**Video Script**

**Lecture 23: 60s TV and Social Change, Pt. 1**

**Fall 2020**

**Welcome**

Hello everyone! We’ve made it to the swinging sixties.

**Key Concepts**

Here are your key concepts for this lecture.

**Donna Reed**

Let’s start here, with a show that we didn’t watch, but one that you might have heard of or seen parodied or mocked by more recent shows. If we think back to what we learned over the last couple of weeks, there is no more quintessentially 1950s media than *The Donna Reed Show*. This was a very light domestic comedy, much like *Father Knows Best*, and it was famous for the mom, Donna, vacuuming and preparing meals in full makeup, a puffy skirt, heels, and pearls.

This show and these televised images of idealized families don’t reflect the reality of 1950s life—which is always more diverse and more complicated than TV will admit—but this is the image the nation is trying to project of itself. We are middle-class, white, suburban, thriving consumers; we love to go to the store and buy all the wonderful products we see on television, and fill our detached suburban homes with wonderful new stuff. Mom’s a homemaker, dad’s the breadwinner, our kids are these chipper examples of humanity.

*The Donna Reed Show* debuts toward the end of the 1950s, but keep this image in your mind as our starting point. It’s hard to express *how profoundly* social movements reshaped U.S. culture in the 1960s. Let’s see how far we get from *Donna Reed* with just a few images of change in the ensuing decade.

**Jackie O.**

In 1963, President John F. Kennedy is assassinated, an event of national mourning and upset.

**MLK & Coretta Scott King**

Across the era, civil rights protesters demand racial equity. This is an image from the Selma to Montgomery march in 1965, but Black protestors across the decade used sit-ins, boycotts, and other methods, building on decades of earlier Black activism. We’re going to talk more in the next lecture about how nonfiction television media like the news covers anti-racist protests, but for now, just think about how this movement is pressing for social change.

**Counterculture**

There’s a youth movement known as the counterculture that grows throughout the 1960s, and with it comes new values, new aesthetics, new art, new social and cultural practices, and new ways of living. It may have hit its height during the so-called Summer of Love in 1967—and here’s a photo of the Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco that sort of exemplifies that hippie spirit—but their impact on U.S. culture continues to reverberate throughout the 60s and on for many years after.

**Vietnam**

That youth movement was powered by and connected to anti-war protests of the 1960s. Here, you see a photo of the enormous March on Washington in October of 1967, when more than a hundred thousand people came to the National Mall to protest the Vietnam War.

**Freedom Trash Can**

Second Wave feminism is usually associated more with the 1970s, but it gets its start in the 1960s, and it rejects everything Donna Reed stood for. Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* is published in the early part of the decade; it’s an influential book that decries the isolation and sadness of the housewife. And protests outside the 1968 Miss America pageant in Atlantic City reject the objectification of women by the media.

Incidentally, this is where rumors about feminists burning their bras started. The women had a “freedom trash can” where women were encouraged to throw in things like girdles, heels, and other uncomfortable trappings of feminine presentation. However, they weren’t allowed to light it on fire. So, no bras were actually harmed in the making of this protest, despite the rumor.

**Gay rights**

The gay rights movement exploded after police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City, in June of 1969. Here, you see Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, two trans women of color who led the fight for queer rights that night at the Stonewall, and for many years after.

**Woodstock**

And while some people might think of Woodstock as the defining image of the 1960s—you know, peace, love, hippies, and music…

**Altamont**

…it’s important to remember that the decade actually came to a close here, at Altamont, in December 1969. This was a West Coast rock festival that ended in tragedy, when Hells Angels murdered a young Black concertgoer.

So, the 1960s is a decade that takes us from Donna Reed through the rise *and collapse* of a utopian youth movement, with countless revolutions in between.

**Newton**

So, for the purposes of this class, we need to understand how all of this roiling social change is reflected *in* the media of the era, and how it *changes* the media of the era.

**[ANIMATION]** So remember, the 1960s are the time of ol’ Newton Minow’s wasteland, right? **[ANIMATION]** Shows like *Gilligan’s Island*  or *The Beverly Hillbillies* are what’s on the air.

**Quote**

So, **[ANIMATION]** today’s lecture is going to address how these mainstream, or lowest common denominator, entertainment programs begin to address the revolutionary social change of the 1960s. How do all of these different movements, protests, and revolutions, and all of their attendant beliefs, begin to creep into shows that were designed to please everyone, *not* push the envelope?

I’ve got four examples for you.

