual arrival of Flip Conroy in Mayberry reveal an inferential racism—a racism knit into the very fabric of Mayberry's fictional white southern world. In "Crime-Free Mayberry" (Season 2, Episode 7, 20 November 1961) a female reporter arrives at the barbershop to interview Andy about the impressive lack of crime in Mayberry. As she enters, she overhears Andy and Floyd (Howard McNear) in the midst of a discussion about a carp the sheriff recently (and proudly) caught. However, the reporter confuses Andy's description of stringing up the carp on an oak tree and joyously taking a picture with him—"I strung him up and had my picture taken with him," he says with a big grin—for the sheriff performing this violence to a person, Mr. Carp.

[91] In *Klansville, U.S.A.* David Cunningham writes that the Klan's presence in North Carolina at its peak in the mid-1960s "Eclipsed klan membership in all other southern states combined … By the summer of 1964, the Carolina Klan established a demanding schedule of nightly rallies across the state, where they enlisted thousands of dues-paying members" (5).

As Andy excitedly relates his fishing triumph the reporter asks probing questions, desperately trying to understand the sheriff's story—the close-up shot reverse-shot pattern captures both parties mounting confusion as Andy and Floyd laugh (with the laugh track) and the reporter appears increasingly concerned and befuddled. In defense of his catch, Andy responds, "Around these parts we figured we doing folks a favor when we kill a carp. They're an awful nuisance." As Floyd nods in agreement—in the same shot—he adds, that carp are "Awful pushy." Then the reporter, looking shocked, responds: "They may be an undesirable element" but that's no reason to kill them, leaving both Andy and Floyd stunned and confused. The humor emerges here from the reporter's clear misunderstanding and Andy's sheer confusion since, after all, it's just a carp. This pacifist and moral sheriff couldn't possibly have committed this violence to another human and so too does this knowledge make the exchange (potentially) funny. As the mayor interrupts the conversation, the reporter reveals her horror to him, but the mayor, who looks rather like Bull Connor—much to her shock—responds that he imagines Andy's killed many a carp, merely repeating Andy and Floyd's dislike of the fish (Figure 16). In a comic turn, the sequence ends as the reporter admits she would no more kill a carp than a pike. This final rhetorical move ensures viewers that this conversation was only about fish.[92] Still, the reporter's confusion conflates the fish with human "undesirable elements" that threaten Mayberry's quaint white way of life. Further, Andy's description sounds far too much like he has gladly participated in a lynching.

[92] In addition, much of the humor here appears derived from her gender and her city-like ways.

Figure 16: The reporter is appalled at the Mayor's response and his agreement with Andy and Floyd.

This moment betrays an awareness of the racially motivated violence outside Mayberry, yet makes light of that violence in a way that aligns African Americans with "undesirable elements" like the carp. The reporter's speedy acquiescence to a racist logic, which aligns African Americans with undesirable elements, underscores the violent forms of erasure upon which the sitcom depends. Here, the joke evacuates lynching, often allowed by southern white law enforcement, of its extraordinary violence and horror. This rhetorical slight-of-hand maintains the utopian vision of Mayberry as free of racial strife or consciousness, while it betrays the white supremacist underpinnings of the fictional town. Put another way, to derive humor from lynching, like the joke about the Emancipation Proclamation, diminishes the impact, terror, and horror of white violence against African Americans in the South. In Mayberry of course, there is neither crime nor violence and there are no African Americans until Flip Conroy.

In March 1967, Rodney Tarkington, playing former NFL star Flip Conroy, became the first African American to appear in a speaking role on *Andy Griffith*. In "Opie's Piano Lesson" (Season 7, Episode 27, 13 March 1967), Flip returns home to

Mayberry to help out in his father's auto shop and he volunteers to coach the school's all-white boys football team. Flip's story suggests that he and his family, and perhaps by extension other African Americans, have been in Mayberry all along. This narrative of Mayberry's integration suggests a space where African Americans and whites have lived in harmony, although separately, since the show's inception. However, this narrative of an invisible presence merely relegates African American characters to the margins of Mayberry's action. At the same time, Conroy's experience in Mayberry as a football coach and later as he plays the piano in Andy's home suggests the clear absence of racism even from a southern sheriff. In this way, *Andy Griffith* argues that racism is neither an individual nor systemic problem in this small southern town. Instead, and despite news reports to the contrary, Mayberry reiterates television's 1950s "concept of ordered worlds where, even when Black characters appeared, there were no serious racial problems. No social ills. No political tensions. All was fine and dandy between Black and white in America" (Bogle 254).[93] If Mayberry is indeed a peaceful utopia, then racism and its accompanying violence are beyond the imaginable bounds of this televisual place.

A sequence near the end of "Opie's Piano lesson" drives this sensibility home: at the end of the episode, Andy welcomes Flip Conroy into his home through the front door and Flip speaks candidly with Andy, even proving the sheriff wrong. In a shot reverse-shot pattern, Flip calmly explains to Andy, Aunt Bee, and Opie—the latter three all appear in the same shot—that it is possible for Opie to learn and perfect multiple activities like football and the piano. Then, leading by example Flip moves over to the piano and begins to play what sounds like a classical piece: the shot frames Flip in the

[93] Bogle discusses how 1980s television programs reiterated the 1950s colorblind world, but I think his description works well here to show how Andy Griffith performs this same work earlier.

foreground as the white family watches him in the background (Figure 17) The pace of the music quickens, along with the edits, as close-ups of each of the family members reveals their reactions: Andy is confused and surprised, Bee appears pleased, and Opie is delighted as he looks up for Andy's approval. As Flip Conroy enters the Taylor house through the front door and takes a seat at their piano, his character challenges television's white domestic and southern mise-en-scène. Even so, the editing and blocking mostly separates him from the white family while his main narrative purpose is to show Opie how he can both learn the piano and play football. Flip Conroy, in fact, only functions in the episode to aid the white family and specifically Opie to sort out an internal conflict as he is escorted onto the screen by white characters.[94]

Figure 17: Flip Conroy plays the piano as the Taylor family watches in astonishment.

In this way, he is not so unlike the older and insidious trope of the "good negro" and what Herman Gray calls "the civil rights subject." Like Bill Cosby in *I Spy*, Flip Conroy represents "the civil rights subject:" "This cultural figure embodies complex codes of behavior and propriety that make it an exemplar of citizenship and responsibility—success, mobility, hard work, sacrifice, individualism" (Gray,

[94] He is quite literally escorted onto the screen by a white teacher in his first scene in the episode.

"Remembering Civil Rights" 354). Flip Conroy appears to be all these things: a former NFL player, a masterful piano player, a good coach performing his civic duties, and a good son helping out his father's business. This formulation of the "civil right subject" conflates racism with classism. That is, Conroy's character, like Bill Cosby, is allowed entrance into the white world through his conformance to white middle class social norms. Indeed, the episode never acknowledges Flip Conroy's race, suggesting that even as the show perhaps challenges representations of race on television, so too does it envision a colorblind contemporary southern world. This whitewashing of the South allows for the sitcom to never address—save for in strange circumscribed ways like the Emancipation Proclamation question or the carp sequence—the violence of rendering African Americans invisible in the region.

Conclusion: Images of a New (Old) South

If the South was a "blight on the broader cultural and political" American landscape, then *Andy Griffith* provided a televisual cure for that southern ailment (Doyle qt. in Barker and McKee 9). In *Framing the South* Allison Graham writes, "Mayberry was CBS's prime-time challenge to its own evening newscasts" as it portrayed a world cut-off from the violent realities of the South: Mayberry was and remains a place of "selective memory, silence, and omissions" in a genre perfectly suited to making the South safe (160). Indeed, during the 1960s when the Civil Rights Movement was so visible on the nightly news, *Andy Griffith*'s extraordinary success showcases the "two worlds into which television had fissioned:" white utopian fantasies of hearth and home versus social upheaval on the nightly news (Barnouw 314). Unlike southern shows before it—*Yancy Derringer* and *Bourbon Street Beat*, for instance—the sitcom successfully

dislocates its South from the plantation and the Civil Rights Movement, while embracing family togetherness and small town southern values. Sheriff Andy—as an alternative to the southern sheriffs on the news—becomes the benign patriarch of Mayberry protecting both his family and community from outside and undue influence, be it bank robbers, city crime solvers, or carp.[95] With Andy at its helm, *Andy Griffith*'s comic and gentle south soothed widespread anxiety about a rapidly changing America as it also re-imagined a white rural South as a palliative for the white racist South appearing on the news (Hankins 104).

Mayberry, however, remained incompatible with the changes wrought by the Civil Rights movement as *Andy Griffith*'s rehabilitated South was still a fictional place indebted to inferential racism. As such, the integration of Mayberry with Flip Conroy feels primarily like a concession to changing times. Like other representations of African Americans in the late 1960s, Flip Conroy was a vision of African American life through white eyes, similar to *Julia* and *I Spy*'s depictions of African Americans, as discussed in Chapter II. Despite *Andy Griffith*'s utopic feel—including its colorblind treatment of Flip Conroy—Mayberry remained a world constructed by white supremacy and nostalgia for a time that never was. Mayberry may not need the Emancipation Proclamation, for its residents are already and have always been free, but the show's dismissive treatment of the Proclamation and the carp humor reflect a positive investment in white (supremacist) society. This comic and hopeful vision of the white South proved extraordinarily profitable and popular for CBS and it would provide a model for white southern and rural

[95] Conspicuously absent from this new version of the South are not only African Americans, but also women as anything other than comic relief, much like the ladies of both *Yancy Derringer* and *Bourbon Street Beat*. Women on *Andy Griffith* either appear as Andy's love interest or there is Aunt Bea, who arrives in Mayberry during the pilot in order to help raise Opie.

representations thereafter—like *The Waltons*—as the white, simple, and the nostalgic answer to the modern urbanizing world.

CHAPTER V

TALES OF TWO SOUTHS:

THE WALTONS, *ROOTS*, AND PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTHERN HISTORY

"It is time to tell the other side 'like it is.' What about the black families who survived the depression intact along with the Waltons? What about the countless black families where Father does Know best and shares the responsibility for child rearing?"

Blanche C. La Croix, *The Chicago Defender* (July 12, 1975)

"Isn't it a shame," Denise Brakefield wrote to *Life* magazine in 1972, "that we have grown so hardened that we find ourselves apologizing when our hearts have been warmly touched by such a beautiful series as *The Waltons*?" (35). Other reviews echoed this response to the homespun family drama. *Life* TV critic Cyclops wrote, "*The Waltons* will make few demands on its watchers, and will always be vulnerable in its sentiments, and may occasionally sink into an intolerable wistfulness—remember, remember, it keeps saying, the time when we were poor yet happy, young yet strong, awkward yet safe—but it's nice" (20). Not only was *The Waltons* (1971-1981) a salve for the violence of the 1960s on and off television, but so too the drama "reaffirmed weekly the moral uplift of cooperative family effort, intergenerational contact, and simple living long associated with the dominant media view of the traditional rural South" (McGee and Graham 373).[96] In a strange turn, *The Waltons* carefully dislocated its version of the

[96] In addition, *The Waltons* offered an alternative to the violent and urban televisual landscape: "The series came on quietly last fall, regarded by many as a throwaway to appease those who deplore television's excessive crime and violence," reported Aleene MacMinn for the *Los Angeles Times*.

South from violent media visions of the region, a feat the drama accomplished in part due to its embrace of a white working class family and its Depression-era setting in Appalachia. Rather than poke fun at the hillbilly Walton family, or criticize the redneck ways of the South, the working-class white family was the moral center of the drama. As inheritors of New Deal-liberalism, *The Waltons* presented an assimilationist model for racial and regional reconciliation as white characters escorted African American characters and Civil Rights-themes onto primetime television. Specifically, John Boy Walton's (Richard Thomas) narration controlled and directed stories about African Americans and white women. While rather progressive—both in its roles for women and its discussions of race and racism—*The Waltons'* politics were inevitably limited as the drama relayed African American stories through white eyes.

In juxtaposition to *The Waltons*, *Roots* (1977) presented a dramatic reinterpretation of southern history that centrally included African American points of view and featured an almost entirely African American cast. Alex Haley, the author of the book upon which *Roots* is based, even worked as a consultant on the series and provided the final voiceover for the *Roots* finale, narrating his family's history after their move to Tennessee. *Roots* embraced a radical approach to southern regional narratives: the miniseries confronted rather than omitted the racial violence of the plantation system, from the slave catchers who brutally amputate Kunta Kinte's (John Amos) foot to the white master Tom Moore (Chuck Connors) who violently rapes Kunte Kinte's daughter Kizzy (Leslie Uggams). Kizzy's betrayal by her presumed friend, the white southern belle Missy Anne, coupled with her subsequent rape represents a radical approach to African American storytelling in primetime—one that revealed the limits of *The Waltons*'

white liberal perspective on both the South and race. Even as ABC insisted on whitening the text for primetime—for instance, adding additional white characters and insisting on white directors—*Roots* appeared both within its diegesis and perhaps due to Alex Haley's fame, as African American stories told from an African American perspective. Unlike *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1974)—a TV movie adaptation of Ernest Gaines' novel that traced the history of Miss Jane from Reconstruction through Civil Rights, as filtered through a white reporter—*Roots*' broadcast did not frame African American stories within white experience. Despite ABC's unenthusiastic expectations for the miniseries, *Roots*' violent South was a hit.[97] While *Roots* seemingly did not indicate a shift in national, much less southern, attitudes towards race, its success did mark a watershed moment in television history. *Roots* demonstrated that network executives and advertisers need not fear a southern backlash and it revealed that dramatic depictions of African American life could be popular and profitable. This recognition overturned industry lore about imagined white (racist) southern audiences, long believed—as I argue in Chapters II and III—to be at best uninterested in and at worst hostile to dramatic depictions of African American life.

The Waltons and *Roots* present two divergent paths that primetime television dramas might have taken in representing the South and race—a white liberal perspective that included yet filtered African American stories through a white lens or a televisual landscape that centrally included African American voices both on and off-screen.

[97] John Millichap and Sharon Monteith echo this sensibility in "Television Movies:" "*Roots* was originally planned as an eight-week miniseries; ironically enough, Fred Silverman's decision to present it on eight consecutive nights was motivated by his fear of a flop" (171). Donald Bogle also suggests that Silverman's decision to run *Roots* as miniseries meant that ABC could "dispose of it quickly" (Bogle 243). Even Silverman later admitted, "I did not have enough faith in it" (ibid.).

