

IMAGES OF GOVERNMENT IN TV ENTERTAINMENT

Presented to:

THE COUNCIL FOR EXCELLENCE IN GOVERNMENT
1301 K Street, NW
Washington, DC

By:

S. ROBERT LICHTER
LINDA S. LICHTER
DAN AMUNDSON

CENTER FOR MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS
2100 L Street, NW
Washington, DC

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Historical Section: <i>The 1950's Through The 1980's</i>	5
Public Officials	5
Civil Servants	18
Law Enforcers	25
Teachers	37
Tables	45
Contemporary Section: <i>TV In The 1990's</i>	55
Public Officials	55
Civil Servants	64
Law Enforcers	73
Teachers	88
Tables	95
Conclusion	105
Tables	111
Methodological Appendix	113

INTRODUCTION

How does television entertainment portray government in America? The answer depends, in part, on how you ask the question. Does “government” refer to the impact of public institutions or the behavior of people who work in them? It surely means federal officials in Washington D.C., but does it also include a local public school teacher in Washington state? Is it a matter of how frequently, how accurately, or how positively government workers are depicted? Such questions are directly relevant to evaluating the scripts, plot lines, and characters of the fictional portrayals of government that populate prime time.

Consider a 1998 episode of the trend-setting Fox series “The X-Files.” The intrepid FBI agent Fox Mulder infiltrates a militia-like anti-government organization at great personal risk. He barely escapes death before foiling a bank robbery attempted by the group. Then he discovers an even greater crime – a secret government conspiracy to implant a deadly biotoxin in the stolen money, in order to test its effects on the general populace. When a shadowy higher-up tells him, “Our government is not in the business of killing innocent civilians,” Mulder replies hotly, “The hell they aren’t!” Then the conspirator challenges him, “What do you hope to accomplish, agent Mulder, as a whistleblower?... To bring down the federal government?” Mulder responds, “I want people to know the truth.” But his opponent gets the last word: “Sometimes our job is to protect the people from knowing it.”

It is difficult to imagine a more negative portrayal of government than this account of high officials ready to expose its citizens to deadly toxins in order to test their military potential. On the other hand, viewers have also seen the Galahad-like agent Mulder (along with his equally idealistic partner, agent Dana Scully) perform various heroics in pursuit of both the truth and the public interest. A theme of this episode is that our own government harbors sinister and dangerous forces. But it also depicts high-minded and courageous government employees fighting to ward off these same forces.

As it turns out, there are more heroic FBI agents in the prime time schedule than there are high-level government conspiracies. But this episode reminds us how complicated it can be to characterize the various facets of the public sector that appear on television entertainment. Over the years the many faces of government have ranged from corrupt politicians like Hazzard County Commissioner Boss Hogg to the crime-solving medical examiner known only as “Quincy,” and from the dedicated public school teachers of “Room 222” to the put-upon policemen of “NYPD Blue.”

To capture this diversity, we analyzed the portrayals of all characters identified as civilian public sector employees, as well as program themes involving government practices and performance, in a sample of past and present prime time entertainment series. We began with a previously collected sample of 620 programs that aired on ABC, CBS, and NBC from 1955 through 1986, which were selected randomly from the Library of Congress Broadcast Archive Collection. To study contemporary programming we taped the first episode of every fictional prime time series that aired

on ABC, CBS, NBC or FOX during every season from 1992 through 1998. If a series was renewed, an episode was included from each season it remained in the schedule. The current-decade sample consists of 614 episodes of 382 different series.

To identify the relevant aspects of each character and plot line, we used the social scientific method of content analysis. This method, which produces objective and systematic descriptions of communicative content, is described in an appendix to this report. Briefly, it involves classifying material according to a priori rules and procedures, the results of which can be tested and replicated. We developed the content analysis system and trained college students to apply it to this program material under our supervision.

In each program we identified some of the most important personal traits and plot functions of every character with a speaking part and an identifiable occupation. Among these were their race and gender, occupation (with special attention to public- vs. private-sector distinctions), the prominence of each role and the valence attached to it (i.e. good guys vs. bad guys), the principal motivations behind each character's actions, and the eventual resolution of their efforts (success or failure). Most importantly for the purposes of this study, we also classified the occupation of each character using the same codes as the U.S. Census Bureau. This procedure produced a sample of 9,588 characters, of whom 2,664 (28 percent) were civilian public sector employees at the local, state or federal level.

The historical sample contained 4,725 characters, of whom 1,194 were government employees; the contemporary sample consisted of 4,763 characters, including 1,470 government employees.

This report profiles four major categories of public sector workers – those involved in law enforcement, including both the court system (judges and government lawyers) and peace officers (police, sheriffs, etc.); public school teachers; elected officials, including characters who either hold or seek public office; and a residual category of diverse civil servants, including mail carriers, clerks, administrators, etc. In addition, we identified several recurring themes related to the practice or performance of government, such as charges of government corruption, the question of whether government decisions are guided by the public interest or special interest groups; the justice systems's treatment of women and minorities, etc.

Our narrative begins by looking at how each of the major government-related groups and themes were treated throughout television's history, with special attention to the changes that occurred from the 1950's through the 1980's. Then we examine the world of contemporary television entertainment, showing how the same public sector groups and themes are presented to audiences in the 1990's. Finally, we conclude with an overview of how today's portrayals both reflect and update past depictions of government on the prime time schedule.

HISTORICAL SECTION

The 1950's Through The 1980's

PUBLIC OFFICIALS

In a 1985 article in *TV Guide*, two former U.S. Senators complained that television portrays politicians as “made up in equal parts of stupidity and cupidity.” According to the aggrieved legislators, “lawmakers are depicted wheeling and dealing . . . or going to parties where a Carrington or a Ewing slips them a few thousand for the campaign.” To counteract this image, they invited writers and producers to come to Washington, where they could meet the “diligent, hard-working and conscientious” public officials the authors said they worked with daily. One of the authors of the *TV Guide* piece was Maine Republican William Cohen. The other was perhaps not the best messenger in this instance – he was Colorado Democrat Gary Hart, who would soon be immersed in the sort of real-life soap opera that the networks usually save for a “sweeps” period.

In any case, such efforts are unlikely to alter Hollywood’s vision of politics. A solid majority (62 percent) of prime time politicians were indeed shown working, but their activities were hardly those the senators had in mind. Elected officials had the worst image of any government-related occupational group on television for the entire time period we studied. They were also the only group to contain a majority of bad guys. Fifty-one percent played negative roles compared to 40 percent who were positive. The remaining nine percent were neutral. (Indeed, our studies show that politics was the only major occupation other than business to produce a predominately negative balance sheet.)

Not all public officials were bad guys, just a much higher proportion than the prime-time norm; their negative rate was double that for all characters in census-coded occupations. That gap widens even more for government employees. Politicians were about three times as likely to be portrayed negatively as were law enforcers. Similarly, eleven percent committed crimes, verses four percent of law enforcers, zero percent among teachers, and seven percent among all private sector characters. Throughout these three decades television showed a variety of wheeler-dealers, corrupt evildoers, and honest crusaders. The methods they chose were fairly consistent for the entire period we studied. Slightly more than a third (37 percent) of all methods politicians used involved persuasion to achieve their goal, another third relied on the authority of their position, and ten percent employed trickery.

If the standard political stereotypes persisted over the years, the mix changed more than once. Public officials were initially viewed as bad guys who were briefly rehabilitated, but then relapsed with a vengeance. From 1955 through 1964, negative characters outnumbered positive ones by 50 to 42 percent, with the remainder portrayed in a neutral fashion. During the following decade (1965 through 1974), by contrast, positive characters outnumbered negative ones by a two-to-one margin of 46 to 23 percent. From 1975 through 1986, the dark side of politics took over again on prime time, as 56 percent of all public officials were portrayed negatively and only 37 percent positively.

The early years of the study featured a host of hard-nosed manipulators who reveled in exercising power. Although some of their machinations served constituents or noble causes, these characters

were usually scheming empire builders or the pawns of shadowy power brokers. Various corrupt politicians and influence peddlers were regular targets of crusading reporters on “Target: The Corruptors” and “Saints and Sinners;” and the crusading lawyers of “Cain’s Hundred” and “The Defenders.” Our sample included a corrupt politician as early as 1955 on the “Schlitz Playhouse of Stars.” The plot concerns a young man who is framed for the murder of a woman. The man behind the frame-up turns out to be Art Healy, a ward boss in the local machine. It seems that Healy was romantically involved with the dead woman. When her father objected to the relationship, Healy had him killed. He covered up the murder by committing another old man to a nursing home in the father’s name. When the woman attempted to blackmail Healy with this information, he had her killed too. Then he set up the young man to take the fall.

The politician as wheeler-dealer was typified by an unusual segment of “The Adventures of Jim Bowie.” This 1957 historical adventure was unusual in presenting a political figure whose corrupt activities were leavened by an endearingly raffish personal style. The episode in our sample deals with Bowie’s efforts to gain power and influence by securing a racehorse for President Andrew Jackson. As the story opens, Bowie is telling one Senator Holcomb about the campaigning he did for both Holcomb and Jackson. Holcomb responds that “such loyalty should not go unrewarded.” He tells Bowie that Jackson has “a very deep sense of gratitude.” So deep, in fact, that his enemies label his devotion to his friends as the spoils system. He then offers Bowie the office of Collector for the Port of New Orleans in exchange for procuring a favorite racehorse for the president. “Think of the

prestige, my boy,” Holcomb tells him, “not to mention the fortune for a man of your talents.” Bowie accepts the offer with a knowing look.

Bowie sets off to buy the horse. When he discovers the owner is a Whig, Bowie smoothly evades his own suddenly inconvenient campaign record. “You must be confusing me with my brother,” he lies, “the black sheep of the family – has funny ideas about politics.” To obtain the money he needs, Bowie collaborates with his friend Sam Houston, cast here as a local politician. But in the end Houston double crosses him by stealing the horse and riding off to give it to the president himself. That leaves Bowie looking like a political novice who is outmaneuvered by a real pro.

Television’s early years also offered some wholly admirable portrayals of public officials. For example, the 1962 season featured Fess Parker in the TV version of “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington.” The hero, Senator Eugene Smith, charmed the sophisticated capital with his modest good nature and homespun homilies. More typical of TV’s crusading politician was the 1964 series “Slattery’s People.” James Slattery was the idealistic and reform-minded leader of a state legislature. In an episode we coded, he jeopardizes his reelection chances by defending an old friend accused of past Communist associations.

This early prototype of the politician as progressive crusader blossomed during the early 1970’s, the period during which public officials were usually seen as a force for good. Two series were built

around idealistic political leaders who regularly challenged the establishment in their efforts to serve the public. One was “The Senator,” played by Hal Holbrook. Senator Hayes Stowe advocates a better world, a cleaner environment, more consumer protection, and other progressive causes. He opposes entrenched interests, usually represented by business lobbyists, and the political status quo.

Also during this period, Anthony Quinn played a crusading Hispanic politician in “The Man and the City.” As mayor of a thriving Southwestern metropolis, Thomas Jefferson Alcala fought for his constituents against machine politicians and a cold bureaucracy. A 1971 episode in our sample was typical of the series: A distraught mother asks Mayor Alcala to help her son, who was picked up by the police after two officers were shot in an ambush. When he discovers the boy is being held incommunicado, he demands that they release him. When his acting police chief objects, the mayor replies, “You can’t suspend the law,” and more heatedly, “In my city we go by the rules.” Meanwhile, Tom has to deal with a city council that wants to crack down on unrest in the Hispanic community. He reluctantly interviews their preferred candidate for police chief, a man named Wheeler, who favors “aggressive police work, some preventive measures, and curfews for troublesome areas” (by implication, high-crime minority areas). This leads to an exchange that establishes the mayor’s concern for his people:

Mayor: “Doesn’t the curfew restrain freedom?”

Wheeler: “It’s for the good of the community.”

Mayor: "Do they willingly give up the freedom and really have a choice?"

Wheeler: "The curfew is inconvenient but necessary."

Mayor: "Isn't law and order without justice meaningless?"

Eventually the mayor manages to help catch the killers without resorting to a curfew. Unlike typical politicians on the city council, he willingly takes unpopular stands to preserve individual rights. And in the end his judgment is vindicated. Like "The Senator," this mayor is a quintessential maverick. His character is defined in opposition to the traditional, self-serving politicians who surround him. He embodies not politics as usual but politics as conceived and practiced by men of courage and principle.

Counterbalancing the politics of principle are the politics of corruption, illustrated by villainous characters who appeared on various dramatic series. For example, a 1968 episode of "Bonanza" involved system-wide corruption in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The Cartwrights protect a witness against the eight top men in the bureau, who are all involved in land fraud. Their efforts to stop his testimony range from a \$50,000 bribe attempt to kidnapping and attempted murder. In fact, a subplot concerns the Cartwrights' difficulties in winning the witness's trust. He has been betrayed so often by government officials, he assumes they are being bribed as well.

Hollywood increasingly focused on the dark side of political life after the mid-1970's. *Police* shows routinely featured venal or unethical politicians involved in various conflicts of interest, bribery schemes, or sexual improprieties. The typical script pitted a maverick cop against politicians allied with business or criminal interests. By the 1980's evil politicians were staples in prime-time soaps. For example, "Flamingo Road" featured the promiscuous Fielding Carlyle, while the mob-connected Gregory Sumner was a leading character in "Knots Landing." NBC's "Grandpa Goes to Washington" provided a short-lived contrast to this negative image. Based on a "Mr. Smith" style maverick politician, retired professor Joe Kelley was the unlikely victor in a Senate race where both major party candidates were exposed as crooks. Kelley's platform was honesty in government, but political corruption was presented as the norm.

The other trend was toward casting foolish or bumbling politicians in humorous roles. Thus Benson took charge of his well-meaning but inept boss Governor James Gatling. "Hail to the Chief" presented a White House so sex-crazed that TV critic Tom Shales commented, "After watching it, one may feel the compulsion to disinfect the television set with Lysol." Typical of this comic genre was Boss Hogg, the blustery county commissioner and machine-style political boss of rural Hazzard County on "The Dukes of Hazzard." Hogg spent much of his time concocting greedy schemes and railing against his nemeses the Duke boys. In a sample 1980 episode we viewed, Hogg's plan to foreclose on an automotive show depends on his keeping the Dukes from competing. So he orders his dimwitted minion, county sheriff Roscoe Coltrane, to get rid of their cherished car "any way you

can, legal or otherwise.” After Roscoe impounds the car on trumped-up charges, Hogg sends it the crusher. When the Dukes rescue it in the nick of time, he orders their arrest for grand theft. When all else fails, Hogg tells Roscoe to stop the show by arresting someone. On what charge? “Invent one.” Such common misdeeds undoubtedly account for the high failure rate of politicians’ plans. While a slight majority of 53 percent succeeded, 35 percent failed. This was twice the failure rate for all characters we studied, and more than three times the failure rate for law enforcers.

Beyond examining particular politicians, we analyzed how television portrays the larger political system. Politics was seen as a selfish business, in which decisions turned on narrow self-interest or the influence of special interest groups, not the common good. Overall, 68 percent of politicians advanced their own interests while 32 percent worked for special interest groups. This mix of negative motives varied over time. During the earliest period, a majority of politicians (57 percent) pursued their own personal agenda, while 43 percent represented special interests. But by the mid-1970's all politicians focused on their own personal gain. From 1975 on, personal priorities still dominated politics, with 73 percent working on their own behalf.

Of the 21 shows that dealt with some aspect of political motivation, most appeared after 1975. In our entire thirty year sample, not a single show presented the political system as functioning to uphold the public good rather than private interests. The crusading politicians who really cared about the public were invariably cast as mavericks or outsiders. They had to battle politics-as-usual or buck

the system to protect the public interest. For example, a 1981 segment of “Lou Grant” revolved around the Los Angeles pollution control board. One member tries to end the board’s practices of giving waivers to any company that will aid the city’s economic development. The other board members outmaneuver him, however, and his fight for clean air falls victim to the alliance between business and government regulators.

