

The picture people
have of the 1950's is
largely a product of
television shows su...



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TV and the 1950s The 1950s was an important decade in the history of our nation since it was a time for rebuilding all that the world had lost during the ravages of the Second World War. However, despite the image of happy shiny families which is presented in shows such as I Love Lucy and Leave it to Beaver, the reality of the situation was quite different. Since there are few individuals left who can actually recall the shape of society in those times, we are left with historical evidence and sociological data which gives us a view of how society really was in those times.

The 50s were also the times when the nation was introduced to television en masse but it was also a time of high mortgage rates, development of suburbs, and a closer concept of a family (Socha, 1996). In such times, TV acted as a family medium with primetime programming which appealed to families of the time. While some TV families were portrayed as living in cities and small towns, others were portrayed as living in rural areas but it was more a touch of nostalgia rather than the factual representation of the American family. The ethnic makeup of the television family was almost always European immigrants rather than black, Hispanic or Asian while it was certainly a time when immigration from the lesser developed countries of the world to America began in earnest.

The image of the family on TV in the 1950s was also important for political reasons since the influence of the media on juvenile delinquency and other social problems had been discussed in Congress. The media certainly had to play its part in promoting the ideas of strong family values and connections between individuals in a family rather than represent what was actually happening in a society that was just coming to terms with the losses it had

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suffered in the war and the economic boom it had experienced during the war years.

While discussing the position on family life shown on TV in the 1950s, Spigel (2007) reports that, “ Programs such as The Donna Reed Show, Leave it to Beaver, and Father Knows Best presented idealized versions of white middle-class families in suburban communities (Spigel, 2007, Pg. 1)”. Therefore, if we watch the same shows today, we do not get an accurate representation of how society functioned and how family dynamics worked in the 1950s.

What we do get is a vision of the producers and directors of the same shows for how they think society should have functioned. Even through the 60s, the idea of being divorced was not acceptable to be presented on TV and family shows where a single parent was leading the household had to explain the absence of a parent with death. Undoubtedly, the society of the time was facing the issue of increasing divorce rates and other social issues which are still present today. However, the pictures we have on TV that show us what the society of the time was like are certainly inaccurate and often quite wishful.

Works Cited

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