However, with the conservative restoration of the 1980s, primetime programming took neither of these routes. This chapter examines these two representational southern landscapes in the context of 1970s socially relevant programming, with specific attention to intersections of race and gender as emblematic of each drama's different yet progressive politics. These readings of both *The Waltons* and *Roots* outline, I hope, the different primetime paths briefly opened and explored in the decade preceding the 1980s conservative backlash.

CBS and the Move Towards Social Relevance

In the wake of the violence of 1968—the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and subsequent riots across the United States—television executives and audiences alike sensed "that much television programming had become irrelevant" (Barnouw 430). As a result, and in a move toward social and political relevancy, networks ditched much of their 1960s fare in favor of a new brand of programming, which both looked and sounded different. *All in the Family* (1971-1979)—the Norman Lear produced sitcom for CBS that followed the comic exploits of the working-class Bunker family in Queens, New York—perhaps best represented television's new look and feel: "Its central figure, Archie Bunker, was a bigot who freely sprinkled his talk with references to 'spics,' 'dagoes,' 'hebes,' 'coons'—racial epithets that had long been among the strictest of broadcasting taboos" (Barnouw 432).[98] Where CBS in the 1960s had embraced rural sitcoms and white hillbillies, CBS in the 1970s diversified in terms of both location and racial representation.

[98] *All in the Family*'s success enabled multiple Lear hit spin-offs from *Maude* to *The Jeffersons*.

While there were far more African Americans on television in the 1970s than the previous decade, these primarily comic visions of African American life were largely written and produced by whites. For instance, Lear also created Archie Bunker's (Carroll O'Connor) African American counter-part George Jefferson (Sherman Hemsley) of *The Jeffersons* (1975-1985), which picked up after the family's move from Queens to Manhattan as they moved on up, thanks to a successful dry cleaning business. Dorothy Gilliam reiterates this sentiment in a 1978 *Los Angeles Times* article arguing "the deadly trap is that the sitcom today is the only network vehicle in which blacks are regularly seen. […] most of the writers of black shows are white" (Q16).[99] While there were far more African American faces on television, the urban sitcoms produced by whites were often inferentially, if not overtly, racist. [100] Social relevance appeared in these shifts to be about location—the urban—and representational diversity, rather than any substantial break with television's histories of racially conservative content.[101]

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[99] Herman Gray argues something similar in *Watching Race*: "The television programs involving blacks in the 1970s were largely representations of what white liberal middle-class television program makers assumed (or projected) were 'authentic accounts of poor black urban ghetto life" (77).

[100] The boom of African American sitcoms in the 1970s points to the limited, yet significant, ways in which the networks adjusted in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement: courting an African American audience by casting African Americans and a white audience by containing representations of African American life within stereotypical roles that did not threaten the white status quo. I am drawing here from Herman Gray's argument in "Remembering Civil Rights," wherein he argues, that "civil rights and black power movements indirectly helped to reconfigure television." Indeed, Gray suggests that these movements "created limited but significant 'adjustments' that eventually resulted in the proliferation of black representations on television in the mid 1970s and again in the late 1980s" (350).

[101] This is true of *Julia* (1968-1971) as well. Although in some ways groundbreaking for featuring an African American actress at its center, the show garnered criticism and outrage both for being whitewashed and for its depictions of African American families and black womanhood. For more on this, see Aniko Bodroghokz's essay "Is that What you Mean by Color TV" in *Critiquing the Sitcom*. Indeed, as Herman Gray writes, "As for fictional television, even the most cursory examination of commercial network programming in the 1950s and 1960s reveals the relative absence of blacks, never mind attention to civil rights issues. As illustrated by *Julia*, *Room 222*, *The Bill Cosby Show*, *The Leslie Uggams Show*, and *The Flip Wilson Show*, the imaginary world presented by fictional television in the middle decades of the twentieth century was one of black invisibility structured by the logic of color blindness and driven by the discourse of discrimination" ("Remembering Civil Rights" 350).

The Waltons, with its predominantly white cast and rural setting, appears a strange fit for CBS's new socially relevant makeover. Nevertheless, the series was far more politically progressive than many of its so-called "socially relevant" counterparts. Set in Appalachia in the midst of the Depression, the wildly successful *Waltons* followed the eponymous southern family—based on creator and narrator Earl Hamner's own family—as they survived and prospered through hard work and family values. Even its timeslot, programmed against the *Mod Squad*—a diverse and youth-oriented police procedural set in Los Angeles—and *Flip Wilson*—featuring African American comic Flip Wilson—during its first season, suggested the family drama's political intervention in the primetime landscape. According to Fred Silverman, then vice president of CBS, "The Waltons' would have a big appeal in rural areas and small towns," whereas *Flip Wilson* and *Mod Squad* he argued, were urban shows (Harmetz 123). In addition, the family drama addressed socially relevant topics like southern racism and poverty while reflecting shifting and more progressive roles for women. Conceived of as an alternative to the violent television landscape and perhaps even the real and televised violence of the 1960s, *The Waltons* ultimately drew a bigger and broader crowd than the network expected (Figure 18).[102] In the 1973-1974 season, *The Waltons*' viewership was only second to *All in the Family*, beating out other hit series like *Sanford & Son* (1972-1977) and *Mash* (1972-1983) (Barnouw 432).

[102] Strangely too, in the show's afterlife it was used by conservative Christian organizations as a teaching tool for family values.

Figure 18: *The Waltons* Family (tvtropes.com)

Will Geer, who played Grandpa Jeb Walton in the series, suggested in the *Los Angeles Times* that *The Waltons'* appeal lay in its style of "Folklore drama. Like a Woody Guthrie song. This gets down to the very roots of this country. A genuine Americana. […] I marvel at the authenticity of this material" (Smith 2).[103] What Geer proposed, and what other critics also suggested, was that *The Waltons'* nostalgia for the Great Depression—a period that heretofore had not been represented on television—and the drama's rosy-hued vision of poverty, gracious cooperative living, and racial tolerance showcased what America was and always had been.[104] That is, after the violence of the 1960s, *The Waltons* offered a way for the country to get back to its white American roots

[103] Will Geer notes in the *Los Angeles Times*, "Time was when the Depression was the invisible era of America as far as television was concerned. Business absolutely refused to sponsor stories about the depression, they pretended it never happened" (ibid.). *The Waltons* represented and championed F.D.R's alphabet-soup agencies like the Citizen's Conservationist Corps (C.C.C.), even featuring that particular agency in a first season episode, "The Boy from the C.C.C.). The days of the blacklist were clearly over, a point further proved by hiring Will Geer, who had been blacklisted in the early 1950s.

[104] For instance, in the *New York Times* Aljean Harmetz marvels at his children's love of *The Waltons* who call the drama 'real' and like it because not everyone is perfect like the *Brady Bunch*.

by way of simple southern living, while the romantic vision of poverty also prepared viewers for an economic downturn. The drama's West Virginia setting and working-class family differentiated *The Waltons* from previous representations of the plantation South, such as those clung to by both *Yancy Derringer* and *Bourbon Street Beat*. Lacking the plantation and thus visible signs of southern raced, classed, and gendered hierarchies, so too did *The Waltons* reimagine a southern mise-en-scène defined by flexible gender roles and interracial harmony. Instead of the backward South so feared by network executives—the region as threat to the "modern or 'enlightened nation'"—*The Waltons* suggested its South as a simple cure to a quickly urbanizing and modernizing nation (Duck 3).

Progressive Politics and New Roles for Women

The drama's progressive politics, indicated by its Depression-era setting, its vision of racial tolerance, and its myriad roles for women, successfully commanded a primetime spot for almost a decade, winning massive audiences and multiple Emmys. *The Waltons* embraced a revised vision of the American dream: instead of celebrating consumption and strict gender roles like most of TV's earlier suburban nuclear families (i.e. the Andersons or the Cleavers), the Walton women worked and played, just like their male counterparts. The show's gender politics—girls that liked to play catch better than buy dresses—were in line with the 1970s women's movement as the Walton women showcased multiple ways to perform femininity. These representations dramatically differ from stereotypical and comedic portrayals of housewives and southern belles—Melody Lee (Arlene Howell) or the belle-gone-bad Evelyn/Rose in *Bourbon Street*

Beat—in the preceding decades of television.[105] Melody Lee, for instance, primarily brought comic relief and light-heartedness to the cop drama as she answered phones and flirted with Cal and Rex's young associate. Similarly, on *The Andy Griffith Show* Aunt Bee provided both comic relief and homespun southern cooking and care to both Andy and Opie, while other young female characters functioned primarily as love interests for Mayberry's sheriff. By contrast, the white women of Walton's Mountain were—unlike those in *Andy Griffith*, *Bourbon Street Beat*, and *Yancy Derringer*—complex, competent, and fully realized characters.

The world of *The Waltons* is "wide enough to encompass both Erin and Mary Ellen Walton" and each character's differing approach to gender (Harmetz 123). During the first season, for example, Mary Ellen (Judy Norton Taylor) gets into the junk business so she can save up for a baseball mitt only to buy a dress instead. The dress substitution is an effort to impress her crush. Ultimately though, she ditches the dress, keeps her dirty overalls, and gets the mitt so she can play catch with the boy she likes. In this instance, Mary Ellen learns that she need not embrace a prescriptive and stereotypical femininity. Whereas Mary Ellen is "continually stifled by the boundaries of the feminine role," her younger sister Erin (Mary Elizabeth McDonough) embraces the trappings of stereotypical femininity, at least as a young girl (ibid.). Other women on Walton's Mountain are similarly stifled by restrictive gender expectations. For instance, in "The Outrage" (Season 9, Episode 1 & 2, 27 Nov 1980), Ike Godsey (Joe Conley) feels like Corabeth (Ronnie Claire Edwards) works too much and wishes for a housewife just like his mother. In an effort to please Ike, Corabeth quits her job at the store and takes up

[105] The more diverse roles for Waltons women appears in line with developing white women's roles in primetime television in the 1970s. For instance, the *All in the Family* spin-off *Maude* (1972-1978) (and the first television abortion) and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977).

housewife duties like cooking and cleaning full-time. However, soon Ike realizes that he misses having Corabeth around the store and that she too is unhappy with her new work. Apologetic and wanting Corabeth to feel fulfilled, Ike sets up a desk for her to begin a real estate agency—her dream job. The moral of the story is that being a housewife is not for every woman (or perhaps even desirable to every man). What both Ike and Corabeth really want is a partner in their marriage, rather than someone to do the cooking and cleaning or be a provider.

While *The Waltons* romanticizes the family's experience of poverty, so too does that romantic vision dislocate white southern women from always and already inhabiting the domestic space be it the plantation or Aunt Bee in Andy's kitchen. Detached from the mise-en-scène of the plantation and the trappings of the southern belle, the women of Walton's Mountain are free to embrace a variety of social and even civic roles. The conventional southern woman was, as Allison Graham suggests in *Framing the South*, "the loveliest and purest of God's creatures, the nearest thing to an angelic being that treads this terrestrial ball is a well-bred, cultured, Southern white woman or her blue-eyed, golden-haired little girl" (qtd. in Graham, *Framing the South* 19). That is, the southern white belle—her upper-class status was particularly important—cultivated by the plantation system was not only the pride and joy of the South, but was interchangeable with and emblematic of the region. In direct contrast, the women of Walton's Mountain are of the poor working class, signified through their dirty and tattered clothes (including pants) in opposition to the belle's pristine appearance and cultured nature. From the Walton girls to Corabeth, female characters explore and inhabit various femininities: Mary Ellen becomes a doctor, Corabeth a real estate agent, Toni

(Lisa Harrison) is in the army, and Olivia (Michael Learned) raises her children on the mountain while married to a loving husband. If the white belle was emblematic of the old plantation South and thereby racist oppression—as we will see in *Roots*—then the women of Walton's Mountain, freed from the trappings of the plantation, become active participants in regional progress alongside the male characters, running businesses, providing medical aid, and eschewing racism.

Waltons' Masculinities and Telling White Stories

The Waltons' progressive vision of the South remains limited, however, by the central role of white men, specifically patriarch John Walton (Ralph Waite) and his eldest son John Boy Walton (Richard Thomas). Inevitably constrained by the politics of primetime, the almost all-white utopian location featured few appearances by African American characters like the Foster family: Verdie (first Grant and then Foster) (Lynn Hamilton), Harley Foster (Hal Williams), and their sons Jody (Charles R. Penland) and Josh (James Bond III). Narrated from the perspective of John Boy, the white Walton men rendered the poor white other a crucial part of the narrative of "regional progress" through "togetherness and achievement in the face of Depression-era poverty" (Graham, *Framing the South* 184).[106] For the white men of *The Waltons*, regional progress appears inextricably tied to stories about "idealistic teaching in the face of racism and poverty," in which the men inevitably play a crucial role (ibid.). For instance, in the first season of *The Waltons*, John Boy (Richard Thomas) teaches Verdie to read and write ("The

[106] In *Framing the South*, Allison Graham discusses the genre of the civil rights film in the 1980s. In this films and what "proved commercially successful" was "the spectacle of the redemption of white authority" (189). Put another way, in a myriad of 1980s and 1990s civil rights films, white lawyers and sheriffs bring closure to a racially fraught southern past. While the Waltons comes well before these films, I think a similar pattern of white redemption—particularly of the working class southern white man—emerges in the relationships between the Walton and Foster families.