Although television condemns political selfishness, it retains some faith in the system’s integrity. Of the thirty-eight shows that raised the issue of corruption, 58 percent portrayed the system as fundamentally honest. But TV’s early optimism waned over time. Prior to 1975, the episodes we coded endorsed the system by a two-to-one ratio. That is, two-thirds of the episodes that turned on this theme affirmed the system’s integrity, while one third portrayed it as corrupt. After 1975, by contrast, fully half (50 percent) presented viewers with a crooked political system in need of reform.

Even when television affirms the system, constant struggle is required to maintain its integrity. As early as 1961, “Target: The Corruptors” devoted an episode to lobbyists. The opening narration set the tone:

The business of making laws by which the citizen is bound is almost an impossible task at best. At worst it can be a criminal activity of shocking proportions — when controlled by lobbyists who exceed their legal limitations....Fortunately most state

legislatures are comprised of men of high caliber...honest men the corruptors haven't been able to buy. But where money proves useless, those forces of evil that can't afford to have honest obstacles stand in their way have other means of chasing these paths.

Following this portentous voice-over, the audience sees two thugs enter a state senator's office, knock him out, and throw him out the window to his death. A crusading reporter discovers that the murder was orchestrated by a powerful lobbyist with ties to organized crime figures. They want the legislature to keep the state "dry" in order to preserve their control over the illegal liquor trade. The lobbyist is arrested and honest politics prevail, but only after a strong rhetorical attack on the power of lobbyists. This example is typical of television's treatment of "special interests" as a danger to the democratic system rather than a legitimate facet of representative government. Thus, good-guy politicians were often shown as reformers who battle with the special interests that control and compromise the system.

The problem of corrupt government and politicians became even more pronounced in the 1970's and 1980's. In the early years, corruption was often mob-connected. By the 1970's corruption tended to focus on personal or political power, with an occasional element of international intrigue. An episode of "Airwolf," a mid-1980's action-adventure series, highlighted this idea. The villains were

a congressman and an industrialist who conspired to build an attack helicopter. Both stood to make a fortune through the illegal sale of the weapon abroad.

There was also increased attention to the work of special interests in government during this era. Major corporations or powerful individuals were seen manipulating politicians, undercutting political opponents, and engaging in other activities that diminished the character of public servants. The results were clear in a sample “Scarecrow and Mrs. King” episode. The story was inspired by a real-world struggle over industrial pollution that threatened marine life in the Chesapeake Bay off the coast of Maryland. A public official has received financial backing from a major fishing company. In return, he must block any bills restricting the company’s operations. But the official can’t keep his promise in good conscience. He begins working with other lobbyists who want to “Save the Bay” (a popular environmentalist bumper sticker in real life). When all else fails, the company has the official killed rather than lose its profitable position.

The most pointed commentary on politics in our sample came from “Good Times,” a Norman Lear comedy set in a poor African-American urban neighborhood. In this episode, the local alderman threatens to evict the Evans family from a public housing project if J.J. Evans doesn’t make a reelection speech for him. The entire episode is peppered with bitter jokes about politicians who break the faith. For example: A new dress is billed as “the election special” because “it’s cut real low, making all kinds of promises you know you’re not going to keep.” As the episode progresses,

alderman Fred Davis exerts continuous pressure on the Evans family by sending prospective tenants to view their apartment. When Thelma Evans complains that there must be laws against this practice, her mother tells her that it is politicians like Davis who make the laws. After the alderman's threat fails, family matriarch Florida Evans laments, "That's the sad thing. As long as there are aldermen like Fred Davis, people like us will always live here in the ghetto." The unmistakable message is that wretched housing conditions in the slums are the product of political corruption.

By the 1980's the good-guy politician had virtually disappeared from the screen. This undoubtedly reflects the conspicuously low ratings of shows that starred public officials. In fact, public officials were rarely found as continuing characters, aside from the occasional schemer who provided subplots on prime time soap operas such as "Dallas." Several series built around government officeholders quickly disappeared: "Fortune Dane" went beyond the standard police drama by having the rough, tough Dane report directly to the equally tough Mayor Amanda Harding, who was always concerned with the practical politics of law enforcement. The show addressed current legal and political topics, such as the sanctuary movement, during its brief run in 1986. Another short-lived effort from the same season was "He's the Mayor," a comedy about a young black mayor who lived with his father, a maintenance man at city hall. Norman Lear's proposed comedy about a bumbling black congressman never got off the ground, after the pilot was denounced as racist by the Congressional Black Caucus.

Political series that enjoyed runs longer than a single season were usually domestic comedies with political backdrops. An example is “The Farmer’s Daughter,” the story of a simple Swedish farm girl named Katrin Holstrom, who became governess for the children of widowed Congressman Glen Morley. Her lack of pretension and common sense were cast as a welcome contrast to the pretensions of official Washington. But the series was only peripherally concerned with Glen’s political causes and career. The real question was whether Glen and “Katy” would marry; their wedding marked the show’s third and last season in 1966. But the public lives of public office holders have rarely held the attention of viewers. When television has concerned itself with politics, the focus was increasingly on the shortcomings of the political system and the people who run it.

CIVIL SERVANTS

The men and women who make the government run on a day-to-day basis have had a pale presence on prime time television. Compared to law enforcers, politicians, and teachers, they rarely took center stage, instead appearing in minor or otherwise unmemorable roles. This catchall category of government workers not covered in previous chapters included political aides, mail carriers, librarians, government clerks, inspectors and public school administrators. We identified a total of 167 such workers across three decades, about one out of every seven characters associated with government. Like television's general population, nearly three out of four government workers (71 percent) were male; 83 percent were white, also reflecting the norm on TV. But this group did contain a much greater proportion of black characters (13 percent versus five percent) than those who appeared in all occupations.

Despite the relatively large number of characters who are included in this group, civil servants failed to make their presence felt on the prime time landscape. Most were walk-on roles or minor parts that served to fill out a scene or provide information to advance the plot. Few were integral to the plot line, and even fewer had story lines built around them. As a result, an unusually high proportion (40 percent) of civil servants appeared in neutral roles, compared to only one in five teachers, one in four law enforcers, and a mere nine percent of political office holders. This is not surprising, since most government workers lacked star power. Only nine percent had a leading role in any episode, about

half the rate for all occupations. Just under a third had minor continuing roles, and fully two in five appeared in a single episode, rather than serving as part of the regular cast.

Even when their roles were fleshed out, civil servants were not especially likely to be shown in a positive light. Forty-two percent of civil servants were portrayed positively, a lower rate than we found among television's general population. In contrast, roughly two-thirds of teachers and three out of five law enforcers were positively portrayed. (For lawyers and judges considered separately, the proportion of good guys rose to three out of four.) The image of civil servants has varied over time, in ways that were neither linear nor predictable. In the earliest period (1955-64), slightly over half (53 percent) were neutral, a third were positive and 13 percent were negative. Between 1965 and 1974, this group was defined both more clearly and more positively. Just over half (57 percent) of public servants shown during this period were positive characters, a third were neutral, and the remaining nine percent were negative. After 1975, however, the prime time portrayals shifted again. During that period, civil servants registered their most negative rating, with 26 percent of characters shown in a bad light. Neutral characters held steady at about a third of all those in this group, while the proportion of positive characters fell to about two in five.

How do we account for this long-term zigzag development from predominately neutral portrayals to first positive and then negative ones? The answer illuminates some broader trends in the prime time schedule and its portrayal of government. In TV's early years, when public servants generally

appeared in neutral roles, politicians provided the main face of government. The staff members of elected officials rarely appeared, and portrayals of government institutions were largely limited to the activities of police departments. Even shows like “Target: the Corruptors”(1961-62) or “Cain’s Hundred”(1961-62), which sometimes dealt directly with government, tended to emphasize the role of politicians. A team of social workers starred in “East Side/West Side,” but that series proved a rarity on prime time. As the exception that proved the rule, this gritty urban drama explored the crime, drug addiction, and daily violence of New York’s slums during its single-season run in 1963 and 1964.

Beginning in the mid-1960's, public officials began to interact with paid staff members, and plot lines began including the functions of government agencies. During the brief period in which “politician” was not a dirty word on television, professional staff functioned as practical foils for their more idealistic bosses. For example, in a 1965 episode of “Slattery’s People,” an aide to state representative (and series star) Jim Slattery tells his boss not to participate in a debate that could jeopardize his chances for re-election. But Slattery’s principles demand that he use the debate to defend a friend who was accused of having Communist sympathies. Likewise, in a 1971 episode of “Man and the City,” the mayor’s assistant warns that nominating a controversial candidate for police chief could cost crucial city council support for programs favored by the mayor. Of course, the high-minded mayor rejects the advice.

Although political aides and operatives assumed more prominent roles in the 1970's, most of the series in which such characters appeared proved short-lived. For example, "All's Fair" starred a political columnist who became a special assistant to President Carter, and a senatorial aide had a continuing role in "Grandpa Goes to Washington." Both shows lasted only one season. An exception to this trend was "Benson," which had the greatest longevity of the genre, running from 1979 through 1986. The eponymous Benson DuBois began the series as a butler to the well-intended but naive Governor James Gatling. But his advice proved pivotal in many political decisions, and he consistently trumped the governor's more experienced political aides in solving problems. In later years Benson became the state Budget Director and orchestrated the governor's successful re-election bid. As the series developed, Benson followed a real-life career track rarely seen in prime time by becoming an elected official (Lieutenant Governor) himself!

Unlike Benson, the typical TV civil servant of that period was a minor character or part of an ensemble cast in a series that was quickly canceled. For example, in 1973 "Carlucci's Department" featured a multiethnic cast of employees at the state unemployment office. "Szysnk," which had a brief run in 1977 and 1978, profiled an urban youth center supervisor who battled other government workers from the city bureaucracy to keep his funding. That same season, "Fish," a spinoff of the popular comedy "Barney Miller," cast police detective Phil Fish and his wife Bernice as the custodians of five juvenile "PINS" (Persons in Need of Supervision). Government child psychologist Charlie Harrison, who was assigned to their case, was indecisive and inept at dealing with the children and

their problems. The kids, in turn, exploited his weaknesses. While Charlie's incompetence frustrated Fish, it was usually Bernice or the kids who provided the best solutions. Alas, "Fish" was no "Barney Miller," and the show was quickly canceled.

The most successful show of the 1970's to focus on a government agency was "Quincy," which chronicled the crime-solving work of a Los Angeles medical examiner. The dedicated, sometimes obsessive Quincy balked at any rules or procedures that hindered his sleuthing. In contrast, his boss Dr. Astin gave priority to following the rules and completing the perpetual paperwork his agency required. While seen as a competent administrator, his skill was no match for Quincy's. In one episode, Astin tried to substitute for the vacationing Quincy but was quickly overwhelmed by the work. In another, Astin yielded to political pressure and reversed Quincy's decision to shut down a construction site after human remains were discovered there. Quincy ultimately succeeded in his quest to close the site, identify the victim, and discover the killer.

Several episodes of other series offered similarly negative portrayals of hidebound bureaucrats, whose adherence to rules or subservience to superiors provided obstacles for the hero to overcome. In a Western that ran from 1981 to 1984, two agents of the Dakota Territory Authority plagued kindly "Father Murphy" as he tried to care for orphans at his school. Murphy masqueraded as a priest to qualify as the children's custodian. The agents were invariably foiled in their attempts to remove the orphans from the school and send them to a public workhouse. Murphy eventually married and adopted all the children. Similarly, in the 1982 sitcom "Report to Murphy," an idealistic parole

officer ran up against the cynical and disillusioned veterans in his department, who scoffed at his unorthodox ideas and his personal involvement with clients.

Although postmen appeared with some frequency as bit players whose deliveries were the most important aspect of their role, it was not until the 1980's that a memorable mail carrier appeared in a series start. But "Cheers" staple Cliff Clavin lent little credit to his profession. A favorite target of ridicule for his friends at the bar, Cliff was obtuse, officious, socially inept, and sometimes dishonest. For example, in a 1985 episode, Cliff has a terrible cold and stops at "Cheers" for a hot drink. His friends try to convince him to go home, but he recites postal regulations and insists he must deliver the mail. He finally relents when his friend Norm volunteers to finish the job. Norm is promptly arrested and jailed for impersonating a mailman. Cliff can secure his release by admitting he gave Norm the mail, but only at the cost of his job. Cliff refuses to take this risk until he is shamed by his friends at the bar. After confessing the truth, his spotless record is blemished by a reprimand, but he retains his job and the friendship of a forgiving Norm.

Surprisingly, television sometimes looked somewhat favorably on the Internal Revenue Service. In the 1983-84 series "Lottery," IRS agent Eric Rush traveled with a sweepstakes official as he awarded big prizes to ordinary people. While Rush's stated job on this prize patrol was to collect the required taxes, he clearly enjoyed watching the winners learn of their sudden wealth. In one show, he also helped capture two imposters who stole someone else's prize. Another favorable portrayal of an IRS

agent illustrates the difference between prime time portrayals of individuals and institutions. In “Remington Steele,” agent Mildred Krebs was assigned to pursue the series star, a suave James Bond type (played by a future Bond, actor Pierce Brosnan) with a mysterious background, on a tax evasion charge. When the soft-hearted Mildred let him off, her bosses dismissed her. But Remington Steele Investigations saved the day by hiring her as its office manager. Mildred joined the regular cast, having proved too kind-hearted to remain an IRS agent.

LAW ENFORCERS

In the fantasy world of prime time television, the most visible activities of government take place in the courtroom and the station house. We identified nearly 1200 characters who were employed in some type of law enforcement, almost one in every five characters in census-coded occupations in our 1955-1986 sample. Our analysis differentiated among several types of law enforcement occupations, not all of which were connected to any government body. Among the 877 governmental law enforcers in the sample, prosecutors and judges pursued justice in the courtroom, while federal agents, police officers, and sheriffs kept peace in the streets.

In the real world these groups exhaust the major law enforcement occupations. But the world of television entertainment is quite different from the real world. The prime time schedule has featured some memorable private detectives who pursued justice outside official channels. Their personae ranged from the glamour boys of “77 Sunset Strip” to low rent ex-con Jim Rockford of “The Rockford Files.” We also encountered a catchall group of security guards, ill-defined secret agents, and other law enforcers who did not conform to clear occupational categories. Even this large and varied group does not include the many ordinary citizens who become crime solvers in the flourishing mystery genre, such as Jessica Fletcher of “Murder, She Wrote.” However, we will discuss some private sector law enforcement professionals, for the insights they provide as foils for their public sector counterparts.

Police officers comprised the single largest group of professional law enforcers. Half the law enforcement characters in our sample did some type of police work, most as detectives rather than lower-ranked uniformed officers. Lawyers and judges were the next most numerous group, accounting for one in five law enforcers. Federal agents accounted for another one in eight. Despite the high profile played by private investigators throughout television's history, this group accounted for just six percent of all law enforcers. Although private eyes have played starring roles ever since the early 1950's, they have rarely shown up in any capacity other than as the romanticized heroic gumshoe around when a particular series was built.

Always a staple of prime-time life, the ranks of law enforcement have swelled in recent seasons. We coded 250 law enforcers in the first decade of our study, just over one for every program analyzed. By the third decade, their number rose to 430, the equivalent to nearly two per program. The biggest increase was in the number of police officers, who were two and one-half times more numerous after 1975 than they were before 1965. The number of private detectives also nearly doubled over that period. The ranks of federal agents reached their peak between 1965 and 1974, when espionage shows were popular.

Like the criminals they pursue, most video law enforcers have been white males. Only eight percent were women, most of whom appeared after 1975, when a number of female detectives began to appear on the airwaves. Their racial makeup has been equally homogeneous. Nearly nine out of ten

law enforcers (87 percent) in our sample were white. Only eight percent were black, and most of those appeared since the late 1960's. Hispanic law enforcers were seen sporadically throughout the three decades we examined, but always in very low numbers. They constituted less than two percent of the total law enforcement sample.

