

Tuning In and Copping Out: ABC's Relevance Programming

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In a January 1971 issue of *TV Guide*, Bob Shayne published “a modest proposal for a new TV series in this year of ‘relevance’” titled “The Young Accountants.”¹ Three youth figures, one white with long blonde hair, one Black sporting an Afro, and one female “Eurasian beauty” set up a pro bono accounting office in this parodic pitch. Their stand against “the sterile world of banking” would help “the poor, the ignorant and the oppressed.” Shayne’s piece claimed, “They are three young people not just talking, but *doing*. Not tearing down but building a better tomorrow through free accountancy [his emphasis].” Shayne points out the contrived and repetitive casting of recent relevance programs while assertively critiquing television’s attempt to take young people off of the picket lines and place them in more acceptable positions of altruistic service. His article crystallizes the high level of mockery and even scorn apparent throughout mainstream press and trade paper coverage of the broadcast networks’ 1970-71 season of relevance. Critics decried the so-called phony attempts of these programs to appeal to youth audiences, often leading to an oversimplification of the noteworthy trend.

Network television executives and producers circulated the concept of “relevance,” a key word that the press soon picked up to characterize a new type of programming. Relevance shows presented teenage or young adult characters, usually as leads, in situations that occasionally featured topical social and political issues such as racism, campus protest, drug use, the counterculture, the sexual revolution, and the Vietnam War. Networks programmed relevance in an effort to attract a “quality demographic” of younger, affluent viewers, but Mark Alvey has argued that successful younger-skewing shows still had to secure “big ratings” in order to remain on the air.² Because of this, relevance programs were not only an appeal to the youth, but rather a difficult effort on the part of networks to differentiate a younger product that could still secure mainstream appeal. A range of relevance-type successes can be traced through variety programming (*The Smothers Brothers* [CBS, 1967-69], *Rowan & Martin’s Laugh-In* [NBC, 1968-73]), and *The Flip Wilson Show* [NBC, 1970-74]), comedy-drama variations featuring Black adult leads (*Julia* [NBC, 1968-71] and *Room 222* [ABC, 1969-74]), and CBS’s 1970s comedy powerhouse of *Mary Tyler Moore* (1970-77), *All in the Family* (1971-79), and *M*A*S*H* (1972-83). These programs, which understandably have generated a great amount of scholarship, all managed to stay topical while finding at least a temporary balance between quality viewers and high ratings. This study focuses on a short cycle of relevance shows following ABC’s successful youth show *The Mod Squad* (1968-73). Imitating *The Mod Squad*’s “One black, one white, one blonde” tagline and police show format, the programs regularly featured trios or duos of youth characters who joined an adult overseer and integrated their personalities and talents into acceptable social establishments. Relevance programs almost all debuted in the 1970-71 season to be savaged by critics and audience ratings,

¹ Bob Shayne, “The Young Accountants: A Modest Proposal for a New TV Series in This Year of ‘Relevance,’” *TV Guide*, January 9, 1971, 32.

² Mark Alvey, “‘Too Many Kids and Old Ladies’: Quality Demographics and 1960s U.S. Television,” in *Television: The Critical View*, 7th ed., ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 28-29.

having since practically disappeared. Considering television's failures, however, can reveal just as much as its successes in understanding how creators have attempted to reach consensus for a broad audience in a turbulent political context.

This paper will trace the discourses surrounding relevance programming while also examining notable episodes, specifically using three ABC programs as a case study: *The New People* (1969), *The Young Rebels* (1970-71), and *The Young Lawyers* (1970-71). Not only did ABC help generate this short-lived format of relevance programming with *The Mod Squad*, but the network also attempted to write their relevance format into a greater variety of premises than the other networks. In the 1969-70 season, directly following the season of *The Mod Squad*'s debut, ABC broadcast *The New People*, a show that depicted forty college students who were marooned on an abandoned atomic test island and forced to create their own society. Although the show was cancelled mid-season it represents a crucial step that influenced how new programs in the 1970-71 season would format relevance. When ABC attempted relevance again with the other networks in 1970, it created the most despised program, *The Young Rebels*, which followed longhaired yet innocuous youth figures who fought the British during the Revolutionary War. On the other hand, ABC's *The Young Lawyers* became one of the more critically successful, yet still doomed, programs of the season. Here the elderly Lee J. Cobb played the director of Boston's Neighborhood Law Office, where young law students, one a passionate Jewish man and the other a Black woman, represented the underprivileged of Boston in court.

Since these neglected programs prove difficult for current scholars to view, this project also takes up a detailed comparison of text and context thanks to access provided to these episodes by the UCLA Film and Television Archive and its accompanying Archive Research and Study Center.³ Solely following critical reception for these programs could lead to the assumption that audiences despised relevance programming as a singular concept, but the actual content and strategies of representation ranged significantly between different shows and even unique episodes. Examining the dialogue between ABC's confusing promotional material, critical reception, and broadcast content shows that a misinformed understanding developed surrounding the idea of "relevance," specifically that it would innovatively reinvigorate television's relationship to controversial cultural issues. Although moments of resistance will be considered, overall relevance shows were not able to deliver on their vague promises and overbuilt audience expectations. In an effort to garner mainstream audiences, relevance programs could not employ appealing formats and narrative processes for depicting divisive social and political terrain.

Selling Relevance: Marketing and Promotion

Before understanding the content of ABC's programs, it is important to consider the expectations that ABC created in the hope of securing a young audience. Aniko Bodroghkozy has offered the most in-depth analysis of 1960s youth movement representations on network television in her book *Groove Tube*.⁴ By the late 1960s advertisers were demanding "quality" audiences of

³ I owe a special thanks to Mark Quigley, the manager of ARSC, who first recommended *The New People* as a research topic to me and coordinated my access to the episodes considered in this paper. The 2014 ARSC Student Research Award also facilitated this entire project.

⁴ Aniko Bodroghkozy offers an in-depth look at the season of relevance, especially focusing her content analysis on returning non-relevance shows that incorporated divisive issues into unique episodes. See "Make It Relevant: How Youth Rebellion Captured Prime Time in 1970 and 1971," in *Groove Tube: Sixties Television and the Youth Rebellion* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 199-235.

young consumers if they were to continue to pay the same rates.⁵ ABC and CBS presidents Elton Rule and Robert Wood both proclaimed to affiliates that they would seek a “young” audience of ages 18-49 for their programming. Elton Rule asserted that the 1969-70 season would put a “high priority on unconventional programming” to appeal to “younger minds.”⁶ Rule and his Vice President of Programming Len Goldberg confirmed their desire to significantly alter their content in another press conference anticipating the 1969 fall season premieres. Rule declared that the network was dropping its reliance on violence in the new season despite ABC’s reputation for action programming.⁷

According to Rule, ABC planned to progress from its third place ratings position with this new approach most typified by *The New People*, a program produced and created by *The Mod Squad*’s inventor Aaron Spelling. The *Los Angeles Times* summarized Rule and Goldberg’s pitch for the show’s marooned youth premise, stating, “it is up to these students to form their own government, their own world, utilizing the theories and ideas that erupt from campuses. Youth takes over.”⁸ Furthermore Rule even argued that the network would not “end up as pruders out of touch” and would even show “things that will affront some people.”⁹ Rule’s rhetoric takes a surprising turn from the usual conception of the network era as one where no audience segment can be alienated. Rather than being intimidated thanks to its last place in the ratings, ABC claimed to be willing to offend. Instead of selling *The New People* according to its action-adventure genre elements, Rule announced their flagship program as one where college campus revolutionaries, one of the most despised groups in America, create their own government. Television advertisements similarly referred to the students as a “cross section of American youth” and asked, “Will their brave new world be a better one? Time has just begun.”¹⁰ Although the ad also emphasized the group’s struggle for survival on a foreign island, showcasing fistfights and ominous rotting dummies left behind as part of the atomic test site, it made quite clear that there would be no opportunity for adult intervention or social constraints of any kind.

As a program *The New People* found many ways to mollify conservative viewers through its otherworldly setting and commentary on the group’s social experiments, but much of this was lost due to Rule and Goldberg’s excitement to sell the show and distance themselves from action and violence. Press coverage and reviews of the program seem similarly confused with its actual premise. A snippet in the *New York Times* stated that the show covered “40 young radicals who build a new society on an island,” while an actual review of the program in the *Washington Post* also described the characters as “forty-five militant youngsters.”¹¹ Both descriptions are surprising, since the pilot episode emphasizes a diverse array of students, where very few, if any, espouse the actual views of political militants. Others, such as the *TV Guide* fall preview for the program, more

⁵ In addition to Bodroghkozy see Mark Alvey’s work for a nuanced look at how networks moved from touting quality demographics to making programming decisions in an effort to secure younger viewers (“Too Many Kids and Old Ladies,” 15-36).

⁶ Quoted in Les Brown, “Elton Rule: Be Different: ABC-TV Prez Puts Accent on Youth,” *Variety*, April 3, 1968, 33.

