

**COLOR ADJUSTMENT
SCRIPT**

[TITLE CARD]

The country's image of the Negro, which hasn't very much to do with the Negro, has never failed to reflect with a kind of frightening accuracy the state of mind of the country.

- James Baldwin

NARRATOR: This is a picture of the American Dream.

[ACADEMY LEADER: 5, 4, 3, 2 ...]

NARRATOR: This is a picture of what the Dream once was.

[MONTAGE: Various primetime family programs.]

NARRATOR: This is a picture of what the Dream has become.

[THE COSBY SHOW]

NARRATOR: At the center of primetime television has been the selling of the Dream. And at the heart of the Dream: the mythic American Family. Once an outsider, the African American is now part of this family, part of the myth. Through television, if nowhere else, we are now watched and welcome in the majority of American homes. But what was the key to the households of primetime America? The key to our inclusion in the myth of the American Dream.

[MAIN TITLE]

COLOR ADJUSTMENT

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: Blacks in combat during World War II]

ESTHER ROLLE: As blacks returned from a war that they fought to give other peoples freedoms that were not allowed to them in their own country, blacks became more determined to get some of ... what I gave my life for!

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: World War II: soldier receives medal.]

HERMAN GRAY: I think the mood in black America after World War II was cautious optimism. The military had just been integrated you know as a result of that war, and it allowed black soldiers in. On the other hand, I think there was a still this caution about racial hostility!

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: Soldiers marching.]

PAT TURNER: There was a great deal of anticipation on the part, not only of the soldiers returning from World War II, but as well on the women and men who worked in the defense industry during the war. They had opportunities that had been unavailable to them prior to the war because of the demand for their labor.

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: Women in industry.]

HENRY GATES: So that you had a highly trained ex-military class. And then you had people who had, who were formerly domestics, often, who had experienced industrial life. So that they were poised for life in the fully in the 20th century, a life that had been experienced by other Americans but which of course had been denied to black people.

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: Blacks celebrate World War II victory.]

NARRATOR: Our optimism after the war coincided with the celebration of a new, infant technology in America.

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: "The Birth of Television"]

ANNOUNCER: After ten years of experiments, the public at last gets a preview of television!

NARRATOR: Race relations and television formed a critical link.

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: "The Birth of Television"]

ANNOUNCER: And so a new industry steps out of the laboratory into the limelight, as television makes its bow to the American public! Where it will go from here is any man's guess!

[TEXACO STAR THEATER]

DANNY THOMAS: The white man, the Negro, the Oriental, the Protestant, the Catholic, the Jew, they've all shared the spotlight on this stage.

MILTON BERLE: Well Danny, if I may inject, that's the way show business operates. Danny, there's no room for prejudice in our profession.

HERMAN GRAY: Television in the early days was a medium trying to find itself. It was a medium that was perched to really make a difference! But the kind of difference that it could make, was really to be proven.

DAVID WOLPER: The format of radio at that time was you had, you know the evening programs, dramatic shows, westerns, comedies. So television was your natural extension. They just took those ideas and made, brought them to pictures instead of sound.

HERMAN GRAY: And to that extent, then I think black folks' representations in television were very much inherited from radio. And of course that gets us into the, the old Amos and Andy sorts of situation comedies.

[THE AMOS 'N' ANDY RADIO SHOW]

KINGFISH: You know of course that there's a shortage of women!

ANDY: I'll say, the one I took out last night only

come up to my belt buckle!

HERMAN GRAY: And of course in radio it was two white characters who came up with the idea, who impersonated blacks.

[THE AMOS 'N' ANDY RADIO SHOW]

KINGFISH: Who's scared? Me? Ha! Ha! Ha!

HERMAN GRAY: And by the time it came over to television, of course, they had to assemble an entire black cast.

[THE AMOS 'N' ANDY SHOW]

AMOS: If you don't give me my money back, I'm going to punch you in each eye! Then I'm going to punch you in the mouth! Then I'm going to take a stick and crack your head! In other words, I'm going to open everything that's closed, and close everything that's open!

SHELDON LEONARD: Well to say that THE AMOS 'N' ANDY SHOW was popular in its day is a shocking understatement! It was a ... enormously, indescribably popular. And also, indescribably primitive in its use of stereotypes and cliches.

[THE AMOS 'N' ANDY SHOW]

SAPPHIRE: It's about time you met some decent people instead of that horrible uncouth group that you associate with!

KINGFISH: Well I've done met all the accomplished people I want to know.

SAPPHIRE: Like Andrew Brown for instance.

KINGFISH: Yeah! Like Andrew Brown!

SAPPHIRE: Well what may I ask has he ever accomplished?

KINGFISH: Well he uh ... just yesterday, he had a run of thirteen balls in the five pocket without once leaning on the pool table!"

SAPPHIRE: That's just what I'm talking about. Andrew hanging over a pool table! You'll never find him in a public library!

KINGFISH: No, they ain't got no pool table in there!

[TITLE ON SCREEN]
1951: 12% Of US homes have TV

SHELDON LEONARD: The composite of all the cliches about lazy black men, and about opportunistic black men. In those days it was taken for granted that the portrayal of characters as they chose to portray them was audience pleasing, and we were in the business of pleasing audiences. So we did it!

[THE AMOS 'N' ANDY SHOW]

KINGFISH: Now what do you see?

ANDY: I can't see nothing.

KINGFISH: Hmmm, just what I thought. You got a stigmatism vision of the optical illusion.

TIM REID: I would be lying if I sat here and said I didn't laugh at it. But it was a strange kind of a laugh. I knew it was bizarre. I knew it was fantasy. I couldn't relate. It angered me, that it was such a stereotypical rendition of my community.

DIAHANN CARROLL: At home, it was very important that we not tune in to Amos and Andy, it was very important to my mother, that I should not see something that was so racist.

[THE AMOS 'N' ANDY SHOW]

MOTHER-IN-LAW: Why you ain't got sense enough to come in out of the rain!

ANDY: I is too. I done it lots of times.

DIAHANN CARROLL: It was years later that I realized that Amos and Andy were brilliant! They were really funny!

[THE AMOS 'N' ANDY SHOW]

KINGFISH: Now ya see, Andy, first, the atom splits, into what they call the monucle. And then the monucle busts and breaks down into what they call neutron, proton, Fig Newtons, and morons.

[Jim Crow signs: Colored Waiting Room, Booker T. Luncheon, Colored Dining Room]

NARRATOR: The struggle to end Jim Crow segregation and the portrayal of blacks as second-class citizens inevitably took television to task.

[THE AMOS 'N' ANDY SHOW]

KINGFISH: Hi, partner!

HENRY GATES: When we think of this group of people whose historical experience had been transformed by the war, poised for full integration into the American society, and then we think about, what they were greeted with, as television made its debut. They were greeted with images of fully autonomous, segregated, separate black community, which was the community in which Amos 'n' Andy thrived.

