"WHO'S LEAR-ING?"

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It must be apparent to most of us that our national attitudes toward foreign affairs have been embittered by our well-intentioned but disappointing efforts to "make the world safe for democracy" and protect human rights everywhere. Democracy in human government and civil rights cannot be found or established in a cultural vacuum, much less in an antagonistic milieu. Our studies in political science are not usually cross-referenced with parallel cultural developments.

It is interesting to note the development of a people's theater in ancient Greece at the same time that democratic political institutions were attempted especially in Athens. The Greek theater began to appear on hillsides where the audiences sat and watched performances below. The theaters whose ruins are now visited and photographed by tourists took their form from those natural, out-door theaters. The Romans, preferring more spectacular, more violent presentations, built huge arenas in which thousands could be thrilled, amused and entertained, frequently by the torture and pain of others.

In the dark centuries following the decline and fall of the Roman Empire the idealistic aspirations of the Greeks for democracy and the Romans for justice began to fade from view and might have been lost entirely were it not for the pains-taking labors of scholars who preserved, copied and translated the manuscript legacy which became the fertile soil in which the Renaissance took root and from which it flourished. In Florence, the Medicis made great music and art available to the people from whom they were completely witheld while they were monopolized by royalty and nobility. In London, while philosophers and political thinkers were writing about human rights and democratic government, companies of players, like the Lord Chamberlain's Company, were

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offering dramatic plays to the people in theaters like the Globe to which admission could be gained by commoners for two-pence. Others, who could afford to pay a half-crown, could be seated on cushions in the balconies.

One of the members of the Lord Chamberlain's Company, was a little known actor, writer and general handy man named William Shakespeare. There is room for controversy about his life and work before the Company began to play in London, partly because it could not have been foreseen that he would become the Immortal Bard, partly because records were kept carelessly if at all, and partly because the name was not uncommon. Aspirants to the Ph. D. can still find challenges for investigations and dissertations on aspects of his earlier life. Indeed, dissertations are still being written casting shadows on his authorship of various works attributed to him.

In the sixteenth century, before the newly innovated art of printing had begun to affect the dissemination of information, authorship was less important than ownership of a piece of literature or a play. A company would purchase a play for a pittance; the original author might easily be forgotten when a company-employed writer might up-date the play or re-write it to fit changes in company personnel. There is no question that William Shakespeare used materials in the Company's library. His genius appeared in his ability to re-write or create for the benefit of the people in the "pits" as well as those on the cushioned seats in the galleries of the theaters. Philosophic speculations on the question of "to be or not to be" might pass completely over the heads of some in his audiences who would prefer to be frightened by ghostly apparitions or amused by Falstaffian slap-stick comedy.

Our generation witnessed the birth of an innovation as radically different for our time as public theater was for sixteenth century London: television. Unlike English drama which came from palaces and castles to the streets of London, television was introduced to the American people in bars and taverns. We can all remember when no one who pretended to intellectuality would admit to being a viewer of television; if he wanted to refer to a television show, he would first defend himself with an apologetic explanation: "I

just happened to turn this on while I was trying to find a news broadcast." To this day, many people prefer not to exhibit television antennae on their roof-tops; in lower middle-class and lower class neighborhoods the television antennae are as much a source of pride as the flickering gas-lights in front of an upper middle-class home. But television has overcome all the resistance and has captured the attention of all classes of our population.

As the most pervasive of all the mass media of communication, television reaches more "publics" than any other, - or perhaps, more than all of the others put together! A particular program might attract fewer publics, to be sure, but still far more than the Globe theater in sixteenth century London. In this author's opinion, Norman Lear has done more "to show real people in real conflict with all their fears, doubts, hopes and ambitions rubbing against their love for one another" than any other contemporary writer or producer. The language quoted here is Lear's own self-appraisal. It has been estimated that more than 120 million Americans have watched and are still watching his shows: "All in the Family," "Sanford & Son," "Maude," "Good Times," "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman," "The Jeffersons," and "One Day at a Time." These millions of people, constituting scores of publics, see themselves in these shows but with a perspective that enables them to laugh at their own failings and foibles. When Archie Bunker was first introduced in 1971 in "All in the Family," there were some who feared that he would make bigotry more attractive and more popular, but most viewers laughed at its irrationality.