Scholar," Season 1, Episode 21, 22 Feb. 1973). Verdie agrees to John Boy's help in exchange for caring for his sister Erin, who is sick in bed. Together Verdie and John Boy set out on a covert literacy project. At once, "The Scholar" opens up a discussion of race and racism and points to race-based educational inequalities. Indeed, *The Waltons* consistently raised concerns about racial inequality and southern racism—Verdie cannot read, Jody is barred from entering a club, and Harley is unfairly punished by southern law enforcement. Later episodes, like "The Hot Rod" (Season 9, Episode 12, 19 February 1981) and "The Outrage" revisit southern racism and each time one of the Walton men comes to the aid of Verdie, Harley, and Jody.[107]

These encounters with overt southern racism function to develop and differentiate the residents of Walton's Mountain as good white southerners. In "The Scholar," for example, Verdie realizes that other inhabitants of Walton's Mountain have learned that she can neither read nor write. Fearing that John Boy has purposefully humiliated her by outing her as illiterate, Verdie abruptly ends their tutoring sessions and kicks a confused John Boy out of her house yelling: "Outside in the world you have all the rights" but not in her home. But, John Boy has not betrayed Verdie's trust. Rather, it was the youngest Walton who mistakenly reported Verdie to her schoolteacher. Once Verdie learns of the mistake, she apologizes to John Boy for her misdirected outrage and together they reconcile and restart the lessons. At once, John (senior) suggests that Verdie's anger might derive from a longer history of racism and social inequality. While the brief exchange between John Boy and his father midway through the episode reveals a longer history of racial tension and social inequality, the resolution of Verdie and John Boy's

[107] The Fosters appear in a handful of episodes throughout the series' long run. Verdie appears in seventeen episodes while Harley Foster appears in seven episodes ("Verdie Foster;" "Harley Foster").

conflict suggests that racism is overcome through interpersonal relationships. As the episode closes, Earl Hamner's voiceover comments that they must learn "now to not get hung up on old racial prejudices," implying that those prejudices used to exist but for the new generation, like John Boy, they are barely a memory.[108]

These moments that reveal white privilege and the problem with colorblindness are often contradicted by the structure of race-based plots. For instance, not only is John Boy colorblind but his ethics, patience, and reason are made visible as he helps Verdie, despite her angry outburst. Multiple close-ups of an angry and hurt Verdie tie her reaction to her body rather than to reason. That she is too quick to anger reproduces blackness as pathologically tethered to bodily impulses, while John Boy's reaction only reaffirms his whiteness and moral authority. That is, even as the resolution of John Boy and Verdie's conflict asserts John Boy's good nature through his inability to see race so too does the drama employ race-based tropes in service of that conclusion. In addition, John Boy (Earl Hamner) retrospectively narrates this interaction, which—within the diegesis—frames Verdie from his white perspective and makes him the unquestioned victim and later hero. Similarly, in "The Outrage," Harley's struggles with southern lawmen are filtered through John Senior and then John Boy's narration. John Boy's inability to comprehend—or even see—race in "The Scholar" and later Jim Bob's confusion when Jody is denied entry to a bar in "The Hot Rod," foreground but do not challenge the Waltons' white and privileged position.

Rather, the resolution of racial strife in both "The Scholar" and "The Hot Rod" implicates white men as crucial in both racial and regional progress. For instance, in the

[108] The above sentiment is repeated in the drama's ninth season. For instance, the realization of injustice and racism propels the white family into action in "The Outrage," for, as John Boy (Early Hamner) narrates, we "failed to realize those freedoms are not evenly distributed."

"The Hot Rod," Verdie's son Jody returns home from the Navy and confesses that he plans on leaving the South: "The South isn't for me. I'll never amount to anything if I stay here," he says. Later, after they've been refused access to a bar, he explains to Jim Bob, "You got it made here. You're white. You come from a white family." What Jody points to, like Verdie before him, is that race matters in the South—after all, the series is set during Jim Crow—and the two boys are treated differently because of their respective races. However, as in "The Scholar," by the end of the episode Jim Bob comes up with a plan to keep Jody at home: the two will open an auto-body repair shop together, a plan that Jody excitedly accepts. Here on Walton's Mountain, away from the racist South, Jody with the help of the white Jim Bob can aspire to the same things as a white boy.

Additionally, the men that ban Jody from the bar in "The Hot Rod" and the café server in "The Outrage," in looking like the southern sheriffs before them, suggest once again that racism has a particular visual style.[109] In "The Outrage," a server at a café refuses to serve Harley. Meanwhile, this same waiter serves a group of German war prisoners seated at the counter, a juxtaposition that reveals the cruelty and deep-seated nature of the waiter's racism. Both the waiter and the sheriff in the café are of the same type: they have potbellies, permanent scowls, and are both dressed in crisp albeit different uniforms. These features align them with nationally circulated images of southern racists, as I discuss in the previous chapter. By comparison, the Waltons men are all thin, rugged, and often dirty. In this sequence, John's (senior) haphazard appearance and slighter build affirms his good nature. These visual cues indicate the

[109] In *Framing the South*, Graham suggests that by the late 1950s in Hollywood "racism became not just a function but an indicator of class, an inherent characteristic—like physical ugliness—of an unaccountably depraved group" (143).

Waltons' lower-class status but also visually distinguish them from southern racist masculinities. In all these episodes, the Waltons' characterizations as good white men become visible via their juxtaposition against the othered bad white racists.

As the Waltons accept difference and actively fight to overturn injustice, so too does the family present a new vision of working-class southerners, no longer pathologically marked by the red neck, "the raw mark of social exclusion" (Graham, *Framing the South* 154). Instead, this new South is perhaps best defined by a politics of social justice. Each encounter with racial, ethnic, or class difference seemingly tests *The Waltons* new and tolerant working class masculinity, from the arrival of the Jewish Manns fleeing the Nazi regime in "The Ceremony" (Season 1, Episode 9, 9 November 1972) to the Waltons embracing the interfaith marriage between Jason Walton and Toni, an American Jew in "The Beginning" (Season 9, Episode 14, 5 March 1981) and Jim Bob's decision to open an auto-shop with Jody Foster in "The Hot Rod." Nowhere is this sensibility more apparent than in "The Outrage" parts one and two, when Harley Foster stands accused of killing a white man. Over the course of the two episodes that open *The Waltons* ninth season, the elder John Walton works to clear Harley's name, a feat he manages by tracking down President Roosevelt—who is on his deathbed—and getting him to grant Harley a Presidential pardon.[110]

In contrast to Mayberry, Walton's Mountain is a place of inclusion and a televisual location capable of both imagining and incorporating difference. This recuperation of the South, however, only occurs by distinguishing Walton's mountain as

[110] Oddly, the reveal of Harley's innocence is overshadowed by Roosevelt's death, which both families mourn together as they watch the train carrying the President's body pass through Charlottesville. This moment, while odd, feels in line with the show's progressive politics and its embrace of F.D.R's politics and programs.

a place outside of the larger region and assuring the harmless nature of its mountainfolk. The mise-en-scène of Walton's Mountain abandons historical symbols of racial strife (i.e. the plantation) or protest in order to indicate the safety and racial tolerance of the mountain. For example, at the end of "The Scholar," Verdie and John Boy hug—a vision of interracial harmony—before Verdie boards a bus, sits down in the front, and heads to her daughter's college graduation. The image of Verdie sitting comfortably at the front of the bus in the Jim Crow South unmistakably recalls similar images of Rosa Parks. Yet Verdie encounters neither protest nor challenge to her position at the front of the bus. Similarly, in "The Hunt" (Season 1, Episode 4, 5 October 1972), John Boy heads out on his first bear hunt with his father and two fellow hunters, one white and one African American. In a visual challenge to segregation—like Verdie—the African American Hawthorne Dooley (Teddy Wilson) and his white companion sit together in the front of the car. Less than a decade earlier, NBC worried that such an image in *I Spy*—as I discuss in Chapter II—would court controversy (Bogle 119). This sequence, like Verdie's position at the front of the bus, underscores *The Waltons*' colorblind aesthetic and ethic. Both Verdie and Hawthorne presented brief visual challenges to a raced southern and network order.

Carefully separated and removed from the racist South and visually lacking in the signs of racism, *The Waltons* reimagines a new old South built on those qualities the region had always called its own: "hospitality, small-town folksiness, and reverence for the family" (Jackson). *The Waltons* presents a narrative or model of "regional progress" through its embrace of interracial harmony and the "spectacle of an almost perfect white family" (McGee and Graham 374). Indeed, *The Waltons* articulated a weekly testament to

incremental, individualistic change. Within this framework, the Fosters often function to showcase southern racial tension and then re-affirm the Waltons' moral standing and the mountain as a place dedicated to equality. This space is markedly different than the rest of the South, which appears a "dark and frightening place" outside the safety and community of the mountain (Harmetz 123). Even while questioning the existing racial and southern order, *The Waltons* replicates a benign white hierarchical order and argues that racism—at least on the mountain—is no more.

As part of this new southern order, *The Waltons* regularly presented white people as the agents of struggles for African American freedom and equality. These struggles were narrated from the perspective of white characters and did not feature African Americans as the key workers in the struggle for their own freedoms. From John Boy teaching Verdie to read to John (senior) saving Harley, this narrative allays white guilt by including and making whiteness crucial to new formations of blackness on television. *The Waltons*' framing of African American stories within a white imaginary—after all *The Waltons* is narrated from an elder John Boy's perspective—replicates a larger cultural struggle for African American voice and highlights the limits of white liberalism, particularly in primetime.[111]

[111] This narrative practice wherein African American stories were escorted onto television was by no means exclusive to *The Waltons*. Civil Rights news media was often mediated by white television news reporters but also white Civil Rights workers' work and beatings were often highlighted by the press. In 1961 white Freedom Rider James Peck was severely beaten in Birmingham and images of his face traveled the globe as a symbol of the movement (Graham and Monteith 22). While "the Mississippi Freedom Summer project was designed in 1964 precisely because white student volunteers would garner press coverage for the movement," Julian Bond recalls that "he and other black SNCC workers could not help feel resentment" when the press focused on white student protestors even as African Americans were beaten during a protest (Graham and Monteith 22-23). This discussion is still very much afoot from *The Help* to the more recent Tarantino filming of *Django Unchained* or the diminished importance of African American work in the Emancipation Proclamation and achieving freedom in *Lincoln*. For more on this discussion, see the "Introduction."

Telling African American Stories: *Miss Jane Pittman* to *Roots*

In 1974, CBS aired *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, a television film based on Ernest Gaines' novel of the same name. The film, which starred Cicely Tyson as Miss Jane, follows the life story of Jane from the end of the Civil War through the beginning of the Civil Rights era when she walks "past the pot-bellied Southern cops" to take a drink from a "whites only" fountain: "It is triumphant moment for her and the African American community—and also for television" (Thomas 10; Bogle 235). Through Jane's story, African American history unfolded for the first time on television from the perspective of an African American character. While the three networks had initially refused to carry the program for fears that it would not garner a mass audience, they could not have been more wrong: *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* "was viewed by 42 million people (47 percent of the viewing audience)," received praise in the press, and won nine Emmys including an Outstanding Actress of the year for Tyson (Bogle 237).[112]

However, as Donald Bogle points out in *Primetime Blues*, the drama "was not without its compromises. Its weakest section dealt with a white reporter (Michael Murphy), who comes to record Miss Jane's story" (235). While no white reporter appears in Gaines' novel—rather the narrator's race is not stated—the television version of *Miss Jane Pittman* "appeared to be reassuring its white audience that there were *good white people* who, realizing the importance of Jane's story, had recorded it" (Bogle 237). Like the good whites of *The Waltons*, the addition of a white reporter as a filter for Jane's story implicated white people as integral in relaying African American stories. This formal

[112] Here I'm drawing form Donald Bogle's research on *Miss Jane Pittman* in *Primetime Blues*. He writes that none of the three networks "thought the series could win an audience" (237).

device also replicated institutional practices wherein African American characters were escorted onto television by whites.[113]

Similar fears about white audience flight would frame media discourses about *Roots* just a couple years later. These anxieties would lead ABC to program the epic saga as a weeklong miniseries rather than as a weekly television event. In fact, ABC initially rejected *Roots* altogether, arguing that it "violated two long-standing truisms of network television" (Bogle 242). First, networks assumed that historical dramas would bore viewers. Second, the networks believed that "dramatic portrayals of nonwhites held little appeal for most viewers" implicitly understood as white (ibid.). That is, as Eric Barnouw observed, "The wide acceptance of these projects [*Roots* and *Holocaust*] took many in the industry by surprise. It went against accepted notions of 'mass audience'" (466). ABC's lackluster approach to *Roots* revealed its own stereotypes of the audience—white and disinterested in African American stories—for the miniseries: "ABC's own inability to predict that 'Roots' would be a blockbuster is evident in its having scheduled the series this week instead of next. Next week marks the start of a new 'sweep' period" (Brown, "ABC Took a Gamble With 'Roots' and Is Hitting Paydirt" 38).[114] Fred Silverman, responsible for scheduling *Roots* at ABC, admitted that even he "did not have enough faith in it" (Bogle 243). *Roots* revealed how the networks continued to function within a racialized consensus model: programming fare that would neither offend nor incite imagined white viewers. *Roots*, they feared, might do both.

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[113] In addition, Bogle suggests, "the reporter looked like a plot device employed to absolve the mainstream viewer of some guilt feelings about America's past history" (235).

[114] By network sweeps, I am referring to "one of the crucial four-week stretches during which the ratings services measure the viewing for local stations around the country" (Brown, "ABC Took a Gamble With 'Roots' and Is Hitting Paydirt").

Roots' incredible success contradicted a continuing industry vision of audiences as almost uniformly white and racist: the "industry lore" suggested that white viewers were not "about to accept a black hero in a serious dramatic program. If it's not a comedy, they just won't accept it" (Havens 35).[115] In this spirit, ABC adjusted Haley's original text for white viewers: the network insisted, "that white actors be prominently cast in the drama" and that it have approval over the entire cast (Bogle 242). ABC even created a new white character: "the guilt-ridden slave-ship captain (Ed Asner) seemed like a plot device to comfort mainstream viewers, assuring them that indeed there were sensitive whites trapped in the inhumanity of the slave system as much as the African captives" (ibid.). Like the good whites of *Miss Jane Pittman* and *The Waltons*, Asner's character in *Roots* could assuage white guilt by showcasing individual morality amidst a violent and inhumane system and the tolls of that very system even on whites.[116] That is, as Linda Williams argues, "Davies becomes, in his own way, a tragic victim of racism, a ruined man who eventually turns to drink" (242). As if to ensure its whitewashed vision, ABC hired white writers and directors for all the *Roots* episodes. Only one African American director, Gilbert Moses, worked on the miniseries; Moses directed the last two

[115] According to Havens an anonymous network executive made the above remark in 1977, just five months after *Roots*' blockbuster success (35).