[THE AMOS 'N' ANDY SHOW]

JUDGE: Quiet please!

NARRATOR: The first primetime television show to feature a black cast, Amos 'n' Andy played on a familiar theme: Blacks might aspire to the American Dream of success, but we were continually, comically, ill-equipped to achieve it.

[THE AMOS 'N' ANDY SHOW]

CALHOUN: Why can't I be a doctor like you two guys?

KINGFISH: Because there ain't no uniforms that fit you! Just shut your big mouth and come on!

NARRATOR: Even before its premiere, the show was sued by the NAACP to block its broadcast. The suit charged -- quote -- "every character is either a clown or a crook. Millions of

white Americans see this Amos 'n' Andy picture and think the entire race is the same."

[THE AMOS 'N' ANDY SHOW]

HENRY GATES: So that the interest of the black community and the images fed to that black community and to the larger American society, in the early 1950's, were diametrically opposed to each other.

NARRATOR: Two seasons after its debut, Amos 'n' Andy was canceled.

[Still Photo: exterior of Supreme Court -- Newspaper headline "Ban of segregation in schools"]

NARRATOR: The nation was heading toward a new era.

[Still Photo: Here lies Jim Crow.]

NARRATOR: Yet television, for the most part throughout the fifties, failed to adjust.

[THE JACK BENNY SHOW]

NARRATOR: In the cultural landscape of primetime America, "Negroes" remained ... in their place.

[SHEENA OF THE JUNGLE]

Sheena: Biaku? Wanaba!

African: Jambo, Jambo Bwana!

[THE TROUBLE WITH FATHER]

WILLIE: Oh, Mr. --! Something's gone wrong! Oh-oh!

STU ERWIN: Watch it! Watch it Willie!

WILLIE: Oh-ah! Oh!!! Oh!!! Oh!!! Yes!

HAL KANTER: I don't think that the sponsor or the network, and certainly not the writers, ever considered uh, the questions of race relations, of stereotyping, and etcetera. That was the farthest from our minds. Again, what we were trying to do was to present an amusing set of characters in as amusing a background as we possibly could, doing amusing things, to entice that audience to come back next week.

[BEULAH]

ANNOUNCER: The Beulah Show! Brought to you by new milder Dreft! For dishes and fine washables! And Deep Cleaning Oxydol for the family wash! Starring Louise Beavers as ... Beulah!

BEULAH: If marriages are made in heaven, my guardian angel has sure been loafing on the job! Ha! Ha! Ha!

HAL KANTER: I think ... Beulah was popular because she was almost idealized, what every person would love to have in a housekeeper. They thought, god if we could get a Beulah, to run our house, this house would be much better off than it was!

[BEULAH]

BEULAH: (Answering the phone) The Henderson's residence.

NARRATOR: But in this idealized dream of the American family, what of Beulah herself? Would she be better off?

[BEULAH]

MR. HENDERSON: Beulah, I have a solution! From now on, on Saturday nights we'll have cold cuts for dinner!

BEULAH: Cold cuts?

MRS. HENDERSON: That's a good idea!

BEULAH: Mr. Harry, I'll dig the yard if I have to, I'll lay a brick wall for you, but I'm not going to serve my family no cold cuts on Saturday night!

PAT TURNER: A show like Beulah reinforced the notion of an African American woman comfortable working in a domestic environment, comfortable working in a white family's home, with no family, no network of her own. And indifferent to the need for that!

[BEULAH]

DONNY: Gosh! Beulah! I'm going to have to dance in front of Mom, and Dad, and everyone!

BEULAH: That's easy. What's bothering you?

DONNY: I just can't dance!

BEULAH: Well that's easy to fix, I'll teach you!

DONNY: Jeepers Beulah! Can you dance?

BEULAH: Can I dance! Donny, when the beat's right, I just take off!

ESTHER ROLLE: You make her so happy in it. And you made her so unaware of her own children and so aware of somebody else's children. That is the Hollywood maid! I knew a lot of people who worked as domestics. And I know people who had to educate their children, from their earnings as a domestic. And they did it because they didn't want their children to go through what they were going through! Noble! That's nobility!

[Still photos of real domestics intercut with stills photos of Beulah.]

NARRATOR: The nobility of our historic dream of freedom and the dream of race relations in early television continued to clash. But most of fifties television retreated from the conflict.

[DRAGNET]

ANNOUNCER: My partner's Frank Smith. My boss is Captain Norman. My name's Friday.

[MONTAGE: 1950's TV shows: I Married Joan, I Love Lucy, Ozzie & Harriet, Hey Mulligan, Leave It to Beaver, Lassie]

ALVIN POUSSAINT: It was something always good, and, and wholesome about white culture. It was so powerful, you kind, you kind of believed that there was ah, this, this life that whites led that was like very kind of wholesome and, and almost trouble free, or that's where the, that's where the, the, the beauty was and the good things and the pleasure.

[MONTAGE: commercials -- Crest, 7-Up, etc.]

[TITLE ON SCREEN]
1955: 67% of US homes have TV

NARRATOR: Through the fifties, nightly television viewing became a family ritual. And the family, not surprisingly, became the centerpiece in this 7 to 10 p.m. primetime programming.

An explosion of new baby boom families found in television neatly packaged images of what the ideal American family should be, what the dream household should have.

We were rarely part of this mythic picture.

[Willie Best as elevator man in MY LITTLE MARGIE]

BOB HENRY: Through the late forties and fifties on television uh, it's as though black people didn't exist! You know? Night after night, there were programs and occasionally, we'd have a super star as a guest.

[EDDIE FISHER SHOW]

EDDIE FISHER: Ladies and Gentlemen, Miss Diahann Carroll!

TIM REID: Someone would yell! Or we would know through the grapevine that there was some black person was going to be on television that night, and we watched it! The rest of it, we didn't watch! I mean there was nothing there related to us! Or we could relate to. So we didn't watch it!

PAT TURNER: I can remember my mother and my aunts and my neighbors, if they heard that a black person was going to be on television, or if they saw one come on the screen, they would dash to the phone and start calling each other! So that the neighbors and the aunts wouldn't miss it! My mother wouldn't call long distance on the phone if there was a death in the family! But she would call my sister far away to tell her that she'd heard that Cicely Tyson was going to be on a program for example. Because it was such a source of pride for them! For that generation, for my mother's generation, somebody who had grown up in the thirties and forties, there was such a void in the magazines and in the radio, so rare to see African American people depicted anywhere! That it was a treat for them.

[THE NAT "KING" COLE SHOW]

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and Gentlemen, THE NAT KING COLE SHOW! With Nat's special guest, Frankie Lane! And now here is the incomparable Nat King Cole!

TIM REID: He was a smooth classy guy! And he sang ... he loved ballads! And love songs! And what a velvet voice he had uh, it was wonderful to see him on primetime television, THE NAT KING COLE SHOW.