In subsequent episodes, however, Archie Bunker is subjected to closer scrutiny and analysis; the viewers at every level of sophistication could see that the bigot is more of a personal tragedy than either clown or demon. When Archie purchased Kelsey's Bar, the Bunker home had to be mortgaged for the down payment. Since Edith refused to sign the note, Archie forged her signature. Upon the discovery of what her husband had done, Edith was outraged. Archie's son-in-law, Mike Stivic, was quick to remind him that what he had done was a penitentiary offense. Archie explained that he only wanted to "be somebody." His drunken and abusive father saw no promise in him while he was growing up; his untimely death terminated Archie's formal education before he could finish high school. Archie did not want to spend the rest of his life on the plant's

loading dock and he was already fifty years old. As the owner of the bar, he could put his name on the window in the place of Kelsey's. Edith relented and Mike put his arm around his none too affectionate father-in-law in appreciation of his sorry state. In that moment, he must have realized that Archie did not call him "meat-head" because he hated him. Viewers at every level of sophistication could understand that bigots really hate themselves and consequently express hatred for others.

Norman Lear's characterization of Archie was derived from Lear's own father, Herman Lear, a second generation Russian Jew who was a salesman of everything from vacuum cleaners to garages, who kept his family poor with his various schemes to get "rich quick." Norman, the son born to Herman and Jeannette Lear on July 27, 1922, in New Haven Connecticut, was able to perceive his father's warm and loving heart in spite of his intolerance and self-assertiveness in his orders to his wife to "stifle herself" and his humiliation of his son by his constant references to him as "the laziest white kid I ever saw." Lear said of his early years: "I grew up in a family very much like those of my characters - a family that lived at the top of its lungs and at the end of its nerves."

After graduating from Weaver High School in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1940, Lear attended Emerson College in Boston for one year before enlisting in the United States Army Air Force in 1942. Although he never returned to college, Emerson made him an honorary Doctor of Humanities in 1968. By the end of the war, Lear had flown fifty-seven missions as a radioman. Before his discharge, Lear sent his resume to a dozen of the top publicity firms in New York and Hollywood. He received two acceptances, and even before his return to the United States, he accepted a position with the New York publicity firm of George and Dorothy Ross.

A year later, he was laid off, so he founded his own company to produce novelty ashtrays. When that venture failed, he went to Los Angeles where he worked as a door-to-door furniture salesman, a sidewalk photographer and as a non-paid press agent for a little theater group. In his few moments of spare time, Lear said

he"hung around with my cousin Elaine's husband, Ed Simmons, who had come out to California to become a comedy writer." They began writing together and were able to sell some of their routines and musical parodies to local comedians. Lear recounted: "We might have gone on like that for years if I hadn't thought of a routine for Danny Thomas one evening." By pretending to be a reporter for "The New York Times," Lear obtained the comedian's private telephone number from his agent. "I called him," Lear recalled, "and he happened to answer the phone. He was fascinated with the way I got his number; it made him laugh. When I explained the routine idea, Thomas asked, 'How long is it?' 'How long do you want it to be?' I asked. 'About seven minutes,' he replied. And I said, 'That's how long it is!' He wanted me to go right over and show it to him, but I told him we couldn't make it for a few hours; I didn't tell him it was because we hadn't written it yet." Danny Thomas paid $500 for the routine and used it three nights later at Ciro's. An agent asked Thomas who wrote the routine. The agent called Lear and asked if he had ever done television. Lear replied, "Of course!"

The agent was none other than David Susskind who immediately signed the writing team of Lear and Simmons to "The Ford Star Review." When Jerry Lewis saw one of their shows, he engaged Lear and Simmons to write all of the "Colgate Comedy Hour" shows starring Dean Martin and Lewis. Three years later, Lear and Simmons left to write "The Martha Raye Show," which Lear also directed. Two years later, they left to return to the West. Their mutual friend, Bud Yorkin, extended them an offer to write for Tennessee Ernie Ford's night-time show, but only Lear accepted. Following that, Lear soloed for two years writing and directing "The George Gobel Show." When that show went off the air, Lear and Yorkin got together again and in 1959 they formed Tandem Productions, Inc.