[116] The whitewashing of *Roots* extended into ABC's promotion for the miniseries: anxious about alienating a white audience, the network placed a lot of white faces in the promotions for *Roots*, worrying that otherwise the program would be a "turn off" to white viewers (Bogle 243). Timothy Havens offers a alternate and nuanced reading of whiteness in *Roots*. He writes of Ed Asner's character as an "allegory of whiteness" rather than an accurate portrayal of a slave ship captain: "given Asner's intertextual identity as both a leftist political activist and the socially conscious character of Lou Grant—his character becomes an exploration of the emotional, psychological, and moral toll that slavery took even on whites supposedly of good conscience" (42). Further, he suggests that Asner's character "provides an opportunity to explore the psychology of whiteness in a racist society […] Going beyond the question of white guilt, *Roots* addresses the culpability of whites who benefit from a racist system, even if they are not active racists" (44). This psychology of a racist society becomes even more apparent in the characterization of Missy Anne later in the series but also in the white Ol' George who befriends Kunta Kinte's descendants but then becomes foreman and briefly falls into the trap of white against black violence before redeeming himself.

Roots installments (Bogle 242). As with earlier struggles over African American representation on television, the programming of *Roots* and concerns about its production betrayed the racism entrenched and encoded in the network system.

By producing *Roots* as a miniseries rather than as a weekly serial, ABC positioned the place of African American stories as special events rather than the norm of television programming. William Didlay, an African American broadcaster in Jackson, MI, noted shortly after *Roots*' TV run, "In a few weeks, they'll forget what they saw and think of it as just another television program" (Brown, "Roots Success in South Seen as Sign of Change" 18). Didlay's comment emphasizes the ways the miniseries was itself a devalued format within the primetime entertainment landscape. The miniseries format, he suggested, was forgettable and lacked the status conferred on a weekly series like *The Waltons*. As a miniseries *Roots* could not repetitively remind viewers about slavery and its violent legacy. In juxtaposition to Didlay's remarks, Todd Gitlin suggests in "Prime Time Ideology" that *Roots* was far more powerful as a miniseries: "The very format was a testimony to the fact that history takes place as a continuing process in which people grow up, have children, die; that people experience their lives within the domain of social institutions" (256). Furthermore, by the mid-1970s the primetime landscape was increasingly dominated by "jiggle" television series such as *Charlie's Angels* (1976-1981), while social relevance persisted as a marker of prestige or quality programming mainly visible in movies of the week or miniseries (Havens 36-37).[117] Within this

[117] Also, Timothy Havens argues in *Black Television Travels* that *Roots* specifically and the miniseries format more generally were inheritors of the move towards "social relevance" in the early 1970s. He writes that by "the middle of the decade" social relevance was "replaced by what were derisively called 'jiggle' series aimed at youthful viewers, such as *Three's Company* (1977-1984) and *Charlie's Angels* (1976-1981)" (36).

context, *Roots* was perhaps perfectly suited to the socially relevant miniseries genre. While Gitlin's argument is particularly compelling, the industrial context—including network anxiety about African American dramas—complicates his assessment. To be sure, the continuing process of history might have unfolded just as easily, if not more effectively, across a longer series.

In spite of the anxiety about programming *Roots*, the "result was a relentless and crescendoing buzz among viewers that culminated in the largest single audience for any fictional television program" (Havens 30). *Roots* remains one of the most influential and important depictions of African American life in pop culture; *Ebony* even cites its 1977 broadcast as one of the most important moments for African Americans in television (Lyons 76). Indeed, just broadcasting representations of slavery on national television "was itself a radically liberal political act" (Havens 39). While critical of the miniseries for its happy ending, Herman Gray argues, "*Roots* helped to alter slightly, even momentarily interrupt, the gaze of television's idealized white middle-class viewers and subjects. […] the miniseries enabled a temporary but no less powerful transitional space within which to refigure and reconstruct black television representations" (79).[118] Further, Timothy Havens suggests in *Black Television Travels* that even as *Roots* embraced a conservative ideology that bracketed racism in the past, so too did the miniseries "activate progressive and radical discourses of black separatism, militancy against white authorities, and racial pride" (39).[119] Put another way, *Roots* showcased the potential—

[118] Gray argues, "*Roots* was an indictment of bad people and of certain forms of brutality, but in terms of the entire edifice of American political, social, and economic structure, it came off pretty unscathed" (qtd in Havens 39).

[119] Havens goes on to show how Black Separatist and Black Power discourses were incorporated into *Roots* (41-42).

what network television could have become—of including African American voices both on and off-screen. If *Birth of a Nation*, as Manthia Diawara writes, "created a fixed image of Blackness that was necessary for racist America's fight against Black people"—a legacy carried on by TV productions like *Amos n' Andy* and *Beulah*—then *Roots* showcased how those tropes aided and abetted racist oppression (3).

Race, Southern Women, and Violence

Roots presented a new and radical approach to southern and African American storytelling that embraced African American points of view, despite industry constraints. Within the diegetic world *Roots'* characters were not escorted onto the screen by a white character, as Miss Jane had been just a few years prior. In the show's formulation, even the good whites—the ship captain and Ol' George (Brad Davis), for instance—remained peripheral characters whose stories were secondary to that of Alex Haley and Kunta Kinte's descendants. These white characters were neither crucial to Kunta Kinte's descendants' freedom nor did the story of the African American family function to reaffirm a white moral center. Moreover, even the seemingly good and redeemable white characters were capable of racialized violence. Where Verdie Grant's anger on *The Waltons* logically derives from a history of racism, her story—including the roots of her anger—remained outside the parameters of John Boy's narration and the colorblind ethic of the show. In contrast, by framing whites through African American eyes, *Roots* allowed for depictions of both physical and psychological racialized violence from Kunta Kinte's capture and journey in a slave ship and his attempts to escape slavery to his daughter Kizzy's betrayal by the white belle Missy Anne and her subsequent rape by her white master Tom Moore.

Kizzy's narrative showcases the horrors and violence specific to African American women during slavery and makes visible the violence of representational tropes used to justify the economic system of slavery and oppression. Near the end of the third installment (25 January 1977) of *Roots*, Kunta Kinte (John Amos) marries Belle (Madge Sinclair) and she then gives birth to their daughter Kizzy. The next episode (26 January 1977) picks up sixteen years later with a teenage Kizzy and her parents still living on the Reynolds plantation; Dr. Reynolds (Robert Reed) promises his slaves that if they abide by his rules that he will keep families together. He is, by comparison to other whites in *Roots*, a good master—a sentiment Belle reiterates—even though he plans to gift Kizzy to his niece Missy Anne (Sandy Duncan). However, when Kizzy breaks his rules by learning to write and then helping her beau Noah (Lawrence Hilton-Jacobs) escape by writing him a traveling pass, Master Reynolds sells Kizzy to the drunk and violent Tom Moore, a less wealthy neighboring plantation owner. On Kizzy's first night on the new plantation she is visited and raped by Moore. She later bears his son, Chicken George (Ben Vereen). Kizzy's story—like Belle and the other African American female characters—articulates both the psychological and physical oppression of slavery.

For Kizzy, the act for which she is harshly punished—writing—reveals her awareness of an oppressive system and actively challenges the myths of white supremacy and the happy plantation-bound slave. Instead of being grateful, as Master Reynolds and Missy Anne believe she should be, Kizzy opts to help Noah and engages in an act of resistance to the plantation owners' social and legal rules. Kizzy's choice reveals her self-determination—a quality incompatible with Missy Anne's conception of Kizzy and with the system of slavery, which imagined and treated slaves as, at best, children. Put another

way, Missy Anne understands Kizzy as a possession, a child to protect, or a doll to be traded back and forth who lacks her own ideas, self-awareness, and self-possession. Master Reynolds and Missy Anne punish Kizzy because her rebellion exposes the lies that uphold the racial hierarchy of the plantation system. That is, Missy Anne's devotion to Kizzy and her earlier promises to protect Kizzy from harm as they read the bible together in Missy Anne's room only function within a system in which Kizzy remains fully and happily devoted to the racial hierarchy, or at least pretends to be.

In a complete reversal of the narrative trope of championing good white individuals, like the morally fraught slave ship captain, Missy Anne's betrayal of Kizzy is vindictive and villainous. The sequence is horrifying. A close-up of Kizzy's screaming face coupled with a shaky camera captures and emphasizes her distress as she is taken away from her parents and tied up at gunpoint (Figure 19). The close-ups of Kizzy's face are made more painful and powerful as her pain is juxtaposed first against her mother's agony and then the steady close-ups of Missy Anne's indifference as she watches her former friend violently taken away (Figure 20). The repeating pattern of shots between Kizzy, Belle, and Missy Anne highlights Missy Anne's cruelty and makes visible her disdain for Kizzy specifically and African Americans generally. Her face taught, she appears alternately angry and unfazed; because she feels betrayed by Kizzy's choice of Noah over her, she believes that Kizzy's treatment by her uncle is justified. Even her physical separation from the violent scene as she watches from above and through a window—a separation further emphasized by the camera's steadiness by comparison to the frantic shots of Kizzy—suggests her indifference, power, and privilege in a racist

system. Here Missy Anne's inability to empathize and see Kizzy as a human being renders her villainous.

Figure 19: Close-up of Kizzy being taken away from her parents

Figure 20: Missy Anne watches Kizzy taken away from behind a window.

This storyline ties the white southern belle—the "angelic being that treads this terrestrial ball is a well-bred, cultured, Southern white woman or her blue-eyed, golden-haired little girl"—to the horrors that befall Kizzy. Missy Anne, who perfectly fits this description of the belle as her white collar accentuates her whiteness, is not just complicit in the violence against Kizzy but actively perpetuates and embraces it (qtd. in Graham, *Framing the South* 19). Indeed, even the series of shots suggests Missy Anne's

complicity in this violence and by extension the belle as an emblem of that same violence rather than as a nostalgic symbol for a happy hierarchical plantation. In addition and later on, Tom Moore's wife (Carolyn Jones) knowingly ignores his ongoing rape of African American female slaves and later points a shotgun at those same slaves, fearing they are on verge of revolt in the wake of the slave rebellion led by Nat Turner (1831). Her fear in this instance is both unfounded and absurd, but her actions reveal the underlying violence of white perspectives and the filter through which she witnesses African American stories. If on *The Waltons*, John Boy's perspective was constructed as benign, then Mrs. Moore and Missy Anne's perspectives suggest the inherent violence of narrating African American stories through white eyes.

These narratives of African American resistance—from an African American perspective—in *Roots* hinted that Mammy (Hattie McDaniel) did not live to serve Scarlett, but rather that her servitude and happy nature were merely a presentation geared at survival.[120] For instance, Kizzy learns from her father to have two lives: an inner life sustained by her father and her ancestry and an exterior life where she performs the part of a slave. This lesson runs throughout *Roots*: both Fiddler and Belle learned how best to "make the system work for them," yet both are betrayed by their supposedly good

[120] This theme runs throughout *Roots*. For instance, when Ol' George, a poor South Carolina farmer arrives on the plantation. Chicken George's son, Tom (Georg Stanford Brown), helps Ol' George get a job as the plantation's overseer, a job that Tom and his brother Lewis (Hilly Hicks) must teach Ol' George to do so that the plantation's master doesn't "find someone who knows how to do it, who likes doing it" (Episode 5, 27 January 1977). In a strange reversal, Tom teaches George how to perform racism and its inevitable violence. In a telling sequence—which again makes visible the ways in which slaves performing tropes is a mechanism of survival, a mask—Tom plays the overseer while Lewis plays the part of the slave. As Lewis performs the part of a slave, his voice goes up and he affects a dialect and drops letters, repetitively calls his brother "massa," as Lewis dances, begs, and pleads with him. Lewis' performance indicates those tropes as a means of surviving white violence and rules.

masters—betrayals that lead to their respective deaths (Bogle 244).[121] Indeed, *Roots* reveals how slaves were forced to perform and cater to white tropes as a means of survival and protection—a counter-narrative to the visual legacies of the leisurely and lush South of *Gone With the Wind* (1939).[122]

Perspective, Performance, and White Male Violence

Roots argued that the performance of tropes under slavery created and enabled a space where African American identity was orally preserved and passed on from generation to generation. For instance, the process of naming, including a naming ritual for Kunta Kinte's male heirs, demonstrates the "power of naming" and the power of story as resistance. Even after Kunta Kinte begins to respond to his slave name Toby, he continues to think of himself as his given name, an identity separate from his ongoing oppression. Havens writes that in *Roots* the naming "ties into the rage felt by many African Americans at the time about the erasure of African names and, thereby, personal and collective history" (41). In this way, he writes, the miniseries argues that "Kunta Kinte prevails over the course of [a] history" and a southern institution that sought to break him down and strip him of identity, dignity, and life (ibid.). This family narrative, which is repeated throughout *Roots*, becomes a means to resist the oppressive scripts of slavery and a way to create black space away from the violence of whites. This is a lesson Kizzy too internalizes: when she refuses to marry a handsome driver Sam, she points out

[121] Similarly, Kizzy's son Chicken George (a product of her rape by Moore) is a talented chicken fighter who believes he possesses a special relationship with Moore, even before he learns Moore is his father. However, like his mother and her mother, Moore betrays Chicken George and sells him in order to pay off a gambling debt. Yet as Chicken George leaves for England, he begins to recount the story of Kunta Kinte to his children, including their descent from royalty.

[122] One episode of *Roots* even unseated *Gone With the Wind*'s status as the most popular telecast of all-time (Geist, "Roots").

their differences saying, "The Master can take my body but he can't touch my spirit. […] When they bought you, you just gave them yourself for free" (Episode 4). That is, Kizzy does not believe white narratives about herself specifically and African Americans generally. She, unlike Sam, has not internalized those tropes—her identity is not fixed nor does it emerge from the ways in which white people understand or treat her.

This brand of resistance is crucial in *Roots* as African American characters resist internalizing white oppression and engage in dialogues about racism and race relations in the South. For instance, in the sixth installment of the series (29 January 1977), Lewis and Tom argue, along with another former slave, about the best approach to living in the post-war South. While Tom embraces interracial cooperation—believing that the law is no longer the white law—his brother argues that life after the Civil War mirrors their experiences as slaves. On one hand, the conversation engages black separatist rhetoric and puts it in dialogue with a more assimilationist drive embodied by Tom. By contrast, Tom's son—after witnessing his father's savage beating—articulates a very different stance: an African American militancy rooted in self-defense and violence. In a repeating shot reverse-shot pattern, close-ups shots of Tom's son Bud (Todd Bridges) and Ol' George's wife Martha (Lane Binkley) provide intimacy as Bud talks about how he plans to kill the "white folks" who whipped his father. In the tight shot of his face, the tears and rage become palpable—the close-up providing viewers access to his hurt, fear, and anger. The backdrop of cricket sounds, the slow pacing of the scene, and the tight shots of Bud and Martha emphasize and highlight the conversation's serious tone. The conversation ends as Martha holds Bud framed in a close-up—an intimate vision of interracial harmony—and suggests that he hate the men for what they've done, rather than for being

white. Even though their discussion ends with a *Waltons*-esque moral and much of the potential violence in Bud's remarks is elided by his youth, the conversation taps into and provides space for radical discourses rarely, if ever, uttered on primetime television.