[THE NAT "KING" COLE SHOW]

Nat King Cole sings "When I Fall in Love".

STEPHEN BOCHCO: I loved Nat King Cole. I loved his music, I loved his voice. As a kid growing up and coming of age as it were, you know, he was a very romantic sound in my adolescence.

BRUCE PALTROW: I loved the way he sang! I loved his ease. I loved his grace! He's so wonderful! A wonderful musician, wonderful piano player. He looked great! A wonderful smile! I don't know, I loved Nat King Cole!

DIAHANN CARROLL: I was very proud to see that elegant man on television. I didn't realize how proud I was going to be, I didn't realize that I had no images, really, that had that kind of sophistication.

HERMAN GRAY: King Cole was a major breakthrough in the sense that black people were in charge of representing the culture and music and talk and so forth, in a way that wasn't so much rooted in humor, it wasn't so much in comedy.

[THE NAT "KING" COLE SHOW]

NAT KING COLE: Well the composer of that song who was so widely unknown fourteen years ago is our guest tonight. And here he is, my good friend, Frankie Lane!

DAPHNE REID: Nat King Cole, I think, appealed to a broad spectrum of people, because he didn't seem threatening! He didn't ... he didn't seem forceful! Or belligerent! Or anything that would make say white people uncomfortable.

[THE NAT "KING" COLE SHOW]

Nat dances soft shoe with Mel Torme.

DIAHANN CARROLL: I think that many of the minorities involved in this profession during that period are guilty of something that we had to do for survival, and that's called adjustments. We had to make adjustments in our mind constantly in order to stay away from the area of anger and what's wrong with me?

[THE NAT "KING" COLE SHOW]

Nat King Cole performing.

BOB HENRY: As a man who wrote, produced, and directed his television show, the feedback I would get occasionally that he had wide acceptance in the white area, because he was a gentleman. I'd hear that a lot. They said he was the kind of guy that you could welcome into your home, he was just a gentleman.

NARRATOR: If any one black performer of the time held the key to primetime's family of entertainers -- the key to inclusion within the American Dream -- it was Cole: the model of assimilation. But was this enough to pay the price of the ticket? Would primetime America open the door and welcome him in?

[NEWSREEL: Black reporter is pushed and beaten along sidewalk.]

LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS PROTESTORS SHOUT: Two, four, six, eight, we don't want to integrate!

PAT TURNER: In 1957, the same time that Nat King Cole was on television, black children in Little Rock, Arkansas are trying to go to school, and meeting with a great deal of resistance, on the part of the white political structure that is supposed to enforce their rights.

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: Little Rock riot footage intercut with Nat King Cole's piano playing.]

HERMAN GRAY: King Cole was very threatening. How dare you bring a black man into our homes and into our communities, with white guests, no less! With white women no less! With white men no less!

PAT TURNER: They're trying to go to our schools. Now look, they've picked a television show? So it became impossible for the producers of THE NAT KING COLE SHOW to find a sponsor willing to underwrite that program. They did not want to alienate their Southern constituency.

[THE NAT "KING" COLE SHOW]

Nat King Cole with white female guest intercut with caricature of black man kissing white woman.

NARRATOR: The reality of race relations had re-framed television, making an otherwise acceptable image taboo. Unable to find a national sponsor, THE NAT KING COLE SHOW ended after one season.

[TITLE CARD]

The Negro performer is still in battle with the white man's image of the Negro, which the white man clings to in order not to be forced to revise his image of himself.

- James Baldwin

BOB HENRY: I think it was Sam Goldwyn who once said when he was criticized about some of the -- why he didn't do shows of a more sociological import -- he said, "If I want to send a message, I'll call Western Union!" Uh, the networks, the sponsors, they just want to get good ratings, high ratings! High ratings good for NBC and it sells product! 'Cause ultimately let's face it, television is a commercial industry!

DAVID WOLPER: The society moves like this and television moves a little behind it all the time. It's never going to be leading, it's always going to follow it. Because it's a sponsored medium!

[MONTAGE: 1950's Chevy, Lucy, De Soto commercials.]

DAVID WOLPER: The theory is when a sponsor advertised a show it's to sell the product, period. He's not ... he doesn't care what ... you can put test pattern on! If a lot of people will watch it, he'll put his commercials in it. So that, if somebody feels by putting a commercial in a television program that has some controversy to, this is early on in television, it may affect their product, they didn't buy anything with controversy!

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: National Association of Broadcasters Convention, 1961]

NEWTON MINNOW (FCC Chairman): Broadcasting cannot continue to live by the numbers. Ratings ought to be the slave of the broadcaster, not the master. You must be willing to provide a wider range of choices, more diversity, more alternatives. It is not enough to cater to the nation's whim, you must serve the nation's needs.

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: Water hoses on blacks, civil rights violence, white people watching TV]

NARRATOR: The networks were predictably slow to take up this challenge in television entertainment, but in the primetime arena of public affairs the civil rights movement provided a golden opportunity.

HENRY GATES: Precisely in this period the images of black people dominated the news! And it was -- they were images of, on the one hand, black men and women being tortured and beaten and abused, and whose rights were being systematically violated.

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: Black woman, men in suits file into police wagon]

HENRY GATES: On the other hand, there was a certain nobility of spirit and no one knew what to do with black people in terms of representing them in a T.V. series.

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: the March on Washington.]

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.: So this afternoon, I have a dream! It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream, I have a dream!

DENISE NICHOLAS: There was so much possible! And there was at the same time, so much fear and so much violence.

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: Police dogs attack blacks.]

DENISE NICHOLAS: And out of this pressure that was brought to bear by the Civil Rights movement on the structures of the South, particularly. There was the potential for a new day! And everybody knew it! Because it was on television!

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: Fanny Lou Hammer singing "Let My People Go" with "Go Tell It On the Mountain."]

PAT TURNER: Those images brought home to America, what was actually going on in these places. And seeing them on television, was much different from reading about it in the newspaper.

DENISE NICHOLAS: I think people began to see African Americans as full-blooded, total human beings for the first time in our history in this country. In a mass way!

HERMAN GRAY: That was a turning point. An important turning point, to mobilize and get the sympathies of whites, who started to see the brutality, who started to actually see the deep resistance to essentially black enfranchisement, into the society. And I think the spill over that it had was to at least raise the question of absence of black representations on television, or at least raise the question of to what extent did television have some responsibility to try to participate in this opening up of the society.

[EAST SIDE/WEST SIDE]

WIFE: Chuck? We've got some new neighbors.

NARRATOR: One of the most provocative series of the early sixties was East Side/West Side. Stories were set in a variety of communities, each dramatizing not America's Dream, but her nightmare realities.

[EAST SIDE/WEST SIDE]

CHUCK: I told you! There's no jobs!

BABY CRYING.

CHUCK: Hear something?

WIFE: Just the baby, crying herself to sleep.

BABY SCREAMS.