"We called ourselves Tandem," Lear explained, because we thought of ourselves as two guys on a bicycle, going uphill." The new company was deliberately designed to allow each partner to pursue his own interests. Tandem produced and packaged television specials featuring such stars as Fred Astaire, Jack Benny, Danny Kaye, Carol Channing, Don Rickles, Andy Williams and Henry Fonda. The Company's first film was "Come Blow Your Horn" (Paramount, 1963) starring Frank Sinatra. The film was an adaptation

from a Neil Simon play by Lear who was also the producer with Yorkin as director. The film was a box office success. With Lear as producer and Yorkin as director again, the Company produced "Never Too Late" (Warner Brothers, 1965). In 1967, Lear's original screenplay, "Divorce: American Style" (Columbia, 1967) won him an Academy Award nomination. Again, Yorkin was the director and Lear the producer. The film starred Dick Van Dyke and Debbie Reynolds; it was fairly successful from the box office standpoint.

Striking out on his own, Norman Lear wrote a script in collaboration with Arnold Schulman and Sidney Michaels about an innocent Amish girl who joins Minsky's Burlesque and inadvertently invents the striptease. ("The Night They Raided Minsky's" - United Artists, 1968) In 1970, Lear was the executive producer of "Start the Revolution Without Me," written by Fred Freeman and Larry Cohen from an idea suggested by Lear; it was produced and directed by Yorkin for Warner Brothers. Filmed entirely on location in France, it was widely acclaimed as "one of the most hilarious and unique satires in many years." Lear made his debut as a theatrical film director with "Cold Turkey" (United Artists, 1971); he also wrote and produced the picture. Dick Van Dyke starred in this picture which dealt with the citizens of an Iowa farming community who accepted the challenge of a tobacco tycoon and tried to kick the cigarette habit for a $25,000,000 prize.

As the motion picture industry became less profitable, Tandem's business manager advised the partners to concentrate on the more profitable television market. Impressed by an article in "Variety" describing the popular BBC-TV series, "Till Death Do Us Part," Lear obtained the American rights to the series, a broad satirical comedy of working-class mores. The bigoted central character of the British program, Alf Garnett, reminded Lear of his own father and their battles over political and social issues. Alf's treatment of his liberal son-in-law suggested to Lear the way in which the situation could be translated into American TV. "My father and I fought all those battles," he told Martin Kasindorf in an interview for a "New York Times Magazine" article (June 24, 1973). "I thought, 'My God, if I could only get this kind of thing on American television.'"

Norman Lear wrote a pilot script centering around the conflicts between the blue-collar bigot, Archie Bunker, and his liberal son-in-law, Mike Stivic, of Polish extraction. Under the title "Those Were the Days," he presented the series idea to ABC programming executives who enthusiastically agreed to finance a pilot. An astute casting director, Lear hired Carroll O'Connor and Jean Stapleton for the leading roles of Archie and Edith Bunker. ABC officials agreed that the show was hilarious but objected to the program's language and frankness. The project was cancelled.

Three years later while Lear was working on "Cold Turkey," Robert D. Wood, then president of CBS, encouraged Lear to revive "Those Were the Days." ~~Would~~ approved the making of thirteen episodes retitled "All in the Family," starring O'Connor and Stapleton in their original roles with Sally Struthers as their daughter and Rob Reiner as their son-in-law. William Tankersley, then director of the department of program practises at CBS, objected strenuously to the "vulgarity" and "irreverence" of the script. Lear agreed to a few minor script changes; he adamantly refused to tone down the initial episode. "I felt we had to show 360 degrees of character and attitudes in the initial episdde," Lear told Arnold Hano in an interview for "The New York Times Magazine." "We had to jump all the way to get wet - you can't get wetter than wet!"

