

TV's Unfair Neglect of Working-Class America

Back in the 1950s, television audiences tuned in every week to *The Honeymooners*, and were dropped into the small, plain Brooklyn apartment of a bus driver and his wife. The early '60s brought a string of hard-hitting urban dramas like *Naked City*, *The Defenders*, and *East Side/West Side*, which showed Americans what was really going on in our mean streets and slums. The '70s saw a boom in earthiness and grime, in sitcoms like *All in the Family*, *Sanford and Son*, and *Welcome Back, Kotter*, which set stories of blue-collar families and the working poor in rooms with threadbare decor and barely functional utilities.

Then in the '80s and '90s we had *Roseanne*, which captured the cramped clutter of an ordinary lower-middle-class home, and used sardonic humor to face — with at-times painful honesty — the hard trade-offs of work and family for people living paycheck to paycheck. All of these shows were either award-winning or popular — or both. They were part of a rich and varied television landscape, where suburban affluence and conspicuous wealth were just as widely represented as they are today, but put into context by some starker visions of American life.

Do we have that now? Consider some of the comedies and dramas of the 2010s that have drawn the most love from audiences, critics, and awards ceremonies: *The Big Bang Theory*, *Scandal*, *Empire*, *NCIS*, *Criminal Minds*, *Girls*, *Black-ish*, *Modern Family*, *Mad Men*, *The Good Wife*, *Homeland*, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, *You're the Worst*, *This Is Us*, *Stranger Things*, and *Mr. Robot*. Money and labor factor into all of those series to varying degrees, but the two are rarely connected. When characters talk about their jobs, it's usually in terms of achieving their dreams, not whether they can make enough to pay their bills. When they talk about money, the conversations tend to revolve around the paychecks as signs of self-worth. Whenever the heroes don't have enough in the bank to do what they want, it's more that they can't realize their grandest ambitions, not that they have to eat canned soup for a week to afford to keep the lights on.

Ignoring the reality of most Americans, who often struggle from paycheck-to-paycheck in order to support families, not to achieve some artistic or athletic fantasy, could be contributing to the political frustrations that arose in our last Presidential election.

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AOW Response

Write a one-paragraph response to the article. This response is YOUR opinion, but it MUST respond to something stated in the article, and it MUST be based on facts and sound reasoning.

Ideas for how to respond: 1) **DISAGREE** with something (it's not important for TV shows to be "realistic"), 2) **AGREE** with something and provide additional reasoning (TV shows should be more realistic), 3) write a **DEFINITION** (what "most Americans" live like), or 4) **SHARE** a personal experience and how it shaped your thinking on the issue.

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