CHUCK: Ruth!

CHUCK: Hey! Please! Stop! Hey you! Hey! Hey cab! Hey stop, will ya? Come on stop man! Hey! Hey cab! Man, will you stop over here?

NARRATOR: There were no neat resolutions in the show, no happy endings, no sentimental songs or canned laughter. In one episode, the show even challenged the unspoken assumptions behind American integration.

[EAST SIDE/WEST SIDE]

NEIL BROCK: Oh come on now! He's a perfectly nice old man, but uh ...But ... You wanted a white Negro, and you got a black one!

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE]

MAN ON STREET: Uh, Negroes have a right to move in under the Constitution, the only thing is, what kind of a Negro?

[EAST SIDE/WEST SIDE]

MAN: I'm telling you, he isn't the type for this community!

NEIL BROCK: What if he were white? Come on? A rough, uneducated, decent sort of a guy, who made it the hard way! A guy who could never be your particular friend. Is that any reason for keeping him out of here? We have a different yardstick for measuring a Negro, don't we? If he went to Harvard, if he plays golf, if he looks like a Boston gentleman and talks like a Philadelphia lawyer, why fine! Let him be brown. Only not too brown. Yeah, your husband believes in equality! But! Mr. Adams is the but.

MAN: Neil! I...

NEIL BROCK: No! I'll see you around.

[TITLE ON SCREEN]

1963: 90% of US homes have TV

NARRATOR: Boldly bucking primetime convention, the show repeatedly undercut the myth of American progress. East Side/West Side was canceled after one season.

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: Black students, clapping and chanting.]

NARRATOR: Still, primetime was faced with adjusting to the continuing civil rights struggle. Could TV entertainment address black life in America, yet still sell success, the

good life, the American Dream?

[MONTAGE: Late 60's commercial.]

HAL KANTER: A luncheon I attended in which Mr. Roy Wilkins spoke. And he spoke to a large group of Hollywood writers and producers and directors.

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: Roy Wilkins]

HAL KANTER: And made a pitch for gentler treatment and more aware treatment of blacks in all media.

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: Roy Wilkins]

ROY WILKINS: ... the inclusion of the Negro American, without racial discrimination ... as full and equal in all phases of American citizenship.

HAL KANTER: And he really shook up that audience! And I left there saying, there must be something I can do.

[JULIA]

HAL KANTER: I thought that I really owed to my black colleagues, my ... some sort of an apology for a lot of the things that we had done on Amos and Andy.

[JULIA]

JULIA: That you didn't get back earlier!

NURSE: You really missed it!

JULIA: Missed what?

NURSE: Dr. Chegley has ...

DIAHANN CARROLL: Hal Kanter created an environment that was new! So he created this young lady who was a nurse, who had a family. And an education. And she lived in an integrated environment.

[JULIA]

MARIE: Well, how did it go?

JULIA: It didn't! I tried Marie, with Brenda you have to turn her off first! However, if there's anything you'd like to know about flamenco? Just ask!

DIAHANN CARROLL: She didn't present a picture of being either overly grateful or overly subservient. She felt she belonged there!

ESTHER ROLLE: It felt like a step above the grinning, domestic, who had to be very stout, very dark, preferably with large eyes, and a wide grin. And I guess we were tired of being so inundated with that imagery, that we accepted JULIA as a breath of fresh air!

DIAHANN CARROLL: I think that we were very one-dimensional in many areas. She was -- listen, she was the perfect mother!

[JULIA]

JULIA: Did you brush your teeth?

COREY: Yes, ma'am.

JULIA: Brushing your teeth, wakes up your mouth! Now, you can eat breakfast.

COREY: Mama, why are we ...

DIAHANN CARROLL: What we had to do, I think, was to find a kind of acceptable area that broke down some barriers, and then we were able to move on from there.

[TITLE CARD]

Aunt Jemima and Uncle Tom are dead, their places taken by a group of amazingly well-adjusted young men and women...ferociously literate, well-dressed and scrubbed.

- James Baldwin

[I SPY]

PIANO PLAYER: A man who has no music in himself...

ALEXANDER SCOTT: Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils.

PIANO PLAYER: Greetings! That's your assignment. That man.

HENRY GATES: We all watched I SPY. I was fifteen at the time. I couldn't wait to watch it! I mean he was my hero! He was a Rhodes Scholar! He was so articulate! I mean so much more articulate than his sidekick, Robert Culp.

SHELDON LEONARD: Race was not a factor! These were two men, there was a male bonding occurring there! Loyalty. Friendship. Love, between the two. And it had nothing to do with uh whether one was black or the other was white.

[I SPY]

ALEXANDER SCOTT: Listen, we've been through a lot together, haven't we?

KELLY ROBINSON: I guess.

ALEXANDER SCOTT: I pulled you out of close shaves, haven't I?

KELLY ROBINSON: Yeah.

ALEXANDER SCOTT: Oh, I know you'd do the same thing for me, if I needed it, wouldn't ya?

KELLY ROBINSON: I would hold ... white hot steel in my hand to save you, are you kidding?

SHELDON LEONARD: Cosby's acceptance was immediate and overwhelming! And this encouraged the medium, the television medium to say, hey! Look what we discovered! They-black people are not only acceptable but they uh ... there's a very good box office! People like to watch 'em!

[I SPY]

ALEXANDER SCOTT: Look, Kelly, you did what you could. You phoned it into the police.

KELLY ROBINSON: Yeah.

ALEXANDER SCOTT: There was nothing else you could do! Nothing!

HENRY GATES: Alexander Scott from I Spy and Julia were designed to overcome the received images of black people from all forms of media ...

[MONTAGE: minstrels, Amos 'n' Andy]

HENRY GATES: Whether it was minstrelsy and vaudeville, or whether it was television's own early history itself.

[MONTAGE: Beulah with lawn mower; Andy with nurse; Julia]

HENRY GATES: These were fully assimilable black people. These were people who could move into your neighborhood and not disturb you at all!

[JULIA]

JULIA: Thank you Mrs. Waggedorn!

MRS. WAGGEDORN: Sure.

JULIA: I'll come back and get Corey ...

BOY: That's your mother?

COREY: Yeah!

BOY: You know what?

COREY: What?

BOY: Your mother's colored!

COREY: Of course! I'm colored, too!

BOY: You are?

COREY: Yeah!

PAT TURNER: The political climate of the 1960's sort of forbade liberal thinking producers from putting any other kind of image on television, and part of their mission if they perceived it as such, to amplify the Civil Rights Movement rested in telling America that black people were just like white Americans, if not better!

[I SPY]

ROBINSON: Uh, he's... an intellectual... Rhode Scholar as a matter of fact. So gentlemen, what you have here is your average tennis ball man, your average scholar!

[JULIA]

FRIEND: You should be proud to have an Einstein in the family!