"All in the Family" had its premiere at 9:30 P.M., Tuesday, January 12,1971, with a voice-over disclaimer describing the program as "a humorous spotlight on our frailties, prejudices and concerns." Anticipating a torrent of angry calls from irate viewers protesting the show's content and Archie's candid remarks about race, color, nationality and the church, CBS hired dozens of extra telephone operators. But the calls never came; those that did tended to favor the program. The reviews were not enthusiastic. "This show proves that bigotry can be as boring and predictable as the up-think fluff of 'The Brady Bunch,'" wrote Richard Burgheim in his "Time" (February 1, 1971) review of the series. On the other hand, in the "National Observer" (March 15, 1971), Clifford A. Ridley called the show "at least the brightest new thing on commercial TV since the early 'Laugh-In.'" Viewer reaction was favorable and was followed by increased critical support.

"All in the Family" was soon found near the top of the Nielsen ratings. By the time the show went into re-runs in May, it had won three Emmy Awards, including one for the best comedy series. At the 1972 Emmy Awards, the host, Johnny Carson, quipped, "Welcome to an evening with Norman Lear," when "All in the Family" ran away with seven of the top awards.

Tandem's second TV series, "Sanford & Son", first appeared on Friday, January 14, 1972. For this show, Lear purchased the adaptation rights to another BBC-TV series, "Steptoe & Son," based on the lives of a crotchety Cockney junkman and his layabout son. Lear and Yorkin, working with writer Aaron Ruben, created the new show. Yorkin was executive producer for "Sanford & Son," but Lear continued his experimentation with "All in the Family," introducing such provocative subjects as impotence, menopause, racism, homosexuality and breast cancer.

New characters were introduced in these connections. One of them, Edith's liberal-minded cousin, Maude Findlay, was created for a one-show guest appearance of Beatrice Arthur, who so delighted the viewers that Lear developed "Maude," a separate series with its premiere on Tuesday, September 12, 1972. Maude was as tolerant as Archie was prejudiced, showing the other side of the coin and revealing that liberalism can be as fertile a ground for comedy as bigotry.

With a skill similar to William Shakespeare's, Norman Lear achieved remarkable balance in his characters: Archie the reactionary vs. Mike the liberal. Maude was introduced as a liberal feminist. George Jefferson is a sort of black Archie Bunker except that George was able to achieve a considerable measure of success in his dry cleaning business. Maude's maid (Esther Rolle as Florida Evans) became the central figure of "Good Times," which was first aired on February 8, 1974; it featured a black family living in an urban housing development.

In the same year (1974), Lear formed a partnership with agent-promoter Jerry Perenchio; they developed T.A.T Communications Company for the production of television

shows as well as theatrical motion pictures and other major forms of entertainment. The first project of T.A.T. was the presentation of the Bunker's next-door neighbors, George, Louise and Lionel Jefferson leaving Queens to take up their residence in a luxurious Manhattan high-rise apartment as the locus for their new series: "The Jeffersons."

It is interesting to note how easily the Jeffersons adapt themselves to upper middle class mores with only occasional hints of their lower class origins. Louise becomes very active as a volunteer in a neighborhood social agency and Lionel commits himself to a college education. George has complete faith in the power of the dollar but remains as much of a racist as he ever was. Tom and Helen Willis are a bi-racial couple who live in the same building which has a white doorman whose open hand is always out. The Willis' family consists of a daughter whose physiological characteristics are black and an absentee son whose physiological characteristics are typically Caucasian. Although he seems to be passing as white, it is obvious that he sees himself as black. George finds it difficult to give whole-hearted acceptance to the romance between his son and the Willis' daughter, leading to their marriage and, in due course, their parenthood. George seems to have less difficulty with Willis' son.

A much less successful undertaking was the short-lived but critically acclaimed series called "Hot l Baltimore," which opened six days after "The Jeffersons" (January 24, 1975) and dealt with the lives of the residents of a seedy little hotel. It was followed by the very successful "One Day at a Time" which premiered on December 16, 1975. Again, this is realistic comedy based upon the lives of a divorced mother and her two daughters, all struggling to discover their own identities. At this point, mother and daughters are all married and the "in-law" relationships afford ample opportunities for amusing but provocative episodes.