⁷ Cecil Smith, “ABC’s New Image to Curb TV Violence,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1969; “ABC Whistles ‘No Money Worries’ Tune,” *Broadcasting*, January 20, 1969, 59.

⁸ Smith, “ABC’s New Image to Curb TV Violence,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1969.

⁹ Quoted in Smith, “ABC’s New Image to Curb TV Violence,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1969.

¹⁰ ABC, “The New People (1969) TV Spot,” *YouTube* video, 1:00, uploaded October 21, 2009, accessed January 9, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IC3nfHURxIY>.

¹¹ George Gent, “A.B.C. Plans to Replace 12 TV Programs in Fall,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1969; Lawrence Laurent, “45 Minutes of ‘The New People,’” *Washington Post*, September 23, 1969.

accurately represented its variety of “conflicting types”: “senator’s naïve daughter, black militant, vicious racist, well-meaning premed student, knuckleheaded football hero, grass-smoking hippie, Ivy League conservative, etc.”¹² Even when the premise was more accurately described, reviewers largely focused on *The New People*’s politically-minded characters rather than its elements of survival and adventure.

ABC also scheduled its content daringly, although the move proved unwise in hindsight. *The New People* went right up against the biggest youth competition on TV: *Laugh-In*. ABC cut the show to approximately thirty-five-minute episodes, which ran for forty-five minutes with commercials directly after *The Music Scene* (1969), a program that aired pre-taped television studio performances of hit songs. *The Music Scene* began at 7:30pm, *The New People* at 8:15pm, and *Laugh-In* at 8:00pm. ABC played only a station identification between their two shows in hopes that viewers would forget about tuning to *Laugh-In*.¹³ The low ratings and midseason cancellation of *The New People* indicate that the strategy did not succeed.¹⁴ Despite struggling in third place in overall network ratings, ABC also held the largest youth audience, and here showed a serious effort to capitalize on this demographic.¹⁵ These unique scheduling moves and the overt championing of a show where radical social theory ruled confirm that the network was ready to experiment. Due to the failure of these attempts, however, ABC’s strategy entering the 1970-71 season of relevance changed significantly.

Like ABC’s 1969-70 season, the following season of relevance began with executives and producers promoting their new slate of content as a whole. During the Television Academy’s annual fall preview held at the DGA, producers declared that their shows would be “youth-oriented,” “contemporary,” and “relevant.”¹⁶ ABC, CBS and NBC each debuted programs that were all cancelled by the season’s conclusion. CBS had *The Interns* (1970-71), *The Storefront Lawyers* (1970-71), and *Headmaster* (1970-71), while ABC delivered *The Young Lawyers*, *The Young Rebels*, and *Matt Lincoln* (1970-71). NBC, although not described as being heavily invested in relevance, would also debut *The Psychiatrist* (1970-71) and *The Senator* (1970-71).¹⁷ Except for *The Young Rebels*, which takes place in 1777, most of these programs situated teen or young adult lead characters working alongside older professionals in familiar workspaces such as law firms (*Storefront Lawyers* and *Young Lawyers*), hospitals (*Interns*), and a teen crisis hotline (*Matt Lincoln*). Others followed adults interacting with youth through an established occupation: private school headmaster (*Headmaster*), mental health professional (*The Psychiatrist*), and government representative (*The Senator*). Press coverage focused especially on the shows that copied *The Mod*

¹² “The New People,” *TV Guide*, September 13, 1969, 34.

¹³ “A Gung-ho ABC Pitch to TV Affiliates,” *Broadcasting*, June 2, 1969, 26.

¹⁴ In his autobiography Aaron Spelling argued that *The New People* failed due to this scheduling experimentation and its time slot opposite *Laugh-In*. See Aaron Spelling with Jefferson Graham, *Aaron Spelling: A Prime-Time Life* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 70. This opinion also circulated in the press: “Music Scene, Palace Cancelled by ABC,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1969.

¹⁵ Bill Osgerby, Anna Gough-Yates, and Marianne Wells, “The Business of Action: Television History and the Development of the Action TV Series,” in *Action TV: Tough-Guys, Smooth Operators and Foxy Chicks*, eds. Bill Osgerby and Anna Gough-Yates (New York: Routledge, 2001), 21.

¹⁶ Quoted in “Here’s How Prods. Rate Next Season: ‘Youthful, Contemporary & Relevant,’” *Variety*, April 8, 1970, 2.

¹⁷ Both of these programs were shown within rotating shows, or wheel series: *The Psychiatrist* in *Four-in-One* (1970-71) and *The Senator* in *The Bold Ones* (1969-73). Harry Castleman and Walter J. Podrazik classify these programs as part of the trend in *Watching TV: Six Decades of American Television*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 216-17.

Squad by trying to create a representative trio of American youth (one white, one Black, one female).

The season of relevance largely abandoned *The New People's* premise of letting the youth run wild, and similarly ABC changed the strategy of much of its previous marketing. Like *The Mod Squad*, these programs were promoted as a more seamless interplay between youthful characters and generic situations based in action and melodrama, rather than the exceptional idea of starting a new civilization. *The Young Lawyers* initially aired as an *ABC Movie of the Week* in its debut season of 1969-70, the movie functioning as a pilot for the series that followed in the next television season.¹⁸ An advertisement for the movie in *TV Guide* pictured the three young stars of the film next to Jason Evers, the Neighborhood Law Office's director who would be replaced by Lee J. Cobb in the transition to a series. The tagline reads, "They're law students. But now their classroom is a courtroom, where only the accused can fail the course."¹⁹ Although the movie presented a campus protest turned riot, an unstable Vietnam War veteran, and a false criminal accusation against two Black men with racist implications, none of this content made its way into the marketing. A promo for the new series featured the voiceover of Lee J. Cobb establishing the program's conceit over clips from the original *Movie of the Week*. In the advertisement he urges, "I'm responsible for these young people. They are tough, vulnerable, angry, and funny. And they are committed. I share their passion for justice, achieved through the law."²⁰ Here the adult presence of an established Hollywood star offered a more balanced appeal to multiple demographics while ensuring the expectations of a familiar courtroom drama livened up by youth figures known for their intriguing character traits.

ABC actually reverted back to their signature programming styles of action and intense drama to attract advertisers as well. An ad for their fall 1970 lineup in *Broadcasting* proclaimed, "Here comes trouble."²¹ Rather than showcasing the channel's newfound character diversity, the ad pictures a lineup of seven white male leads. The text reads, "Starting this fall, these men will be getting into it, helping people out of it, stopping it and even starting it." The ad goes on to list *The Young Lawyers* as "a taut courtroom and personal drama starring Lee J. Cobb" and summarizes *The Young Rebels* as a "trio of underground patriots fighting for American independence in 1777." ABC concludes, "What does all this mean in the marketplace? It means adults under fifty. Our prime success. And your prime target." Even in its approach to advertisers ABC hid their relevance label in favor of more general and certainly redundant selling points: drama and male agency. Elsewhere *The Young Rebels*, assumed by many to be a naïve attempt at solely a hip young adult audience, was described by ABC as part of a "family-audience" night programmed next to *The F.B.I.* (1965-74).²² ABC certainly joined in on the relevancy craze, but their promotions were nowhere near as outright in courting controversial content. Meanwhile CBS's *Headmaster* ran much more topical, yet still reassuringly conservative, ads stating that their lead, Andy Griffith, would look at "sex education and student militancy" through a mix of drama and comedy.²³

¹⁸ This was a strategy used by the *ABC Movie of the Week* that paid off quite well. See Michael McKenna, *The ABC Movie of the Week: Big Movies for the Small Screen* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2013), xix.

¹⁹ Advertisement for *The Young Lawyers*, *TV Guide*, October 25, 1969, A65.

²⁰ ABC, "Promo for 'The Young Lawyers' (US, 1970-1971, ABC)," *YouTube* video, 1:26, uploaded September 14, 2011, accessed January 9, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqiM_VGt1dk.

²¹ Advertisement for ABC Television Network, *Broadcasting*, March 30, 1970, 78.

²² "How ABC Views the Fall Season," *Broadcasting*, May 18, 1970, 52.

²³ Bodroghkozy, *Groove Tube*, 206.