JULIA: I don't need a seven year old prodigy! I want a normal child! But if I don't do something fast, Corey's going to wind up either in the institute for advance study, or the funny kindergarten!

[TITLE CARD]

At the moment we're presenting the white Negro. And he has very little Negro-ness.

- Diahann Carroll, TV Guide 1968

HERMAN GRAY: You almost have to over-endow the character with attributes that comfort white middle class sensibilities, and strip him or her of anything else, so that the sense of the white Negro becomes what it takes to make them acceptable.

NARRATOR: Both because and in spite of this image Julia suffered scathing criticism.

HAL KANTER: There were whites who said no black woman is really that pretty! Or she probably is a white woman with dark make-up! That's some of the criticisms we heard. There were also the rednecks who said, "How dare you Southern Jews put niggers on the air, and cram them down our throats like that!" You'd be surprised how many letters I personally got like that.

DIAHANN CARROLL: In the black community, it caused a great deal of anger. They said she's a sellout. She's an Oreo cookie. Why doesn't this show represent the street, where I spend my life, I spend my time. I don't want to have to think about a woman that has pushed herself into the middle class.

NARRATOR: The controversy around JULIA was typical of black shows not just in the sixties but before and since. Because primetime images of us were so rare, each image became precious, involuntarily bore the burden of representing the race. But since such images were typically one-dimensional, like most of television, they often came under attack, despite high ratings, for what they failed to reflect. And so where AMOS 'N' ANDY was faulted for featuring bumbling black men in a segregated world, JULIA was rebuked for much the opposite: an integrated world with a successful black family, minus black men (the father had been conveniently killed in military duty), a black family severed from African American culture and society.

[MONTAGE: Civil Rights violence punctuates a scene from JULIA, I SPY, AMOS 'N' ANDY]

ANNOUNCER: We interrupt this program ... the worse race riots since those two years ago in the Watts ... at least 24 persons are killed ... New Jersey's largest city ... rocked the city of Detroit ... plenty of days and nights ...

PAT TURNER: It's almost as if there were two black Americas. There was the black America that you saw on the news, which confronted racial issues head-on.

[MONTAGE: Civil Rights violence punctuates a scene from JULIA.]

PAT TURNER: And then there was the black America that you saw the rest of the evening on primetime television, where racial hostility was virtually absent, where harmony dictated the neighborhood, where there were no signs of any kinds of struggles with segregation. So you get on screen this idealized view of how blacks and whites work together, that most people knew were inaccurately depicting the reality.

[MONTAGE: Civil Rights violence punctuates a scene from JULIA and I SPY.]

[TITLE ON SCREEN]
1968: 95% of US homes have TV

SHELDON LEONARD: I didn't set out to reflect realism! I set out to do an entertaining show. I didn't decide not to deal with the racial crisis that were tearing the country apart at the time. I just decided to deal with another kind of material. I decided to fulfill my function as an entertainment maker, rather than as a sociologist.

HAL KANTER: What I said at the time was ... that the audience gets enough of the confrontation and the incendiary actions of people in the ghettos and people in Watts for instance. They see enough of that on the news. They read enough of that in the newspaper. When they turn on the television, to have a half-an-hour of pleasantries, let's ignore all that.

[MONTAGE: Late 60's sitcoms and JULIA.]

HAL KANTER: In those days, our mandate was to amuse an audience: not to excite them. And I stuck to that mandate to try and amuse as many people as I possible could.

[TITLE CARD]

Television is cotton candy for the eyes.

- Aaron Spelling, Producer

HERMAN GRAY: The point is that there is this universe of experience that is held up as the norm, and once people enter into it, including whites, that everybody has to sort of work hard to participate in that universe.

[MONTAGE: NELSONS, BRADY BUNCH]

HERMAN GRAY: The entertainment function of television is predicated on the assumption that this world is a comforting, world that we all aspire to -- black, white, Latino, Chinese, Japanese it doesn't matter. That's where I think television's ideological function, to use that language, uh, really starts to show up. But it's hidden behind this notion that television's only there to entertain. Well, in its entertainment what it's doing is reinforcing, legitimating, normalizing that particular universe.

NARRATOR: By the late sixties, the myth of America as one big happy family was under concerted assault.

[MONTAGE: late 1960's news footage and entertainment shows]

I'm an educated American!

Find out what it's about.

I don't, I gotta find out what it's about?! I was in World War II fella, and I served three years!
I know what it's about!

[ALL IN THE FAMILY]

MIKE: It's in the Bill of Rights!

ARCHIE: From the mountains...

MIKE: Why do you think we broke away from England to begin with, huh?

ARCHIE: To the prairies, to the ocean white with foam!

MIKE: Because we didn't agree with them! We demanded freedom!

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE]

WOMAN: Because I have a son that's going to go into the army!

[ALL IN THE FAMILY]

ARCHIE: God Bless America -- you dumb Pollack!

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE]

They've got the nerve, to walk around here!

[ALL IN THE FAMILY]

MIKE: Not any more! I'm leaving! You're prejudiced!

ARCHIE: God Bless America ... Get away from me!
My home, sweet home ...

PAT TURNER: ALL IN THE FAMILY absolutely blew the lid off of these conventions of families, like the ones you would see on THE DONNA REED SHOW or THE BRADY BUNCH, or FATHER KNOWS BEST. You'd never hear those white male head of households saying anything disparaging about black people. But you certainly heard it from Archie Bunker.

[ALL IN THE FAMILY]

ARCHIE: Now listen little girl, been around a lot of places, I've done a lot of things ... But there's one thing Archie Bunker ain't never going to do, and that's break bread with no jungle bunnies!

NORMAN LEAR: When I started ALL IN THE FAMILY, one of the early accusations was, "What is this guy doing sending messages?" Or, "How dare he talk about these subjects or address these subjects?" And I remember very early thinking, my god they're talking about sending messages. What was the message in all of the television shows, especially the situation comedies, of the sixties?! The message was louder and clearer than anything I could do. It was there was no race, there were no race problems in America. There was no Vietnam! So I thought well, we're not saying that much at all.

[ALL IN THE FAMILY]

ARCHIE: That ain't the American way, Buddy! No sirree! Listen here, professor, you're the one that needs an American history lesson, you don't know anything about Lady Liberty, standing there in the harbor, with her torch on high! Screaming out to all the nations of the world, send me your poor, your deadbeats, your filthy. And all the nations sent them in here, they come swarming in like ants! The Spanish PRs, the Japs, your Chinamen, Krauts and Hebes. They all come in here! And they all agreed to live in their own separate sections! There they feel safe, and they'll bust your head if you go in there! That's what makes America great, Buddy!

PAT TURNER: I think that Norman Lear's programming represented the first step towards reality in depicting American households. And I think it's because the public was growing intolerant across the board, of these perfect families they were seeing on primetime television.

