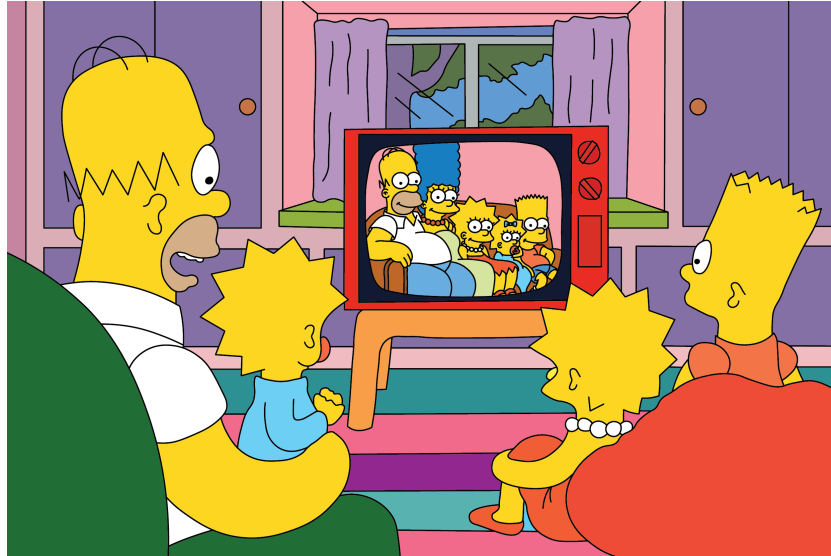


## **YAAXXXX: TV Sitcom**

Seminar discussion: Xday and Xday, X time, X location

Professor: Ila Tyagi (ila.tyagi@yale-nus.edu.sg)

Office hours: tyagi.youcanbook.me



## **Overview**

This is a course on American television history, with a special focus on the sitcom genre. The first three weeks begin with broad questions such as “what is TV?” and “what is sitcom?,” as well as providing you with some experience writing an original sitcom script. From Week 4 to Week 9, we examine the evolution of the American sitcom from its origins in the 1940s up to the 1990s. We close read individual episodes of multiple TV genres, ranging from sitcoms to cooking shows to soap operas, paying particular attention to such themes as gender, race, postmodernism, and war. Toward the end of the semester, we will consider how the sitcom genre has traveled beyond U.S. borders to other countries, and dwell on how recent technological developments like the rise of streaming might shape the future of television.

## **Requirements**

- 1) Essay 1 (30%): A 3,000-word “theory” paper due by 11:59pm on Sunday, 20 February by email to me. This paper applies at least one media theorist to a television show produced within your lifetime.
- 2) Essay 2 (30%): A 3,000-word “history” paper due by 11:59pm on Sunday, 17 April by email to me. This is a research paper integrating primary sources on any aspect of television dating from prior to your lifetime.

3) Research presentation (20%): A 10-minute oral presentation in class, either during Week 12 or Week 13, on your Essay 2 topic.

4) Class participation (20%): This includes attending class having done the readings and watched the assigned videos or episodes, speaking regularly during each seminar discussion, as well as attending office hours at least once during the semester. All the readings are available on Canvas as PDFs. You will need Netflix access for this course.

## **Policies**

Students are allowed up to two seminar absences unexcused by an AD note or MC during the semester. Each subsequent absence unexcused by an AD note or MC will result in the final course grade dropping by one level (A to A–, A– to B+, etc.).

Papers that are turned in late will result in their grade dropping by one level, unless an extension has been granted beforehand.

Final course grades will be based on the following scale: A (100–95%), A– (94–90%), B+ (89–85%), B (84–80%), B– (79–75%), C+ (74–70%), etc.

## **Readings**

### **Week 1**

#### **What is TV?**

Xday, XX January

*No readings.*

Xday, XX January

Gary R. Edgerton, “A Dream in the Making,” in *The Columbia History of American Television*, pages 16–37.

To watch:

Prelinger Archives, “Television Commercials (1950s–1960s),” available at [archive.org/details/Televisi1960](http://archive.org/details/Televisi1960).

### **Week 2**

#### **What is Sitcom?**

Xday, XX January

To watch:

i-D, “Obsessed: The Chinese Friends,” available on YouTube.

To read:

David Crane and Marta Kauffman, *Friends* pilot script, NBC, 3 March 1994.

Xday, XX January

David Marc, “Origins of the Genre: In Search of the Radio Sitcom,” in *The Sitcom Reader: American Viewed and Skewed*, pages 15–24.

Brett Mills, “Genre,” in *The Sitcom*, 24–49.

### **Week 3**

#### **Producing a Sitcom**

Xday, XX January

To watch:

Vox, “Why So Many Sitcoms Look the Same,” available on YouTube.

To read:

Noah Charney, “Cracking the Sitcom Code,” *Atlantic*, 28 December 2014.

Xday, XX January

*No readings.*

### **Week 4**

#### **Radio Origins in the 1940s**

Xday, XX February

*Day off for Chinese New Year?*

Xday, XX February

To listen:

David Von Pein’s Old-Time Radio Channel, “My Favorite Husband—The First Show (7-23-48),” available on YouTube.

David Von Pein’s Old-Time Radio Channel, “Amos & Andy—‘The Broken Clock’ (3-17-44),” available on YouTube.

To watch:

E. M. Mihal, “1952, ‘The Amos and Andy Show’ in The Broken Clock,” available on

YouTube.

ampopfilms, “Amos & Andy: Anatomy of a Controversy (1983),” available on YouTube.