Harry Castleman and Walter Podrazik conclude that the 1970-71 relevancy shows failed due to the “unrealistic claims” of advertisements implying “the presentation of strongly pro-radical positions.”²⁴ I agree that this position reflects expectations regarding these programs, but I have yet to find advertisements from ABC that signaled radical content in the same way that *The New People* did. Similar to *The New People*, accounts of *The Young Lawyers*’s and *The Young Rebels*’s premises began to exaggerate the programs’ political slants. Despite ABC’s attempts to neutralize possibly offensive content, critics and viewers placed the programs firmly within the discursive register of boldly relevant programming trying to speak to the youth. *TV Guide*’s fall preview described the premise of *The Young Lawyers* and then expanded on Aaron Silverman’s character, claiming that he desired “to be William Kunstler when he grows up.”²⁵ Their readers’ letters section two weeks later featured an individual who cited this comment and claimed, “First, I would like to see whether such a grotesque perversity can possibly be true. Second, if it is, I would like to note carefully the sponsors of the program so that, under no circumstances, will I buy their products.”²⁶ *TV Guide*’s editor responded claiming that the magazine was at fault for including the Kunstler comment rather than the show. Even though *TV Guide*’s preview and ABC’s promo for *The Young Rebels* contained no reference to contemporary rebels, one *TV Guide* reader also wrote in arguing, “there is no such thing as a long-haired patriot,” while another complained in general that all the new shows’ “so-called actors are long-haired creeps.”²⁷ These examples demonstrate the pitfalls of creating a youth program in the season of relevance. Due to the redundancy of programming and overall anticipation of the vague promises of “youth-oriented relevancy,” conservative audiences interpreted the shaggy youth as radical characters, rather than accept the characters’ incorporation into conventional programming.

The confusion derived from these marketing campaigns not only shows how significant of a generational divide existed at this time, but it also exemplifies Jonathan Gray’s work on paratexts. Gray argues that paratexts inflect how audiences conceive of and read texts, where even paratexts preceding the text, “entryway paratexts,” can become as vital in creating meaning as the text itself.²⁸ In its advertising of post-*New People* relevance shows, ABC encoded meanings reliant on conventional television genres, where young people were employed in respectable positions within society, rather than focusing on political engagement. Despite this, certain audiences and even press coverage deciphered different meanings, wary that the shows would heroicize troublesome radicals. Even the network’s attempt to guide audience interpretations away from controversy failed due to a divisive cultural climate that made the sign of youth, combined with the concept of social

²⁴ Castleman and Podrazik, *Watching TV*, 217.

²⁵ “The Young Lawyers,” *TV Guide*, September 12, 1970, 36.

²⁶ “Letters,” *TV Guide*, October 3, 1970, A2.

²⁷ For *TV Guide*’s preview of the program see “The Young Rebels,” *TV Guide*, September 12, 1970, 29. For letter responses see “Letters,” *TV Guide*, October 24, 1970, A4. For ABC’s promotional material for *The Young Rebels* see their fall preview special: “ABC Fall Preview 1970,” *YouTube* video, 29:10, uploaded September 14, 2013, accessed January 9, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2CogEYLViU>. Although ABC did not make overt comparisons between Revolutionary War patriots and contemporary youth protestors in their promotional material for the show, actor Lou Gossett repeats this metaphoric connection in multiple interviews for the program. His repetitive wording sounds like it may be at the behest of ABC, but the fact remains that direct advertising for the show regularly characterized it more prominently as a historical action program with young stars. For Gossett’s interviews see Cecil Smith, “Gossett in Series ‘The Young Rebels,’” *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 1970; Judy Stone, “Lou Gossett: ‘Did We Always Eat Watermelon?’,” *New York Times*, August 30, 1970.

²⁸ Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 35-39.

relevance, almost unacceptable in itself for some. Ultimately ABC's plan to sell relevance within safer bets of established television dramas failed to sufficiently pacify a wide audience, but more open-minded target audiences and critics would also reject the new shows based on the programs' actual engagement with cultural issues.

From Pilot to Series: Creating a Sustainable Format

In their classic essay "Television as a Cultural Forum," Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch set a new standard for understanding network television as a liminal space of cultural self-reflection.²⁹ Part of Newcomb and Hirsch's argument relies on the importance of television's bizarre scenarios and metaphoric locations used to move outside of society's boundaries and begin a reflective discussion of it. ABC's relevancy programs exemplify this concept, subverting and displacing civilization itself in *The New People*, or crossing history with anachronistic youth figures in *The Young Rebels*. *The Young Lawyers* may seem more conventionally true to life, but even courtroom melodramas, here inverting age expectations, can provide a set structure within which to confront social concerns. Despite ABC's clear efforts to be contemporary and topical in content, the series' premises each resort to specific strategies to mediate cultural reflection, making it more palatable for general audiences but also inevitably becoming less relevant in the process. Rather than simply mocking creators for being out of touch, as many have done, it is worth considering how these programs were initially conceived and then altered in the pickup from pilot to series. Understanding the unique formats used for a cultural discussion can explain the disjunction between expectations and realized programming.

The New People breaks significantly from the patterns of other relevance and youth oriented programming in the late 1960s, especially regarding its escape from adult authority. The pilot follows forty college students on an international cultural exchange tour whose plane crash-lands on the island of Bomano, an abandoned atomic test site that provides them with a makeshift town stocked with food. At the first episode's conclusion, the one surviving adult from the crash perishes and the group is left to their own devices. Aaron Spelling created the program for ABC, producing it with his then partner Danny Thomas. ABC likely gave this unproven format extra license thanks to its producers' ongoing hit, *The Mod Squad*. In his essay on Aaron Spelling's popularity, Bob Schneider credits the creator's ability to capture "youthful exuberance modified by adult (parental) pragmatism" which "presented visions of the family affirmed" through the universal concept of protecting "The Community."³⁰ For Schneider it was the "inter-generational" appeal that worked for *The Mod Squad* and failed in the youth-only utopian vision of *The New People*. *The New People* experimented by casting off the mandatory adult figure, who formed an authoritative safety net around the beliefs of the youth in nearly all other similar programs of this period. Schneider's observation may explain why the program failed to develop as wide of an appeal for an older generation, but the actual licenses taken by the series rival much of the repetitive and predictable situations mocked in later relevance programming. *The New People* could not be simply written off as "Mod Squad lawyers, Mod Squad doctors...Mod Squad [1777] revolutionaries," as many critics described the 1970-71 programming slate.³¹

²⁹ Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch, "Television as a Cultural Forum," in *Television: The Critical View*, 5th ed., ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 503-15.

³⁰ Bob Schneider, "Spelling's Salvation Armies," *Cultural Correspondence*, no. 4 (Spring 1977), 27-33.

³¹ Cecil Smith, "ABC Unwraps 11 New Series This Week as Its Fall Season Debuts," *Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 1970.

Aaron Spelling and Larry Gordon created the concept for *The New People*, hiring Rod Serling to write the pilot but later only crediting him in a development role once their editing down of the pilot alienated Serling.³² A pitch for the show's original concept, submitted by Spelling and Gordon to ABC, explains a bit more detail for how it was originally devised.³³ In the most revealing summary, the material states:

How many times during the present war of the Generation Gap, have we heard the young proclaim... "If we had our way... if we weren't committed to the mistakes of our parents and grandparents...if we could make our own rules!" AND, how many times have the adults answered... "We have tried. We have tried. If only you know the problems... if you had to make the decisions, what more could you do?" That moment has arrived. For this is the beginning of a new society... a society composed solely of the young and the younger... this is THE NEW PEOPLE [ellipses and emphasis included in the original text].³⁴

Here the creators explain that *The New People* will not be a program about cross-generational cooperation, but rather one that takes an observational and critical view of what young idealists could do if "the revolution" happened. The older generation does not enter into the narrative as characters, because the program situates older audiences as critical onlookers of an experiment sure to disprove at least some new ideas of young activists.

If this makes *The New People* seem like a didactic and condescending exercise, it becomes overwhelmingly so in one suggested episode's plot. In this episode the group holds an election to determine a leader for the island. After an energetic campaign the process disintegrates into "beatings at night" and "fights in the street." The "minority group" loses the election and "takes over one-half of the town and proclaim[s] their independence." After the group prepares for war, the accidental near-death of a young woman leads to peace and a political compromise: "the minority to live by the majority's laws... the majority to respect the right of the minority."³⁵ To Spelling and Gordon's credit this heavy-handed allegory of college students assaulting political protestors and then enacting a war never made it to production. Other episodes in the pitch vary between love triangles, survival plots, and issues of law and order, finding somewhat less patronizing ways to critique youthful naïveté.³⁶ In all cases the program dealt with fostering a community and discovering compromises among these forty individuals. The parents may be left out of the picture, but instead of developing an inter-generational appeal, *The New People* considers inter-ideological conflict. The episodes described emphasize regular clashes of political factions between characters, but this conflict proved incredibly difficult to sustain past the episode's pilot. Furthermore, if every character were to take up the position of the "minority," then no conservative majority would remain to rebel against. Spelling's pitch seems unique in the abstract, but the difficulties in Serling's script and the direction that the network took in subsequent episodes developed into a much different format.

³² Serling did not publicly denounce the program, but clearly distanced himself from it in interviews: Cecil Smith, "Rod Serling: The Prolific TV Writer Has a 'Novel' Idea," *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 1969.

³³ Untitled program concept for *The New People*, ABC Television Network Scripts and Production Material for Television, 1954-1974 (Collection PASC 220), Box 12, Folder 16, Performing Arts Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California (hereafter ABC Collection).

