

Sunshine lives in
black and white



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Sunshine Lives in Black and White Your School Sunshine Lives in Black and White When television first arrived en masse to American households, the family often gathered around the set to watch the news and a few variety shows. The novelty of television was what made it entertaining. As the media advanced, situational comedies and dramas, most adapted from the previous form of family entertainment, the radio, joined the news shows and variety shows. The 21st century idea of television reflecting the lives of the viewers was foreign to those involved in its early years. Instead, the programming of those early years of television, specifically the 1960s, reflected an idealized view of what American life should be. But, despite being idealized, the reality television presented was beneficial for the viewer when compared with modern television. The simple innocence, balance, and logic of the 1960s programming provided a safe outlook on life for family and children.

The quintessential 1960s television sitcom was *The Andy Griffith Show*. The antics of the small town sheriff, his bumbling deputy, and the sheriff's small son form the core of the show. The innocence of the show comes largely from the small town setting. Though Andy Griffith is a sheriff, crime is relatively rare. The most frequent criminal is the town drunk, Otis. The biggest event to threaten the innocence of the town is when a nail salon opened and some of the men in town begin getting manicures. In contrast, 21st century television has taken the small town setting and removed all innocence. Modern shows involving small towns are often investigations of the evil that lives beneath the surface of small town life. A perfect example of this type of show is *Desperate Housewives*. Though innocence seems to permeate the suburban setting of the show, it is all a cover for the murder of

a mother in the community. Everything is innocent on the outside, but corruption runs to the core.

In *The Andy Griffith Show*, the view of reality presented is one of balance. Andy balances his job as a sheriff with his role raising his son as a widowed father. Aunt Bea balances her role as substitute mother to Opie with her role as maternal support to Andy. Modern television lacks this balance. In these modern programs, the characters are often extreme caricatures. Take *Homer Simpson* for instance. The patriarch of *The Simpsons* does not balance his role as town clown with any other responsibilities. He is father to three small children but largely shirks his responsibilities to them in favor of being the butt of many jokes.

Lastly, the logic of 1960s television as exemplified by *The Andy Griffith* is simpler than that of modern television shows. The logic is simply to do what is right. When confronted with a dilemma, Andy always does what is morally right. There is no grey area. Modern shows very rarely follow this type of logic. The characters live entirely in a world of grey. The answer to a dilemma is often what would benefit self the most. *Dexter*, a series on Showtime in which a serial killer works for a police department killing those criminals who slip through the cracks of the justice system, walks a very morally ambiguous line. The audience does not want the character Dexter to get caught killing because he is murdering those who are evil. But, he is as evil as they are. This type of morality typifies modern television.

The television of the 20th century is arguably more entertaining for the viewer. But, this entertainment does not necessarily benefit the viewer. Yes, he is entertained. But, is it worth a loss of innocence and an ambiguous sense of morality?