The men and women who uphold the law have always been among Hollywood's heroes, and this sample proved no exception to the rule. Nearly two-thirds of the law enforcers in our sample (62 percent) were portrayed positively, compared to 44 percent of all characters in census-coded occupations. There were distinct variations among the different types of law enforcers, however, and all types of government agents and officials were eclipsed by private eyes. These outsiders had the highest positive rating and the lowest negative rating of any law enforcement group. Five out of every six private investigators (83 percent) who appeared in any role were shown as good guys, and a mere five percent turned out to be bad guys. Close behind were government agents, among whom 80 percent were positive and only seven percent negative. They were followed by lawyers and judges, who were 74 percent positive and 12 percent negative. Police were 59 percent positive and 12 percent negative. Sheriffs ranked last among all law enforcers; among this group 45 percent were positive and 35 percent negative.

The bulk of all positive law enforcement characters were shown as competent and efficient professionals devoted to their work. Accordingly, they were generally cast in a purely professional

context. Eighty-two percent were always seen on the job, while only three percent were cast in a personal role. (The remaining 15 percent engaged in both kinds of activities during a given episode.) In contrast, 52 percent of our general population (i.e. all characters in census-coded occupations) performed an occupational role. Viewers were far more likely to see the personal sides of other public sector workers. For example, teachers and public officials were portrayed in a purely non-occupational context four to five times frequently as law enforcers.

Despite all the violence on TV, many law enforcers were portrayed as stolid characters who stressed diligence over daring, employed compassion more often than physical courage, and apprehended criminals with deduction rather than weaponry. Relatively few law enforcers performed acts of physical heroism, such as a climactic gun battle with criminals. Instead, the majority of “good guy” police officers were emotionally detached professionals who performed their jobs with competence and thoroughness.

The prototype of this breed was Sergeant Joe Friday of “Dragnet.” Our sample included another exemplar, Lt. Dan Muldoon of “Naked City.” In a typical 1958 episode, Muldoon is on the trail of a man who attacks milkmen and steals their uniforms. He is puzzled by the robber’s behavior until an investigation reveals that the attacks coincided with a string of residential burglaries. Muldoon realizes that the robber used the uniforms to gain entrance to buildings. The milkmen’s route lists showed which people were on vacation, information that helped the burglar pick his targets. Finally,

when Muldoon and his men corner the outlaw, he plans their attack to ensure that no innocent bystanders will be hurt. Careful planning and professional execution result in the man's capture. Muldoon is neither morally outraged by the criminal's actions nor sympathetic to his motives. He is just a professional doing his job.

Such expressions of both competence and concern for others were responsible for a high success rate among law enforcers. Eighty-one percent of their activities had successful outcomes, compared to 70 percent among all characters examined for this study, and also higher than any other sample of government employees. However, not all law enforcers were good guys; one out of seven was portrayed negatively. Many of these characters were well-intentioned bumbler whose ineptitude or naivete provided comic results. A memorable version of the comic lawman was provided by New York City officers Toody and Muldoon of "Car 54, Where Are You?," an "idiot sitcom" from the early 1960's.

Few law enforcers were real evildoers, but they occasionally exploited their official positions to expedite their unscrupulous schemes. For example, in a 1965 episode of "The Fugitive," a sheriff misuses his authority to secure the reward for capturing murder suspect (and series hero) Dr. Richard Kimball. When Kimball comes into town looking for work while fleeing the police, Sheriff Charlie Judd recognizes him from a police bulletin. Assuming that a reward is offered, he conceals Kimball's capture from his deputy and other police officers. Judd has all but spent the reward money when his

scheme crumbles. The persistent Lieutenant Girard, who has tracked Kimball all over the country, finds out Judd and Kimball have been seen together. He confronts Judd only to find that Kimball has escaped. Girard files charges against Judd and informs him that there was no reward for Kimball's capture. Judd loses his job and his reputation.

As time went on, the halos of law enforcers grew slightly tarnished. Police remained predominantly positive characters, but their sterling image dimmed somewhat. Before 1975, good guys outnumbered bad guys on the force by an overwhelming margin of nearly ten to one. Thereafter, the gap narrowed to about three to one. Local sheriffs underwent an even more dramatic transformation. (Compare the virtuous sheriffs on early Westerns, like the fictionalized Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterson, to the bumbling schemers of Hazzard County in the 1970's.). Before 1975 good guy sheriffs outnumbered bad guys by a two-to-one margin (54 versus 28 percent). Thereafter, the ratio was nearly reversed, with negative characters outnumbering the positive by 48 to 28 percent.

A similar tendency occurred with regard to criminal activity within the law enforcement ranks. Before 1975 corruption was nearly nonexistent on prime time police forces. Fewer than one-half percent of TV's police committed crimes compared to six percent of all other occupational groups. After 1975 this difference completely disappeared. During the following decade, police committed crimes at the same rate (still six percent) as the other occupational groups we coded. Similarly, no federal agents in our sample committed crimes before 1965; after 1975, three percent broke the law

they were sworn to uphold. In contrast to the more critical portrait of government law enforcers, positive portrayals of private eyes remained above 80 percent throughout each of the three decades. Only three percent of private eyes broke the law after 1975, about half the rate of policemen and other occupational groups.

Although TV's endorsement of law enforcers grew less vigorous over time, this group continued to be composed of cool professionals who usually chose words over weapons as a means of collaring criminals. In fact society's guardians generally emphasized talk over action, relying on persuasion and their legal authority before resorting to physical force. Of all methods used by law enforcers, 39 percent relied on their authority, while 33 percent involved persuasion. Although a variety of real life court decisions narrowed that authority over time, it remained a frequent backdrop for police on television. Commonplace events such as serving arrest warrants, issuing tickets, controlling traffic, and making arrests remained a key part of their on-screen responsibilities. It was persuasion, not violence, that legitimized this authority in most plot lines, and secured assistance from private citizens during legal investigations. Violence was usually reserved for subduing vicious criminals or coercing assistance from unwilling parties. It accounted for only nine percent of the methods employed by law enforcers, surprisingly close to the six percent rate we found among other occupations. In fact, violence was used less frequently than deception and trickery, which was often used in the context of undercover police work.

While television usually supported individual law enforcers, it has criticized the system's failings, especially as time wore on. In its earliest days, television presented police, lawyers, and the courts as a team united in pursuit of the truth. Police protected and served the public, lawyers championed the rights of individuals, and courts equalized the odds between the powerful and average citizens. Individuals who battled crime and the methods they used were rarely criticized. But gradually, and partly in response to changes in the real world, television began to qualify its blanket endorsement of law enforcement. Issues like defendants' rights, community opinion, police brutality, racism, and sexism provided forums for questioning the efficiency and fairness of the justice system. TV's law enforcers could no longer operate with impunity, since procedural errors could invalidate an arrest.

This kind of social criticism first appeared on television in the late 1960's, mostly through rhetorical challenges to iniquities in the justice system. But by the early 1970's, a new type of social criticism evolved through a change in plot structures. Rather than relying on dialogue, programs built more elements of the justice system into their story lines. Since different parts of the system have different goals, rules and priorities, tension and criticism emerged naturally. Thus, the District Attorney's office could criticize police behavior, police could condemn the inactivity of the courts, and the courts could strike down improper procedures used by attorneys or police.

At times, following legal rules and procedures defeated the best attempts to administer justice. One popular show of the 1980's, "Hardcastle and McCormick," built its premise around this problem.

Retired Judge Milton G. Hardcastle evened the score with criminals who had evaded conviction because of smart lawyers, weak evidence or other legal loopholes when he served on the bench. Ironically, he was aided by a young Mark McCormick, an auto thief who avoided a prison sentence by agreeing to help the judge pursue criminals. In this series, justice was delayed but not denied. Hardcastle's scrupulous standards applied equally to all, even former colleagues gone wrong. In one episode, he busted a cabal of corrupt judges who gave death sentences to criminals who had previously escaped punishment.

Hardcastle was one of the first judges to have a central role in a series. In earlier periods, judges typically appeared in a single episode of a series or were occupied by personal rather than judicial matters. For example, in the early 1960's Judge Henry Garth was a leading character in the Western "The Virginians," but he concentrated on running the Shiloh Ranch. In the mid-1980's, however, TV introduced a judge with the soul of a social worker. The young idealistic Judge Harry Stone of "Night Court" went far beyond the facts and technical functions of his court. Although he didn't hesitate to sentence the parade of petty criminals who came before him, Judge Stone entertained his court with magic tricks, served as a therapist when needed, and showed compassion beyond the call of duty. He helped immigrants cut through the red tape of the INS, and found housing for a group of foreign beauty queens who were left stranded by an unscrupulous promoter. In one of his more unorthodox cases, Judge Stone helped a rock musician fake his own death so he could get out of the music business.

Government lawyers shared the anonymity of judges in TV's early days, when lawyering was largely the domain of private attorneys. In contrast, most government lawyers made single appearances in episodes of various police and courtroom dramas. The one exception was prosecutor Hamilton Burger, who lost every case to Perry Mason from 1957 through 1974. Even when government lawyers took center stage, the shows on which they were featured usually lasted only one season. Examples include "The Public Defenders" (1954-55), "For the People" (1965), and "The Protectors" (1969-70) which featured D.A. William Washburn as a progressive official who struggled with his identity as a black man while enforcing the law during an era of social and racial upheaval. This pattern finally changed with the success of "Night Court," (1984-92) which portrayed the best and worst of state's attorneys from 1984 through 1992. In the former category, Assistant District Attorney Dan Fielding was manipulative, sexually obsessed, and ethically challenged. In contrast, three female legal aid attorneys showed sensitivity toward their impoverished clients while fighting the old boy network.

By the 1970's television no longer assumed that the justice system would treat people fairly and equally. Before 1975, charges of favoritism or corruption by police and the courts were raised only to be rejected. Nearly 90 percent of shows that dealt with this issue exonerated the system. That image changed after 1975. During the last decade we studied, half the shows that dealt with this charge pronounced the system guilty. Moreover, this theme appeared twice as frequently as it did

during the preceding two decades . Similarly, charges of corruption were raised as often in the third decade studied as in the two previous decades combined.

This shift was illustrated by a 1976 segment of “Barreta,” in which a mobster bribed a judge to ensure the success of his operations. On a 1985 “Miami Vice” episode, a powerful drug dealer controlled the entire police force and court system of a small island nation. A 1976 episode of “Kojak” acutely examined favoritism in the legal system. While investigating a death, Theo Kojak uncovers evidence of a gang rape and new information on an old homicide. Pressing further, he discovers that a powerful matriarch, who controls a political machine, tried to cover up the rape and the homicide because her son was involved in both crimes. She has the District Attorney railroad a conviction, pay off two witnesses, and bribe the investigating officers with promotions. The D.A. cooperates to gain her support for his upcoming run for governor. Kojak’s diligence unravels the coverup, and the guilty parties are finally punished.

In the post-Watergate era of popular mistrust in public institutions, television portrayed a justice system in need of reform, yet capable of redemption. If a police department was corrupt, a crusading officer or lawyer could usually change it. Outside whistleblowers and investigative journalists also played a role in policing the justice system in prime time during this period. They often exposed complex schemes that escaped the notice of other officials. While justice was no longer seen as pristine, neither was it portrayed as hopelessly tarnished.

Most TV law enforcers were still portrayed positively as they struggled to confront the increasingly demanding task of maintaining social order. But over the decades, the law enforcer's social mission was altered. The heroic police officer often had to become an outsider within the system, who was willing to fight entrenched ideas and bureaucratic rigidity to accomplish worthy goals. Elliot Ness and Joe Friday would hardly recognize the world of Frank Furillo of "Hill Street Blues," who had to fight turf battles and red tape along with criminals. Television continued to champion law enforcement, but the justice system was no longer glorified.

TEACHERS

Public school teachers ranked among television's most admired professionals, although they accounted for only about two percent of all the census-coded characters in our study. Their noble mission involved not only instilling knowledge but aiding youngsters mentally and emotionally. Accordingly, teachers tended to be shown as calm, caring, and moral individuals who placed their students' interests above all others. They were consummate professionals at work, and warm and benevolent in their personal lives. Almost two-thirds (64 percent) were positively portrayed, edging out the 62 percent positive rate for law enforcers. Teachers ranked far ahead of politicians (40 percent positive) and other civil servants (42 percent), as well as the general population of census-coded characters (44 percent). Only sixteen percent of teachers were shown in a negative light, and not one ever committed a crime, a degree of probity unmatched by any other occupational group.

Unlike law enforcers, teachers were rarely cast in life-and-death-situations. In the relatively low-key classroom setting, comedy and drama often mixed in the eternal struggle to mold young minds. Thus teachers tended to focus on day-to-day concrete problems, rather than larger philosophical issues. But these problems did not limit their influence to the job. Compared to other government workers we studied, teachers were more likely to combine the professional and personal aspects of their lives. Forty percent were shown in this combination context, an equal amount performed purely job-related

functions, and one in five dealt exclusively with personal matters. Teachers were almost twice as likely to perform in this context as the entire group of characters we coded.

For television's educators, persuasion was the logical method of choice. Nearly three out of five methods (58 percent) used by teachers involved persuasion, compared to 42 percent among the general population and roughly a third for other government workers (38 percent for politicians, 33 percent for law enforcers). Professional authority ranked a distant second among methods used by teachers, accounting for 23 percent of all cases. No teacher ever resorted to the use of violence, and they rarely resorted to trickery. Despite their sterling image, teachers' success rate fell below the overall average. As we note below, this reflects the increasingly difficult social problems television's teachers encountered after 1970. Sixty-one percent succeeded in their goals, compared to 72 percent of all characters. Among government workers, teachers fell between law enforcers, the most successful at 81 percent, and public officials, who succeeded only 53 percent of the time.

Teachers reflected the overall racial uniformity of the prime time world. Eighty-two percent were white. But notably, 16 percent were black, versus only five percent of non-governmental characters and roughly similar proportions of other government workers. Teachers were also slightly more likely to have top billing when they appeared. Twenty-six percent were series stars, compared to 18 of the total population. Approximately a quarter of teachers had continuing minor roles, while half put in a single appearance.

Television's first successful schoolroom series featured the mild-mannered "Mr. Peepers." Robinson Peepers taught biology in a small Midwestern town. His self-effacing manner made him popular with his charges at Jefferson High School and TV audiences of the early 1950's. Played by comedian Wally Cox, he combined small stature with a big heart and an almost maternal dedication to his students. The relative realism and low-key humor of that show influenced many later series in this genre.

Another favorite of TV's early days was the more extroverted Connie Brooks, the warm and witty English teacher of "Our Miss Brooks." Her daily travails included a blustery and blundering principal (an enduring comic type) and a handsome biology teacher, Mr. Boynton. As reticent as Mr. Peepers, Boynton thwarted Connie's dreams of a married life. This series also provided an early illustration of the audience's tendency to equate actors with their roles. Star Eve Arden not only was a popular speaker at educational functions, but also received several offers to teach English at schools around the country.

Thus television's early views of teaching were generally light-hearted and benign, an impression reinforced by the classroom scenes in "The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis." It was not until the early 1960's that the dramatic possibilities of the genre were explored on "Mr. Novak." John Novak was a dedicated young English teacher in a Los Angeles high school. The earnest but sometimes brash

Novak was encouraged but often tempered by Jefferson High School's more moderate principal, Albert Vane.

Television's image of teachers changed in the late 1960's, when two new series focused on a more urban and less affluent milieu than viewers had experienced before. On "The Bill Cosby Show," the star brought his humanistic touch to the comic role of a coach and physical education teacher in a lower-middle class Los Angeles neighborhood. The real breakthrough, however, came with "Room 222." There Pete Dixon, an idealistic African-American teacher, taught American history to an integrated class in a big city high school. From 1969 through 1974, this series dealt with pressing youth-oriented issues of the time, such as student rights, racial prejudice, and drug use. The show was widely praised and received awards from educational and civil rights organizations.