³⁴ Untitled program concept for *The New People*, ABC Collection, 5.

³⁵ The episode is titled "The First Hurrah." Untitled program concept for *The New People*, ABC Collection, 11-13.

³⁶ The creators prided themselves on their unconventional generic status arguing, "We avoid the sameness of story telling... we avoid the labels. We are not just an adventure show, or just a cop show, or just a lawyer show, or just a soap opera. We are all these things and more." Untitled program concept for *The New People*, ABC Collection, 7.

What made *The New People* unique as a solely youth starring program would also lead to its repositioning of character identities, which also impacted sincere discussions of cultural issues. Rod Serling's difficulties in developing a satisfactory pilot script reveal exactly how challenging it could be to create a sustainable world of outspoken political conflict on network television. Serling's script went through several revisions and was eventually shot as a fifty-one-minute episode, which had to then be cut to a thirty-five-minute pilot. A personal note on Serling's copy of the pilot script reads, "This provided a great deal of money but ABC cut 20 minutes out of it & it died to death."³⁷ The final pilot that aired begins by introducing the group of college students to their new chaperone, Mr. Hannichek, who determines that their tour of the South Pacific will be terminated thanks to all of the bad press that their radical antics have caused.³⁸ The group is hopelessly divided along racial and political lines, arguing over how the Southern Right-winger named Bob Lee tore down the Russian flag over an embassy, or how the outspoken Black student Bones claimed that the American people were imperialists on a Hong Kong television program. After the group's plane crash-lands on the island of Bomano, they discover its empty town and resort to drinking and partying. At this point the white racist jock, Bull, who fought verbally and physically with Bones the entire episode, first tries to shoot Bones and then puts out the group's signal fire to spite him. After a plane flies over the island without seeing the fire, Bones leads a lynch mob against Bull, nearly striking him with a torch before the ailing Hannichek intervenes:

Bones: Where you been Hannichek? We just got dropped out of the world, and this boy here is the one who done it to us.

Hannichek: Well then, do it the way it should be done. You know what I mean, get a rope.

Bull: No, no!

Hannichek: Why not, this Black man here is an expert on it. I bet if we looked up his family tree, we'd find a dozen limbs his ancestors hung from. But you gotta call it what it is, it's a lynching.

Bones: [dropping the torch] I've had it up to here with dying...up to here. You know, that's a helluva freedom march I've been on all my life, from no place to no place.

The Black radical learns his lesson: that he has become just as susceptible to hatred and violence as those who oppress him and his race. Different iterations of the script and extended pilot had a more conservative Black female character negatively comparing Bones to Malcolm X or the Black Panthers.³⁹ Serling depicts the Black Power movement as equivalent to ahistorical notions of reverse racism, a logic that repeats throughout other episodes of these relevance programs. Bones realizes that he has perverted the positive freedom marches of the Civil Rights movement into something pointless.

The episode provides a pointed example of the denigration of radical racial politics through regressive representation, but the Serling script reveals additional problems of representing

³⁷ Rod Serling, *The New People* pilot script draft, November 11, 1968, Rod Serling Papers, 1945-1969 (Collection 1035), Box 16, Folder 4, Performing Arts Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California (hereafter Serling Papers). Ironically in Aaron Spelling's autobiography he claims that Rod turned in a "perfect first draft" that required no notes or changes. See Spelling with Graham, *Aaron Spelling*, 70.

³⁸ "Pilot," *The New People*, September 22, 1969, DVD9541 T. Accessed in the Archive Research and Study Center, UCLA Film and Television Archive, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California (hereafter ARSC). The "Long Version" is available under VA15058 T.

³⁹ Serling, *The New People* pilot script draft, Serling Papers, 10.

politically vocal youth at all. In a line from the script and the extended pilot one adult derisively refers to the students as “black militants, white militants, political Lefties, political Righties, glue sniffers, banjo players...” The entire American youth population seems to be steeped in extremism, leading Serling’s script to ignore the value of different causes in their own right. One note from Aaron Spelling in Rod Serling’s script recommends,

“...could we get two or at least one more character...[of a] ‘middle of the road’ attitude...the network feels very strongly that this strengthens the feeling that not everyone in the group is a malcontent, [and] would make the group as a whole a lot more likable, and I must say, Rod, that I agree with them on this point.”⁴⁰

Other comments ask, “...can we have a moment of compassion from Bones so he is not all black! (No pun intended),”⁴¹ and, “Len feels we need more forgiveness for Bull. Can our black girl, Barbara, have a beat with him?”⁴² One could argue that Spelling and the network were trying to remove any realistic conflict from *The New People*, censoring the program for a happy closure that removes the political punch from it. But Serling’s script consists almost entirely of arguments between characters, offering little personality for the various figures and barely even touching on the details of their political beliefs. *Variety*’s television critic Les Brown pointed out that this issue still remained in the final product stating, “The people involved are all one-dimensional embodiments of ideologies without a trace of humanity and it is hard to care for any of them. There are no characterizations, only lefties and righties, Uncle Toms and militants, middleclass rebels and southern bigots, bullies and pacifists. They should have called this ‘The Non People.’”⁴³ The realization of politically vocal characters did not necessarily ensure any rational discussions between relatable characters in this iteration of the program, much like some of Spelling’s episode pitches also revealed.

Situating the older generation as critical onlookers with only one identifiable voice of reason, Hannichek, resulted in a fairly chaotic pilot that promised more of the same since Hannichek dies from his crash injuries at the pilot’s conclusion. Because of this, the program’s main characters became “the establishment” rather than the radicals. Bull would not return to the show, Bones thankfully underwent a name change to Wash but also became much more selfless, and the Southern racist Bob Lee quickly dropped all of his prejudices. Moving forward, different characters from the forty students would have a guest appearance in each episode and usually take on the role of the individual against society, the dropout, or the political ideologue. *The New People* moved away from some of Spelling’s abstract lessons of revolution and towards a safer opposition of an identifiable community dealing with a weekly outsider. Supposedly the group of regular cast members would work through their ideological differences to build a society, but in fact the principle cast naturally followed conventional wisdom needed to incorporate the radical character into a healthy civilization.

Examining the development process of *The New People* allows for a more nuanced understanding of how television shows can significantly change their structure to arrange for a cultural discussion while also creating relatable characters. For Spelling and ABC, the youth characters would have to become more conventionally minded people in order to appeal to a large

⁴⁰ Serling, *The New People* pilot script draft, Serling Papers, 11.

⁴¹ Serling, *The New People* pilot script draft, Serling Papers, 23.

⁴² Serling, *The New People* pilot script draft, Serling Papers, 53.

⁴³ Les Brown, Review of *The New People*, *Variety*, September 24, 1969, 41.

audience. Newcomb and Hirsch argue that television programs in the network era should be expected to reproduce the dominant ideology, but for audiences they begin, rather than conclude, a cultural discussion.⁴⁴ If this is true then *The New People* could supposedly still prosper by its new format, but the weight of promotional material and even the program's theme song set up different expectations than each episode's actual structure. Every week new audiences tuned into a theme song by The First Edition containing lyrics stating, "What kind of world will they create? / Facing the problems of man / Thousands of years haven't solved them / Yet all of them think they can." The lyrics play over an image of a female character, Ginny, holding a flower in front of a line of soldiers with raised guns. More shots proceed of students protesting with signs reading "Stop the War" and footage of soldiers moving through foliage. The song begins with an atomic explosion and ends with the American flag overlapping two student's faces before the entire group is shown. The segment is literally and figuratively explosive with imagery and connotations. It encapsulates the counterculture and Vietnam War protests within fears of atomic oblivion and patriotism. Out of this explosion may come a true revolution, creating the new America and a new society that the young generation believes they can achieve. The original concept for the show, its promotion, and theme song, promise a discussion of how to run a society that will address the strife of deep social and political divisions. To then put the main cast on the conservative side of most discussions, however, is not an acceptable payoff for these promises. Spelling and ABC faced the difficulty of creating likeable revolutionaries without allowing their politics to succeed entirely and therefore alienate a mainstream audience. Transitioning from pilot to series meant that characters would have to be labeled revolutionary only in name. Although this essay will later consider how individual episodes complicated and at times escaped this constraint, the failure of *The New People* led ABC to contain its relevance material in safer premises.

Even though ABC emphasized *The Young Rebels* as a family action show by the time of its premiere, the pilot did exhibit elements that clearly tried to allegorize youth protest movements. Aniko Bodroghkozy argues that by comparing 1960s activism to the Revolutionary War, the show "depoliticizes" the movement by confusing it with empty signifiers of patriotism.⁴⁵ She explains the backlash that the program underwent thanks to some who misinterpreted the explosions used by the young patriots' Yankee Doodle Society as an approval for the despised Weather Underground bombings, which had recently rocked the country.⁴⁶ The failed attempt of the program to capture viewers based on iconography and concept alone is duly noted by anyone who has bothered to cover this series. Examining the pilot episode, however, shows that creators attempted to balance and quickly dispense with any assumptions that their heroes could be considered revolutionary by the standards of 1970.