Roots supported this call for radical African American politics as it showcased how white characters internalize and perpetuate a racist system. Even the good Christian ship captain falls prey to moral corruption. Although his understanding of his job is ethically fraught, he cannot resist wielding power over African American bodies: "even principled white people are/were affected by the evils of chattel slavery and the erotics of racial violence" (Havens 43). In contrast, Tom Moore exemplifies the violent white master who treats African American women as objects—a politics made clear in his repeated rape of Kizzy. Even the typically benevolent white Ol' George becomes briefly complicit in the violence against Kunta Kinte's family when he begins to take his role as overseer seriously. Unlike previous representations of racists in primetime television and even on *The Waltons*—where southern racism is a physically identifiable trait—*Roots* suggested that white racism looked, felt, and worked in a variety of different ways. In *Roots*, white men, even the good ones, actively participate and benefit from the system of slavery. In this way, *Roots* could not allay white guilt—perhaps as Captain Davies was meant to—but instead insisted that whites must actively resist complicity in racial oppression.

Like the guilt-ridden slave ship captain, Ol' George reveals the "culpability of whites who benefit from a racist system, even if they are not active racists" (Havens 44). Ol' George is perhaps the character who most resembles the Walton family, as he arrives on the plantation having come from a place inhabited predominantly by poor white

people. Since in South Carolina he and his wife rarely encountered slavery, he comes to the institution as an outsider. This sense is further enhanced by his lower-class status, as he remains too poor to participate in the slave-based economy—a sensibility furthered by the tattered and dirty clothes he wears upon his arrival at the planation, which more closely resemble those of the African American slaves than the other white characters. Because of Ol' George's naïveté—a result of his class status but also a privilege of his whiteness—Tom must teach him the codes and inner workings of institutionalized racism. Furthermore, that George becomes the overseer at all is merely a facet of his whiteness.

This privilege is particularly visible in the wake of emancipation: Ol' George stands with Kunte Kinte's family listening to the new plantation owner but then he is pulled out of the group. As he stands with the senator and new foreman of the plantation—both members of the Night Riders, a precursor to the Klu Klux Klan—the camera tilts slightly up at him, conveying his newfound position of power. He then surveys the crowd of African Americans standing before him, who now appear at a slightly lower angle. This positioning reflects Ol' George's adopted—albeit temporary—belief in the group's inferiority. In addition, the editing reiterates Ol' George's physical separation from the group of African Americans and his newfound allegiance with the white plantation owner and foreman. Meanwhile, the foreman suggests that Ol' George might someday be able to move into the plantation home. Despite not being actively racist, Ol' George still benefits, as Havens suggests, from the racist system. He possesses class mobility and is given power solely because he is white, unlike his African American counterparts even after emancipation.

Ultimately, however, Ol' George must refuse becoming complicit in the racialized violence. The miniseries showcases this crucial and active decision when Ol' George refuses to participate or take pleasure from the "erotics of violence"—a decision Captain Davies couldn't resist (Havens 43). After an argument with Lewis, Ol' George is hurt and angered and as a result internalizes his newly learned raced divisions. Later in the episode Ol' George and his wife watch as Night Riders, with their heads covered by pillowcases, wake Tom in the middle of the night and tie him to a tree to whip him, while Ol' George tells his wife that there is nothing they can do. Like Missy Anne, who watches from her bedroom window—visually separated from the violence she witnesses—Ol' George too watches safely barricaded in his home. Close-ups of Tom reveal his agony, while close ups of his mother, brother, and wife—connected by the sound of the whip and Tom's moans—showcase the collective pain of witnessing the violence as they stand unable to help Tom.

Then, in a melodramatic turn—a close up of George, a shot of the hooded man lashing Tom, and then Ol' George shouting at the Night Riders—Ol' George rushes from his cabin to Tom and takes the whip from the Night Rider after a heated exchange.[123] During this exchange, the shot-reverse shot pattern between close-ups of Ol' George and an anonymous Night Rider suggest their equality as the camera captures them at the same angle—despite that the hooded rider is on horseback. As Ol' George pretends to enforce the Night Riders' violence, he makes visible both his privileged position—he will never experience this kind of violence—but also the choice he must make to actively resist

[123] Linda Williams suggests that "Flagellation in this case depicts a scene in which things are not as they seem and yet are as they seem—in which master and slave are in their 'proper' historical places and yet not in their places—since the white man's beating also rescues the black man from a worse fate: a beating unto death" (248). That is, as Ol' George rescues Tom from the Knight Riders he must use their violence as a cover and as protection for Tom.

participating in perpetuating a racist system. Indeed, it is just after he helps save Tom's life that he becomes a crucial part of the family's covert plan to leave the plantation for freedom in Tennessee—a plan that relies on the performance of and catering to racial stereotypes.

Roots suggested the power of performing and playing to white stereotypes: Chicken George formulates an exit strategy for the family that relies on catering to white racism, a move that instills a false sense of comfort in the white community. Indeed, the series ends with an "elaborately plotted rescue-escape that relies heavily on the wiley patriarch's ability to outsmart the whites" (Williams 249). The penultimate series of events relays once again the importance of perspective as *Roots* showcases whites—good and bad—escorted onto the small screen by African Americans. For instance, as the family puts the escape plan into action, Tom ventures into town and encounters the plantation's new foreman. During the encounter, a shot-reverse shot pattern reveals the white foreman from a low angle and Tom from a high angle, reflecting the perspective of the white character and his presumed power. Further, Tom's voice and cadence change to reflect more stereotypical sounds of blackness, which are particularly audible against the silence of the scene. Because we are privy to the family's plan, as the African American family panders to racist tropes, the form emphasizes the nature of raced performance. That is, instead of enhancing the white characters' power, the form makes the white characters appear particularly cruel and foolish. Further, the consistent theme of raced performance reminds viewers time and again that racist tropes—visible across television—are instrumental in maintaining a racist system.

Alex Haley's final voice-over narration drives the power of story and perspective home. *Roots* ends happily and triumphantly as Chicken George leads his family to freedom in Tennessee, accompanied by an upbeat and triumphant soundtrack as a wide shot captures a series of wagons pulling into a green pasture. As Chicken George and Tom narrate the family's history, a tight shot of the father, son, and then family reveal the family together but also situate them in their new location and home. As Chicken George utters "we is free," the music picks up, tight shots reveal the family hugging, and then a wider shot shows them walking into the distance. This new home is decidedly lacking in any symbol of racial hierarchy—its green expanse providing a visual parallel to early shots of Africa as well as a marked difference to the built landscape of the plantations.

Where Walton's Mountain provided a small safe and utopian space detached from the horrors of the South, the plantations of *Roots* suggested a regional counter-narrative to decades of southern imagery. Through Alex Haley's story, the plantation was, at least for eight days, re-rooted in the violence of slavery and racist oppression. For Herman Gray this happy ending relayed the conservative underpinnings of the miniseries, and as Havens argues, "the miniseries did portray the imaginary resolution of the racial tensions that slavery produced under the rubric of the American Dream" (44).[124] Yet both critics agree that *Roots*' afterlife and affect on television remains substantial, as the "medium lacked the capacity to contain such volatile political currents once they were let loose" (ibid.).

[124] Linda Williams suggests that Chicken George's rescue of his family, "also rescues the miniseries from taking very seriously the images of interracial beating it had just conjured" (249). She goes on to argue that the "the last twenty minutes of the final episode becomes a strangely lighthearted charade bordering uncomfortably on minstrelsy" (ibid.). Arguably though, the 1979 sequel *Roots: The Next Generations* reveals that participation in the American Dream even after the official end of slavery was not available to all and suggests the problems with African American inclusion in that white fantasy.

Conclusion: Two Representational Routes

The Waltons and *Roots* present two divergent representational paths that primetime television could have taken in the 1970s as the medium adjusted to the gains of the Civil Rights Movement and the rise of African American groups such as the Black Power movement, black separatists, and black nationalists (Havens 29). Indeed, *The Waltons* makes these shifts visible in its attention to racial inequality—like in "The Scholar" or "The Hot Rod"—and racial violence based in the South. Even so, the drama's predominantly white cast discloses the limits of racial representations when narrated through John Boy's white eyes. As a result of this perspective, *The Waltons* inevitably re-imagines white intervention as a crucial and determining factor of African American stories. However, *The Waltons*' progressive and liberal politics, which were attuned to raced, classed, and even gendered inequalities—and even the systemic injustice that existed outside Walton's Mountain—were not compatible with the racial politics of the 1980s conservative backlash.

In juxtaposition, *Roots* suggested that whites remained peripheral to African American stories. For instance, although Ol' George helps with the final escape plan by catering to his white employers' virulent racism, he remains an accomplice rather than the white savior crucial to formulations of on-screen or historical blackness. Instead, "*Roots* picked up on and recirculated a range of African American discourses, chief among them the extreme psychological, cultural, and communal ruptures that slavery caused; the importance of reconnecting with the past and with Africa; and the historical

and contemporary culpability of whites and white power structures" (Havens 29).[125] In addition, the miniseries' incredible success promised that African American "dramatic programming could be mainstream hits" despite racist industry arguments to the contrary (Bogle 246). The crescendoing effect of *Roots* presented a very different South to a national audience and proved that African American dramas and excavations of our violent history could—despite industry lore—garner a mainstream audience without a southern backlash.

Sadly, after the conservative restoration initiated by Reagan's election in 1980, primetime television would venture in neither of the directions presented by *The Waltons* or *Roots*. Strangely, one primary effect of *Roots*' success for television programming was the brief revitalization of the miniseries but most of the miniseries that followed "told stories about white American and European history" (Havens 29). In addition, the South was clearly no longer off-limits. From the troublemaking Dukes brothers of *Dukes of Hazard* (1979-1986) to the female-centered sitcom *Designing Women* (1986-1993) about a group of interior designers in Atlanta, primetime programming displayed a renewed interest in the region. Where *The Waltons* had at least acknowledged racism and racial strife—even if the drama figured racism as an individual rather than a systemic issue—the new set of 1980s southern shows narratively disavowed any connection to southern racism and racist violence. The *Dukes of Hazzard* even featured a Confederate flag atop the brothers' car General Lee, which while meant to incite comedy obscured both Lee and the flag as symbols of the old and violent racial order. Indeed, the white southern

[125] In its wake, these discourses circulated both national and internationally—as Havens shows in *Black Television Travels*—yet the miniseries' happy ending also safely cordoned off racial oppression both in the distant past and as specific to the South.

liberalism advocated by *The Waltons* appears almost entirely absent from the southern-set primetime shows that followed in its wake. These mostly comic representations reiterated the South as primarily white, rural, and removed from a history of racial strife.[126]

Roots' primary televisual legacy then was that it overturned industry lore that dramatic television depictions of African Americans were unprofitable. This legacy would become visible in the 1980s as the three-networks, now competing with cable and later Fox (1986), began specifically targeting African American audiences with narrowcasting and casting African Americans in token or sidekick roles in dramas. These institutional practices increased African American visibility but failed to challenge the white status quo. Further, few programs—save for the short-lived *Frank's Place* (1987-1988)—would locate African American stories in the South, thus re-preserving the southern space as a conservative, white, rural, and often colorblind location. Put another way, 1980s programming seemingly separated the South from issues of race, a perplexing maneuver that produced two divergent representational routes: northern-set sitcoms written by and featuring African Americans like *The Cosby Show* (1984-1995) and southern-set dramas like *Miami Vice* (1984-1989) and *Matlock* (1986-1995), which embraced interracial harmony through white-African American partnerships.

[126] Prior to *Dukes* and spanning the years of *Roots* and its sequel, *Carter Country* (1977-1979) had a weekly spot in ABCs primetime lineup. *Carter Country* made southern racism comic via the encounters of the Northern, educated, and African American detective, Sergeant Curtis Baker (Kene Holliday) with a rural Georgia town. In many ways, this show appears a comic version of the later *In the Heat of the Night* (1988-1984), which told the story of an African American detective who returns to the South after many years in the North, only to encounter racism amongst his fellow officers and citizens alike.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION:

TWO PRIMETIME PATHS:

REGION, RACE, AND THE ORIGINS OF POST-RACE RHETORIC IN *MIAMI VICE* AND *THE COSBY SHOW*

"I believe in states' rights; I believe in people doing as much as they can for themselves at the community level and at the private level. And I believe that we've distorted the balance of our government today by giving powers that were never intended in the constitution to that federal establishment. And if I do get the job I'm looking for, I'm going to devote myself to trying to reorder those priorities and to restore to the states and local communities those functions which properly belong there."

-Ronald Reagan at the Neshoba County Fair, 1980

In 1980 Ronald Reagan gave a campaign speech at the Neshoba County Fair, a "traditional forum for the outpourings of segregationists" (qtd in Graham, *Framing the Sout*h 185). In the speech Reagan "proclaimed his commitment to states' rights" and his belief that the Federal government had and continued to overstep its bounds in states' business (ibid.). He said, "I believe we've distorted the balance of our government today by giving powers that were never intended in the constitution to that federal establishment" ("Transcript of Ronald Reagan's 1980 Neshoba County Fair speech"). Given that it was delivered just miles from where Civil Rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner were murdered in 1964, the Presidential candidate's invocation of states' rights rhetoric in the above quote—a staple of white

segregationists during the Civil Rights movement—betrayed something far more insidious. In citing states' rights in the midst of white segregationists, Reagan proclaimed an alliance with segregationists and a disregard for Federal intervention in states' business. By extension, particularly given the context and location, his argument seemingly tapped into contempt toward Federal Civil Rights legislation. Reagan's speech evacuated states' rights rhetoric of its racially charged meaning, as he suggested that states' rights were merely about restoring local communities with the power to function properly (ibid.). Reagan's strangely race-neutral argument for states' rights and a small Federal government disclosed an inferential racism, wherein histories of violent and institutionalized racism were obscured.