[MONTAGE: Footage of 1960's protests, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., The Black Panthers, Stokeley Carmichel, BEWITCHED and JULIA]

NARRATOR: Throughout most of television's history, the primetime family had been a sanctuary against social crises. Lear re-adjusted this picture. The TV family, as in real life, became a political battleground.

[ALL IN THE FAMILY, Busing news footage]

ARCHIE: The world is coming tumbling down! The coons are coming!

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: Boston bussing confrontation.]

ARCHIE: Well let's see how wonderful it is when the watermelon rinds come flying out the window!

NORMAN LEAR: My father was as racist as Archie Bunker in his own way. And I used to fight with him all the time. And I never thought that anybody in America would have a

problem with the kind of thing they lived with all the time.

[ALL IN THE FAMILY]

ARCHIE: I think that, I mean, if God had meant us to be together, he'd have put us together! Well, look what he done! He put you over in Africa, he put the rest of us in all the white countries!

SAMMY DAVIS, JR.: Well, you must have told him where we were, 'cause somebody came and got us!

NARRATOR: Ironically, this show broke one mold while reinforcing another: though social change and conflict were now shown to affect family life, through it all family bonds remained intact. With love, flexibility and, not least, humor, our troubles could be contained, even resolved, "all in the family."

[GOOD TIMES]

ESTHER ROLLE: When GOOD TIMES debuted, I was happy to do it! Because I had long wished to redeem the image of the domestic worker. I looked at the first script, I said, well, where is these children's father? Where's my husband? There is none. Oh no! It wasn't written for that, it was written for you and your three children. I said, then you find the actress who can do it. I'm sure there are some who can do it! I can't. Because I insisted, I got a husband.

[GOOD TIMES]

FLORIDA: James, how long have we been married?

JAMES: Getting towards 21 years now.

FLORIDA: That's right! And we have had a lot of arguments in them 21 years.

JAMES: Yeah, we havin' a pretty good one now.

NARRATOR: GOOD TIMES was the first primetime series to feature a black family with mother and father. In contrast to the "integrationist" shows of the 60's, GOOD TIMES was set in the heart of Chicago's black Southside community.

[GOOD TIMES]

JAMES: Honey, we are poor! If you was to make a list of all the things people want to be, poor would be right down at the bottom of the list! Above sick and dead!

HERMAN GRAY: I think with GOOD TIMES you get the attempt to basically replicate what you have in ALL IN THE FAMILY, but make it more relevant to what was going on in black communities across the country.

[MONTAGE: unemployment lines]

[GOOD TIMES]

FLORIDA: How much money we got in that shoe box?

JJ: About thirty-two dollars!

FLORIDA: About some seventy-two dollars short!

JJ: I got a hundred ways I can get thirty dollars!

FLORIDA: And I got a hundred ways to warm your butt if you do! I don't want you stealing James, Jr.!

JJ: I wouldn't do that mama! I may just find seventy dollars!

FLORIDA: Yeah! But I don't want you finding it before it gets lost! Now what's going through you, boy?

MICHAEL: Mama! Boy is a white, racist word!

FLORIDA: Michael, this ain't no time to be black!

HENRY GATES: GOOD TIMES represented the greatest potential and also in my opinion the greatest failure. It had the greatest potential because it was an inner city family that was nuclear ... that was solid!

[GOOD TIMES]

JAMES: What is it? Another eviction notice?

FLORIDA: Well it ain't no Valentine card!

JAMES: Oh baby! We got two of those while you was in the hospital! But my friend, Monte, who works down in the project? He said, "Don't worry about it!"

FLORIDA: That's the same Monte that said Nixon was going to be poor folks best friend!

HENRY GATES: They would talk about real world issues, and how an actual black family deals with those real world issues of racism and economic discrimination. But what happened?

[GOOD TIMES]

JJ: DYNAMITE!

HENRY GATES: They elevated J.J.'s role, which had been one of amusing and sometimes sophisticated comedy, to that of a buffoon!

NORMAN LEAR: The audience just loved it! But we erred by giving them too much, by not stopping sooner and giving and finding something else, to fill the, you know, what J.J. had to do to amuse an audience.

PAT TURNER: It was very easy for the producers of GOOD TIMES to fall back on the familiar way of making people laugh about blacks! Familiar way of giving them language that's too sophisticated, clothes that are ill-fitting, and a value system that puts pleasure at the top!

[MONTAGE: JJ INTERCUT WITH MINSTREL AND COON IMAGES]

HERMAN GRAY: His humor was tied to a long tradition of the kind of minstrel character. J.J.'s function in it, was essentially to deflate, to let off a lot of the build-up in the particular issues that the show tried to address. I mean I thought it was a very -- in retrospect, particularly -- a very clever use of a character to rob the show of

the kind of political bite that it might have.

[SANFORD & SON]

SANFORD: Oh! Oh, oh, oh-oh!

NARRATOR: By the mid-seventies, so-called "ghetto sitcoms" populated primetime, eagerly watched by us all.

[FURST FAMILY OF WASHINGTON]

MAN: Ticket-ticket-ticket! How 'bout some lucky numbers for today?

MAN: Whowee! If it was, what it was, then it was at the "Y".

HENRY GATES: On the one hand, many of us applauded these TV programs because at last, the quote unquote reality of the black experience, that is, the inner city life, was being represented. On the other hand, these programs were problematic, because they represented the hell holes of the ghetto as places where human beings could survive.

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: Ghettoes]

HENRY GATES: They made the ghetto palatable to the larger American society. Precisely when the social programs of the 1960's, such as the War on Poverty, and The Great Society, were ending, these programs were saying, let them end! Let them end, because the people are happy! They have good lives! They can survive there, and they can thrive!

[GOOD TIMES]

HENRY GATES: Any of the impetus for changing the American society, that could have come from showing these real world situations as abominable and unacceptable and intolerable was completely lost!

[SANFORD AND SON, WHAT'S HAPPENING]

HERMAN GRAY: You know, humor and comedy at least for black

Americans has always had this kind of double edge on it.

[FURST FAMILY OF WASHINGTON]

ONE MAN: Tough times, huh?

SECOND: Tough? Oh, man. Things is so bad at our house, that the rats just come in and boo!

NORMAN LEAR: I don't think there's any question that white America's uncomfortable with victimization or with however you want to term the black experience. That which makes you feel guilty, makes you uncomfortable.

NARRATOR: Could primetime break the mold of comedy and still comfort white America? By what formula, what alchemy, could television transform racial oppression and racial guilt into a drama of the American dream?

[ROOTS]

Show Opening

DAVID WOLPER: I felt that ROOTS didn't sound like a good idea with 90% of the country white, 10% of the country black, I'm going to do a 12 hour show where the whites are the villains and the blacks are the heroes? Does not sound like a very good idea when you first say it. But the thing that attracted me is ... was it showed a ... two things. Number one: it showed the power of an underdog overcoming enormous odds to succeed. Number two: it showed the power of family.

[ROOTS]

Baby crying.