The pilot episode introduces our trio of secret patriots, the longhaired leader Jeremy Larkin, the freed slave and blacksmith Isak, and their military strategist Henry.⁴⁷ A token woman named Elizabeth also helps out the men and has an appearance in the show's opening credits, but her role

⁴⁴ Newcomb and Hirsch, "Television as a Cultural Forum," 507-8.

⁴⁵ Bodroghkozy, *Groove Tube*, 210.

⁴⁶ Bodroghkozy, *Groove Tube*, 207-8. For negative reception of this nature see Review of *The Young Rebels*, *TV Guide*, November 21, 1970, 52; Les Brown, Review of *The Young Rebels*, *Variety*, September 23, 1970, 54. Lou Gossett also confirms that this confusion took place in an interview: Carol Kramer, "Black Actor's Odyssey," *Chicago Tribune*, October 31, 1971.

⁴⁷ "Father and I Went Down to Camp," *The Young Rebels*, September 20, 1970, ARSC DVD12203 T.

and screen time are almost entirely insignificant compared to the others. The episode opens as the trio wards off the British army by using explosives. They eventually ally themselves with General Lafayette, another young rebel who, according to the end titles, joined the army at age nineteen. In order to maintain his anonymity Jeremy must convince his father that he is an apathetic rascal while playing patriot by night. His brother Robert, however, has officially joined the Continental Army much to the disapproval of his father Mordecai, who calls it “a senseless gesture.” By the episode’s conclusion Mordecai has seen the ruthlessness of the British and Robert perishes in battle. As Mordecai eulogizes his son he proclaims,

If Robert could hear me now, I believe he would say to me, “Father you understand at last.” Yes Robert, at last. That passion which I called your youth, that fancy which I called treason, it is to my everlasting shame that while you lived I never understood that which you stood so ready to give your life for.

The generation gap conflict of the entire series is completely solved by the pilot’s concluding sequences. Jeremy must continue his false reputation as a scoundrel, but Mordecai shares his son’s exact political stance. Throughout the pilot and the series the young rebels extol freedom for all men, and the pilot even opens with John F. Kennedy’s famous quote, “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” Rather than fashioning the British into the establishment, the young rebels have themselves taken the establishment position alongside their parents.

After this pilot almost no episodes reference contemporary social issues. Other plots deal with traitors, British assassins, and different missions that the team must undergo for Lafayette. Clear-cut goal oriented narratives culminate in gunfights, fistfights, and races to the rescue. The only episode that explicitly draws on contemporary issues attempts to separate the Yankee Doodle Society from the Weather Underground.⁴⁸ In the episode a man named Edwards attempts to steal the group’s explosives in order to massacre the unsuspecting British along with civilians. By the episode’s conclusion the group has stopped him and convinced him that “terrorism” can never lead to “freedom.” Aside from this episode, *The Young Rebels* actually seems like a relevance pilot that ABC hoped would garner a youthful following before delving into generic territory. The show’s airing led one critic to simply call it another TV western set in a different time period.⁴⁹ For any socially relevant characters that did appear, similar to *The New People*, the trio of young protagonists would always take the role of the establishment, fighting for freedom and correcting the outsider of their mistakes.

The Young Lawyers found a middle ground between *The New People* and *The Young Rebels*, beginning as a successful ABC *Movie of the Week* and then lasting a full first season before being cancelled.⁵⁰ *The Young Lawyers* may have failed due to the scheduling problems of its position next to ABC’s debut of *Monday Night Football*, or because ABC had to drop a significant amount of programs when the Prime Time Access Rule took effect in the 1972-73 season. Regardless, the program still derived mixed reviews and struggled to secure significant ratings.⁵¹

⁴⁸ “Dangerous Ally,” *The Young Rebels*, December 6, 1970, ARSC DVD12200 T.

⁴⁹ Brown, Review of *The Young Rebels*, *Variety*, September 23, 1970, 54.

⁵⁰ *Los Angeles Times* critic Cecil Smith called it the best feature of that season of *Movie of the Week*: “Holding Brief for ‘Young Lawyers,’” *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 1969.

⁵¹ When ABC dropped most of their relevance programming at midseason they also set a new time for *The Young Lawyers*, but affiliates were also allowed to reschedule the program as they saw fit. For more on this see “ABC-TV Affiliates Adjust with Ease,” *Broadcasting*, January 18, 1971, 47. Cecil Smith also commented on the show’s poor

Rather than presume that one answer can be found to explain why a program was cancelled, this essay will consider how *The Young Lawyers* managed to play down some of the issues of relevance to capture an inter-generational approach based in liberal humanism.

The Young Lawyers movie acted as a pilot for the series, purposefully setting up the configuration for the show that would follow in 1970.⁵² Originally the movie featured three student lawyers, a studious and straight-laced white man named David, a Jewish activist named Aaron, and a Black woman named Anne (later renamed Pat).⁵³ Jason Evers played the adult role of Michael Canon, which would be renamed and taken over by Lee J. Cobb in the move to series. The pilot's narrative brings the cast together in the Neighborhood Law Office, a firm that serves the underprivileged of Boston by allowing supervised student lawyers to represent them in court pro bono. The feature focuses on the defense of two Black musicians (one played by a young Richard Pryor) who have been accused of attacking and robbing their white cab driver. In the end the young lawyers investigate and discover that the taxi driver's own son, a troubled Vietnam War veteran, beat him over likely suspicions that the father had engaged in a sexual relationship with his wife. More important to the movie and series as a whole, however, are the movements made by Canon and Aaron that bring the two generations together.

Michael Canon's character exemplifies the strategy of integrating the young with an adult voice of reason, and here within a legal institution. Bodroghkozy notes this strategy throughout much television programming in the 1970-71 season, arguing that a "Great White Father figure aligned himself with youth, not with the dominant system of power the young opposed."⁵⁴ Early in the episode Michael Canon finds his son imprisoned after his participation in a campus demonstration turned riot. Canon tells him, "Robbie you know I'm not opposed to demonstrations per se, but breaking the law, that's something else." After Canon's son retorts that he is afraid of his own father, Canon quits his job in corporate law. Canon takes his step across the generation gap, telling his boss, "It doesn't take a genius to see there's a war going on this country between old and young, and no matter how enlightened we think we are, we're all busy fighting." Leaving the upper class social elite to take a role in repairing his relationship with his son and the youth of America, Canon tells his wife that he will take a pay cut to \$10,000 a year as the NLO's new director. Here the establishment becomes elitist greed and snobbery, while liberal guilt and altruism allow for Canon to form a new rebellion within the system. To emphasize this, the shooting script for the movie even has David's father referring to Canon as a "hippie" thanks to his career choice, a telling overstatement of his positioning in the narrative.⁵⁵

When Canon arrives for his new job in the Neighborhood Law Office, Aaron has just decided to quit because the student lawyers are not being given any important work to do in court.

placement next to *Monday Night Football*, which gave the program different air times on the East and West coast. He covered this alongside his accounts of the show: "Scene '70," *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1970; "The Young Lawyers: Zalman King, Lee J. Cobb and Judy Pace," *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1971.

⁵² *ABC Movie of the Week*: "The Young Lawyers," October 28, 1969, ARSC VA13792 T.

⁵³ Although Zalman King's Jewish identity never plays a role in any of the episodes that I have been able to view, both King and critics pointed out how his Jewish appearance was out of character, yet welcome, for the protagonist of a prime time show. For these comments see Smith, "The Young Lawyers: Zalman King, Lee J. Cobb and Judy Pace," *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1971; Bob Shayne, "Leading Man Named Zalman?" *New York Times*, February 28, 1971.

⁵⁴ Bodroghkozy, *Groove Tube*, 210.

⁵⁵ Michael Zagor, "The Young Lawyers": A Movie of the Week for ABC-TV shooting script, February 20, 1969, ABC Collection, Box 12, Folder 16, 53.

He storms out of the office telling Canon that “the copout is built in, it’s in the system.” Aaron returns to coordinating demonstrations, but Canon asks for his help to investigate their new case. Visiting the activist headquarters, Canon calls Aaron’s work “a symbolic act on behalf of an abstract ideal.” The program provides this abstraction, showing signs being designed in the room that say “City Hall – Don’t Do It All,” “Teach Black History,” “Hands Off Schools,” and “People vs. Politicians.” The signs’ wording is specifically listed in the script, which claims that the demonstration issue is “Local Control.”⁵⁶ In a post-Tet Offensive America where Vietnam War protest surged and the country’s opinion was shifting, the signs almost all display vague and abstract concepts in the program’s effort to redirect Aaron’s antiestablishment attitude. By the episode’s conclusion Canon has shown Aaron that he can join a concrete revolution of aiding the disempowered and fighting injustice from within the system.