Shorter runs were enjoyed by "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman" "Forever Fernwood," and "All That Glitters." The latter depicted a world in which all the male/female roles were reversed. Lear explained his "idea:" "I woke up one morning and wondered what the world would be like today if God had created Eve and decided she needed a playmate and took a rib and made Adam. Just that simple!" The sixty-five episodes of the "simple" series created a startling controversy.

When asked how he chose the often controversial subjects he developed, Lear explained: "I believe the subjects that touch us the most are those we laugh hardest at or cry the longest for. The more we care, the more we feel. The more we feel, the more we respond. We are in the business of theatre and good theatre is response. . . . . Our company is composed of interested men and women who listen to the news, have families and care about the world around us. Many subjects come from that."

Obviously, Norman Lear could not do all this writing and producing himself. His tributes to his associates were well-deserved. Rembrandt's did much of the work in his studio, but the Master always approved or sometimes improved upon the works that were presented to the world bearing his name. At first, Lear did much of the work, as has been indicated; later, he relied upon his associates, but the character of his genius can be discovered in all of the productions with which he is identified.

In January, 1982, Lear and Perenchio formed Embassy Communications, the successor to their T.A.T. Communications Company and the organization responsible for the management of Tandem's productions and cable operations.

Norman Lear is the recipient of countless awards and honors including three Emmy Awards as producer of "All in the Family:" and Academy Award nomination for his "Divorce: American Style" screenplay; the 1971 and 1977 Showman of the Year Awards, Publicists' Guild; the 1973 Broadcaster of the Year, International Radio and Television Society; 1973 Man of the Year, Hollywood Chapter National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences; the 1976 Award of the National Conference of Christians and Jews; the 1977 Valentine Davies Award, Writers' Guild of America; the 1977 Mark Twain Award, International Platform Association, being cited as "Mark Twain's successor as America's most delightful humorist, gentle depictor of the virtues and weaknesses of humanity with humor's paintbrush;" the 1977 George Foster Peabody Award, for "establishing (with "All in the Family") the right to express social comment in a social comedy, for devising the technique of humor as a bridge to better understanding of national issues, for providing an excellent production in every way and for providing the public with that greatest of all healers - humor"; in 1981, two honors for his efforts toward the preservation of the First Amendment rights: the William O. Douglas Award from the Public Counsel and the First Amendment Lectureship Award from the Ford Hall Forum; and in 1982, the International Radio and Television Society's highest honor, the Gold Medal, for "His profound effect on a medium which has itself profoundly affected this nation."

Lear is a dedicated family man above all. Perhaps this explains his tremendous success with family centered themes. When Edith Bunker died and Jean Stapleton left the cast of "All in the Family," the name and primary locus of the show were changed to Archie's Tavern, and the rating went down. Again, Archie's well-concealed humanity and compassion were disclosed in a grief reaction that could be used as a clinical example.

Frances Lear, Norman's wife of more than twenty-five years, is one of the country's

leading experts on employment for women - presiding over a consulting firm, Woman's Place, and lecturing and writing about the subject. They have two daughters, Kate and Maggie; Norman has one married daughter, Ellen, by his first marriage.

Lear is also known as a human rights activist. He sits on numerous boards of organizations committed to the preservation of human and civil rights. More recently, he has directed his efforts and energies toward the formation of People for the American Way, a broadly based, nonpartisan national committee whose purpose is to meet the challenges of discord and fragmentation with an affirmation of "the American Way" dedicated to the maintenance and restoration of pluralism, individuality, freedom of thought and expression and religion, and tolerance and compassion for others.

When he was asked if he thought shows like "All in the Family" have had any effect on bigotry, Norman Lear smiled and said: "If the Judeo-Christian ethic has had no effect on prejudice over the last 2,000 years, I'd be an awful fool to think we could do it in a half-hour of comedy. I do what I do, not because I expect to change the world, but because I love it. The entertainment business is a tough business and it can be incredibly frustrating, but there's nothing in the world I'd rather be doing. If there's anybody anywhere having a better time, you'll have to point him out to me."