A 1972 episode in our sample illustrates "Room 222's" willingness to debate educational philosophy, a topic rarely featured in earlier series. In this segment, Pete Dixon considers leaving to take a job as principal of another high school. He is attracted by the chance to try new things, particularly a less structured approach. As he puts it, "Teaching is communication. You have to have less structure and formality to achieve that. I might even experiment with no attendance record." Eventually he decides to remain a teacher, because he is unwilling to give up his direct contact with students. But the content of this show did address the real-world debate involving traditional versus progressive approaches to education.

After "Room 222," television's teachers dealt more actively with contemporary social issues. They also moved from teaching subjects like science, history, and English into fields like coaching and remedial studies. In such settings they often encountered students who were viewed as the school's outsiders or underdogs. "Lucas Tanner" was something of a transitional figure, a former professional athlete who became an English teacher. Much of this 1974 series revolved around Lucas' efforts to relate to the kids with a casual approach that created conflicts with more traditional teachers.

The new-style teacher became a staple during the late 1970's in shows such as "Welcome Back, Kotter" and "The White Shadow." Gabe Kotter had returned to his old Brooklyn high school to teach a remedial class of challenging students. His "sweathogs" represented the broad ethnic mix of many working class urban neighborhoods. They included the cool Italian Vinnie Barbarino, a street-smart African American named "Boom Boom" Washington, the ambitious Juan Epstein, who had Jewish and Puerto Rican roots, and the classic class nerd Arnold Horshak. Educating this diverse group required considerable patience and sometimes bending the rules. Threaded through the humor of the show were messages on drug abuse, sex education, and the value of obtaining a diploma. The series was based on the actual experiences of Gabe Kaplan, who portrayed Kotter. Kaplan had been a student in a remedial class in a Brooklyn before becoming a successful comedian.

"The White Shadow" varied this theme by pairing a white basketball coach with a losing team of black players from an inner city school. The coach's goal was to teach them to become winners in

both sports and life through instilling attributes like discipline and teamwork. After two seasons, the team won their city's basketball championship. Along the way, they dealt with topical issues like drug abuse, venereal disease, and youth crime. During one especially dramatic episode, a team member was hit by a stray bullet from a liquor store holdup.

The last show in our study that featured an urban ethnic school was "Fame," a 1982 series set in New York's High School for the Performing Arts. The series focused on the aspirations of budding young performers, mostly singers, dancers, musicians, and comedians. While they had many dedicated teachers, the central character was dance instructor Lydia Grant. Every show included performers in song-and-dance routines that she directed. Although "Fame" did not attract large audiences, it was a critical success. It also represented the elimination of a major trend in this genre, a tendency to focus less on the concerns on teachers and more on the activities of students. Kotter's "sweathogs," the basketball players on "The White Shadow," and the talented young artists of "Fame" all played a more central role in their series than the students of earlier decades. Teachers remained important, but the focus shifted toward their interaction with strong student characters. This trend has continued in the most recent shows, such as "Square Pegs" and "Fast Times," which present school life much more from the students' viewpoints. "Square Pegs" in particular explored a variety of adolescent concerns, ranging from social cliques to new-wave music.

Even as attention shifted from teachers to students, the most popular teachers championed their students against their common opponent, school administrators. Teachers on television have traditionally been more sensitive than administrators to students' needs and problems. This trend crystallized in the 1970's with shows like "Room 222," "Welcome Back, Kotter," and "The White Shadow." In the latter series, coach Ken Reeves stood as a buffer between his struggling student-athletes and an academically demanding principal. Gabe Kotter shielded his remedial "sweathogs" from the disapproving Mr. Woodman. The students of "Fame" often encountered opposition from literature teacher Ms. Sherwood and the bureaucracy that was represented by vice principal Quentin Morloch. Despite these problems, students had the opportunity for a solid education.

Overall, there was little wrongdoing within the school setting, and never any mention of corruption in the school system. If a teacher was accused of some impropriety, the charge usually proved to be false. Any conflicts that arose rarely escalated beyond the clashing views of sensitive teachers and inflexible administrators. The major concern for all these shows was always how to reach students. In the early days some students simply didn't want to learn or were otherwise preoccupied. Dobie Gillis and his beatnik friend Maynard Krebs were chronic problem students, and Miss Brooks sometimes despaired of getting through to Walter Denton. But by the late 1960's more serious problems began to interfere with education. Television's teachers had to cope with learning disabilities and family problems, including child abuse, alcoholism, drugs, unwanted pregnancies, and

illegal alien status, as well as mental and physical handicaps. Faced with these escalating obstacles to training students, teachers grew even more dedicated.

Teachers attempted to deal with these problems by becoming socially aware and responsive. “Room 222” led the way, but the trend continued with plot lines about drugs, crime, and the like in “The White Shadow.” Ralph Hinkley tried to instill a social conscience in his complacent students on “The Greatest American Hero.” The art and music teachers of “Fame” challenged intolerance toward the handicapped, racial and religious discrimination, and the potential loss of funding for the arts. In “The Bronx Zoo,” reform-minded principal Joe Ranzig (played by “Lou Grant’s” Ed Asner) took on such hot-button topics as birth control, day care, and racial tensions in a schoolroom setting. Across town at Manhattan’s Monroe High School Charley Moore and his honors students often found time to comment on real-world political controversies. But even these socially aware educators were less radicals than humanitarians and sensitive reformers. Thus, the issues faced by teachers changed with the times, but their dedication to their profession never flagged.

TABLE I - 1
NUMBER OF CHARACTERS 1955 - 1986

GOVERNMENT OCCUPATIONS		1194
Law Enforcers		877
Judges		43
Lawyers		41
Federal Agents		135
Local Police		530
Local Sheriffs		76
Other		52
Public School Teachers		70
Public Officials		80
Other Civil Servants		167
OTHER OCCUPATIONS		3531
TOTAL		4725

TABLE I - 2 GENDER (%)			
	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
LAW ENFORCERS	92	8	100%
Court System	87	13	100%
Federal Agents	89	11	100%
Police	94	6	100%
Sheriffs	99	1	100%
TEACHERS	53	47	100%
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	97	3	100%
OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS	71	29	100%
OTHER OCCUPATIONS	76	26	100%

TABLE I - 3
RACE (%)

	WHITE	BLACK	OTHER	TOTAL
LAW ENFORCERS	87	8	5	100%
Court System	93	7	0	100%
Federal Agents	93	7	0	100%
Police	84	9	7	100%
Sheriffs	99	1	0	100%
TEACHERS	84	14	2	100%
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	90	4	6	100%
OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS	82	13	5	100%
OTHER OCCUPATIONS	91	5	4	100%

TABLE I - 4
PROMINENCE OF ROLE (%)

	SERIES STAR	SERIES REGULAR	SINGLE EPISODE	TOTAL
LAW ENFORCERS	20	28	52	100%
Court System	7	13	80	100%
Federal Agents	32	33	35	100%
Police	8	29	53	100%
Sheriffs	14	24	62	100%
TEACHERS	26	26	48	100%
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	19	12	69	100%
CIVIL SERVANTS	9	30	61	100%
OTHER OCCUPATIONS	17	23	60	100%

TABLE I - 5
TONE OF PORTRAYALS (%)

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL	TOTAL
LAW ENFORCERS	62	13	25	100%
Court System	74	12	14	100%
Federal Agents	80	7	13	100%
Local Police	59	12	29	100%
Local Sheriffs	45	35	20	100%
TEACHERS	64	16	20	100%
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	40	51	9	100%
OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS	42	18	40	100%
OTHER OCCUPATIONS	44	27	30	100%

TABLE I - 6
COMMITTED CRIME (%)

	CRIMINALS
LAW ENFORCERS	4
Court System	4
Federal Agents	2
Police	3
Sheriffs	11
TEACHERS	0
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	11
OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS	2
OTHER OCCUPATIONS	7

TABLE I - 7
CONTEXT OF PORTRAYALS (%)

	OCCUPATIONAL	PERSONAL	COMBINATION	TOTAL
LAW ENFORCERS	82	3	15	100%
Court System	84	4	12	100%
Federal Agents	77	5	18	100%
Police	80	3	17	100%
Sheriffs	75	5	20	100%
TEACHERS	40	20	40	100%
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	62	17	21	100%
OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS	60	18	22	100%
OTHER OCCUPATIONS	52	24	24	100%

TABLE I - 8
RESOLUTION OF ACTIVITY (%)

	SUCCESS	FAILURE	UNRESOLVED	TOTAL
LAW ENFORCERS	81	12	7	100%
Court System	68	20	13	100%
Federal Agents	93	3	4	100%
Police	81	12	7	100%
Sheriffs	67	18	15	100%
TEACHERS	61	30	9	100%
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	53	35	13	100%
OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS	77	14	10	100%
OTHER OCCUPATIONS	70	20	10	100%

TABLE I - 9
METHODS USED (%)

	PERSUASION	AUTHORITY	VIOLENCE	DECEPTION	OTHER	TOTAL
LAW ENFORCERS	33	39	9	12	7	100%
Court System	37	50	1	2	10	100%
Federal Agents	31	28	12	21	8	100%
Police	34	43	8	10	5	100%
Sheriffs	32	37	13	8	10	100%
TEACHERS	58	23	0	1	18	100%
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	38	33	3	10	16	100%
OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS	48	19	4	9	20	100%
OTHER OCCUPATIONS	42	26	6	12	14	100%

TABLE I - 10
THEMES OF EPISODES

	HONEST	CORRUPT	NUMBER OF SHOWS
Justice System Is:	71%	29%	34
Political System Is:	58%	42%	38

TABLE I - 11
THEMES OF EPISODES

	SELF-INTEREST	SPECIAL INTERESTS	PUBLIC INTEREST	NUMBER OF SHOWS
Public Officials Serve:	71%	29%	0%	21

CONTEMPORARY SECTION

TV In The 1990's

PUBLIC OFFICIALS

In the 1990's television's public officials are memorable neither for their visibility nor their virtues.

A mere two percent of the characters we coded were office holders or office seekers. They stood out among all government workers for their lack of both social diversity and personal virtue. Eighty-seven percent were male, the highest proportion of any governmental group. In contrast, only about two-thirds of characters in private sector occupations were male. Likewise, politicians were the least racially diverse group in the study. Ninety percent were white, compared to 80 percent of the prime time general population. In particular, this group contained only about half the proportion of blacks as did other government occupations – seven percent of politicians, compared to 18 percent of law enforcers, 15 percent of civil servants and 19 percent of teachers (and 12 percent of the general population).

Public officials were usually confined to single appearances in a particular episode. Only six percent had starring roles; characters in other occupations were over three times more likely to be the central focus of a series. Politicians were also notable for mixing business with pleasure (which, in their case, often meant extramarital affairs.) Thirty-four percent combined professional and personal matters. Just over half performed purely job-related functions, the lowest rate among all government workers.

In any context, politicians were among the least admired characters in prime time. Negative characters outnumbered positive ones by 31 to 22 percent, nearly reversing the two to one positive margin of portrayals found among all other public sector employees combined (38 to 19 percent). This showing was also substantially worse than the overall totals of 30 percent positive and 22 percent negative portrayals among all census-coded occupations. Finally, it was proportionately worse than the earlier poor showing of public officials from our historical survey of television entertainment (40 percent positive vs. 51 percent negative).

Direct comparisons are somewhat difficult because of the tendency of contemporary shows to present neutral characters from all walks of life more frequently than did earlier series. If we exclude neutral characters from the comparison, however, the proportion of negative public officials rose from 56 percent in the earlier time periods to 63 percent in the 1990's. Consistent with this pattern, politicians were nearly three times as likely to break the law as were other characters, by a margin of 7.4 percent to 2.6 percent. Like other government workers, they usually relied on persuasion (31 percent) or their position of authority (17 percent) to achieve their goals. But they were the group most likely to use deception (16 percent versus eight percent for the total population.)

While past decades offered a few noble idealists in public life, their latter day counterparts are driven mainly by greed, ambition, or lust. In one respect, television is an equal opportunity critic of politicians. Prime time office holders have become so nonideological that programs often avoid

stating any specific party affiliation, even when politicians are central characters. The entire profession of politics is frequently condemned as corrupt, incompetent, or both. This combination was personified by the brief series “The Powers That Be” (1991-92), in which a befuddled Senator Powers was pushed by his ambitious wife to run for President. In standard soap opera fashion, his professional and personal travails intersected. He was surrounded by scheming aides and had an ongoing affair with one of them; his illegitimate daughter from an earlier affair lived with his family but continuously clashed with them; and so forth.

“The Monroes,” another short lived soap opera of political machinations, portrayed a Kennedy-style clan in Maryland. John Monroe, the family patriarch, wanted to run for governor, but his hopes were threatened by various family skeletons and the usual stable of Machiavellian aides. Among the shenanigans that the series packed into its mercifully brief run: Monroe’s son, an ineffectual congressman who won his seat through his father’s money and connections, has sexual encounters in his office that could expose him to public embarrassment. His daughter may be sleeping with the President. And his own affair with a possible spy finally forces him to relinquish his quest for the governor’s mansion.

Ironically, two of the most negative portrayals of politicians came from executive producer Linda Bloodworth Thomason, a prominent friend of President Clinton. The first was Senator Strobe Smithers in “Hearts Afire;” the second was the reincarnated Suzanne Sugarbaker in “Women of the

House.” Smithers was a doddering and possibly senile conservative southern senator who survived by the quick wits of his staff. As if Smithers’ own inappropriate comments and misunderstandings were not enough to label him a loser, he was having an affair with his secretary. Smithers was constantly giving away silly little congressional trinkets and memorial items to visitors (a practice he believed impressed his visitors, even though it was obvious to everyone else that the practice was only embarrassing). Some efforts were made in early episodes to stress that Smithers was once a good Senator with laudable traditional views of America and its institutions. These fell by the wayside as Smithers descended into loony behavior, only to be written out of the second season entirely.

A laudable past was not part of Suzanne Sugarbakers’ biography. Sugarbaker was a former beauty queen who came to Washington to take over the Congressional seat vacated by the death of her fifth husband. From the start, Sugarbaker was portrayed as a shallow, stupid, vain and materialistic bimbo who had no place in Congress. To cap it off, she had no idea that many of her remarks were inappropriate. By defending them she just kept digging herself a deeper hole. In a “straw-that-broke-the-camel’s-back” scene, Sugarbaker defends some controversial remarks by comparing them favorably to Prince Charles’ taped comments to his mistress Camilla Parker Bowles suggesting that he wanted to be a tampon. In reaction, Sugarbaker’s administrative assistant exclaims, “Since coming here, you have diminished all women as sexual commodities, slandered homosexuals, insulted blacks and bragged about being rich. Now while it is true that you did not say you wanted to be a tampon, I don’t see how that is a cause for rejoicing or in any way offsets your other statements.”

“The Simpsons” offers a cartoon version of the corrupt and incompetent politician through occasional appearances by Mayor Quimby. He routinely accepts and gives bribes, shifts his positions with the whims of public opinion, patronizes a brothel, and cheats at every turn. Our sample included the “Whacking Day” episode, about an annual Springfield event in which residents compete to drive snakes into the town square and beat them to death. The mayor rigs this contest in his favor by having his aides collect dead snakes, for which he will take credit. Unfortunately for Quimby, Lisa Simpson has convinced the town to abandon this grisly ritual. Quimby ends up looking foolish when he parades before his jeering constituents carrying his handful of snakes.

A more controversial portrayal of a bungling politician appeared in the short-lived 1998 series “The Secret Diaries of Desmond Pfeiffer.” This series appeared on the UPN network, which (like its competitor the WB network) broadcasts an abbreviated prime-time schedule to a relatively small national audience. The fledgling UPN and WB offerings were not included in our sample, because we don’t know yet whether they will grow into full-fledged competitors of the major broadcast networks, as Fox did during the past decade.