This brand of coded raced rhetoric came to define the Reagan administration's and neoconservative representations of race in the 1980s. This racial position posited, as Omi and Winant suggest, that, "No state policy can legitimately require, recommend, or award different status according to race" (57). That is, race and racial recognition, neoconservatives argued, could play no part in the social or governmental structure—a position that disavowed historic and systemic racism and "the racial dimensions of *social structure*" (Omi and Winant 57).[127] Indeed, this neoconservative formulation of race posed "race as a *problem*" that was no longer pertinent to the contemporary moment (55). Yet, as Herman Gray argues in *Watching Race*, the "conservative Republican strategy to 'get America moving' relied heavily on dramatic and racialized media images of an

[127] Here Omi and Winant cite Thurgood Marshall who argued that "state actions in the past and present have treated people in very different ways according to their race, and thus the government cannot retreat from its policy responsibilities in this area" (57). This position, they argue, might be labeled as politically liberal.

isolated and pathological underclass"—almost always figured as African American—"trapped in a culture of poverty:"

> Only through such appeals to menace and irresponsibility, framed and presented in television news through figures of black male gang members, black male criminality, crumbling black families, black welfare cheats, black female crack users, and black teen pregnancy, could such claims on America (and its image of middle-class, heterosexual, masculine whiteness) find resonance within the discourse of traditional values (23; 17).

Television news, Gray argues, was at the very core of the Reagan administration's strategy, an approach which re-criminalized black bodies and re-coded blackness as inevitably lower class and thereby a threat to the American (read white) way of life.

This strategy, as Gray points out, "of using black bodies to mobilize white resentment was by no means new or simpleminded" (32). This contradictory combination of race-neutral rhetoric coupled with the repetition of raced tropes—such as Gray describes above—recalled earlier televisual and filmic depictions of blackness. However, this tactic was particularly effective, Gray argues, because of two emerging "countercurrents in the black American social landscape:" the emergence of the African American middle class (the model minority) and the "deep skepticism and distrust by blacks of Reagan and Bush as well as the new-right coalition that sustained them" (ibid.). The former—the rise of and increased visibility of an African American middle class—Gray argues, enabled Republicans to disguise racism in "personal rather than structural terms while appealing to the virtues of individual merit, strong moral character, and hard work" (ibid.). This approach disavowed the racism ingrained in social structures, while it

pandered to the new right or neoconservative white constituency's racist insecurities and fears.[128]

This rhetorical strategy rejected race, racism, and race-based inequalities as it mobilized historically violent signs of blackness as symbols of what was wrong with America. At the Neshoba County Fair Reagan didn't just proclaim an alliance with white segregationists. Instead, he laid the foundation for a racialized and contradictory approach that would use African Americans as scapegoats, while suggesting that race had nothing to do with it. These discourses—very much part of the Republican-right policy as Gray, Omi, and Winant show—permeated primetime television. If *The Walton*s and *Roots* presented two routes for what primetime television could have become, then the conservative backlash coupled with the deregulation of the three-network system significantly altered the medium's liberal potential. Within this context, *Roots* did not mark a moment of incredible progress in race relations, as I argued in the previous chapter. Rather, it revealed the financial potential of shows featuring African American actors and points of view.

In this climate, *Roots*' legacy was two-fold: interracial harmony and white-African American partnerships in the South and the evolution of the African American sitcom based in the North. *Miami Vice* showcases one clear way in which new conceptions of audience, competition with cable, and the racial politics of the conservative right re-figured and influenced primetime television content in representations of the South. This re-configuration of primetime simultaneously

[128] Specifically, Gray argues that this combination meant that the "Republicans had the best of all possible worlds—an ineffective opposition, crumbling cities, rampant crime, and a Democratic congress—all of which provided them with an always available set of easily mobilizable demons and villains. In their largely white constituency they also found deep fears and insecurities in whose service black, brown, gay and lesbian, poor, and female bodies could easily be exploited" (33).

disavowed the power of the South to police network content, while it embraced—like Reagan's Neshoba County Fair speech—an inferential racism and race-based hierarchies indebted to television's fraught relationship with the region. By contrast, *The Cosby Show* re-imagined African American experience in the North—it was the first primetime series where an African American controlled the creative content—and it projected a complex, dignified, and comic vision of African American life in the United States. Despite prevailing critiques of the sitcom's embrace of the American Dream, *The Cosby Show* provides contradictory readings: a representation of the model minority and a race consciousness. What both these primetime programs share though is a strange sensibility that racism is neither systemic nor a barrier to equal access and opportunity, as they disentangle race from the South. These shows rehearsed, what Todd Gitlin calls, a "social fixity"—primetime shows "express and cement the obduracy of a social world impervious to substantial change" (254). Yet, the world they articulated remained one that often obscured that "race has been" and remained "a fundamental axis of social organization in the U.S." (Omi and Winant 13).

Deregulation and the Fragmenting of Primetime

By the mid-1980s the classic network system with its three-network oligopoly — NBC, ABC, and CBS—had virtually collapsed. This collapse occurred "[t]hrough a combination of deregulation, the rise of cable and satellite technology" which caused a proliferation "of channels and program forms" (Hilmes, *NBC: America's Network* 173). These major shifts ushered in "an era of competition, diversity, and choice [that] eventually replaced scarcity, public interest obligations, and centralized control" (ibid.). By 1985 all three major networks had been sold and become part of larger corporations.

Within this newly deregulated climate, Fox launched its new network. Unlike previous attempts at a fourth network, Fox succeeded. Fox presented "a major challenge to the established networks, and prosper[ed] through its core strategy of marketing to young and urban audiences" (Lyons 19). Not only did the 1980s usher in an era of extraordinary deregulation and competition, in line with Reagan era economic policy, but evolving TV technology, like the VCR and remote control, changed the ways in which viewers interacted with programming. As a result of this quickly changing television economy, networks scrambled to re-imagine techniques to attract audiences, increasingly understood as segmented by race, gender, and location rather than monolithically white, suburban and middle class.[129]

With the advent of cable and the proliferation of choices (made increasingly visible and viable by the VCR and remote control), television watching, once imagined as a nationally shared experience became increasingly localized.[130] Instead of targeting a white suburban nation, advertisers now sought to target specific demographics like yuppies and buppies with niche commercials. Of these new categories, white yuppies were perhaps the most financially interesting to network television. This is not to say, as Jane Feuer notes in *Seeing Through the Eighties*, that yuppies were actually a large audience category, nor did many baby boomers self-identify as yuppies, thinking it a derogatory term. Rather, as Feuer argues, "during the Reagan years, the major networks

[129] The Hollywood film industry made similar changes in the late 1960s and 1970s when it began backing New Hollywood and Blaxploitation films in order to attract a young white counterculture audience and a Black audience respectively.

[130] Donald Bogle reiterates this notion in *Primetime Blues.* He argues that "As cable entered more American homes, providing more choices for viewers, individual television programs were gradually becoming less of a shared national experience. …Viewership—and the TV experience itself—became fragmented. … Cosby was the last show everyone watched" (302-303). But, this fragmenting began earlier than Cosby as networks sought to attract specific high-end niche viewers, rather than the masses.

were not so much interested in 'pure' yuppie demographics as they were in constructing yuppie spectators for advertising" (58). These imagined white yuppie spectators were educated, lived in cities, and importantly had disposable incomes to spend on high-end products. This new demographic as imagined by the networks had the potential to be a goldmine. But, if the networks were going to successfully accomplish this task, and compete with cable, then as Donald Bogle argues, they were going to need a new and different brand of programming that could deliver yuppie spectators to advertisers. Thus, the networks attempted to call the yuppie generation into being with shows like *Hill St. Blues* (1981-1987), *Miami Vice*, *Dallas* (1978-1991), and *Dynasty* (1981-1989).

Within this framework, the South's real and imagined economic power no longer posed a direct threat to network profits, as the region once had—at least, according to sponsors and network executives, as I argue in Chapter II of this project. The South no longer could, if it ever did, wield power over national television programming as *Roots*' largely positive reception had proved in 1977. Citing a history of southern network refusals to carry programs featuring African American performers like Nat King Cole and Barbara McNair, the presentation of *Roots* on "virtually every station affiliated with ABC-TV—including those below the Mason-Dixon line" meant, for Les Brown and many network executives he interviewed, that change had come ("'Roots' Success in South Seen as Sign of Change" 18). Indeed, that no violent backlash occurred after *Roots* was broadcast, meant for many white southerners, that *Roots* "proved how far we've come in black-white acceptance" (ibid.). In the absence of a clear southern backlash, it seems what network executives saw most clearly were the possible profits associated with marketing to an imagined and underserved African American audience.

With the southern excuse officially put to rest and the realization of an untapped African American audience, the networks attempted a series of dramas starring African American leads. Riding the coattails of *Roots* and its sequel, in 1979 both ABC and CBS premiered programs starring African American actors: *Benson* (1979-1986), a sitcom starring Robert Guillaume; *Paris* (Sept 1979-1980), a detective drama starring James Earl Jones; and *The Lazarus Syndrome* (Sept-Oct 1979), a medical drama starring Louis Gossett, Jr.[131] Despite good reviews, *Paris* failed to garner a large enough audience, while *The Lazarus Syndrome* suffered from poor ratings (Brooks and Marsh "Paris;" Bogle 232). As a result both dramas were canceled. The only show to survive more than a season was the domestic sitcom *Benson*, a spinoff of the hit series *Soap* (1977-1980). *Benson* followed the comic endeavors of its eponymous main character, an African American butler working for a state governor who eventually runs for governor himself.[132]

While *Roots: The Next Generations* (1979) garnered significant viewership, the decline of both *Paris* and *The Lazarus Syndrome*—but the success of *Benson*—suggested that network television was still a conservative and white institution. After CBS canceled *Paris*, Bogle suggests, "there didn't seem to be much hope for a strong, dramatic African American lead on the weekly primetime schedule" (233). Similarly, the commercial failure of the New Orleans-set *Frank's Place* (1987-1988), about a college professor who inherits a restaurant, was "an artful, not especially confrontational 'dramedy' … that

[131] Also, riding the coattails of *Roots*' success, Alex Haley even teamed up with Norman Lear for *Palmerstown U.S.A.* (1980-1981), a *Waltons*-style drama based loosely on Haley's childhood in the rural South.

[132] At the end of the series, Benson and his rival await the campaign results, and "in true cliff-hanger tradition, the outcome was no revealed, so viewers never did find out who won" (Brooks and Marsh 125).

featured African Americans in ways Gray argues were less assimilationist;" the show's cancellation "reinforced the limited terms within which" African Americans appeared on television (Gray qtd in Budd and Steinman). For instance, *Frank's Place* embraced controversial issues of race, class, and region as "it offered a refreshingly un-simplistic vision of the Deep South" (Geist 178). Yet, consistent re-scheduling and low ratings led to its cancellation (ibid.). Instead, NBC—at least—embraced a revision of 1970s socially relevant programming, where the television landscape looked more diverse but characters of color remained confined to side roles in dramas or confined by the sitcom genre, like in *The Cosby Show*. In this context, *Miami Vice* exemplifies the ways in which primetime television geared at yuppies reimagined a racially harmonious South through interracial bonding, while still privileging whiteness. Not often included under the label of southern-set television, *Miami Vice* is in fact exemplary of 1980s southern shows in its representation of race, its embrace of colorblindness, and its dismissal of southern racial history as a structural reality of the present.

Miami Vice, Southern Racism, and Interracial Partnerships

These major industrial and cultural shifts certainly did not cause *Miami Vice*'s production, but these changes in the network system brought on by Reagan era neoliberalism provide a context for *Miami Vice*'s production and reception.[133] The drama itself was reportedly (and famously) conceived on a napkin by Michael Mann, its first season producer and director, as "MTV Cops." The show held true to its conception story

[133] Along the same lines, Jane Feuer argues in *Seeing Through the Eighties* that "We can't argue that Reaganism as a politically dominant ideology caused the aesthetically superstructural phenomenon of *Dynasty* to happen or that a change in the technological 'base' of television—the emergence of cable TV—directly caused MTV to emerge." Rather, Feuer suggests we might understand both MTV and *Dynasty* as "symptoms of the Reagan age" (1).

with episodes punctuated by prolonged music video-like interludes and a highly visual style: the Miami of *Miami Vice* is a place of fast cars, sun, flamingos, beaches, boats, and beautiful people, with an undercurrent of crime and drugs that power the city.[134] This origin story suggests that the show would bring a cable, and specifically music video, sensibility to a network show—a move that would attract a younger, wealthier, and presumably hipper audience. In his book length study *Miami Vice*, Steven Sanders argues that, "[w]hen *Miami Vice* premiered in 1984, the site-specific format returned to television with a noir sensibility that implicated the city as a buzzing hive of criminality and corruption" (20). Not only did *Miami Vice* envision the city as a crime-ridden and dystopic location, the show's narrative relied on conceptions of the city as such. On *Miami Vice*, Barnouw suggests, "drugs, smuggling and prostitution were constant themes—not as social problems challenging public policy but as occasions for lavishly choreographed sequence of violence and pursuit, always accompanied by loud, pulsating music" (513-514).

The Miami invoked on *Miami Vice* tapped into national discourses about the one time Magic City now figured as a "Paradise Lost" by a 1981 *Time Magazine* article, as it visually distinguished the city from representations of the South. With palm trees, flamingoes, beaches, and fast pacing, *Miami Vic*e's vision of the South was unlike any previous representation of the region. This new and flashy formulation of the region seemingly severed the drama from much of the South's fraught representational history. In addition, news reports about shifting populations in Miami combined with Reagan's

[134] *Miami Vice* is perhaps most influenced by two televisual forces: *Hill St. Blues* and MTV, which premiered and launched respectively in 1981. While *Hill St. Blues* with its ensemble cast and gritty unnamed urban location played with the form of the police procedural so too did *Miami Vice*, albeit in different ways.

War on Drugs framed the southern city, once a wintertime safe haven for the white upper classes, as a city glamorously under threat.[135] Unlike, New York—to which Miami is compared in the opening sequence of the pilot—which is dark, gritty, and dangerous, Miami is glossy, bright, and exciting.[136] *Miami Vice* excavated, packaged, and sold Miami and its glamorous lifestyle, replete with gun battles and high fashion, to the new generation through its ruggedly handsome interracial duo, the white Sonny Crockett (Don Johnson) and his African American partner Ricardo Tubbs (Philip Michael Thomas).