As an *ABC Movie of the Week* and series, *The Young Lawyers* went through a few significant revisions that continued to ensure a domesticated discussion of social issues. Most notable is the early decision to focus on the indigent people of Boston rather than the counterculture and other social issues. Michael Zagor’s original treatment for the movie featured two hippies, who were touring the country on motorcycles, as the accused.⁵⁷ The shift in focus to Black musicians, victimized by a white cab driver’s racism, characterizes many episodes of the program that are more interested in an intervention in classism and racism. As the movie turned to series, Aaron became the new young lead and the conservative David Harrison was dropped entirely. Each week Aaron offered youthful vigor that clashed at first with the older David Barrett, but by the episode’s conclusion the two always joined their opinions.

A perfect example of the series’ idea of social conscience can be seen in the episode “The Glass Prison,” which examined the life of an ex-junkie and jazz trumpet musician on parole.⁵⁸ In it Aaron fights on the side of the musician, who violates parole under the stress of not being allowed to associate with other musicians or his own drug addicted wife. Throughout the episode Barrett explains to Aaron that the man only has the right to finish his sentence as a parolee and therefore must live under the restrictions, but Aaron argues that the parolee has been stripped of his fundamental rights as a human being. Rather than Aaron learning a lesson from Barrett, by the episode’s conclusion Barrett sides with Aaron after the musician is sent back to jail. Barrett angrily tells Aaron with deep conviction that the law as written denied this man his fundamental rights. It should be noted here that going back to *The Young Lawyers* movie, ABC’s Department of Broadcast Standards and Practices reviewed its script and commented on how both the feature and series would need to uphold respect for the law. Director Dorothy Brown states, “When our young lawyers find flaws in the Establishment - when they find flaws in the older members of the profession, we must be cautious that the end result is more understanding and respect for legal matters and lawyers and the courts [their emphasis].”⁵⁹ Broadcasting standards dictated that episodes such as this one would end by redirecting social conscience back into the establishment. “The Glass Prison” concludes with Barrett arguing that if Aaron fights (within the judicial system), someday he or another persistent attorney could succeed in changing the law.

⁵⁶ Zagor, *The Young Lawyers* shooting script, ABC Collection, 28.

⁵⁷ Michael Zagor, *The Young Lawyers* pilot story, ABC Collection, Box 13, Folder 5, n.p.

⁵⁸ “The Glass Prison,” *The Young Lawyers*, November 2, 1970, ARSC DVD9484 T.

⁵⁹ Dorothy Brown, *The Young Lawyers* Shooting Script Review, December 18, 1968, ABC Department of Broadcast Standards and Practices, ABC Collection, Box 13, Folder 3.

Through conclusions such as this, *The Young Lawyers* found more success in managing expectations and staging discussions that might appease conservative and liberal viewers. Importantly, in the changes from movie to series the program resituated relevance outside of political activism and counterculture, bringing the young and the old together. The benefits of a seasoned Hollywood actor, Lee J. Cobb, and the unique energy that Zalman King brought to the show as Aaron also impacted the program's general quality. Before *The Young Lawyers* King had left television to act in underground films in New York City and later returned to Los Angeles, gaining notoriety amongst several critics who described him as a rising star and an authentic youth voice.⁶⁰ The channeling of such youthful talent and energy into these mandated constraints allowed for the show to avoid the denied expectations of *The New People*, while also touching on social conscience in ways that *The Young Rebels* completely ignored.

Returning to compare these three iterations of relevancy begs further questions as to why audiences and critics reacted more positively to a program that brought cultural problems and youthful idealism within the judicial system. If network television has been built on absurd premises to work through culture, then why did *The New People* and *The Young Rebels* fail to provide comfort? Categorizing these programs as "relevant" in the first place may have backfired on ABC and the other networks. Castleman and Podrazik come to this conclusion arguing, "By promising a new era in television realism after nearly a decade of escapism and fantasy, but then delivering the same old goods, the networks' new shows had to be judged, however harshly, by a different set of rules."⁶¹ Once networks claimed that they would address the problems of the country, critics wanted the programs to take strong stances, rather than domesticating difficult issues. Regarding *The New People*, one critic argued, "to project the 'new' people—or the young—into a Twilight-Zone fantasy is simply avoiding a situation all too real and, consequently, a cop-out."⁶² Les Brown of *Variety* wrote up a piece on the failure of relevancy programming, claiming that "relevancy" just functioned as "ambiguity." He argues that television inherently could not state the promised political views of relevancy because it still had to gather a popular audience.⁶³ In a list of cop-out strategies Brown rants,

Mark that the conservatives and liberals are never really bad fellows and that views they fictively espouse have little relation to the real-life doctrines they are supposed to espouse...Mark that the blacks who are sympathetic are those who deport themselves as, and hold essentially the values of, the white middle class. Mark that whatever happens and whoever is involved, the Establishment is always right and always wins.

Brown's comments echo those of many other mainstream critics covering relevancy programming, including the less problematic content of *The Young Lawyers*.⁶⁴ If these new shows had not been

⁶⁰ The *Los Angeles Free Press* television critic Harlan Ellison claimed to be friends with King and regularly praised him: "The Glass Teat," *Los Angeles Free Press*, April 3, 1970, 36. For mainstream press coverage of King see Smith, "The Young Lawyers: Zalman King, Lee J. Cobb and Judy Pace," *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1971; Gregg Kilday, "Zalman King Lived Role in 'Ski Bum,'" *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 1970; Shayne, "Leading Man Named Zalman?," *New York Times*, February 28, 1971.

⁶¹ Castleman and Podrazik, *Watching TV*, 217.

⁶² Cecil Smith, "The Brady Bunch Wins 'Worst' Honor," *Los Angeles Times*, September 29, 1969.

⁶³ Les Brown, "TV's Stillborn 'Relevancy': Putting It All Apart At Start," *Variety*, September 30, 1970.

⁶⁴ Surprisingly Les Brown actually gave a positive review to *The Young Lawyers*: Review of *The Young Lawyers*, *Variety*, September 23, 1970, 52. Others were not as kind to it or other relevance programs: Review of *The Young Lawyers*, *TV Guide*, November 7, 1970, 24; Lawrence Laurent, "'The Young Lawyers' A Most Likely Loser," *Washington Post*, October 25, 1970; Clarence Petersen, "'Relevance' Eludes Nets; Viewing Off," *Chicago Tribune*, September 30, 1970.

hyped and sold under the label of relevance, it is possible that critics and audiences may not have engaged with the shows through such politicized readings. Brown characterizes patterns of ideological manipulation that scholars have often pointed to all of television for enacting upon the American public, especially throughout the 1960s and 1970s.⁶⁵ Ironically, unlike *The New People's* marketing, ABC tried to avoid setting expectations of political content too high in their 1970-71 relevance shows, proving that meaning can circulate in complicated and even misinformed ways from marketing to critical reception. Regardless of ABC's efforts to tone down their content, the categorization of relevancy was used in the press. This guided critics and audiences toward specific reading strategies that demanded a certain type of discussion, one that incorporated realism, greater topicality, and a more balanced consideration of different viewpoints.

Considering the Issues: Racism, Feminism, and Activism

So far this project has examined the format and general positioning of youth characters within ABC's relevance series as a whole, but it is also worth considering the strategies of representation used to confront unique issues. Like *The Mod Squad* before them, these series alternated between issue-oriented episodes and safer generic territory. Relevance programming involved a regular cast of youth characters in the conservative role, but issue episodes had to negotiate exactly how the outsiders of social movements were depicted and often rehabilitated. A sampling of these select episodes can further elucidate how creators employed their program's format in response to cultural conflict, denigrating radical social change but occasionally delivering moments of subversion in the case of *The New People*.

Although popular media at this time regularly depicted the counterculture and political activists as white, almost all of the relevance shows featured a Black character. Even when these characters are given agency in the narrative, they usually exist as token roles devoid of any realized racial identity or background.⁶⁶ Judy Pace, who played the Black woman Pat on *The Young Lawyers*, was rarely given any agency other than secretarial on the program, even undergoing racist network censorship at one point. Several African American and mainstream presses covered an instance when Pace had to be replaced by a white actress for a scene where Pat and Aaron were to share a drink at a bar. The episode's writer John W. Bloch made numerous requests for ABC to keep Pace in the scene, but the network refused. The WGA sent a notification of the event to their membership while ABC confirmed that the change was made to appease Southern viewers. Considering how little screen time Pace garnered despite being one of three regular characters, the censorship only added insult to injury. Her character never speaks of her own racial identity and instead the show focuses on helping individual Black clients, rather than considering to systematic racism.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ For work considering network television as a hegemonic institution see Bodroghkozy, *Groove Tube*; Todd Gitlin, "Prime Time Ideology: The Hegemonic Process in Television Entertainment," in *Television: The Critical View*, 6th ed., ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 574-94, and *Inside Prime Time* (New York: Pantheon, 1983); Lynn Spigel and Michael Curtin, eds., *The Revolution Wasn't Televised* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁶⁶ For more on this see Elaine Pennicott, "'Who's the Cat That Won't Cop Out?': Black Masculinity in American Action Series of the Sixties and Seventies," in *Action TV: Tough-Guys, Smooth Operators and Foxy Chicks*, eds. Bill Osgerby and Anna Gough-Yates (New York: Routledge, 2001), 107; Bodroghkozy, *Groove Tube*, 193.