DAVID WOLPER: I know that whites are going to be very uncomfortable seeing this program. I said I'm going to have to cast my blacks ... actors as comfortable as I can for the audience watching. I did not want to scare away my white audience before they got to see the program. I wanted to get them in to see the show. And if they thought they were going to see a show where they were going to be overpowered by the actor, you know, overpowering them in some social

message, you know, they may not watch the show!

HENRY GATES: Never had so many white viewers watched anything black in the history of television! That was amazing.

[ROOTS]

BELLE: Oh god, no! No, master! You can't sell Kizzy too! No, master, not my baby! My child! Oh, master, no! Not my child! Not my baby! Master!

MASTER: Belle!

BELLE: Master, beat her! Do anything you want to her! Anything! Master! Tear the skin off her worthless hide! She an awful nigger to do such a thing, master! Please master! In the name of Jesus, have mercy! Me and Toby, we give you our lives master. Master! Forty years, master! Forty years I've served you! Don't I ...

MASTER: Well you're doing a job! She disobeyed the rules. She has to suffer the consequences, that's all there is to it!

BELLE: Master, please! Please, master. I beg you! Please don't sell her! Please, master!

MASTER: She's already being sold.

TOBY: Oh, then, master, please sell me and Belle with her. But don't split up the family, master! You've never been that kind of man! Please master!

MASTER: Mr. Tom Moore owns Kizzy now. Mr. Odel will take her away then.

TOBY: Sir!

KIZZY: No! No! I don't want to go!

BELL: My baby!

KIZZY: Missy Anne, please, please, please ...

PAT TURNER: Lots of people I think can tell you about the aftermath of ROOTS in the work place or in the school!

About going to work or going to school after each night and episode and the kinds of conversations and dialogues that were opening up between black and white Americans for the first time in the aftermath of those episodes of the program. Very profound experience!

ALVIN POUSSAINT: There was something that gripped America about this story that Alex Haley wrote about a current black person tracing his history all the way over into Africa and going there and finding relatives. It was something like intriguing about that, almost fairy tale-ish.

[ROOTS]

FATHER: Kunta Kinte. Behold! The only thing greater than yourself!

FIDDLER: The first slave, you weren't always a slave. Before he's a slave, he a free man! In Africa! And he was called, Kunta Kinte. And Kunta Kinte had a daughter, Kizzy. And he taught her some words he brought from Africa ...

ALVIN POUSSAINT: It was something that in a way white Americans could identify with because so many of them are immigrants. You know, the title of the program wasn't the brutalities of slavery, I mean, it was ROOTS.

HENRY GATES: I think that part of the popularity of ROOTS was just, for just that reason! It showed black people being just like every other American immigrant group, uh, for the first time, to such a large audience.

DAVID WOLPER: ROOTS was a Horatio Alger story, that's correct! About the start of a family here and ending up here! And that's a good story. Positive stories are much more acceptable to audiences than negative stories are.

[ROOTS]

HERMAN GRAY: ROOTS was still an assimilation story, the way in which it was made palatable. And the way in which it was made a powerful story was to make it a family saga about movement into, into America. It didn't indict the American society. It was an indictment of bad people, it was an

indictment of certain forms of brutality. But in terms of the whole edifice of American political, social, cultural structure, it came away pretty unscathed.

[ROOTS]

MAN: We's here! This here, our land!

NARRATOR: We had finally found a place in mainstream America, less by changing society, as by patiently adapting to it. Television's profoundly conservative bias was again underscored: primetime had selectively reframed American history, transforming a national disgrace into an epic triumph of "The Family" and "The American Dream." Still, it seemed for many of us that ROOTS had, at last, delivered the "positive image" of black success we'd long dreamed of. But had we reached the promised land?

[TITLE CARD]

We're moving on up, to the Eastside!
We finally got a piece of the pie.

- The Jeffersons, Title song

HENRY GATES: If you took the argument implicit in black history about our images to its logical conclusion, the millennium would come when a refined Afro-American doctor and his wife, who let's say, hypothetically, was a partner in a Wall Street law firm, would have, and who would obviously, comfortable, very elegant, well-educated, who'd have lovely, perfect children, who would of course go off to college. If an image such as that can be projected, let's say into virtually every American home, the argument went historically, we as a people would be free!

[THE COSBY SHOW]

CLIFF: Hey, back from shopping. How was it?

THEO: Great! We only had one fight.

CLAIRE: It started the moment we left and it hasn't finished yet.

CLIFF: What happened?

CLAIRE: I took him to Bookman's and he wouldn't let me go in.

THEO: Dad, Bookman's is a mens wear store

CLIFF: Mens wear store. No mothers allowed.

ALVIN POUSSAINT: Before THE COSBY SHOW came on, the American public had been bombarded with negative images of the black family. When THE COSBY SHOW came on, and I know even Cosby's thinking that it was seen that the Huxtables, the family would be a good opportunity to project new images of black people in America! That ultimately might diminish attitudes of racism, rather than to support them.

[THE COSBY SHOW]

DENISE: Hi. You two look comfortable.

CLIFF: We are.

DENISE: Great, because I want to talk to you about something.

CLIFF: You can't borrow my car.

NARRATOR: From its premier, THE COSBY SHOW catapulted into America's top ten show. The triumphant saga of ROOTS continued -- in the Huxtables.

[THE COSBY SHOW]

THEO: But dad!

CLIFF: No 14 year old boy should have a \$95 shirt unless he's on stage with his four brothers.

NARRATOR: In part the show's success was its image of success, an image perfectly attuned to the politics of post-Civil Rights America.

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE]

REAGAN: Economic recovery, rededication to values, also the spirit of renewal, gaining the upper hand. All will improve family life in the eight-

ies. We need to replace a welfare system that destroys economic independence and the family, with one that creates incentives for recipients to move up and out of dependency.

HERMAN GRAY: The Reagan ideology was predominantly that if you open up access to corporations to make money, then the opportunity structure opens up. Well, we see that didn't happen!

[NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: Unemployment and poverty]

HERMAN GRAY: We've got this incredible polarization of rich and poor. And black people converged around the poverty end of that. And I think that, to have then a show that mediates between that polarization, we come away with the sense in which, "Well, the society's fine! I mean there's no problem! You just have to work hard. You just have to have the right values, the right kinds of desires and aspirations, and it'll be alright!"

[THE COSBY SHOW]

VANESSA: None of this would have happened if you weren't so rich!

CLIFF: Let me get something straight. Okay? Your mother and I are rich? You have nothing.

CLAIR: Your father and I are not rich!

CLIFF: We're not?

CLAIR: No, honey, you know that! Rich is when your money works for you, not when you work for the money! And we work hard for money!

NARRATOR: In many ways the Huxtable family favored primetime families of Old. The television family was a mythic sanctuary, a shield against social crisis within the worsening polarization of 1980's America. This dream of the happy, harmonious, successful, black family, held a powerful seduction.