Nonetheless, series like “Desmond Pfeiffer” can provide anecdotal evidence that illuminates the paths contemporary television entertainment is exploring. This particular series was notable for its attempt to satirize the current sexual shenanigans in the nation’s capital by moving the political setting back to the Civil War era. Accordingly, the series depicts President Lincoln as a sex-crazed flake. In one

episode, after being caught having telegraph sex with a mysterious woman, Lincoln tries desperately to cover up his fixation, to the point of ludicrous denials and obfuscation. At one point he even recoils in shock at the mere suggestion that he would have a female intern in his office without an escort. In the end Lincoln is saved from embarrassing scandal by the discovery that his long-distance paramour (unknown to him) was actually his wife.

A more popular source of prime time political merriment is “Spin City.” This ABC sitcom presents the comically chaotic world of the New York City Mayor’s office. The fictional mayor, Randall Winston, is portrayed as a scatterbrained bungler. Mayor Winston relies on Deputy Mayor Mike Flaherty and his staff to keep him out of trouble and rescue him from his errors. Mayor Winston actually plays a fairly small role in most plotlines, but he is usually shown doing something a little dim-witted. For instance, in the 1998 season premiere, one scene shows the mayor practicing facial expressions into a mirror prior to a TV interview. He poses one expression and says “concerned mayor.” He identifies the next expression as “thoughtful mayor”. He then looks through his glasses backwards and observes, “very tiny mayor”.

In a 1996 episode, Mayor Winston committed a sexual faux pas that his staff scrambled to fix. While listening to a speaker from the Women’s Political Caucus, he notices her resemblance to his high school French teacher – his first sexual encounter. Recalling the experience triggers an embarrassing erection. To avoid making this visible, he remains in his seat when the woman finishes her speech,

which is interpreted as a slight. The mayor's staff somehow hopes that releasing his medical records will explain his behavior. But the plan is shelved when the staff discovers that Winston once spent a night in a mental institution. When questioned by one of his deputies, he explains that someone put LSD in his punch at a college party. "Next thing I know I'm three-quarters of the way up a pine tree, naked as a jay bird, trying to get away from all the giant bugs....Coincidentally, that's the same night I decided to become mayor." The deputy promptly burns that page in the mayor's personal file.

The bumbling boobs of sitcoms give way to manipulative schemers in dramatic series. And such shows often followed the script of a morality play by giving evil politicians their just desserts. Politicians had the highest failure rate and the lowest success rate for any group. Twenty-nine percent failed in their chosen endeavor, roughly twice the rate for our total population. The obvious reason for this is the reprehensible behavior of public officials, which often is thwarted by the good guys in the episode. For example, crime solving stars in other occupations frequently brought criminal politicians to justice. In a 1997 episode of "Diagnosis Murder," series star Dr. Mark Sloan first cleared a city councilman of his ex-wife's murder, then discovered that the councilman not only was involved, but the killing was part of his elaborate plan to embarrass a political opponent and force him out of the race. Mystery writer Jessica Fletcher collared another evil city councilman by exposing his unscrupulous attempt to profit from an illegal land deal that resulted in the murder of an environmentalist who endangered the scheme.

In fact, television sometimes presented holding public office as a punishment in itself. In an episode of "Picket Fences," a robber was sentenced to take the job of mayor as a form of community service to atone for her crimes. It seems none of the town's respectable citizens wanted the position. This is no wonder, since Rome, Wisconsin was probably the worst place to be a mayor in all of television. In this version of dysfunctional small town America, long time Mayor Bill Pugent died of spontaneous human combustion while facing trial for murder. Then came Howard Butts, a charming old man who suffered from Alzheimer's. In the end he would die mysteriously, either as a suicide or a mercy killing committed by his son. And we cannot forget the businesswoman who legitimately won the office despite the risqué nature of her lingerie business. Of course it was not long before her dark secrets were unmasked. It seems that she had contracted with a local farmer to use a cow to carry her artificially fertilized embryo to term.

To put it mildly, the succession of mayors in "Picket Fences" illustrates television's lack of regard for those who make politics their profession. In addition, as we found in earlier decades, television's criticism extends beyond individual politicians to the political process more generally. Once again, we encountered several series episodes built around the theme of political corruption or self-interest. Overall, five episodes portrayed politics as a corrupt, compared to only one that reaffirmed the integrity of the process. For example, a 1997 episode of "Dellaventura" portrayed politics as a nasty game in which dirty tricks easily shaded over into illegality, and political cowardice was taken for granted. In this episode a successful lawyer named Sarah Macaruso has been nominated by Mayor

Guiliani for a judgeship in New York City. After a party to celebrate her nomination, Sarah is drugged and taken to a motel room. In the room she is posed in various embarrassing sexual poses with a young man who looks underage. When she wakes up in the morning, she calls Dellaventura for help. He promises to find the people responsible and, most importantly, to keep the whole thing quiet. As he takes her home, Dellaventura narrates in a voice-over, "...The only bad thing about making promises is that you have to keep them. Even though Sarah was the victim, if word got out, her name would be tainted. When there is even a hint of scandal a politician can outrun Carl Lewis. Her chances of becoming a judge would be as good as me dancing Swan Lake."

A 1996 sample episode of "Due South" contained a much pithier sequence that illustrates prime time's portrayal of public office holders placing their personal interests above those of their constituents, a point that was made in eight shows in our sample. One scene takes place at a city council meeting, in which Benton Frazier tries to communicate the dismal plight of residents in his apartment building to a decidedly indifferent council member. In response to Frazier's pleas that he devote attention to their needs, the man comments, "I'm a councilman, for God's sake! I've got a golf game in the morning." In the 1990's, more than ever, when it comes to politics, television votes "no."

CIVIL SERVANTS

Employees of public agencies have low visibility on TV's current agenda, compared to their numbers in the real world work force. Only five percent of all characters we coded belonged to this occupational group. Moreover, like teachers and politicians, these government workers rarely received top billing. Only five percent played starring roles, less than half the rate for law enforcers and private sector workers (both 16 percent). Just over a third of these civil servants (37 percent) played minor continuing roles, while over half (59 percent) made only single appearances. When they did appear, however, they were frequently seen on the job. Over two out of three performed occupational tasks, just under one in five combined personal and professional matters, and even fewer (14 percent) focused on purely personal concerns.

Despite their low visibility, civil servants came closer than most groups to reflecting America's gender and racial diversity. Almost two in five (39 percent) were female, compared to a third (34 percent) of television's general population. (Over 80 percent of politicians and law enforcers were male, as were about two thirds of teachers). Like other types of public employees, civil servants were also more racially diverse than private sector characters. Fifteen percent were black, and another three percent were Hispanic.

In general, civil servants behaved like other public employees in choosing methods to achieve their goals. Just under half (43 percent) involved persuasion. But they were less than half as likely to rely on their occupational authority, the second most popular method among all other governmental groups that we coded. Given their lack of star status and the limited ability of individual workers to change institutional bureaucracies, they had little power to wield. Their lack of power and their low positive ratings, as described below, account for their minimal success. Only 43 percent achieved their goals, while nearly as many (41 percent) had an unclear or unresolved outcome. Among all governmental groups, only public officials scored fewer successes (29 percent).

Most importantly, civil servants were among the least admired groups of public employees that we studied, although their split of good guys and bad guys was only slightly worse than that of the general population. Only 22 percent were shown in a positive light, barely half the rate of positive characters we found among law enforcers. What salvaged the image of civil servants was their large proportion of neutral roles (66 percent). Thus, this group contained about the same amount of negative characters (18 percent) as other governmental sectors (apart from politicians, who had a negative rating of 36 percent). Their crime rate of four percent was also typical for government groups, again with the exception of politicians, who were about twice as likely as all other occupations to commit crimes.

Television in the 1990's rarely built shows around admirable workers in government agencies. Most favorable portrayals of this occupational group were only mildly positive characters who did their jobs without fanfare. Among the few exceptions was the eponymous "Roc," a municipal trash collector for Baltimore who worked hard and took pride in his job. Roc Emerson was an average man content with limited dreams. Although he sometimes annoyed his wife by bringing home "perks," the useful things others had discarded, he was devoted to his family. Like many of their viewers, Roc and his wife carefully saved to buy their own semidetached home. But when he temporarily assumed a supervisory position, he demanded top quality work from other trash collectors. This caused so much dissension, that he was relieved to return to his regular job. The episode reinforced Hollywood's view that dedicated civil servants are the exception, not the rule.

More often, television conveys a jaded view of workers in government agencies. They were rarely seen as entirely malevolent, in the fashion of a social worker on "The X-Files" who turns out to be the devil in disguise. Rather, civil servants were frequently portrayed as robotic paper shufflers or abrasive malcontents who were too lazy, apathetic or self-absorbed to serve the public. The U.S. Postal Service has fared especially badly in this regard, being represented by two memorably inept mail carriers. The lovable bumbling blowhard Cliff Clavin was one of the rare government workers who showed up in both our historical and contemporary samples, as a cast member of the long-running sitcom "Cheers." Cliff's lack of professionalism was alluded to in several episodes, in which he faced disciplinary action for various job infractions. But Cliff was a paragon of public service

compared to the unsavory Newman of “Seinfeld.” Among his numerous unpalatable personality traits was a general laziness. Contradicting the postal service’s famed motto, rain and snow proved sufficient deterrents to stay this carrier from his appointed rounds.

Another comic image of the goldbricking government worker appears in the current season of “Spin City.” In one plotline, Paul (the Mayor’s Press Secretary) fakes an ankle injury to extend his honeymoon by a couple of days. When a co-worker, Stacy Paterno, is caught trying to take an illegitimate sick day, Paul gloats about his own success. He even dances a little jig to flout his own dishonesty. When Stacy expresses disbelief, Paul retorts, “Hey, that’s two extra days on my honeymoon, Blondie – all on Uncle Sam’s dollar!”

Comedies featuring legislative and executive aides also used inept characters for cheap laughs. In “Hearts Afire,” a senator’s receptionist, who doubles as his mistress, attempts to fax a copy of her panties to her mother because the two are starting a mail order bikini business. “Women of the Hill” presented even more extreme incompetents in the nation’s capital. One of Representative Suzanne Sugarbaker’s aides is so obtuse that she sews a satanic symbol on her son’s clothes, which gets him disciplined at school. This same congresswoman’s press secretary is a stereotypical alcoholic former reporter.

Television sometimes positioned good guys and bad guys at odds within a single agency. We encountered this in two different series that dealt with the sensitive issue of child custody. In the premiere 1994 episode of the sitcom “On Our Own,” the Jericho children are abruptly orphaned when both parents die in a car accident. The local social services agency has to find them foster homes, because all are under age 21. A conflict develops between two agency employees charged with this task. Supervisor Jordan Ormsby is a rule-bound official who warns his staff against becoming personally involved with clients. But Alana Michael, the new social worker assigned to the Jericho case, sympathizes with the children and their desperate desire to remain together. Faced with the threat of being parceled out to different families, the kids try to pass off the oldest boy, dressed in drag, as an aunt who came from out of town to claim them. Alana sees through this charade, having already spoken to the real aunt, who could not care for the children due to illness. But Alana is so moved by the kids’ plight that she conspires in this ruse when her boss Ormsby drops by for a spot check and is totally smitten by the “aunt.” During the series’ brief run, Alana continued to help the family evade her by-the-book boss and stay together.

Television switched the positive and negative roles between supervisor and subordinate in a 1996 “King of the Hill” episode that also dealt with child welfare. A string of misunderstandings begins when a stray baseball gives young Bobby Hill a black eye. When a neighbor sees Hank Hill’s angry altercation with an incompetent store clerk, she starts a chain of gossip and speculation on Hank’s temper and Bobby’s injury. Eventually someone reports their suspicions to the local social services

agency. An overeager social worker, recently arrived from Los Angeles, jumps on the investigation. He finds abuse at every turn, even in the most innocent situations. After he admonishes a protesting Hank Hill that “Loud is not allowed,” the plain-spoken good ol’ boy explodes at the thought of “my hard earned tax dollars going to pay for a bunch of little twig boy bureaucrats.” Shortly thereafter, the social worker eavesdrops on Bobby and a friend imitating the argument. Misunderstanding what he overhears, he tries to have Bobby removed from his home. The investigation is eventually dropped when the social worker’s boss, a local man imbued with common sense, realizes that the child abuse charge is groundless. It seems that the overeager “twig boy” neglected to check out the facts of the case. His boss puts the incompetent underling on a bus back to Los Angeles where, presumably, he belongs.

Despite his being kicked out of town, this personification of the meddling bureaucrat proved so popular that the series later brought the character back for an encore. In 1998 he reappeared in an equally officious capacity while enforcing the Americans with Disabilities Act in Hank’s workplace. In this episode a drug-addled useless employee of the Strickland Propane company discovers that he can’t be fired, because he is legally classified as disabled. Other employees soon pick up the scam, discovering various spurious “disabilities” that protect them from having to do any real work. Eventually Hank saves the day by quitting his job so that the work force falls below the number of employees required to make the law applicable to a small business.

Notwithstanding “twig boy’s” reprise as a bureaucratic busybody, this episode is notable for its criticism of a specific statute as an example of government overregulation that harms productivity. Unlike the earlier episode, the villain was not simply an individual bureaucrat who let his authority get the better of his common sense. The main target was the law itself, and the lesson was the familiar complaint that we need to get the government off our backs. In a prime time schedule that tends to blame government for being inefficiently progressive and responsive in serving the underprivileged, this plot line stood out for its echoes of conservative populism.

Nonetheless, both these “King of the Hill” episodes illustrate how television treats the quality and performance of government agencies thematically, in addition to portraying the individual characters who staff government offices. We coded 22 shows whose plots included some theme about governmental performance (apart from the political system, which we considered separately). Among these, 68 percent reflected negatively on the workings of government and only 32 percent portrayed government performance in a positive light.

Among the most frequent targets of criticism were government bureaucracies whose staffs were indifferent to the public they were suppose to serve. In a 1996 episode of “Due South,” series star Benton Frasier goes to City Hall to seek redress against a landlord who attempts to unfairly evict his tenants. There he encounters a receptionist who is reading the paper instead of doing her job. She rouses herself long enough to pass him on to the wrong official. Frasier eventually goes to several

different offices, where anonymous civil servants look at the complaint form he completed, only to direct him elsewhere. Frustrated and confused by all this red tape, he finally returns to the receptionist's desk. But this time she won't even put down her newspaper to help him. "Roseanne" featured a similarly frustrating encounter, in which Roseanne Conner and her husband went to the local Internal Revenue Service office to obtain proper tax forms. They complained about the long lines, but to no avail. Ultimately they received no help from the comically officious clerks, who gave them indecipherable instructions that sounded like pre-recorded speeches.

Another theme that surfaced in several shows was the diversion of government programs or facilities to serve the private interests of bureaucrats. "The Simpsons" provides a comic illustration of this theme. Marge Simpson's unattractive sisters Selma and Patty Bouvier are both clerks at the Department of Motor Vehicles. Their lack of professional interest in either their work or their clients is a running gag in the series. In one episode, the man-hungry Selma uses her job to screen for dates, allowing a nearly blind man to get his license without passing the vision test because he agrees to date her. Similarly, in one episode of "Seinfeld," Newman and Kramer get involved in a scheme to use a government mail truck to haul recyclables from New York to Michigan, where they will yield a better price.

In sum, the far-flung administrative apparatus of government has a low profile on prime time. Few memorable characters appear as civil servants, and those who do make a lasting impression often fit

the stereotype of the officious, indifferent or inefficient government bureaucrat. On television in the 1990's, public employees frequently put their own private interests above those of the public whose interests they are sworn to serve.