**Star Trek**

The first is *Star Trek*, which began in 1966 and only runs until 1969 in this, the first incarnation of the franchise.

**Quote**

And this was its mission: exploration, peacekeeping, and contact with others. That’s sort of the spirit of the whole show. Its creator, Gene Roddenberry, had a very specific vision of the future, and that vision sort of functions as a response to the civil rights movement.

**Sulu**

The fictional crew of the starship Enterprise was racially integrated. Rodenberry had this vision that in the future we would be open, and tolerant. It made sense to him that hundreds of years in the future, we would live in a world where people of different races and different genders worked side by side.

Here is national treasure George Takei as Lt. Sulu—and while this doesn’t specifically have to do with the 1960s, Takei is generally a fascinating person. In the years after *Star Trek* he became an out, gay icon, and he also spoke about his experience as a boy in a Japanese internment camp here in the United States.

**Spock**

Here is Spock, who’s played by Leonard Nimoy—who *is* a white actor. But the character of Spock is half human and half Vulcan, a kind of alien in the *Star Trek* universe. Symbolically, Spock becomes this bi-racial character. The show couches this symbolism in science-fiction—so, it’s not an overt message about race. But several episodes (including the one you will watch for this week) depict Spock navigating between two cultures and two parts of his identity.

**Nichelle Nichols**

And I want to dwell here for a moment with Nichelle Nichols, who played communications officer Lt. Uhura. In 1966, when the show premiered, a little over 3% of speaking roles in primetime television shows went to Black actors, and it was even worse in ads—only .65% of speaking roles in commercials were given to Black performers. There was virtually no representation of Black women in professional roles.

Because of this absolute dearth of representation for Black women, Nichols saw playing Uhura as more than just an acting gig. She did not take lightly the chance to embody this professional woman of the future, even though she was predominantly a theater actress and her passion lay outside science fiction television. She was thinking of leaving the show to go take a starring role on Broadway, and that’s where the interview I’ve asked you to watch picks up. There’s a very moving reason why she ends up staying with *Star Trek* through its whole run.

**Kiss**

Nichols is famous for a 1968 episode of the show called “Plato’s Stepchildren,” which includes the first romantic interracial kiss on American television between Uhura and Captain Kirk, played by William Shatner.

Nichols wrote about this event in her autobiography. She said that **[ANIMATION]** *“…[the episode] received a huge response. We received one of the largest batches of fan mail ever, all of it very positive, with many addressed to me from girls wondering how it felt to kiss Captain Kirk, and many to him from guys wondering the same thing about me. However, almost no one found the kiss offensive" except from a single, mildly negative letter from one white Southerner who wrote: "I am totally opposed to the mixing of the races. However, any time a red-blooded American boy like Captain Kirk gets a beautiful dame in his arms that looks like Uhura, he ain't gonna fight it."*

***Star Trek* images**

Now, let’s be honest: *Star Trek* wasn’t perfect. *Star Trek* included a species of alien, the Orion women, who were basically just green burlesque dancers. Captain Kirk seduced his sweaty way across the Universe.

**Uniforms**

The women in the future wear extremely tiny skirts and gogo boots while the men get sensible athleisure. Uhura is often presented as the telephone operator of the Enterprise rather than an equal to her male colleagues. All of this is true. But if we are looking for ways that the ethics of the civil rights movement were beginning to shift mainstream television shows, it’s visible—if limited—when you look at *Star Trek’s* integrated and somewhat egalitarian vision of the future.

**Bewitched**

Our second example of how mainstream shows incorporated civil rights discourse is *Bewitched*, which ran from 1964 to 1972. And this show is a domestic comedy not unlike those of the 1950s, however, the twist is that Samantha, the wife, is a witch. This tilts the scales of power in the idealized mid-century suburban home. Samantha has virtually limitless power, so she’s technically the one in control, but that power is still subject to the gender ideology of the era. If she was really so powerful, why not just zap her ding dong of a husband to the moon when he brings his boss home for dinner unannounced?

So, this is an interesting example of how civil rights discourse begins to bleed into mainstream television because it does so in some really weird ways. We’re going to take a quick look at two episodes.

**The Witches Are Out**

The first is a 1964 episode called *The Witches Are Out*, in which Samantha hates Halloween because it gives people a terrible image of what witches are. They aren’t all old child-eating crones with warty noses. Her aforementioned ding dong of a husband, Darren, is an ad guy and he’s working on this Halloween candy account. His client wants him to use an ugly witch in the ad campaign, and Samantha is livid. They get in this fight that’s sort of a coded way of talking about race and representation.