In *Miami Vice*, Tubbs and Crockett's partnership reveals the new ways in which network television attempted to court African American viewership for primetime dramas. This method relied on casting one regular African American character and/or bringing African American actors on for guest appearances. For example, Donald Bogle suggests, "What excited African American viewers was, simply stated, Philip Michael Thomas. … a bona fide old-style matinee idol and full-fledged action hero" (282). Diahann Carroll's appearance and character on *Dynasty* serves as another example of a network courting an upscale African American audience. Bogle writes, "*Ebony* also reported that with Carroll's initial appearance, the show's ratings zoomed in Chicago, Detroit, New York, and other cities with large Black populations. The average number of viewers rose from 34 to 41 million" (263). Networks repeated this pattern on other shows like *Knots Landing*, for example, with Halle Berry joining the cast in the 1991-1992

[135] This rhetorical shift coincided with, or emerged from, a series of events in the early 1980s: the 1980 Marielito boat lift brought 125,000 Cubans to Miami; race riots erupted in May of 1980 after an all white jury acquitted four white policemen of the murder of Arthur McDuffie, a black motorcyclist; and between 1977 and 1981 "approximately 60,000 Haitians sought refuge in South Florida" fleeing Francois Duvalier's Haiti (Nijman 59).

[136] For example, the pilot's opening sequence, save for brief dialogue by Tubbs, appears as an extended music video replete with fights, a gun battle, and a discouraged Tubbs standing in a poorly lit and trashed filled New York alley.

season (Bogle 264).[137] However, to many African American viewers, *Dynasty* failed to do much with Carroll's character or delineate her from her white counterparts and family: "Never did the scripts endow Dominique with any type of Black sensibility. Or, dare it be said, anger, both social and racial" (Bogle 263). Similarly, Thomas' character on *Miami Vice*—like Cosby in *I Spy*—was increasingly pushed to the side both by the show and the mainstream media, which focused more on Crockett and Don Johnson respectively.[138]

By privileging Crockett over Tubbs within the text, the show refuses to challenge southern and national race based structures while it argues that those same structures no longer exist—a position that reflects Omi and Winant's formulation of the neoconservative racial project. Indeed, *Miami Vice* exemplifies the highly policed space for blackness that continued to exist on television dramas by featuring Tubbs as the African American sidekick to the white Crockett. The figure of Ricardo Tubbs at once challenges negative stereotypes through the figure of the African American detective, while at the same time containing it within a television landscape largely populated by criminals of color. Tubbs' classy costuming affirms his class status: his three-piece suits, particularly in juxtaposition with Crockett's pastel ensembles, construct him as

[137] These guest roles drew in black viewers, Bogle argues. He continues "A 1986 study conducted by BBDO Worldwide, one of the nation's largest advertising concerns, indicated that African American audiences--watching certain programs like *Knots Landing* in a block--boosted ratings and saved such shows from being canceled" (264).

[138] This sensibility becomes clear time and again; for example, in "The Golden Triangle: Part 1" (Season 1, Episode 13) Crockett functions as a hostage negotiator while Tubbs stands in the background and watches or later in the series, "Through Irish Eyes" (Season 3, Episode 1) ends with Crockett comforting Gina, while Tubbs is almost cut out of the frame. Further, the pilot relies on racial stereotypes to differentiate Crockett and Tubbs' motivations. Where Tubbs is motivated by emotion and revenge, Crockett is driven by justice and so makes, the show suggests, calculated and rational decisions. Indeed, Crockett is center of dramatic interest. This is shown not only in the way the framing consistently privileges Johnson over Philip Michael Thomas and Edward James Olmos, but also the movement focuses on Johnson following him when he enters or leaves a room, interacts with the other vice squad members, or interrogates a subject. (Sanders 27-28)

restrained, professional, and middle class.[139] Like earlier representations of the "civil rights subject"—Cosby in *I Spy* or Diahann Carroll in *Julia*—and later the "model minority," Tubbs 's characterization and his partnership with Crockett reaffirm the conservative right colorblind ethics and the myth of equal access to the American Dream. In this way, loyal to his partner, Miami, and the law, he becomes an example of the model minority—part of this process, within the diegesis of the show, is Tubbs' own dismissal of racial difference and southern institutionalized racism.

Tubbs's character becomes the emblem of a no-longer-racist South and his continued partnership with Crockett promises and ensures that the white southern lawman—the figurehead of segregation—is indeed reformed.[140] Yet in order to perform this representational feat, *Miami Vice* like the raced rhetoric of Reagan's administration relies on race-based tropes, a discursive move that contradicts the show's colorblind politics. For instance, in the pilot episode, "My Brother's Keeper" (Season 1, Episode 1, 16 September 1984), Crockett and Tubbs engage in a quick and fraught confrontation on Crockett's boat, after Tubbs reveals that he has been lying about his identity. This revelation comes after Crockett threatens him with a flare gun and traps him up against a wall with his hand on Tubbs' throat (Figure 21). In a shot reverse shot pattern Crockett's whiteness is emphasized through his positioning in the sunlight, while Tubbs' blackness is accentuated through his placement in the shadows (Figure 22). This lighting further stresses Crockett's position on the side of justice and truth, while it suggests Tubbs'

[139] In Season 1 Tubb's still wears an open shirt that shows some chest hair with a gold chain. But by Season 3, Tubbs' costumes become increasingly formal, grey, and buttoned up.

[140] This post-race sensibility seems a nod at progressive race relations, while clearly upholding a white status quo, not so different from Jim Crow race politics. As Stuart Hall puts it, what "replaces invisibility is a kind of carefully regulated, segregated visibility" (24).

shady and suspicious behavior, guided by his desire for revenge—a desire that later close-ups of Tubbs holding a shotgun suggest are tethered to his body.

This altercation, which positions the conflict as racially based through the emphasis on each man's respective race, calls up a history of southern racialized violence enacted by white southern lawmen. Tubbs even articulates his anxiety about southern whites in his response to Crockett's violence. As Tubbs reveals the truth—after accusing Crockett that "we all look alike to you southern crackers"—the frame widens and the tension of the altercation subsides. Despite Tubbs' assertion that Crockett's anger has raced dimensions, the narrative supports Crockett's fury as justified: he fears that Tubbs' deception will ruin his career. Further, this altercation figures race and racism as problems that need to be solved, fixed, and then relegated to the past.

Figure 21: Crockett Confronts Tubbs on his boat

Figure 22: Crockett backlit with a blue tint that highlights his blue eyes

Their initial reconciliation and eventual partnership suggests that Tubbs' fear of a racist South is misplaced—a thing of the past, something America "outgrew long ago"—and that Crockett represents a new brand of colorblind southern lawman (Bogle 255).[141] Like the happy endings of *Roots* or *The Waltons* discussed in the previous chapter, the racial conflict and its swift resolution in the pilot affirmed and assured audiences that racism was firmly part of the past, even in the South. That *Miami Vice* visually lacks any symbols of southern racial hierarchy—like the plantation—further emphasizes its colorblind politics and detachment from old southern institutions.

Instead, the drama replaces racial conflict with visions of interracial harmony where "noble white heroes" like Crockett, with "no racial hang-ups or biases" still always occupy the center (Bogle 265). That is, as these "dramas failed to accurately delineate the racial lines," they presented "self-congratulatory tales [that] suggested that past racism

[141] This altercation recalls Verdie Grant's confrontation with John Boy Walton—as discussed in the previous chapter. In both instances the invocation of race falls onto African American characters that ultimately realize that they were wrong to invoke the so-called race card. In these formulations, as Bud and Steinam note, "It's *their* problem, not our racism. It was, after all, an avowedly anti-racist liberal, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, now the Democratic senator from New York, who introduced to public discourse the notion of "pathology" regarding female-headed African American families." That is, when racial conflict is displaced onto characters of color, white privilege is obscured and along with systemic and structural racism.

had resided mainly in the minds and hearts of evil, deranged people" (ibid.). As Bogle articulates, this race-blind politics presumes racism as a character flaw—the fault of an individual—rather than a systemic issue embedded in our national social structures. That is, as *Miami Vice* disentangled racial strife from the South, so too did it suggest that race was no longer a fundamental or organizing force of the contemporary 1980s South and by extension the nation (Omi and Winant 13).

This brand of representation was by no means exclusive to *Miami Vice*.[142] Rather, other southern-set shows mobilized similar visions of primarily white, yet racially harmonious Souths. Often in these primetime Souths, African American characters, like Tubbs, entered onto the screen escorted by white characters, white writers, and white producers.[143] For instance, in *Matlock* (1986-1995) Andy Griffith returned to television, but this time to an integrated Atlanta. The pilot opens with Ben Matlock (Andy Griffith) defending an unnamed African American man on a murder charge in court. This image, which might recall Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch in *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1962) and is consistently repeated in Hollywood films about the South and race relations, indicates a new colorblind South through its main character Ben Matlock. He, like Sheriff Andy on *The Andy Griffith Show*, is a highly ethical white southern man on the right side of the law. But unlike Andy, Ben Matlock has an African American sidekick, Tyler Hudson

[142] For instance, *Matlock* (1984-1990) set in both Atlanta and an Atlanta suburb (where Matlock lives); *In The Heat of the Night* (1988-1992) set in Sparta, Mississippi; *Savannah* (1996-1997) set in Savannah, Georgia; and *I'll Fly Away* (1991-1993) set in an unspecified Southern state. In the latter part of the decade *In the Heat of the Night* would tackle small town Southern racism but still would feature an African American and white partnership, where the African American detective serves (often) to aid white townspeople in overcoming their racism.

[143] Simultaneously, films like *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991), *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989), *Steel Magnolias* (1989), and later *Forrest Gump* (1994) presented a "'kinder, gentler' version of the South" (McPherson 16). This "new Old South" appears not so different from nostalgic pre-Civil Rights versions of the region: from *Birth of a Nation* (1915) to Shirley Temple films like *The Little Colonel* (1935), and *Gone with the Wind* (1939), or even Disney's controversial *Song of the South* (1946).

(Kene Holliday), whose presence indicates that Matlock is not racist. If not overtly racist, these primetime shows were inferentially racist as they celebrated competing visions of the region rooted in nostalgia for the simple white rural South—like *Andy Griffith*, *The Waltons*, or even *Dukes of Hazzard* (1979-1985)—while erasing any remnants of the racial inequality and struggle, which still plagued the region.

The Cosby Show and Northern Signs of Blackness

In contrast, on *The Cosby Show*, African American characters were complex characters not escorted onto the screen (and into the domestic space) by whites. Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis write in *Enlightened Racism* that, "after decades of degrading media images of black people in other shows, the Huxtable family presented black characters that black *and* white audiences could relate to" (2). Indeed, the sitcom "uncoupled portrayals of African Americans from their prior connections with poverty and popular youth culture"—representations, which as Gray shows, were repetitively featured on television news in the 1980s (Havens 90).[144] *The Cosby Show* was the first of its kind—its success initiated more progressive spin-offs like *A Different World* (1987-1993)—and it disproved long-held industry lore about the profitability of African American authored television.

As Krystal Brent Zook argues, in the late 1980s, a sitcom like *The Cosby Show* "presented the refreshing possibility that racial authenticity could be negotiated rather than assumed—or perhaps done away with altogether. What emerged were contested narratives that challenged the very notion of 'blackness' itself'" (2). Zook lays out four "key elements of black-produced television:" autobiography, improvisation, aesthetics,

[144] Krystal Brent Zook echoes this argument; she writes, "Cosby was a controversial attempt to uncouple blackness and poverty" (15).

and drama (5). Even as *Cosby* appealed to a mass audience—as Donald Bogle argues, it was the "last show everyone watched" before the breakdown of the network system—and was harshly critiqued for its embrace of the American Dream, the sitcom still makes visible some of the key aesthetics that Zook defines as central and specific to African American television (Bogle 303).[145] In this way, Cosby's depiction of blackness dramatically differs from *Miami Vice*, yet—like other representations of African Americans on television—the sitcom inevitably embraces a conflicted and at times contradictory racial politics.

Cosby's authorship of the show, including his central role onscreen, upended industry lore about African American-produced television as being unprofitable. Indeed, Cosby's integral role in the sitcom was revolutionary: "J. Fred MacDonald notes, that 93% of black shows (apart from *The Cosby Show* and *A Different World*) were still run by white producers in the late 1980s" (qtd in Zook 17). Unlike the Norman Lear produced 1970s sitcoms—*The Jeffersons*, *Sanford and Son*, or *Good Times*—the Huxtable family was not escorted onto the screen by white producers or writers—a racial formulation which extended into the diegetic world. As Donald Bogle states, "not until the advent of Cosby's series was there a program in which the governing sensibility […] lay in black hands. Cosby would not only be the show's lead actor but also the show's co-creator, co-producer, and executive consultant" (292). Further, Cosby hired and nurtured

[145] Mike Budd and Clay Steinman share a similar sensibility about the show's reach in "White racism and *The Cosby Show*:" "Profitable as it has been for broadcasters and for Cosby and his partners, the show may prove to be one of the last great mass-audience entertainers. As the commercial networks lose more viewers to cable, videocassettes, and video games, they pitch increasingly specialized demographics." Additionally, Havens provides a series of reasons for the show's popularity abroad, which include "appreciation and dignity of Bill Cosby's character—as compared with conventional, satirical portrayals of black men in popular culture—among black South Africans; identification with family size, communication patterns, and the ability to retain one's cultural identity in the face of white, western pressures in Lebanon; and the series' portrayals of masculinity, feminism, and youth culture in Barbados" (80).

African American talent both on and off-screen: for example, he hired "young African American directors" to work on the show (ibid.). In this way alone, *The Cosby Show* was ground breaking for primetime and it proved to be one of the most profitable shows in primetime history. Havens suggests, that *The Cosby Show* "attracted more viewers and made more money than any series in television history, netting over $1 billion in domestic syndication sales" and it became a hit overseas (80).