LAW ENFORCERS

Images of law enforcement in the 1990's have built upon the trends toward realism and moral ambiguity in cop shows that took root in the 1980's. Series such as "Law & Order," "NYPD Blue," "Brooklyn South," "EZ Streets," "Reasonable Doubts," "Courthouse," "Angel Street," "Homicide: Life on the Street," and "Under Suspicion" have all chosen a gritty, morally conflicted milieu for their characters that represents a direct descent from "Hill Street Blues." Because of this, television's law enforcers continue to have tarnished badges or dirty robes. Viewers see cops who tread a fine line between abusing suspects and enforcing the law, judges who make rulings they do not always relish, and prosecutors who make deals because it is the best outcome possible, even if justice is only partly achieved. Further, since the late 1970's, modern law enforcement characters encounter more in-house corruption and criminality than their predecessors did.

The current decade has also featured some unusual experiments in portraying television law enforcers. In "The X-Files," FBI agents chase extra-terrestrials and puzzle over other unexplained phenomena. The short-lived series "Arresting Behavior" featured a comedic spoof of such reality-based shows as "COPS." "Likely Suspects" made the viewer a part of the show by casting the audience as an unseen partner to Lieutenant Marshak. "Hudson Street" attempted to find humor in the squad room, à la "Barney Miller," but with far less success. "Due South" played on the culture clash between a straight arrow Canadian Mountie (a throwback to the square-jawed professionals of the 1950's) and

a slovenly but streetwise Chicago police officer, who reluctantly teamed up to fight crime. Perhaps most unlikely of all were the federal agents in "Timecop," who pursued criminals across time to protect both history and the future.

As this lengthy and diverse listing suggests, law enforcers continued to dominate government-related roles on prime time. They constituted 31 percent of all characters in census-coded occupations during the 1990's, more than five times the rate for politicians, teachers or civil servants. Among specific groups of law enforcers, police far outdistanced their colleagues, again following long-term trends on prime time. Three in five law enforcers were men and women in blue, while only 11 percent were federal agents, ten percent were judges, seven percent were government lawyers, and three percent were sheriffs. The much favored outsiders of television's earlier decades, private investigators, also represented only four percent of all law enforcers in the 1990's.

Law enforcers were about twice as likely to appear in starring roles as were members of other government groups. From "Michael Hayes" to "NYPD Blue" to "Hudson Street" to "Courthouse" police officers, judges and prosecutors are virtually synonymous with television drama these days. Sixteen percent played key roles in a series, reflecting the average for all characters we coded. Roughly two in five had minor continuing roles, while an equal proportion (45 percent) made a single appearance. Among all law enforcers, private eyes (P.I.'s) were almost twice as likely as their governmental counterparts to be stars. In such series as "Dellaventura" and "Charlie Grace," private

eyes took center stage. Over 40 percent of P.I.'s had top billing, versus just under a quarter of sheriffs, lawyers and federal agents. Unlike earlier eras, however, few of these series survived past a few episodes. At the other end of the spectrum, only eight percent of judges were central to a show; four out of five made single appearances. As we have seen, shows about judges are infrequent and rarely succeed in winning the allegiance of large audiences. Recent efforts such as "Court House," "Orleans" and "Home Court" only reinforced that longstanding pattern.

Those who enforce and interpret the nation's laws continued to be portrayed mostly in an occupational context, although to a slightly lesser degree than their predecessors. Seventy-one percent were all business, compared to just over half of TV's total population. Six percent dealt with personal matters and just under one in four combined the two. In series like "Law & Order," "Homicide," and "The X-Files," personal details about the characters are carefully parceled out, and many characters seem to have no life outside the squad room or courthouse. Judges performed purely occupational tasks 80 percent of the time, the highest proportion among all law enforcement groups. "Law & Order" illustrates television's typical treatment of judges. In this series judges come and go, rarely contributing more to the plot line than a one-or two-sentence instruction from the bench. In contrast, only two in five private eyes focused solely on work. They were much more likely to combine their personal and professional lives. Recently created private detectives find work in much the same way as their predecessors – through friends and family. For instance, Anthony Dellaventura took on a blackmail case involving an old friend in "Dellaventura."

Law enforcers retained their predominantly favorable image from TV's earliest days through contemporary times. Forty-three percent were shown positively in the 1990's, about twice the rate for public officials and civil servants, and considerably higher than we found among teachers (34 percent positive). Law enforcers also far outranked private sector occupations, which had an overall positive rating of 26 percent. Fewer than one in five law enforcers were bad guys, and about three in five were neutral. Thus, although television features more characters in neutral roles than it did in decades past, good guys outnumbered bad guys among 1990's law enforcers by a margin of better than two-to-one. Yet, even this positive profile pales in comparison to the five-to-one positive margin we observed among law enforcers in previous decades. Among our occupational subgroups, government lawyers and judges continued to fare best (about three to one positive) and local sheriffs worst (with negative characters outnumbering positive ones), just as in previous decades. And once again, private eyes topped all governmental law enforcers in the good guy list, this time with a 63 percent positive rating.

Although police dominated the airwaves in terms of sheer numbers, they scored in the middle of the pack as law enforcement role models. Their 45 percent positive and 15 percent negative ratings nearly matched the overall figures among all law enforcers. Officer Jimmy Doyle of 1997's "Brooklyn South" was one of these unalloyed good guy cops, who could rise to the highest level of heroism. In one episode, during a major shootout that leaves three people dead, Officer Doyle braves gunfire to tackle the shooter and save a female hostage. He is widely hailed by fellow officers, commanders

and people on the street as a real hero. More typical in recent portrayals of police officers, however, are mixed characters who are well-intentioned but have personal flaws or pursue their goals in a sometimes reprehensible manner. The poster boy for this sort of flawed cop is Andy Sipowicz of “NYPD Blue.” Over the six years the series has aired, Sipowicz has progressed from an unethical and abusive alcoholic to a sober, married father of a new baby. But he hasn’t smoothed all the jagged edges of his volatile personality.

A recent episode reveals how Detective Sipowicz can be portrayed as be both a compassionate human being and an abusive cop. In one scene, he and his partner Bobby Simone rough up a suspect in the shooting of a fellow detective. After dropping the man off at the hospital for treatment, the hard-boiled Andy turns into a relationship counselor, trying to convince Bobby that he should rekindle his relationship with Detective Diane Russell. He advises Bobby that some support from him would help Diane get a handle on her drinking problem. Andy even invites Bobby and Diane over for dinner to help them ease into a renewed relationship.

As we found earlier, sheriffs continued to be the only law enforcement group among whom bad guys outnumbered good guys. Fewer than one in four were positive, while a two in five were negative. As the worst of the bunch, it is not surprising that sheriffs were also the law enforcers most likely to commit crimes. Eight percent engaged in criminal behavior, three times the rate for other law enforcers as well as for the general population of census-coded characters. For instance, “Walker,

Texas Ranger” offered a small town Southern sheriff whose streak of virulent racism led him to beat and even murder blacks and Latinos who were unlucky enough to happen into his town.

Persuasion is television’s method of choice, and law enforcers once again followed this overall trend. In the 1990's they proved even more likely to rely on their persuasive powers than on their official authority to achieve their ends, reversing the order we found in previous decades. Just over a third (34 percent) of all methods they used involved persuasion, compared to one in five (21 percent) that relied on the authority of their position. Law enforcers employed violence seven percent of the time, about twice the rate for politicians and civil servants, but still a notably small minority of all instances. For these disciplined professionals, violence serves as a method of last resort, just as it did among their predecessors.

The 1997 season premiere of “Profiler” showed federal agents working through this progression of methods. Series star Dr. Sam Waters, a psychological profiler for the FBI’s Violent Crimes Task Force, is wrongly accused of a homicide. After she fails to persuade the local police of her innocence, she is offered an opportunity to help find a serial killer. In exchange for her help, federal authorities promise to delay the local officials. Dr. Waters takes this deal and proceeds to track down the killer, relying on her authority to order forensic tests, gain access to crime scenes and command other members of the task force. Eventually, she tracks the killer down and tries to persuade him to give up. Only after he advances on her threateningly does another agent jump him. In the ensuing

struggle, the killer is thrown off a catwalk to his death. Violence serves not only as the method of last resort in this case, but also as the ultimate punishment for an evil character who cannot be redeemed.

As befits their critical social mission and generally positive portrayal, law enforcers usually achieved their goals. Fifty-five percent were successful, approximating the average for all groups we coded. Only nine percent failed, and 36 percent had an unclear or unresolved outcome. Among all government groups, law enforcers ranked second behind teachers (70 percent success), but ahead of civil servants (43 percent) and politicians (29 percent). Private eyes, who topped the list of good guys, were also the most successful (79 percent). Although sheriffs were the least admired, their success rate (74 percent) outdistanced that of police (54 percent), lawyers (56 percent) and federal agents (50 percent). This high success rate for sheriff's departments is probably due to the unusual department found in the quirky series "Picket Fences." Although faced with a dizzying array of controversial issues and convoluted cases, the department usually succeeded in catching the bad guy.

By contrast, the poor success rate among federal agents was influenced by "The X-Files," in which agents Mulder and Scully are frequently frustrated by shadowy conspiracies, not to mention the difficulty of dealing with bizarre or inexplicable phenomena. In one episode they discover that the government has conspired with a chemical company to cover up an epidemic unleashed by a deadly parasite, for which the company bears responsibility. Agent Mulder threatens to go public with the

story, only to discover that the evidence has been destroyed and an airtight cover story fabricated. FBI Assistant Director Skinner tells the distraught Mulder, “you never had a chance” to reveal the type of conspiracy that “The X-Files” fans love to fear.

As these examples suggest, law enforcement in prime time is no longer a matter of an individual cop catching a crook. Every aspect of the justice system is portrayed in one show or another. For example, law enforcement practices and the actions of the courts have received a significant amount of debate in recent years. In most cases the legal system is presented as an appropriately restrained institution that jails the guilty for their crimes. But when the issue of corruption in the system is raised at all, viewers would do well to expect the worst.

In fact, recent developments have ratcheted up the conspiratorial ambiance that distinguishes “The X-Files” and its clones. In the 1998-99 season, with Mulder and Scully officially reassigned off the X-Files, the FBI takes on a more sinister and overtly manipulative image. It is now much more clear that FBI agents and officials are actively trying to cover-up the X-files and are manipulating Mulder and Scully to that end. In previous seasons, Asst. Director Skinner either aided Mulder and Scully or allowed them to have free reign in their investigations. After a disciplinary hearing, Mulder and Scully now report to a different Asst. Director. The new agent in charge of the X-Files works actively to suppress them, even as he rigidly toes the Bureau line.

Tellingly, one of the main tools to that end is the use of bureaucratic rules to crush their spirit of independence. The superior to whom Mulder and Scully now report is a humorless bean counter who seeks to control their movements and actions by closely auditing their expense reports and duty logs. By burying them under paperwork and regulations, he hopes to keep them in check. In several episodes he refuses to approve items in their expense accounts, forcing them to carry the costs themselves. He also frequently telephones them in the field to check on their whereabouts and activities, in order to make sure that they are not working on the X-files.

In addition to a new boss, Mulder and Scully have new duties that are more typical of the actual work of many FBI agents. Although their current duty assignments are intended to be seen as menial and demeaning, they are more representative of the daily routine of the bureau in real life. In one episode they are checking on individuals who have bought large quantities of ammonium nitrate fertilizer as part of a check on possible militia activity. (Ammonium nitrate can be used to make explosive devices.) In another episode Scully is shown administering lie detector tests to prospective government employees – a task which Mulder manages to avoid by becoming involved in another X-file.

All this is a long way from the excitement of uncovering government conspiracies or alien abductions. In fact Mulder jokes in one episode that his next assignment will be to clean the floor with a toothbrush. The implication, of course, is that such menial tasks are meaningless punishment duties

of no use to society. This denigration of real world law enforcement activities, in comparison to the save-the-world heroics of prime time fantasy, casts a new light on the “X-Files” depiction of federal law enforcement. Despite the highly positive portrayal of the two stars, the series attacks the institutional structure that makes real life FBI heroics possible. Where various monsters and little green men have failed to deter our heros, the crushing weight of government bureaucracy threatens to succeed.

Fox’s “Millennium” has taken a similarly conspiratorial turn in the 1998 season. Ever since the series began, the Millennium group has been portrayed as a murky institution with ancient roots that supposedly attempts to thwart evil as the millennium approaches. This has given the series a quasi-mystical tone focusing on the battle between good and evil. For the first two seasons, series star Frank Black used his own gifts of premonition and the resources of the Millennium group to solve serial killings and other acts of violence. Following the death of his wife in a mysterious epidemic last season, however, Black turned openly against his former sponsors. This season Black believes that the Millennium group is behind the epidemic and a host of other evils.

Accordingly, the Millennium group is now seen as an agent of evil that acts in concert with the FBI and other government agencies to control and manipulate human action and destiny. For instance, the season premiere features a murky plot about genetic experiments to produce offspring who are identical and have enhanced psychic abilities. When these experiments threaten to become public,

the Millennium group (or its governmental allies) engineers plane crashes and other accidents to kill off the women and their children. Frank Black, who has left the group and now works for the FBI, is called in to investigate the plane crash. However, Black is also suspicious of the FBI and often finds himself odds with its bureaucracy. He sees conspiracies at every turn, but no one else believes him. Even his FBI partner remains skeptical, since conclusive evidence always seems to slip through his fingers. Thus, this series echoes “The X-Files”’ turn toward finding its central conflict in pitting the individual against the government agency for which he or she works.

In fact, whether the agent is a “he” or “she” makes a difference. One of the most frequently addressed areas is the treatment that women and minorities receive from law enforcement. In the wake of the riots following the verdict in the Rodney King case, many shows explored the way police treat racial minorities. The Clarence Thomas hearings, with their allegations of sexual harassment, also raised issues that worked their way into prime time plots. Out of 25 episodes that dealt with such issues, just under two-thirds (64 percent) concluded that women or minorities received fair treatment. For instance, the premiere episode of “Under Suspicion” showed women receiving equal treatment, but only after a struggle. Detective Rose Phillips is introduced as the first female detective in a Pacific Northwest police department. Her male colleagues spare no effort at harassment, suggesting that her path to success involves the bedroom. However, Phil (as she prefers to be called) is able to handle their come-ons and rude remarks, often shooting them down with a quick wit or simply shrugging off the comments as harmless.

While most discussions of the treatment of women have focused on activities inside the station house, plots concerned with the treatment of minorities have looked at the broader community. For example, a 1994 episode of "New York Undercover" dealt with a racially charged rape case. A Puerto Rican high school girl alleges that she was raped by five football players, three of whom are black, from a rival high school. Complicating matters, the detectives assigned to the case are an African American and a Hispanic American of Puerto Rican descent. Despite the many racial tensions created by the case, the officers treat both the suspects and the accuser fairly. Eventually they discover that the rape charges were part of a scheme cooked up by the girl and a bookie to get the five players thrown off the team, increasing the odds of the other team's victory.

Occasionally, ethnic tensions are played out within the police force. One example occurs on CBS's "Martial Law," which focuses on Sammo Law, a Chinese cop who is in the country on an exchange program. The show's premise sets up a culture clash that provides an opportunity for Law to deal with bigoted American cops. The treatment is none too subtle. For instance, in a 1998 episode Detective Portman asks Law, "So, what's policing like in that God-forsaken, dog-eating, overpopulated Panda ranch?" Portman taunts Law throughout the show with derogatory comments until he finally forces a fight, which (of course) he loses.

When police brutality became an issue, nearly half the shows (five of eleven, or 45 percent) affirmed its existence. "NYPD Blue" offered an example of the sort of tacit approval that often greets police

brutality. In a 1995 episode, Detectives Sipowicz and Simone rough up a wounded robbery suspect; Simone holds him by the throat as they demand information. The robber gives up the name of his accomplice while complaining about the pain of his wounds. Later, Simone and Sipowicz force the man to call his accomplice and arrange a meeting before they allow him to receive medical treatment. This abuse of a suspect, while clearly illegal, escapes comment or sanction in the episode.

