



Archie Bunker's America: TV in an Era of Change 1968-1978

Josh Ozersky

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Archie Bunker's America discerns what was “in the air” as television networks tried to accommodate cultural and political swings in America from the Vietnam era through the late 1970s. Josh Ozersky’s spirited examination of the ways America changed television during a period of intense social upheaval, recuperation, and fragmentation uncovers a bold and beguiling facet of American cultural history. From the conflict-based comedy of *All in the Family* and such post-sixties frolics as *Three’s Company* to tendentiously apolitical programs like *Happy Days*, Ozersky describes the range and power of television to echo larger schemes of American life.

Around 1968, advertisers who were anxious to break into the lucrative baby-boomer demographic convinced television networks to begin to abandon prime-time programming that catered to universal audiences. With the market splintering, networks ventured into more issue-based and controversial territories. While early network attempts at more “relevant” programming failed, Ozersky examines how CBS struck gold with the political comedy *All in the Family* in 1971 and how other successful, conflict-based comedies turned away from typical show business conventions. As the 1970s wore on, the innovations of the previous years began to lose their public appeal. After Vietnam and Watergate, Ozersky argues, Americans were exhausted from the political turbulence of the preceding decade and were ready for a televisual “return to normalcy.”

Straightforward, engaging, and liberally illustrated, *Archie Bunker's America* is peppered with the stories of outsider cops and failed variety shows, of a young Bill Murray and an old Ed Sullivan, of Mary Tyler Moore, Fonzie, and the Skipper, too. Drawing on interviews with television insiders, trade publications, and the programs themselves, Ozersky chronicles the ongoing attempts of prime-time television to program for a fragmented audience—an audience whose greatest common denominator, by 1978, may well have been the act of watching television itself. The book also includes a foreword by renowned media critic **Mark Crispin Miller** and an epilogue of related commentary on the following decades.

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