## **Week 5**

### **Family and Food in the 1950s**

Xday, XX February

To watch:

Shout! Factory, “Father Knows Best: Bud Takes Up The Dance | Season 1 Episode 1,” available on YouTube.

William Berrin, “Make Room for Daddy, Season 3, Episode 26, ‘Don’t Yell at Your Children’ (1956),” available on YouTube.

Throwback, “The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet—The Rivals (1952),” available on YouTube.

M P, “Leave It To Beaver S02E13 Happy Weekend,” available on YouTube.

Cheddar, “Why Sitcoms Stopped Using Laugh Tracks,” available on YouTube.

Xday, XX February

To watch:

Cheddar, “The Rise and Fall of the TV Dinner,” available on YouTube.

TheVladbocean, “Julia Child The French Chef— Your Own French Onion Soup,” available on YouTube.

Saturday Night Live, “The French Chef—SNL,” available on YouTube.

To listen:

Gastropod podcast, “TV Dinners,” 2 February 2021, available on Gastropod.com.

## **Week 6**

### **Fantasy in the 1960s**

Xday, XX February

*Readings pending.*

Xday, XX February

*Readings pending.*

*\*ESSAY 1 DUE SUNDAY, 20 FEBRUARY BY 11:59PM\**

## **RECESS WEEK**

### **Week 7**

#### **Topicality in the 1970s**

Xday, XX March

To read:

Josh Ozersky, “‘The Church of What’s Happening Now’: The Great Shift, 1970–1972,” in *Archie Bunker’s America: TV in an Era of Change, 1968–1978*, pages 60–83.

Xday, XX March

To read:

Michael J. Arlen, “Television’s War,” *New Yorker*, 27 May 1967.

Rick Worland, “The Other Living-Room War: Prime Time Combat Series, 1962–1975,” *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Fall 1998), pages 3–23.

### **Week 8**

#### **Soap Operas and *The Simpsons* in the 1980s**

Xday, XX March

To watch:

Cheddar, “The Real Reason Soap Operas Look So Different,” available on YouTube.

Austin McConnell, “Why Are Soap Operas STILL On The Air?,” available on YouTube.

TED, “4 Larger-Than-Life Lessons From Soap Operas | Kate Adams,” available on YouTube.

DALLAS70, “DALLAS—Who Shot J. R. Documentary,” available on YouTube.

To read:

Richard Corliss, “The ‘Dallas’ Shot That Was Heard Round the World,” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 November 1990.

Xday, XX March

To read:

Steeves, H. Peter. “‘It’s Just a Bunch of Stuff That Happened’: *The Simpsons* and the Possibility of Postmodern Comedy.” In *The Sitcom Reader: America Viewed and Skewed*,

edited by Mary M. Dalton and Laura R. Linder, 261-71.

Henry, Matthew. "The Triumph of Popular Culture: Situation Comedy, Postmodernism, and *The Simpsons*." In *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader*, edited by Joanne Morreale, 262-73.

## **Week 9**

### **Golden Ages in the 1990s**

Xday, XX March

*Readings pending.*

Xday, XX March

To watch:

Al Jazeera Plus (AJ+), "What Happened To The Golden Age of Black Sitcoms?," available on YouTube.

To read:

Kristal Brent Zook, "Introduction" and "Blood Is Thicker than Mud: C-Note Goes to Compton on *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*," in *Color By Fox: The Fox Network and the Revolution in Black Television*, pages 1–24.

## **Week 10**

### **Global Sitcom**

Xday, XX March

To watch:

*Under One Roof* (Singapore, 1994–2003), Season 1, Episode 1 ("Joy, Luck & Harmony"), available on Netflix.

*Phua Chu Kang Pte Ltd* (Singapore, 1997–2007), Season 2, Episode 26 ("Under Another Roof"), available on Netflix.

To read:

Kenneth Tan, "Under One Ideological Roof: TV Sitcoms and Drama Series," in *Cinema and Television in Singapore: Resistance in One Dimension*, pages 107–44.

Xday, XX March

To watch:

*Ojo's in d'House!* (Nigeria, 2013), Season 1, Episode 1 ("Moving In") and Episode 2 ("Dinner Disaster"), available on Netflix.

To read:

Neil Munshi, “Mo Abudu: Media Mogul Putting Africa in the Picture,” *Financial Times*, 19 April 2021.

Emeka Umejei, “Newspaper Coverage of China’s Engagement with Nigeria: Partner or Predator?,” in *China-Africa Relations: Building Images through Cultural Cooperation, Media Representation and Communication*, pages 167–83.

## **Week 11**

### **Future of TV**

Xday, XX March

To read:

Josef Adalion, “Inside Netflix’s Quest to End Scrolling,” *New York Magazine*, 28 April 2021.

Joy Press, “Binge Without Borders: *Lupin*, *Call My Agent!*, and the Global TV Explosion,” *Vanity Fair*, 13 May 2021.

Emily VanDerWerff, “*Bloodline* Shows What’s Wrong With Most of Netflix’s Original Series,” *Vox*, 23 March 2015.

Xday, XX April

To watch:

*Master of None* (2015–Present), Season 1, Episode 2 (“Parents”), available on Netflix.

*One Day at a Time* (2017–2020), Season 1, Episode 1 (“This Is It”), available on Netflix.

*#blackAF* (2020), Season 1, Episode 1 (“because of slavery”), available on Netflix.

## **Week 12**

### **Presentations**

Xday, XX April

*No readings.*

Xday, XX April

*No readings.*

## **Week 13**

### **Presentations**

Xday, XX April

*No readings.*

Xday, XX April

*Day off for Good Friday?*

*\*ESSAY 2 DUE SUNDAY, 17 APRIL BY 11:59PM\**