Finally, seven out of the ten episodes (70 percent) that raised the issue of justice system corruption affirmed its existence. For example, a 1995 episode of “Charlie Grace” revealed multiple layers of police corruption. Charlie Grace’s own career as a policeman ended when he turned in a group of crooked cops and was ostracized by his fellow officers. Working as a private detective, Grace comes under suspicion for the murder of Earl Jonas, whom he once sent to jail for the armed robbery of a payroll company. In order to clear himself, Grace conducts his own investigation. He discovers that Jonas had an inside partner when he robbed the payroll company – a defense attorney who is also the son of a police captain. Grace discovers that at the time Jonas was indicted, the captain made a deal for his silence. When Jonas was released, the officer killed him to keep the scheme under wraps.

An equally jaundiced portrayal of the legal system, if a more eccentric one, is found in the current ABC series “Maximum Bob.” This series pits public defender Cathy Baker against Judge Robert Gibbs, the Roy Bean of Deepwater, Florida – a lecherous, abusive, scheming egotist nicknamed “Maximum” Bob for his draconian punishments he hands out. He also displays a minimum of civility

and inhibition. The first time Baker finds herself facing Gibbs, he propositions her. When she rebuffs him he cites her for contempt and throws her in jail. Baker tries to establish some sanity by linking up with the town sheriff, but they can never seem to get the better of Judge Gibbs.

For instance, in one episode Gibbs uses an offhand comment from Baker to bolster his political ambitions by deflecting his critics. When Baker unthinkingly mentions that she hates manatees, Gibbs takes the opportunity to deflect the criticism he has been receiving from local environmentalists. He makes sure they hear about the hapless lawyer's politically incorrect views on wildlife, leading them to launch a protest rally against her. As the protestors march around Baker's office, Gibbs gleefully taunts her, "You have righted the wrongs perpetrated against me by hordes of lily-livered, tree-hugging, unshaven environmentalists. You got me off the Everglades enemies list. You are going to get me elected governor!"

In an even more far-fetched episode, Gibbs has a defendant bound and gagged in the courtroom over Baker's strenuous objections. Baker argues that he has prejudiced the jury and moves for a mistrial. Gibbs retorts sanctimoniously, "I don't think you give these fine ladies and gentlemen credit. I think they can decide for themselves what sort of man this defendant is. That is the beauty of the American system of justice." No sooner has Gibbs denied her motion than a woman rises in the gallery and drops the bombshell that Gibbs sexually molested her when she was his law clerk. She claims Gibbs ripped her clothes and bit her on the buttocks.

Later Gibbs does a TV interview in the hopes of rehabilitating his image. He is doing well until he says, "I believe no means no, but until it is no it is deliciously possibly yes." This line is so devastating that his political consultants rush into the courtroom to literally pull the plug on the interview. In the end, Gibbs is saved by his wife, who makes a heartfelt appeal to Baker to defend him. The complaints of sexual harassment have not been resolved at the end of the episode, but the judge is already back in form. A closing scene shows Gibbs and his cronies playing poker in his courtroom as an attractive young volunteer for his election campaign is ushered into his chambers.

Overall, law enforcement show in the 1990's have continued television's long-term trend toward a grittier or more realistic mis-en-scene and greater criticism of human failings and institutional inadequacies, while still portraying individual law enforcers in a generally sympathetic light. Social issues such as community relations, the treatment of women and minorities, and allegations of police brutality are now among the problems that plot lines regularly confront. The justice system, warts and all, has become a regular feature of the law enforcement landscape. More often than not, the cops still catch the robbers during prime time. Increasingly, though, the good guys have to fight the system and their own foibles along with the bad guys.

TEACHERS

In the 1990's teaching remained among the least visible major occupations on prime time. Public school teachers accounted for only two percent of all members of census-coded occupations, the same percentage as in previous decades. Like most characters in the world of prime time, contemporary teachers were predominately white males. Fully two-thirds were male and about three-quarters were white. About one in five were black, and only two percent were Hispanic. Teachers reflected slightly more racial diversity than any other government group, however, including the highest proportion of African Americans (19 percent).

In one important way the visibility of teachers has declined significantly over the years. In the 1990's they rarely enjoy star status. Only nine percent were the stars of the shows in which they appeared, just over half the rate for the general population. Viewers were far more likely to encounter teachers in single appearances (42 percent) or minor continuing roles (49 percent.) But they reflected TV's norm in the activities that engaged them. Three in five (60 percent) performed occupational functions, more than twice the rate of those who combined professional and personal concerns (25 percent). Only 15 percent were involved in purely personal matters.

If teachers are less visible than they once were on prime time, they are more likely to be successful when they do appear. In the 1970's and 1980's, the success rate of television's public school teachers

was diminished by the trend toward inner-city settings in which social problems impinged on the classroom. In the 1990's, by contrast, teachers have succeeded over eight times as often as they failed, by 70 percent vs. eight percent, with the remainder unresolved. This success rate places them well above other public sector groups, as well as the general population, which enjoyed a success rate of only 50 percent. These successes have sometimes been hard-won. For example, in one episode of "King of the Hill," substitute teacher Peggy Hill is given the unpopular assignment of teaching the sex education class at Tom Landry Middle School in the small town of Arlen, Texas. Peggy has to overcome her own embarrassment over the subject matter and the initial opposition of her equally traditional husband Hank. Nonetheless, she perseveres and eventually delivers her lectures to a classroom audience that consists of her own son and the belatedly supportive Hank.

Moreover, even though teachers usually lacked a high profile, they remained among television's most favored groups. Thirty-four percent were portrayed in a positive light, compared to 26 percent for the general population. Likewise, only one percent of teachers committed a crime, compared to three percent of all census coded characters. Just under half (46 percent) of teachers were presented in a neutral light, reflecting the large proportion of characters who appeared in only a single episode.

Television's public school teachers continue to be cast in the mold of dedicated professionals striving to help their youthful charges to overcome both personal and social problems. The most admirable teacher to appear in recent years was Louanne Johnson in "Dangerous Minds," a short-lived 1996

series based on the hit movie that starred Michelle Pfeiffer. Johnson used her military training as a former Marine to teach English in a tough inner-city high school plagued by gangs, drugs, and discipline problems. Johnson was an effective professional who used a variety of innovative teaching methods to inspire even her most apathetic students. Not only did she push her kids to strive for lofty goals, she went far beyond the call of duty by purchasing school supplies with her own money and even babysitting for a teenage mother so she could continue her studies.

A more complex portrait of an involved and innovative teacher appeared on a 1994 episode of "My So Called Life." In this plot line, a substitute English teacher discards the regular teacher's traditional lesson plan and instructs the students by provoking candid discussions of literature. He takes over the literary review and uses it as a vehicle to challenge the students to write what they feel. The results are blunt, emotional, and sometimes risque. Yet he doesn't pander to the students. On the contrary, he doesn't hesitate to criticize them and demand that their work improve. Despite his popularity with the kids, however, he is fired when the literary review breaches the bounds of propriety. Then he suddenly decides to leave town without explanation. The audience eventually learns that this dedicated teacher departed after being served with a summons for failure to pay child support.

One of the few purely negative teachers in our sample appeared in a 1992 episode of "Picket Fences." During a staging of the "Wizard of Oz," a teacher playing the Tin Man dies. An subsequent

investigation reveals that he was murdered by nicotine poisoning. Viewers eventually learn that he had an affair with one of his students and took nude pictures of her. After impregnating her, he forced her to have an abortion. When the girl's father discovered the affair, he killed the teacher.

Teachers relied mainly on rational means to pursue their goal. Nearly half (44 percent) of the methods they employed involved persuasion, about the same proportion we found among other characters. But teachers were twice as likely other census-coded characters to employ the authority of their position, by 17 percent to eight percent. For example, the long-suffering Edna Crebobbles of "The Simpsons" regularly (if not always successfully) issues commands and assigns punishment in a frequently vain effort to keep order among her elementary school students.

In the same series, one of TV's few principals illustrated the varied use of authority in the hyperbolic fashion that is typical of this acerbic animated satire. Principal Seymour Skinner constantly tried to win promotion to the central administration staff, but something (usually the incorrigible Bart Simpson) always interfered with his plans. During the course of this series, Skinner has locked troublemakers in the basement while the school was being inspected, and shipped Bart to France as an exchange student to get him out of the way. In a recent episode, Skinner was unmasked as a fraud who stole another man's identity. This fake "Skinner" was a wild youth who had trouble with the law. In lieu of serving time, he enlisted in the military, where he met the real Seymour Skinner. When the real Skinner went missing in action, the imposter stole his identity and established himself

as a pillar of the community. Even when the real Skinner returned many years later, the perverse town of Springfield voted to let the imposter keep his assumed identity and his job. Even Skinner's mother chose her adopted son over her natural one.

Another less than sterling principal appeared in the short lived comedy "The Faculty." Principal Herb Adams was so obtuse, he could not even find the teachers' lounge. The assorted teachers at Alexander Junior High were hardly better than Adams. The tongue-tied Mr. Clark did his best conversing on the Internet. Amanda Duvall was a disinterested, sharp-tongued teacher who disparaged the students. These characters frequently matched "The Simpsons'" Mrs. Crebobbie in their lack of interest in accomplishing anything other than surviving the school day.

The most recent addition to the high school rogues gallery appears in a program that was not in our sample but has lately become a cult hit – the WB network's "Buffy the Vampire Slayer." Principal Snyder is constantly hounding Buffy and friends, since he believes Buffy to be a troublemaker and a bad influence. For example, in the current season he meets with Buffy and her mother to discuss readmitting Buffy to high school, from which she was expelled. He starts to lay out conditions for her readmittance, such as a requirement that she leave the school grounds immediately at the end of the school day. At this point Buffy's mother intervenes to tell Snyder that she has already spoken to the school board, and he is required to... At this point the principal cuts her off to finish the sentence, "admit any student who legally resides in the district and is not currently incarcerated, as she out to

be.” Of course, unbeknownst to the officious Snyder, it is only the misunderstood Buffy who can save the school (and the world) from the vampires who secretly populate it. Although Buff’s targets are the undead among us, one gets the impression that the writers would just as soon drive a stake through the heart of soul-deadening bureaucrats.

These examples illustrate a theme laced throughout the past quarter century of TV entertainment. The best teachers (and other public sector workers) were unconventional characters who discarded established procedures and methods for progressive ideas. Those who bent or even broke the rules were ultimately more effective teachers than their more traditional counterparts, who did the minimum to fulfill their duties and failed to go the extra mile to help failing students. And while Hollywood was quick to criticize what it considers rigid bureaucrats and outmoded educational approaches, television never made teaching look simple.

For example, in a 1993 episode of “Boy Meets World,” young Corey denigrated the profession and claimed teaching was easy. One of his teachers, Mr. Feeny, bets with Corey that he cannot successfully teach a week of lessons on prejudice and raise the class grade. Attempting to interest the kids in “The Diary of Anne Frank,” Corey discovers how difficult it is to teach. Although no one wins the bet because the grade remains unchanged, the experience raises Corey’s esteem for the profession he had derided. As for the wise and caring Mr. Feeny, over the course of the series he is promoted first to vice-principal and then principal of the high school that the growing Corey

attends . Whatever the failings of television's version of the school system, it is nice to know that virtue is still rewarded.

TABLE II - 1
NUMBER OF CHARACTERS 1992 - 1999

GOVERNMENT OCCUPATIONS		1470
Law Enforcers		1049
Judges		109
Lawyers		86
Federal Agents		113
Local Police		660
Local Sheriffs		35
Other		46
Public School Teachers		107
Public Officials		72
Other Civil Servants		242
OTHER OCCUPATIONS		3293
TOTAL		4763

TABLE II - 2
GENDER (%)

	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
LAW ENFORCERS	81	19	100%
Lawyers	59	41	100%
Judges	75	25	100%
Federal Agents	84	16	100%
Police	85	15	100%
Sheriffs	86	14	100%
TEACHERS	63	37	100%
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	87	13	100%
OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS	61	39	100%
OTHER OCCUPATIONS	66	34	100%

TABLE II - 3
RACE (%)

	WHITE	BLACK	OTHER	TOTAL
LAW ENFORCERS	75	18	7	100%
Lawyers	85	13	2	100%
Judges	90	10	0	100%
Federal Agents	82	15	3	100%
Police	70	20	10	100%
Sheriffs	95	0	5	100%
TEACHERS	77	19	4	100%
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	90	7	3	100%
OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS	74	15	11	100%
OTHER OCCUPATIONS	80	12	8	100%

TABLE II - 4
PROMINENCE OF ROLE (%)

	SERIES STAR	SERIES REGULAR	SINGLE EPISODE	TOTAL
LAW ENFORCERS	16	42	42	100%
Lawyers	20	56	24	100%
Judges	8	13	79	100%
Federal Agents	23	36	41	100%
Police	17	46	37	100%
Sheriffs	22	16	62	100%
TEACHERS	9	49	42	100%
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	6	24	70	100%
CIVIL SERVANTS	5	36	59	100%
OTHER OCCUPATIONS	16	33	51	100%

TABLE II - 5
TONE OF PORTRAYALS (%)

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL	TOTAL
LAW ENFORCERS	43	16	41	100%
Lawyers	59	10	31	100%
Judges	29	10	61	100%
Federal Agents	48	23	29	100%
Local Police	45	15	40	100%
Local Sheriffs	22	40	38	100%
TEACHERS	34	18	48	100%
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	22	31	47	100%
OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS	16	18	66	100%
OTHER OCCUPATIONS	26	23	51	100%

TABLE II - 6 COMMITTED CRIME (%)	
	CRIMINALS
LAW ENFORCERS	2
Lawyers	3
Judges	0
Federal Agents	1
Police	2
Sheriffs	8
TEACHERS	1
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	7
OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS	4
OTHER OCCUPATIONS	3

TABLE II - 7
CONTEXT OF PORTRAYALS (%)

	OCCUPATIONAL	PERSONAL	COMBINATION	TOTAL
LAW ENFORCERS	71	6	23	100%
Lawyers	70	7	23	100%
Judges	80	3	17	100%
Federal Agents	72	4	24	100%
Police	71	7	22	100%
Sheriffs	62	3	35	100%
TEACHERS	60	15	25	100%
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	53	13	34	100%
OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS	68	14	18	100%
OTHER OCCUPATIONS	55	17	28	100%

TABLE II - 8
RESOLUTION OF ACTIVITY (%)

	SUCCESS	FAILURE	UNRESOLVED	TOTAL
LAW ENFORCERS	55	9	36	100%
Lawyers	56	13	31	100%
Judges	73	7	20	100%
Federal Agents	50	5	45	100%
Police	54	8	38	100%
Sheriffs	74	13	13	100%
TEACHERS	70	8	22	100%
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	29	29	42	100%
OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS	43	16	41	100%
OTHER OCCUPATIONS	50	15	35	100%

TABLE II - 9
METHODS USED (%)

	PERSUASION	AUTHORITY	VIOLENCE	DECEPTION	OTHER	TOTAL
LAW ENFORCERS	34	21	7	8	30	100%
Lawyers	36	18	1	8	37	100%
Judges	28	42	2	3	25	100%
Federal Agents	32	18	4	9	37	100%
Police	35	20	8	7	30	100%
Sheriffs	30	21	13	4	32	100%
TEACHERS	44	17	0	0	39	100%
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	31	17	3	16	33	100%
OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS	43	5	2	9	41	100%
OTHER OCCUPATIONS	39	8	3	8	42	100%

TABLE II - 10
THEMES OF EPISODES

	HONEST	CORRUPT	NUMBER OF SHOWS
Justice System Is:	30%	70%	10
Political System Is:	17%	83%	6
Government Bureaucracy Is:	20%	80%	5
TOTAL	24%	76%	21

TABLE II - 11
THEMES OF EPISODES

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NUMBER OF SHOWS
Evaluation of Government	32%	68%	22

CONCLUSION

From its earliest days, television has split its vote on government employees. Prime time has usually given thumbs up to law enforcement officials and public school teachers, thumbs down to public officials and office seekers, and a dismissive wave of the hand to civil servants or “government bureaucrats.” The sheen on all of these groups has faded in recent years, and the same is true for the institution of government. Although many positive characters still represent the public sector in the prime time schedule, television is more critical of government institutions than the individuals who represent them.