**[ANIMATION]** She says: “You of all people, you should know better! That’s the kind of thing we’re trying to fight. That picture. It’s offensive. Is that how you think I look?” Darren rolls his eyes at this, saying that since most people don’t even believe in witches so it’s okay to discriminate against them.

**[ANIMATION]** She continues to argue: “How would you like it if you were always being represented as something different?” after which she calls him flat-out prejudiced, even bigoted.

**[ANIMATION]** Darren responds, "If I were prejudiced, I wouldn't've married you would I?"

**Protest Sign**

So, Darren eventually relents and uses a modern-looking witch in the ad, but he’s fired for doing so. In response, Samantha and her witch friends invade the candy guy’s dreams, turning him into an ugly witch as revenge, and then staging a protest where they hold up signs like this, that say “Witches are people too!”

Not unlike the example of Spock, what you see here is a white actor written in such a way that she has to negotiate multiple identities that are treated by the show in a racialized way. On this *Bewitched* episode, you even see them incorporate the language of prejudice and symbols of anti-racist protest. So again—the civil rights movement bleeds into the show, but here it’s treated completely metaphorically. And I think you can make compelling arguments that this might advance the cause to audiences otherwise unwilling to entertain the idea of racial equity, but also dilutes that cause by freeing it of any sign of Blackness.

**Sisters at Heart**

A 1970 episode of *Bewitched* discusses racial equality more explicitly, and that’s because it wasn’t just written by the regular writing staff. Marcella Saunders, a 23-year-old teacher at a predominantly Black high school found that her students were struggling with literacy. They don’t like to read because they’ve been underserved by their educators, but they do love storytelling in the form of television. So, she reaches out to every show her students watch to see if they could arrange some kind of visit or project with her students, and *Bewitched* is the only show that responds. They pay to have the class come visit the studio and this group of 10th grade English students writes the story for this episode, called *Sisters at Heart.*

The story involves Tabitha, the little baby witch of the family, and her non-witchy friend, who is Black. The girls love each other so much they want to be sisters, so Tabitha keeps changing their skin color. Throughout the course of the episode, an explicitly racist character comes to see the error of his ways.

Now. By current standards, how progressive is this? It definitely skirts the line of blackface, and it’s also a very sentimental, pat treatment of racism and inequality. As an artifact of its era, though, it’s an interesting experiment in what kinds of stories Black students wanted their shows to tell.

**Twilight Zone**

Our third example is one of my *all time* favorite shows, *The Twilight Zone*, which ran from 1959 to 1964. So, we’re not going chronologically—this was on the air a little bit earlier than the other shows we’ve talked about so far. The show was only a moderate success at the time, despite it being one of Newton Minow’s favorites. It was cancelled three times!

If you’ve never seen the show before, many of the episodes kind of walk the line between science-fiction and horror, and if anything it’s famous for having a *twist* in many of the episodes—like, something you didn’t see coming. Most of the episodes also have a strong moral, or a lesson you should learn.

This show doesn’t so much reflect civil rights discourse as it does critique the dominant social and political climate of the era.

1. It critiques the danger of the Cold War by problematizing space and the space race.
2. It critiques the paranoia of Cold War-era fearmongering about Communists in the U.S.
3. It critiques the supposed perfection of those 1950s suburbs.

**Cold War**

So, just to take a quick detour…what was the Cold War, again? Well, it was an era of tension between the US and the USSR that manifested geopolitically in the forms of a nuclear arms race, the space race, military standoffs, and so forth.

It also had a cultural impact within the United States in the form of increased paranoia about Communists. Communists, according to Senator Joseph McCarthy, could be *anywhere*. They could be *everywhere*. A mania for naming and rooting out suspected Communists wherever they may be, including in Hollywood, came to be known as *McCarthyism*.

**Rod Serling**

So, Rod Serling is the brains behind *The Twilight Zone* and the pen behind its most full-throated critiques of Cold War politics. Serling graduated from high school during WWII and became a military paratrooper. He was stationed in the Philippines and in Japan and saw lots and lots of death during his time there. He had flashbacks and nightmares about the war for the rest of his life. You can see this in his writing, which often dwells on themes like the arbitrariness of life and death, and memory, and hate, and trauma.