⁶⁷ This occurred in the previously mentioned episode "The Glass Prison," leaving Pace with only one line in the entire broadcast. For coverage of this see David W. Rintels, "Censorship on Television: How Much Truth Does 'The FBI' Tell About the FBI?" *New York Times*, March 5, 1972; "Blasts TV Censorship," *New York Amsterdam News*,

The New People offered a more outspoken Black character through its depiction of Wash, who quickly assimilated into the group after the show's pilot episode. Wash had escaped the ghettos of Harlem and often references his past throughout different episodes. When one student on the island attempts to grow marijuana, Wash is the one who tears up the last budding plant claiming that in Harlem people "turn on so they can turn off."⁶⁸ Although Wash references his social background, his comments are based on the rhetoric of uplifting his race rather than a critique of entrenched racism. Wash fits into the establishment role with the rest of the youth characters, an establishment that is racially integrated and harmonious.

Thanks to its displaced island setting, *The New People* crafts an incredibly regressive view of late 1960s race relations when Wash faces off against a group of Black separatists. In an episode featuring guest roles for Billy Dee Williams as the leading militant and Judy Pace as the woman of his group, Wash is captured and imprisoned for snooping on the group of four's separated community.⁶⁹ Heath (Williams) fears that Wash will tell the rest of the island that they have formed their own society, and refuses to let him out of their makeshift prison. As a veteran of the Civil Rights movement, Heath tells Wash, "We don't fight brother, we separate." Wash responds to Heath's criticism of white hegemony by urging, "Racism ain't my thing baby." Heath replies, "Not racism! Race identity!" Wash argues for a colorblind approach to racism, telling Heath that "the color disappears" when you get to know another person and proclaiming that racism existed back in the Civil Rights era but not on the island of Bomano. Black Nationalism and the critique of racism are contained within Heath's paranoia, which is disproven when the rest of the island rescues Wash. Undermining Heath's expectation, they have no intention of attacking his Black community. By creating a utopian society, the episode implies that the Black Power movement is a racist organization that refuses to forget the memory of America's departed racism. The program aligns the viewer with the show's regular, Wash, against Heath and the other Black characters, offering no real discussion of the tumultuous and relevant race relations of the era.

This strategy played itself out in another episode of *The Young Rebels*, which managed to craft its racist logic with somewhat less obvious parallels to reality.⁷⁰ Here Isak's brother, a slave named Pompey, has run away to find an all-Black town. After the British capture Pompey he acts as their spy in an effort to gain his own freedom. On numerous occasions Isak warns Pompey that "no men are free unless all men are free." When Pompey does finally make amends with the Yankee Doodle Society at the episode's conclusion, he has joined their cause and equated white struggles under the British with Black struggles under racism. A critique of racism is not entirely denied, but the outsider Black character learns another lesson: that running from white society rather than staying and contributing constitutes a selfish and traitorous act. These episodes function as condescending lessons for Black youth, ignoring an obviously relevant racial context and again failing to offer a satisfying discussion of race within the shows' otherworldly contexts.

While racial political movements were allegorized with disdain, female characters often suffered from tokenism as well. A *TV Guide* feature article written by feminist Caroline Bird critiqued the new slate of network programming for only offering female characters in stereotypical positions,

March 13, 1971; Jack Gould, "Writers Attack Censorship of TV Scene," *New York Times*, February 11, 1971; "Yes, Virginia, Racial Snips Are Still Made in TV Scripts," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, February 18, 1971.

⁶⁸ "The Pied Piper of Pot," *The New People*, December 8, 1969, ARSC DVD12152 T.

⁶⁹ "The Prisoner of Bomano," *The New People*, December 29, 1969, ARSC DVD12156 T.

⁷⁰ "Unbroken Chains," *The Young Rebels*, December 27, 1970, ARSC DVD12201 T.

or acting as “mechanical props” to let viewers know “what their male colleagues were thinking.”⁷¹ Judy Pace’s main function as errand-runner in *The Young Lawyers* drew criticism from Bird as well. Most relevance programs had nothing to say in response to the growing feminist movement, and Bird’s assessment of female roles on television proves quite applicable to them as well. The only episode that seems germane to this growing concern is a two-part plot explored by *The New People* that addresses rape.

To claim that these two episodes form an ideal feminist text of empowered women would not be accurate, but they do offer a significant critique of patriarchy’s failure to address violence against women.⁷² In the episode one of the older students on the island named Ben builds a home for Susan and tells her frankly that on this island “it doesn’t matter whether you love me or not, when my house is finished you’re gonna live in it.” A terrified Susan begs the other students to help, but the men believe that Susan is just being “uptight” and overreacting. Susan attempts to pass a law against rape on the island, but the men ignore her, claiming that they do not need a law for something that could not happen on their island. Her efforts are even disregarded by her closest female friend Ginny after another woman’s sudden accusation of rape against Bob Lee is emphatically disproven. Ben stalks Susan, stealing her possessions and threatening to hurt others if she will not come with him. Susan responds by blaming herself and deciding to give in and be his bride in order to keep the others out of harm’s way. In the episode’s conclusion Bob Lee comes to her rescue by disingenuously claiming that if Ben thinks he can take any woman on the island without her permission, Bob Lee intends to take Susan for himself. An extended fistfight with Ben leaves his elaborate home burnt to the ground, leading Ben to relent in his pursuit of Susan. Bob Lee admits that he was wrong to oppose Susan’s law and agrees to help her pass it.

Although Susan only functions as a pitiable victim, for once an episode of the show actually takes the female perspective for the entire length of the narrative. The two-part format provides extra time to react to Susan’s desperation as everyone on the island repeatedly ignores her pleas and dismisses her very real fears. On the one hand, the episode points much of its critique at the youth, who supposedly would endorse a society with no laws. This is not an entirely misplaced critique, as the counterculture often showed a significant amount of misogyny and disregard for the feminist movement. Furthermore, the abuse of women is tied to an older actor who repeatedly extols “the old days, the basic days.” Ben references the benefits of arranged marriages and the repetition of his nostalgia posits him as the representative of traditionalism. The elaborate log cabin home that Ben creates for Susan is emblematic of the American domestic ideal, where he hopes to place Susan within the role of mother and homemaker for his future family. The episode equally attacks conservative American values and young social movements for their disregard for women. That being said, the plot leaves much to be desired, such as a more debatable issue of women’s rights than rape. Furthermore, the male characters who disregard Susan’s pleas still eventually rescue her, remaining correct in their initial assurance that their patriarchal society would protect Susan. The episodes’ flaws are apparent, but the narrative formulates a somewhat more complex consideration of social concerns, rather than resorting to relevance shows’ usual depiction of an outsider being corrected.

⁷¹ Caroline Bird, “What’s Television Doing for 50.9% of Americans?,” *TV Guide*, February 27, 1971, 5.

⁷² “A Bride in Basic Black: The Courtship,” *The New People*, November 24, 1970; “A Bride in Basic Black: The Surrender,” *The New People*, December 1, 1970, both available on ARSC DVD12155 T.

Thanks to the unconventional distancing of *The New People* from the real world, the show had the potential to examine how the youth might run society, rather than spending all their time demonstrating against it. Instead of always condescending and moralizing to the youth through cautionary tales, this format occasionally opened up unique opportunities for social critique. For episodes dealing with countercultural dropouts, *The New People* reverted to its regular format of opposing the principle cast to guest starring troublemakers. Yet for episodes dealing with earnest attempts toward establishing law and order, the island's inhabitants did occasionally find success in devising alternative social configurations. One particular episode critiques power structures and militarism, culminating in the disarming of the entire island.⁷³ The episode opens as two guest characters, Bricker and Davis, collect all of the islands' guns and propose to the group that just "because plastic society establishment can't handle its gun problem [doesn't mean] that we can't handle ours." Before locking up the guns, the group decides to elect Davis as the sole peace officer who can carry a single gun and police the island. Davis is an unsure young man who describes his new job of policing others as a chance to find his life purpose. When he shuts down the town bar early and oversteps his boundaries, Bob Lee and the others turn against him. The episode uses rapid zooms and point-of-view shots to show Bob Lee envisioning Davis as a police officer wearing a helmet, appearing to be part of a riot squad. A reference to campus unrest is also made earlier in the episode when Davis praises police officers for having kept his college campus from closing. After some scuffles between the two, Davis and Bob Lee discover that Bricker has saved a powerful machine gun for himself and both work together to stop him. The episode ends by valorizing Davis, but it also critiques his hope to find self-actualization by controlling others. Perhaps most surprising is that Davis locks up the island's entire arsenal and throws the key into the ocean, effectively removing guns from society.