HENRY GATES: Cosby represents everyone's fantasies. Everyone wants to life that life.

PAT TURNER: Cosby's very appealing to black audiences because it does posit a dream. Cosby's very appealing to white audiences because it reinforces the notion that the Civil Rights Movement took care of all of the racial inequities of the society. And most successful shows depicting the African American experience in America, are shows like Cosby, that reaffirm the American dream, and hardcore, middle class values. Where you work hard, you are rewarded with good-looking children, good-looking wives, nice cars, nice households, and that image is the one that's perpetuated. Anything that digresses from that norm is suspect! And will probably not be granted tenure on primetime television. As evidenced in a program like FRANK'S PLACE.

[FRANK'S PLACE]

Show Opening.

HENRY GATES: For many people FRANK'S PLACE was the best television program involving black people that there's ever been! FRANK'S PLACE showed a broader range of types, than any other black television program that I can remember! But it was killed by the ratings.

DAPHNE REID: They didn't know how to handle it, and they supposedly couldn't schedule it with anything. Whatever they scheduled it with, there was a problem. It didn't relate to anything else they had on the schedule. So they moved it! Six times! The audience couldn't find the show. My mother couldn't find the show half the time.

TIM REID: We looked for the unusual whenever we did the show. It caught constant flack! They didn't want us to do it! They kept wanting us to be funny! Now if we had been funnier, it'd probably still be on the air. They really want you to be colorless, they want you not to bring your race with you!

[FRANK'S PLACE]

WAITRESS: You shouldn't be off gallivanting with a bunch of snobs, laughing at him behind his back because he's colored! You ought to be just here, like us!

FRANK: I'm colored? What do you mean I'm col-

ored? I haven't heard that word in twenty years?

WAITRESS: It's nothing, Frank.

FRANK: No, I want to know!

WAITRESS: See this bag?

FRANK: Yeah!

WAITRESS: Which is darker? Me or the bag?

FRANK: You!

WAITRESS: Which is darker? You or the bag?

FRANK: What are you talking about?

WAITRESS: The Capital C Club? In the old days Frank, if you were a light-skinned black, you were a Creole. They spell Creole with a capital C. If you were dark-skinned, it was creole with a little C, and there was a big difference between the two.

WAITER: Skin color used to be the big separation in New Orleans, Frank.

WAITRESS: Still is. They just ain't ... as out and open about it.

FRANK: Well, why would Ozel Dry have me there?

FRANK: So what was I going to be? The first darkie in the Capital C Club?

OZEL: Oh, man look I am sorry! I should have been more up front with you about this. There's a group of us in the Club that are trying to change things!

FRANK: And I'm the guinea pig?

OZEL: Well sort of! See! You got all the credentials to put an end to this whole color thing. You-you're ...

FRANK: Ozel, let me cut to the chase here, okay? All my life I've been, quote, "the only black." The only black in this class. I was the only black in that organization. I was the only black on this team. Look man, I'm not about to be the

only black in a black club. I think that's going too far, don't you think?

HENRY GATES: FRANK'S PLACE was too real for Americans. I mean it was the closest thing to the reality that I have experienced growing up and that I experience now as a person of color in American society, that I have encountered on television. And I don't think that the average white American is prepared to encounter the full complexity of that reality. They want to encounter fictions of that reality, which are palatable to them.

[MONTAGE: WEBSTER, GIMME A BREAK, FRANK'S PLACE, DIFF'RENT STROKES]

TIM REID: They are comfortable with that! With that kind of fantasy. They are very uncomfortable with FRANK'S PLACE. And I understand that! And I'm not saying that that's the worse thing in the world! It's just that I am comfortable with my people! I'm comfortable with my background. I want to see my story told.

NARRATOR: By the end of the 1980's, television had been in American homes just over 40 years: the status of black Americans had remarkably improved.

[ALL IN THE FAMILY]

GLORIA: You've never told us how you feel about black people.

EDITH: You sure have to hand it to them. I mean two years ago they were nothing but servants and janitors. Now their teachers and doctors and lawyers. They've come a long way on TV.

NARRATOR: African Americans continue to succeed -- in primetime. But what of the historic dream that new, "positive" images would help improve America's race relations?

HENRY GATES: I don't think that you can change 300 years of history, 300 years of exploitation of black people by white people in the west, that you can change hundreds of years of representation of black people in stereotypical roles just by having a prominent black man in a situation comedy. It's

not going to work that way. Images are one part of a larger formula of social behavior and you can't give to them all of this importance, that they will free us if we control them. They do not have enough autonomy to liberate us.

NARRATOR: Still, if TV cannot liberate us, it continues to mold how we are seen and defined.

STEPHEN BOCHCO: There are times when I look at this medium and think boy whether we like it or not, whether any of us likes it or not, it is arguably the most powerful communications medium in the history of the world. And there is no corner of this earth that doesn't access this drivel that we put out, by and large. And whether its in the deepest, densest, urban ghetto in America, or whether its in some outpost of the furthest reaches of India or Africa or South America, you know they are seeing episodes of, I don't know, THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES, or HILL STREET BLUES, or LA LAW. My god, whether you like it or not, you're representing your country. And what are you saying about it? And do you have a responsibility to represent everything about it? I don't know, I don't know the answer to that.

ESTHER ROLLE: One while, they said we can only sing and dance. Then when we left singing and dancing, they said we could only be comics. But there's room for the singer. There's room for the dancer. There's room for the comic. There's room for the serious dramatic actor. There's room... what makes you think a whole race of people have to be alike, and how dumb and uninteresting we would be.

HENRY GATES: What we get, is the continuing press towards an imaginary middle. And part of my critique is of that imaginary middle, whether it's a class middle, whether it's a racial norm, whether it's some idealized aspiration of what the good life is. I think that what we need are more complicated ways of imagining ourselves in the world, that are truer to what people know and what people's imaginations are about. And that those things are inflected by difference. And that what we need to do is begin to illuminate that difference, not so that people are divided and can't have access to each other, but so that we understand the ways in which inequality get perpetuated and operates. But also so that we learn more about each other and more about ourselves. And I think that TV simply hasn't done that.

[TITLE CARD]

What television does is routinely transform bitter conflict, into sweet, satisfying confection.

- TV critic

[TV COMMERCIALS: 5th Dimension advertising ice-cream, 80's black commercials]

NARRATOR: African Americans have claimed a high profile in this commerce of pop culture. But what have we bought and what have we traded? Have we exchanged the myths of pre-television America for new fictions just as confining? For impossibly rigid, homogenized fictions of The Family and The American Dream? And if this is the price of the ticket to acceptance, is it worth paying? Is this dream worth keeping alive?

[TITLE CARD]

All roles are dangerous. The world tends to trap you in the role you play and it's always extremely hard to maintain a watchful mocking distance between oneself as one appears to be and oneself as one actually is.

- James Baldwin