Even though Cosby's show appealed to a mass (i.e. white) audience, the sitcom mobilizes "visual signifiers of blackness" (Zook 5). For instance, both Cliff and Theo (Malcolm-Jamal Warner) don traditional African-appearing ties with their tuxedoes (Figure 23) in "Physician of the Year" (Season 1, Episode 15, 17 January 1985) or in "Cliff's Birthday" (Season 1, Episode 24, 9 May 1985), Cliff meets Lena Horne, a "potent pop cultural symbol for African Americans" (Bogle 297). In addition, sounds of African American music punctuate the series from Ray Charles to jazz and R&B (ibid.; Havens 90).[146] Yet another episode discusses "the time Cliff had conked his hair," a conversation that emerges as Cliff makes fun of Theo' s new earring (Bogle 298). Following Zook, these moments sprinkle the series with aurally and visually specific African American aesthetics—the mention of conking, for instance, functions as an "in-joke" while poking fun at Theo's attempt to impress a girl provides universal humor (Zook 7). In these instances, Cosby signals both a universal appeal and a clear understanding and embrace of the specificity of African American experience in the

[146] Donald Bogle provides a series of other examples of how Cosby wove the specificity of African American experience into the sitcom. For instance, Cosby insisted on keeping an "Abolish Apartheid" poster on Theo's door, after NBC attempted to censure it (Bogle 297). Later, he even chose the names Winnie and Nelson for his grandchildren, a clear reference to South Africa's Mandela family (ibid.).

United States. In this formulation, race was neither a problem—as Omi and Winant suggest—nor did race go unacknowledged, but rather it was a facet and fact of life.

Figure 23: Cliff's colorful tie replaces the traditional western bowtie.

This African American aesthetic becomes clear in the sitcom's narration of Civil Rights history, which as I argue in previous chapters had long not been representable on primetime entertainment television. While fictionalized, the remembrance of the March on Washington in "The March" (Season 3, Episode 6, 30 October 1986) appears almost autobiographical as characters recall their individual experiences. In "The March" Theo unexpectedly receives a 'C' on his history paper about the March on Washington. However, after dinner with his grandparents and after he reads his paper to an unimpressed crowd, the gathered group of Cliff, Clair, and their parents reminisce about that day, its heat, the people, and the feeling. Amidst personal problems—a serious lack of orange juice in the fridge, Theo's desire for a perfect weekend, and Vanessa's (Tempestt Bledsoe) decision to ask out the boy she likes—the episode provides both space and a serious tone to the discussion of the March on Washington. "The March" ends as Clair's father sings a spiritual—an aural signifier of blackness—while the camera slowly zooms in on his face. As the others listen intently, the song appears to take the entire group back to that day as they share and appreciate their collective experience

(Zook 5). In what seems an a-typical Cosby moment, "The March" ends as the song ends on a serious and solemn note: the group listens and Cliff bows his head and nobody says a word; no joke relieves the sadness, the tension, or the importance of this moment.[147]

Mostly clearly, "The March," with its open ending and "exploration of painful in-group memories and experiences," suggests a break from the "joke per page" formats demanded of traditional African American sitcoms (Zook 9). On occasion the sitcom also addressed classed or gendered differences; for instance, Cliff dissuades Theo from his plan to become a "regular person"—i.e. not go to college—with a quick, witty, and targeted lesson: he says the "government comes for the regular people first" and then using monopoly money Cliff explains to Theo the difficulties of economic access without a college degree. Or, *The Cosby Show* addresses sexism, for example, via the character of Elvin (Geoffrey Owens) who consistently insults Clair by suggesting that she be subservient to her husband. These conflicts—usually resolved by the end of the episode—allowed at least minimal access to the dramatic explorations of raced, classed, and gendered differences.

Despite its progressive politics and signifiers of blackness, *The Cosby Show*'s incredible success remained partially due to its universal appeal, made possible, critics argued by the Huxtables' existing in a "social political vacuum," no doubt in part a result of network constraints (Bogle 295).[148] Even as the show discusses African American

[147] In addition, the series revisits the history of Civil Rights repetitively: Rudy watches Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech on television while in another episode "Clair and her school chums recalled their college experiences during the civil rights era" (Bogle 297).

[148] Even so, Bogle argues that the series subtly and impressively integrated symbols of African American life from Cliff's Morehouse College t-shirt and posters of Martin Luther King and Frederick Douglass (295-296). Cosby even, Bogle suggests, "Deftly wove African American history into a number of memorable episodes" (297).

history and utilizes visual signs of blackness, the family appears cut off from contemporary racial politics. Like Tubbs—or perhaps even more so—the Cosbys represent the model minority: "These African Americans were just like whites, loyal to the ethos of capitalism and bourgeois individualism, and that loyalty rewarded them with the same middle-class privileges as whites" (Gray 19). The Huxtable family lives in a Brooklyn brownstone, both parents are present, college (and graduate school) educated, and successful professionals—Cliff (Bill Cobsy) is a doctor while Clair (Phylicia Rashad) is a lawyer (ibid.). Crucial to the Cosby aesthetic too are the recurring establishing shots of their Brooklyn brownstone, which function as a consistent reminder of place and class: urban, the North, and middle class.

Tucked safely away in the north, *The Cosby Show* often replicates the erasure of racial inequality and the raced barriers to economic success, embraced by the neoconservative right. In the first season, the image of interracial solidarity which ends "Physician of the Year" drives this home: Theo gives his father's award acceptance speech—while Cliff delivers a baby elsewhere—which ends as the young man calls for everyone to stand up and hold hands as he proclaims, "I am an American and this is my American family." A shot reverse-shot pattern reveals the audience rising and taking hands and then Theo holding hands with an older white man as he declares them all family (Figure 25). This image, particularly in the wake of the speech, both models Cliff as an accomplished and thoughtful doctor and father—against news images of criminalized African American men—but also disavows racial differences within the middle class. Indeed, Theo/Cliff's final line of the speech coupled with the racially diverse gathered group of doctors all holding hands presents a seemingly idealistic vision

of interracial bonding and solidarity. This moment reveals a concern many critics—such as Henry Louis Gates—voiced about the sitcom: that it obscured the racial dimensions of social structures and embraced the mythology of equal access. That is, for Henry Louis Gates, the show's positive images and championing of the American Dream problematically gave credence to neoconservative claims that government and social structures need not take race into account (Jhally and Lewis 3).

Figure 24: Theo holds hands with an older white doctor, one of Cliff's colleagues.

Jhally and Lewis helpfully sum up the critical response to *The Cobsy Show*. They write, "The history of critical response to popular culture often follows a similar pattern: elaborate praise becomes an increasingly difficult burden, and critics' euphoria is almost invariably followed by cynical backlash" (2). *The Cosby Show*'s reception followed this rule. Generally "analyses of *The Cosby Show* fit broadly into one of two views: the show is seen either as a socially progressive or as an apology for a racist system that disadvantages most black people" (Jhally and Lewis 3). Arguably, the show did both simultaneously—like *Roots* before it—embracing the rhetoric of the American Dream while also presenting an African American family that challenged dominant representations of African Americans in the media. Perhaps unfairly, the burden of

representation fell on *The Cosby Show* because it was the first successful African American authored series. These competing impulses though created a contradictory and always conflicting text, yet as Stuart Hall suggests, this fraught nature is the very essence of "black popular culture:" "It is a sight of strategic contestation" ("What is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" 26). In this way, we might understand *The Cosby Show* as exemplary of Hall's definition of black popular culture rather than a failure or success in African American representations.[149] The sitcom makes visible the ways in which primetime programming adjusted its content in the wake of *Roots*—as television networks courted an African American audience—and those minimal changes in representation wrought by the Civil Rights movement.

Past Souths: 1955-1980s in Primetime

This project has traced the ways in which the South evolved and circulated—both on and off the small screen—during the network era. Indeed, both the real and imagined South, more than any other American region, influenced and constructed the content of post-war primetime programming. As I've argued, prior to the 1970s the region remained profoundly troubling to the networks, as the examples of Nat King Cole and Harry Belafonte reveal. Even for CBS, *Andy Griffith* served as both a challenge and a palliative to its evening news broadcasts of the Civil Rights Movement, coverage of Vietnam, and escalating violence and social unrest across the United States. *The Andy Griffith Show*, which maintained its top Nielsen ratings throughout its entire run, reimagined the South along comfortable and comic white lines. Like its dramatic predecessors, *Andy Griffith*'s

[149] Specifically, Hall suggests that as "black popular culture" enters the mainstream and moves "directly into the circuits of dominant technology—the circuits of power and capital," it is homogenized as it "passes into the hands of the established cultural bureaucracy" ("What is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" 26). That is, the creators of "black popular culture" inevitably relinquish control over their own narratives, so too do those narratives shift and change for dissemination in mass culture.

white southern world was built on and linked to southern white supremacist values, as Chapter IV details. The sitcom genre—unlike the dramas *Yancy Derringer* and *Bourbon Street Beat*—proved uniquely capable of rehabilitating the region and its most troubling symbol, the white southern sheriff.

By the 1970s, however, primetime television's dominant fare was outdated and seemingly irrelevant. At the same time, the major social shifts produced by the Civil Rights Movement were beginning to effect television programming and content. Primetime programming in the 1970s arguably represents one of the more experimental and diverse periods in television history since the medium's early days (i.e. *The Hazel Scott Show*). Indeed, in this decade—and as the specter of a southern backlash faded—the networks experimented with white progressive programming like *The Waltons* and African American-driven programming from the *Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* to *Roots* and its sequel. These latter programs challenged monolithic white visions of the South and networks' and sponsors' beliefs about audience and what kind of programming could be the most profitable—a realization which resulted in the proliferation of African American characters on primetime in the 1980s. However, as I've argued above, the prevailing rhetoric of the neoconservative political project and deregulation reconfigured primetime programming. That is, colorblind rhetoric in conjunction with the mobilization of African American bodies—along with women, gay men and lesbian women, and the soviet empire—as signs of the ills of (white) society obscured the racism of racially charged strategies (Gray 33-34). Along with Reagan, Gray suggests, whites could now "safely express [their] racial fears without being labeled a racist" (34).

Perhaps as a result—or at least in step with—this newly colorblind climate, mythologies about a monolithic rural South prevailed in and were mobilized by network entertainment programming.[150] Tara McPherson notes in *Reconstructing Dixie*, that the 1980s and 1990s "saw countless television reruns of *Gone With the Wind* (with record audiences), the theatrical re-release of the film, negotiations for and release of the sequel *Scarlett*, [and] at least six broadcast miniseries," as well as multiple primetime dramas about the South (16). These shows signaled, to use McPherson's term, a "new Old South," a South that was "contemporary yet gentrified," primarily white, and rural (16). Instead of a toxic wasteland for a nation's racist beliefs, the South became once again the last bastion of a mannered and conservative white America reliant on, and nostalgic for, the plantation and its emblem: the white lady.

As Christopher Geist notes, "while other regions of the nation developed a measure of social complexity on television in the fours decades after World War II, the network-mediated South remained a land of redneck humor and homespun family drama" (179). In a November 1991 issue of *Entertainment Weekly*, Devon Jackson noted that in the wake of a plethora of successful 1980s shows set South of the Mason-Dixon line "networks have become more enamored of the onetime Confederacy than ever before." Jackson provides a few reasons for this sudden southern turn such as that "Southerners account for nearly a third of the country's 92.1 million TV-viewing households." But what is most striking about Jackson's piece is his sense that setting shows down in Dixie "could be part of the movement away from hard-edged, urban cynicism and back to those

[150] Here I am drawing from Crystal Brent Zook's discussion of 1980s and 1990s network television in *Color By Fox*. These programs, as if uninterrupted by the Civil Rights Movement and de-segregation, entertainment programming between the 1950s and the late 1980s featured what Representative Edward Towns referred to as "plantation programming" (qtd in Brent Zook 11).

qualities the South has always called its own: hospitality, small-town folksiness, and reverence for the family."

Despite decades of televisual anxiety about the region and shifting representational strategies, by the end of the 1980s and amidst nascent post-race rhetoric, the South appeared virtually unchanged from pre-Civil Rights depictions of the region. This close study of the formative years of primetime television programming and the South articulates how representational grammars of race and region were fixed in the early years of primetime programming. Yet, the two routes taken by primetime in the wake of *Roots* and *The Waltons* separated depictions of race from the South—as we saw with *Miami Vice* and *The Cosby Show*—a puzzling legacy, which recoded a region synonymous with African Americans and racial unrest as a Mayberry-esque safe, white, and nostalgic location.

Conclusion

This dissertation began with a discussion of *Lincoln* and *Django Unchained*, two recent films about southern history and slavery that sparked massive media debates about race, history, and questions of authorship and representation. A year earlier, *The Help* initiated similar conversations in its depiction of Civil Rights-era Mississippi from the perspective of a white woman. In addition to these films, primetime television has re-discovered the region across genres: *Duck Dynasty* (2012-present), *Real Housewives of Atlanta* (2008-present), *Dexter* (2006-present), *Vampire Diaries* (2009-present), *The Walking Dead* (2010-present), and *Treme* (2010-present), just to name a few. These films and television shows—while outside the scope of this dissertation—continue to spark both interest and debate about race, region, and representation. More so than any other

U.S. region, the South remains the site of intense fascination, abjection, nostalgia, and violence.

Leigh Anne Duck writes in *The Nation's Region*, "when national discourse has acknowledged the conflict between southern conservatism and national democracy, it has typically done so in ways that localize this conflict—a 'backward South' and a modern or 'enlightened nation'" (3). That is, Duck argues that the ways in which media historically localized the "race-problem" as a southern problem, rather than a national one, relies on a long representational lineage of the South as different, backwards, and a threat to the imagined democratic nation. If in the post-war period, television's purpose was to call a nation into the being, mend hearth and home, and create good citizens then, the South (and the televised violence of the Civil Rights Movement) posed a direct threat to that white suburban nationalist fantasy.

The representational maneuvers enacted by the likes of *Andy Griffith*, *Bourbon Street Beat* (despite its televisual failure), or later *Miami Vice* attempted to render that threatening South safe for national consumption. In so doing, they invoked southern manners and downhome southern living as emblematic of all that is good about America, while erasing the racism and racial violence upon which the white South was built. That is, the white South became both the threat to the democratic nation and the potential cure for all that ailed a nation in crisis. In returning to the South during the formative years of primetime and at a moment when the region visually contested narratives of a democratic nation provides, I hope, a foundation for re-thinking a contemporary television landscape saturated in problematically post-racial southern imagery.

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