The direct references to police brutality and campus revolt are surprising inclusions that place much more blame on the representative police-keeping force than the students. Even though both figures join together under the same cause of fighting a new villain, Davis does not prove that he has enough responsibility to arm himself. The only answer to his flaws is for the island to dismantle and disarm their institution of government. These conclusions were not available for other relevance programs due to their placement in the real world. When an episode of *The Young Lawyers* depicted a police officer being convicted for mercilessly beating a drug dealer, the officer comes off as a bad apple who is successfully prosecuted by the law, reassuring faith in the judicial system.⁷⁴ In the episode the police are still affirmed as well-meaning people separate from this individual, but in *The New People* policing as an institution, explicitly linked to campus riots, is found to be untenable and is done away with entirely. The episode is a startling example of the rare conclusions that *The New People* reached on occasion thanks to its unusual setting.

Although moments of resistance can be found in these programs, both *The New People* and *The Young Lawyers* came to the same conclusion regarding political activism and the protest movements that divided the country. In an episode of *The New People*, the regular cast member Stanley decides to wage a revolution against anything he can find.⁷⁵ First he argues that the building of a shower system for the girls will lead to a "sweat shop" of employment, and then that the girls' dorm is "segregation by sex." Stanley asks the group, "What kind of social order are we

⁷³ "The Guns of Bomano," *The New People*, December 22, 1969, ARSC DVD12150 T.

⁷⁴ "The Russell Incident," *The Young Lawyers*, November 9, 1970, ARSC DVD12204 T.

⁷⁵ "Comes the Revolution We Use the Girls' Shower," *The New People*, October 20, 1969, ARSC DVD12153 T.

going to build around here if we can't get a rise out of anybody?" Most problematically he befriends a Black girl named Alyssa in an effort to make others reject their interracial relationship. Although Alyssa has agency in the episode and even makes a brief critique of disingenuous white liberal attitudes toward African Americans, she still lacks any racial identity of her own and reaffirms the colorblind nature of the island. All of Stanley's efforts prove fruitless and the group agrees that these social problems simply do not exist on the island. *The New People* engages in its myth of social utopianism, again precluding the possibility of racism. Countercultural protest, revolution, and social change all function as empty rhetoric and immature grabs at attention by the young to find a sense of purpose. Any attempt at critiquing the establishment for ingrained inequality could not be articulated realistically. Despite the show's opening credits referencing Vietnam War protest, prominent issues such as this are avoided thanks to the group's displacement from civilization. The episode also characterizes Stanley as socially inept and willing to put his movement above the good of others. Obscuring any humanist concern for social inequality, these critiques reappear in multiple episodes of other relevance programs.

In its final episode, "I've Got a Problem," *The Young Lawyers* considered the Vietnam War, the only one of these ABC shows to have explicitly looked at this incredibly relevant issue.⁷⁶ Since the show did not have the escapist settings of other programs, a difficult negotiation had to be used for the episode to work. Rather than discussing the ethical nature of the war itself, the episode focused on free speech and military conscription. When Aaron makes a guest appearance on DJ Billy Walden's teen-oriented radio program, a caller confesses that he does not want to serve in the army, but has been given a draft notice. When Aaron offers legal aid but refuses to tell the young man what to do, the man calls him a copout for not answering the question. The host Billy does answer by referring to the war as "illegal and immoral" and claiming that he would go to jail before being inducted. After the call the station owner fires Billy, and Aaron defends him on the grounds of a breach of contract. Billy, however, sabotages the case by purposefully ranting about his right to free speech in court, against the wishes of Aaron and the Neighborhood Law Office. In the episode's conclusion Aaron discovers that Billy has been conspiring with Clove, a writer for the underground press who has been publishing headlines about Billy's case and leading rowdy protests outside the courthouse. Billy and Clove had planted the young caller, Walter, in order to cause the entire uproar, but Walter actually does face the real problem of what to do about his draft induction.

The episode repeats many previously mentioned strategies to negatively characterize political protest. Regardless of Aaron's opinion on the Vietnam War, which is never given, the episode positions him as the establishment going against the propagandist underground press.⁷⁷ The press has no other choice but to create controversy in order to protest, since supposedly there

⁷⁶ "I've Got a Problem," *The Young Lawyers*, March 24, 1971, ARSC DVD12172 T.

⁷⁷ ABC had a troubled relationship with their local underground press due to their hiring of the *Los Angeles Free Press*' television critic Harlan Ellison to write an episode of *The Young Lawyers* titled "The Whimper of Whipped Dogs." The episode aired March 10, 1971. When Ellison felt that his script had been butchered, he went on a rant in the press, sharing sensitive production information and condemning the entire system of television's creative process. His complaints were mostly related to excised dialogue and scenes that rendered the plot unrealistic, rather than pinpointing any political censorship. Although this occurred much too late for the episode "I've Got a Problem" to be a response to Ellison's actions, it is a notable case of protest from the exact audience that ABC hoped to incorporate and win over while still obviously attacking the group in episodes like "I've Got a Problem." For Ellison's column entries against ABC see his collected writings found in *The Other Glass Teat: Further Essays of Opinion on Television* (New York: Ace Books, 1983), 360-74.

are no real issues of injustice already available. When Billy and Clove complain about the establishment keeping them down, Aaron retorts that only the radio president complained about Billy's comments. If Billy had followed Aaron's directions to win his trial by breach of contract, the system would have provided justice for Billy against this single person. The episode carefully guides the viewer back toward faith in the government's ability to achieve justice.

Other efforts are made to categorize the protestors as selfish and inconsiderate, as opposed to the real change happening at the Neighborhood Law Office. Throughout the episode, Clove's opulent and spacious apartment appears, placing her and her activist group in the upper class. The episode creates a class binary between the humble NLO and the privileged counterculture, the same binary used throughout the series to distinguish the protagonists from the wealthy corporate law establishment. The protestors also ignore Walter, who anxiously debates how to respond to his draft notice. A series of exchanges between Aaron and the activists perfectly captures *The Young Lawyers's* redirection of youthful frustration.

Billy asks Aaron, "Do you really believe your naïve faith in the system is going to save it from destruction?" Aaron replies, "...you're not interested in saving anyone, you're interested in confusion. You talk about humanity but when a human being comes here for help, you use him." When Clove mocks Aaron and asks if he will "save the world," Aaron replies, "No, no. I'm gonna try to help him, just one person." The episode concludes as Aaron and another NLO student listen to Walter's questions about the draft. They explain the law's stance on conscientious objectors and continue to discuss his concerns and opinions. As their ongoing conversation fades away, Barrett looks in on them and then leaves the office for the night. The audience is treated to a literal cultural dialogue being left open, but only after a demonization of the counterculture and political protestors.⁷⁸ By 1971 many viewers could guess that Aaron would be against the Vietnam War. The episode even opens up a space to read this by foregrounding Aaron's guilt-ridden statements that he did "cop out" by not sharing his unnamed opinion publicly. At another point in the episode a conspicuous poster hangs above Aaron's desk and reads, "Thou Shalt Not Kill, Right." Since the dialogue never explicitly reveals any regular cast member's position, the episode redirects its focus to affirm human service over political and social disruption. When Aaron defends himself against the countercultural figures, he offers a metacommentary on the critical rejection of relevance programming. If relevance shows were despised for lacking a stance on specific issues, Billy's youth-oriented radio program does take its stand, but only to generate unnecessary controversy. Aaron emphasizes the importance for him and the show to stand for the universal ideal of helping others, rather than offering vague critiques of the system. Unfortunately relevance programs came at a time when critics and audiences demanded a different type of cultural negotiation on their television, one that found a way to more explicitly consider cultural issues.

Relevancy programming depicted the frustrations of a polarized society and its distrust for foundational American institutions, only to urge viewers back toward illusory ideals and using the same proper channels for change. ABC's topical programming would soon give way to more successful iterations of relevance based on comedy. Most notably *All in the Family* catered to both sides of an explicit discussion and generated laughs from the confrontation, rather than forcing an agreement. The label of relevance programming promised too much in terms of serious reflection

⁷⁸ For Bodroghkozy's look at *The Mod Squad*, including certain episodes that took more pluralist views on the counterculture and war protestors, see her chapter "Negotiating the Mod: How *The Mod Squad* Played the Ideological Balancing Act in Prime Time," in *Groove Tube*, 164-98.

and delivered too little. Much of this programming's legacy has led to the mockery of network cynicism. Rather than replay tropes of greedy executives, it is worth considering that perhaps relevancy was not only a failure of the networks, but also a victory of audiences who demanded a more authentic and complex political debate.