He began working in radio when he was at Antioch College on the GI bill, and he moved to television during the golden age of TV dramas in the 1950s. He was a prolific teleplay writer and also a vocal critic of sponsor control and censorship of programs by advertisers. Talking about a political drama he wrote for *Studio One*, he said **[ANIMATION]** *"I was not permitted to have my senators discuss any current or pressing problem. To talk of tariff was to align oneself with the Republicans; to talk of labor was to suggest control by the Democrats. To say a single thing germane to the current political scene was absolutely prohibited."*

It was because of his beliefs about censorship that he maintained the strictest of creative control over *The Twilight Zone*. He writes 92 of the 156 episodes himself over five years and finds that, through allegory and genre, he has a clear path to comment on the ills of Cold War politics and paranoia—and your reading for this lecture addresses this.

Let’s look at a couple of themes.

**Invaders**

This is a still from the 1961 episode “The Invaders,” which you’ll watch for this week’s screening. This and other episodes like it ask what it means for us to go to space—to compete so voraciously with other countries to do so, and to become not just Americans, but Earthlings, we leave the planet. Serling uses stories of space, told from different perspectives, to make us think about what it meant to be human, and how we should behave. You’ll see that in “The Invaders,” which I also love because it has virtually no dialog. You’ll see some of the legacy of silent film in this show.

**Who can you trust?**

In the early 1960s, Hollywood was still working through the blacklists of the 1950s—when prominent industry figures were accused of being Communist sympathizers and then exiled from the business. And paranoia among regular people of some political orientations about the spread of Communism was still a compelling social force, particularly as the tensions that led to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 heightened.

*The Twilight Zone* comments on these social conditions by dramatizing over and over again the story of us vs. them. How do we know you’re one of us? And how do we protect ourselves if you’re not. Episodes like “Will the Real Martian Please Stand Up?” in 1962 both tell the story of us vs. them *and* interrogate the impulse to mistrust everyone you see.

In this episode, a bus gets stuck in a storm and the passengers have to figure out why there are more people getting off the bus at this little diner than got on. Weird occurrences happen. Who is the infiltrator? And *why?*

**Suburbs**

Finally, instead of depicting the suburbs as this idyllic place seen on shows like *Father Knows Best*, you know, Eden with a split-level ranch, the suburbs of *The Twilight Zone* are often the site of fear, alienation, phoniness, anger, prejudice, and suspicion.

In “Stopover in a Quiet Town,” the couple seen here wakes up from a hangover in a town where they seem to be the only residents. They realize throughout the course of the episode that literally everything around them is fabricated—it’s fake.

**Beatlemania**

Our final example isn’t exactly like the other ones, because I’m talking about a fan movement, not a *show*. But the rapturous, full-bodied fandom of teen girls wild for the Beatles was put on full display on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1964—which was just about as mainstream a show as you could get—and their screaming and writhing and crying helped hint at the changing gender politics of the 1960s.

**Ed Sullivan**

So, more than 73 million Americans tuned in to watch the Beatles make their stateside television debut on Ed Sullivan in 1964. Commenters and journalists of the time had already been describing Beatles’ concerts as “orgiastic” because they were full of young women shrieking and drooling and fainting and sweating and throwing their bodies at these young men.

**[ANIMATION]** Writer Barbara Erenreich and some others looked back at Beatlemania and saw it not quite as an organized protest movement, but still the “first mass outburst of the ‘60s to feature women—in this case girls, who would not reach full adulthood until the ‘70s—and the emergence of a genuinely political movement for women’s liberation.” So, it wasn’t a protest per se, but through their expressive Beatles fandom, women and girls got to slip the handcuffs of mid-century gender ideologies.

**Quote 2**

The quote continues: “The screaming 10-to-14-year-old fans of 1964 did not riot for anything, except the chance to remain in the proximity of their idols and hence to remain screaming. But they did have plenty to riot against, or at least to overcome through the act of rioting: …teen and preteen girls were expected to be not only ‘good’ and ‘pure’ but to be the enforcers of purity within their teen society—drawing the line for overeager boys and ostracizing girls who failed in this responsibility.

**Quote 3**

“To abandon control—to scream, faint, dash about in mobs—was, in form if not in conscious intent, to protest the sexual repressiveness, the rigid double standard of female teen culture. It was the first and most dramatic uprising of women’s sexual revolution.”

What this means is that being a Beatles fan gave girls and young women the momentary right to express sexual desire and inhabit their bodies in ways that were normally unacceptable or unladylike—and on February 9, 1964, they brought all that unbridled sexual energy to the set of the most middle-of-the-road family variety show you could get.

So, from *Star Trek* to *Ed Sullivan*, we do not see an overt discussion of changing social norms. And yet, in oblique and coded ways, even these lowest common denominator shows began to whisper to its audience about what was happening in the streets.