These are the principal patterns to emerge from our systematic study of 1,234 prime time series episodes and 9,588 characters over the past four decades. Throughout this report, we have compared the various public sector groups with an undifferentiated aggregate of private sector workers. But Table III-1 provides a more detailed overview of how governmental employees stack up against all major professions represented on television during the 1990's. Law enforcers and teachers received the highest marks, with government lawyers and judges gaining even more favorable portrayals than peace officers (police, federal agents, sheriffs, etc.). They were followed by teachers, whom television has always portrayed as practitioners of a noble calling. These groups all fared better than any private sector occupation, outstripping such popular groups as doctors and defense attorneys.

probity of the political process eventually reaffirmed its integrity. Since then the proportions have been reversed, with 62 percent of such shows concluding that politics corrupts. In fact, television takes a dim view of the whole political process. Political decisions are usually pictured as the outcome of either narrow self-interest or the unseemly influence of special interest groups.

This decline in television's confidence is not confined to the narrowly construed realm of politics and government proper. Even the armor on TV's blue knights has been losing its shine of late. Until the 1970's, most law enforcers were clean-cut exemplars of virtue and fighters of evil. Throughout the real world turmoil of the 1960's, prime time police pursued their quarries within a clear-cut moral universe and a smoothly functioning system of justice. During the next decade this Manichean world began to unravel, as scripts began to question the propriety of police behavior and the legal and moral assumptions behind the justice system. Prior to 1975, over ninety percent of the police were good guys, and cops almost never committed crimes. By the 1990's, the proportion of positive police had dropped below 50 percent, and the number of abusive and criminal cops had risen, although this group still fares better than most other occupational groups.

Further, the police increasingly had to contend with a flawed justice system. In shows like "Hill Street Blues" and "NYPD Blue," the good guys ended up fighting the bureaucracy and internal corruption as well as criminals and evildoers. Once again, our thematic analysis revealed how much more flawed the system became over time. Before 1975, nearly nine out of ten shows (89 percent)

TABLE III -1
tone OF PORTRAYALS - SELECTED OCCUPATIONS (%)
1992 - 1998

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL	TOTAL	INDEX SCORE*	NUMBER OF CHARACTERS
COURT SYSTEM	46	13	41	100%	+33	194
PEACE OFFICERS	40	19	41	100%	+21	854
TEACHERS	34	18	48	100%	+16	107
PRIVATE ATTORNEYS	41	26	33	100%	+15	191
MILITARY	35	19	46	100%	+16	200
DOCTORS	39	25	36	100%	+14	349
OTHER PROFESSIONALS	39	28	33	100%	+11	222
OTHER HEALTH PROVIDERS	14	7	78	100%	+7	208
JOURNALISTS	23	18	59	100%	+5	294
OTHER WHITE COLLAR	21	18	61	100%	+3	803
BLUE COLLAR	18	18	64	100%	0	517
CIVIL SERVANTS	16	18	66	100%	-2	242
BUSINESS	31	39	30	100%	-8	558
PUBLIC OFFICIALS	22	31	47	100%	-9	72

* Index Score represents percent positive minus percent negative portrayals.

TABLE III - 2
THEMES OF EPISODES

	HONEST	CORRUPT	TOTAL	NUMBER OF SHOWS
POLITICAL SYSTEM				
1955 - 1974	65	35	100%	20
1975 - 1998	38	62	100%	29
LEGAL SYSTEM				
1955 - 1974	89	11	100%	18
1975 - 1998	42	58	100%	26
LEGAL/POLITICAL COMBINED				
1955 - 1974	76	24	100%	38
1975 - 1998	40	60	100%	55
TOTAL NUMBER OF SHOWS				93

In sharp contrast, public officials and office seekers finished dead last in popularity, with half again as many negative portrayals as positive ones. These prototypical self-interested wheeler dealers comprised one of only three groups that contained a majority of bad guys; the others were civil servants and private business characters. The category of government workers was also notable for having the largest proportion of neutral portrayals among public sector professions. This reflects the insignificant parts usually assigned to the staff aides, clerks, mail carriers and the like who perform the everyday work of government bodies.

Law enforcers have always received the lion's share of television's attention, accounting for about one out of every five characters in census-coded occupations ever since the 1950's. Most law enforcement officials were always shown as good guys, although private eyes fared even better in terms of their positive portrayals and crime-solving prowess. Officers of the court, such as judges and government attorneys, have had the most favorable image of any group. The generally positive portrayals of peace officers were balanced by the occasional bad cop and the stereotypical crooked small town sheriff. Surprisingly, television's law enforcers have relied far more on persuasion and professional authority than on their guns and fists to collar criminals. For these dedicated but emotionally detached professionals, violence was usually a last resort.

By contrast, public school teachers appeared relatively rarely throughout television's history. Yet their audience impact was magnified beyond their numbers by the starring roles they often played.

From “Our Miss [Connie] Brooks” in the 1950's to “Welcome Back [Gabe] Kotter” in the 1970's to Louanne Johnson of “Dangerous Minds” in the 1990's, teachers were cast as accomplished professionals and caring human beings who placed their students' interests above all else. Their common bond was always an ideal of service to others, but they gradually became more socially aware and responsive to problems outside the classroom. Beginning in the late 1960's TV's public school teachers gradually moved from largely white middle-class settings to multi-ethnic urban schools. Surrounded by poverty, crime, drug abuse, and learning disabilities, they championed their students' needs and progressive teaching methods against an entrenched institutional structure.

While many of television's teachers were memorable characters, civil servants remained largely anonymous. There have been rare exceptions, such as “Quincy,” the indefatigable crime solving medical examiner, and “Benson,” who worked his way up from being a governor's butler to serving as the state budget director and eventually running for governor himself. Unlike teachers, however, this group also produced some memorably negative role models for public service. Among these were the socially and professionally inept mail carriers Cliff Clavin of “Cheers” and Newman on “Seinfeld,” and Marge Simpson's surly sisters Patty and Selma, who staff Springfield's Department of Motor Vehicles. Such characters are notable for combining unpleasant personality traits with inferior work habits.

If teachers and law enforcers were TV's pillars of virtue, politicians often epitomized vice. They were mostly portrayed throughout the decades as serving either powerful interests or their own personal gain, rather than the public good. Whether smooth and sophisticated, like Cong. Neil McVane of "Dynasty," or crass and blustery, like Boss Hogg from "The Dukes of Hazzard," public officials were seen as forever on the make by licit or illicit means. Indeed, politics has always run neck-and-neck with business in the competition for TV's least-liked occupation. This was true even in TV's early years, when the medium was generally kinder to the establishment. Television's ticket has been split between Machiavellian wheeler-dealers and corrupt power-brokers, on one hand, and the occasional crusading maverick or idealistic outsider, on the other. The latter good-guy politicians appeared most frequently during television's "relevancy" period during the late 1960's and early 1970's. They generally stood for "apple pie" values like the public interest, honesty and accountability, civil rights, and environmentalism. But the "Mr. Smiths" who came to Washington were usually swept out of office by the Nielsen voters, leaving behind a motley crew of machine bosses and backroom schemers.

Another troubling finding is the long-term trend toward more negative portrayals of both governmental institutions and the people who staff them. Not only did public officials receive their most negative portrayals in recent years, the same thing happened to the political system. As Table III-2 shows, our thematic analysis found a sharp increase over time in portrayals of systemic corruption. Before 1975, nearly two out of every three shows (65 percent) that questioned the

that dealt with this issue upheld the probity of the judicial process. Since then a majority (58 percent) of shows have portrayed a corrupt system of justice. As the cops have been encumbered by new constraints, some of the slack has been picked up by private eyes and citizen sleuths, like Jessica Fletcher of "Murder, She Wrote," who are exempt from the system's failings. Unlike their official counterparts, these outsiders remain mostly heroic and effective. Thus, television continues to enforce the law without glorifying the law enforcement system.

In recent decades prime time has rarely conveyed the message that the public is protected by a government operating in their interest. For example, when all thematic treatments of the legal and political systems are combined, three out of five shows since 1975 have found corruption, whereas three out of four shows before 1975 confirmed the system's integrity. At best the dedicated individuals who work for the government protect the public from the system's inadequacies or excesses. Most law enforcers are still cast in an admirable light, especially when they clean house or oppose a system that places the rules over human needs. Likewise, the best public servants confront authority and ignore bureaucratic procedures that interfere with positive outcomes. These days television's public sector heroes have to fight the system to make it work for the people.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

The study relied on the social scientific technique of content analysis. This method is defined as the objective and systematic description of communicative material. Because it is both systematic and reliable, it permits the researcher to transcend the realm of impressionistic generalizations, which are prone to individual preferences and prejudices. Objectivity involves following explicit rules and procedures that define analytic categories and criteria to minimize a researcher's subjective predispositions. It implies reliability – additional researchers applying the same procedures to the data should reach the same conclusions. Reliability checks and measurements are an integral part of the research. A systematic approach requires that media content and analytic categories be included or excluded according to consistently applied rules.

For this study, we began by conducting what is called an emergent or qualitative analysis. This involves examining a diverse sample of shows and taking extensive notes on all topics that may later be subjected to formal content analysis. The idea is to develop an intuitive "feel" for the material so that the formal categories reflect the essence of the stories and characters, rather than being imposed on them artificially. In practice, this meant charting a sufficient number of themes, plots, and character traits, to gain a sense of the way television tells its stories and the substance of the tales themselves.

For this first phase, we reviewed 250 programs that were not included among those sampled for this report. The information gained from this qualitative study became the basis of a formal content analysis system that examined character traits and program themes. Each character trait and thematic treatment was identified on a standardized coding sheet, and college students were trained to scan the people and plots in each program to see how the analytic categories were applied. Only then did we begin the systematic analysis that provided the material for our conclusions about the portrayal of government on past and present television entertainment programming.

For the historical analysis, we catalogued the plots, themes, and characters from 620 prime time programs from the 1950's through the 1980's. The sample was drawn from 20,000 programs catalogued at the Library of Congress. For consistency we restricted our analysis to regularly scheduled fictional entertainment series broadcast on the ABC, CBS and NBC television networks. The programs represent a stratified random sample of single episodes from 20 different series during each of the 31 seasons from 1955 through 1986. We identified 7,369 speaking characters in these shows, of whom 4,725 had occupations that were listed among those identified by the U.S. Census Bureau.

In studying television in the 1990s, we examined one episode of every regularly scheduled prime time series that aired on the ABC, CBS, NBC or FOX networks from September 1992 through December 1998. For each season we taped the first episode of every regularly

fictional entertainment series. As in the historical sample, this procedure excluded movies, miniseries, and non-fiction series ranging from news magazines to game shows and “reality shows.” This resulted in the examination of 614 episodes from 351 different series. We identified 9,210 speaking characters in these shows, of whom 4,763 had census-coded occupations. Thus, the full content analysis was applied to a total of 1,234 programs and 9,588 census-coded characters, including 2,664 civilian public sector employees.

In both the historical and contemporary analyses, the reliability of coding decisions was rigorously assessed. Working separately and independently, all coders separately analyzed the same program material until they reached the same conclusions about the themes and character traits on display. If consistent agreement proved impossible on some theme or trait, it was dropped from the analysis. More often, initial disagreements were resolved by refining the rules according to which coders based their decisions. Eighty percent agreement was the minimum allowed, but it was usually much higher.

Following these rules was critical to the study's scientific objectivity, because it insured that the coders were not making subjective judgments based on their own inclinations. To make the analysis consistent, coders examined the content of each episode as unique unit. In other words, the way a character was coded any given episode was not affected by the character's behavior in any other episode. Equally important, each such interpretation was guided by a set of standardized rules and procedures designed to insure that different viewers will assign

the same meaning to a character's behavior. In making such judgments, coders are following rules rather than expressing personal opinions. The resulting high levels of agreement in coding decisions, or intercoder reliability, indicate how well the rules worked in minimizing individual subjectivity.

Thus, content analysis is as removed from casual viewing as scientific polling is from "man in the street" interviews. It is not a panacea, in the sense of providing perfectly objective or absolutely definitive results. As in polling, the success of the enterprise depends to some degree on the skill and sensitivity of the investigator, and there is always some margin of error to the findings. In principle, however, this approach can help to structure the vast diversity of entertainment programming by assigning material to discrete categories that facilitate valid, reliable, and quantifiable judgments. One strength of this analysis lies in the consistency of methods used in the historical analysis and the contemporary review. In both samples we looked at the same character traits using the same categories. Coders examined plot lines for the same thematic points to maximize the comparability of the data.

Our analysis of characters began with such basic descriptive information as age, race and gender to map the population of television. The occupation of each speaking character was identified with particular attention as to whether the character worked for government or the private sector. The content analysis identified common occupations like doctors, lawyers, teachers and accountants as well as unusual occupations like models, actors and professional

athletes. From such basic information the coding moved on to items that were closely linked to the plot line. The role each character played was determined in order to separate the stars from minor players and continuing characters from those who appeared in a single episode. Coders identified the primary context of each character's actions, separating characters who were primarily seen at work from those who were seen mostly at home.

Perhaps the most pivotal element of the analysis is the function a character plays in the plot. This category separates the good from the bad from the neutral. Positive characters engaged in behavior that the show treated with approval, such as altruism, friendliness, or professional competence. Negative characters committed criminal acts or otherwise displayed malevolent or foolish behavior. A small number of characters were coded as "mixed" for displaying a combination of laudable and undesirable traits. For instance, comic characters were sometimes presented as well-meaning or good-hearted but misguided or inept. Dramatic characters sometimes committed reprehensible acts but later repented or redeemed themselves. We reserved a residual neutral category for characters whose brief appearances had no significant effect or role in the plot.

To simplify the data presentation and facilitate comparisons, and because all mixed characters contained significant negative elements, this report combines mixed and negative characters into a single category. This did not significantly alter our substantive conclusions, which are based on comparisons across occupational groups. All groups were subject to the same

aggregation of categories, and our data analysis determined that public and private sector groups did not differ significantly in their respective proportion of mixed characters. We also isolated the most reprehensible behavior by noting whenever a character committed a criminal act. In determining the criminality of characters we relied on judgments made in the show to identify lawbreakers, rather than imposing our own definitions. In this way we let the storytellers dictate the bounds of legal behavior rather than imposing some outside standard on characters. This approach allowed us to compare criminality across shows that are set in different time periods or different countries.

The methods that characters use to achieve their goals are a significant part of any story. Hence, our analysis identified which methods characters used in pursuit of their goals. Over the years characters have used methods ranging from persuasion to violence and from bribery to seduction. Law enforcers, teachers and other officials have also relied upon the authority of their offices to command and direct the activities of others. As a final step in the analysis of characters, we assessed whether each character ultimately achieved all or most of his or her goals. In some cases, due to multi-part stories or continuing story lines, the character's ultimate success or failure could not be assessed and was coded as unresolved.

Our thematic analysis focused not on individual characters but on the story as a whole. In this part of the content analysis, the goal was to identify significant plot developments or stretches of dialogue that made some point about government institutions or practices, independently

of how individual characters were depicted. To this end we looked for discussions of honesty or corruption, competence or incompetence, and caring or neglect in all government institutions. We also examined the role that self-interest and special interests were said to play in politics and government. Because of the high salience of legal issues in prime time television, we analyzed how the legal system treated women and minorities, as well as charges of police brutality or misconduct. Thematic analysis is intrinsically more open-ended than character analysis, but our thematic coding was restricted to direct dialogue or overt depictions of government, rather than allowing inferences about the subjective implications of a situation that was not explicitly developed in the episode under consideration.