

A Touch of Color: Family-Friendly Integration in Late 1960s TV

by Caryn Murphy

After Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in April of 1968, a California woman named Harriet Glickman wrote to Charles Schulz and asked him to consider adding “Negro children” to his popular *Peanuts* comic strip.¹ Schulz initially declined, indicating that he had nothing to gain from such an addition; he would almost certainly be criticized for offering a token representation of black identity. Glickman followed up with another letter, claiming that the fact of the representation itself would be its significance. The *Peanuts* universe needn’t be transformed into a didactic space; the presence of black characters would be enough. Schulz acquiesced and introduced “Franklin” in the summer of 1968. Although the new character was black, he did not discuss race and racial difference. He became a member of the *Peanuts* gang who was often present, but rarely foregrounded in the gang’s adventures. As the fiftieth anniversary of Franklin’s introduction approached, the *New York Times* noted that the representation served to depict “friendship between black and white children as utterly normal.”² This article focuses on a similar strategy of integration that was utilized in family-friendly television programming at this same time. As broadcast networks sought to integrate prime-time programming, a trend emerged as black children joined white children in the narrative universes of *Gentle Ben*, *Mayberry R.F.D.*, and *Family Affair*. I argue that these programs were integrated with “token” black characters, and I analyze how the complicated business of integrated television was simplified through “colorblind” representations.

Media scholars have argued that from 1955 to 1964, prime-time television was an “all-white world,” with few significant representations of racial and ethnic diversity.³ By 1965, African American audiences were increasingly recognized as a desirable consumer demographic, and as a result, sponsors and advertisers were requesting integrated programming.⁴ This shift in the priorities of sponsors helped to support the introduction of *I Spy* (NBC, 1965-68), which featured Bill Cosby in a co-starring role. The action-adventure series became a critical and popular success, demonstrating that mass audiences would support programming with African-American leads. In *Primetime Blues*, Donald Bogle notes that as a result of the success of *I Spy*, “Some critics called the 1966-67 television season the Year of the Negro.”⁵ That season saw the debuts of *Daktari* (CBS, 1966-69), *Mission: Impossible* (CBS, 1966-73), and *Star Trek* (NBC, 1966-69), all of which featured black cast members, although none of these characters were leads. These roles demonstrate that prime-time programming was beginning to diversify as advertisers began to focus on broadening their address to African-American consumers, but such efforts were proceeding slowly. In early 1968, a joint committee of Hollywood labor unions announced the results of a recent prime-time survey indicating that roles for minority performers had actually declined since 1964.⁶

In 1967, Lyndon Johnson appointed a National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to study the root causes of racial unrest in major U.S. cities. The 1965 Watts riots drew attention to the ways that red-lining had created de facto segregation, making black citizens a permanent underclass. The summer of 1967 saw similar disorders in cities including Detroit and Newark, which resulted in numerous deaths, serious injuries, and millions of dollars in damage. The commission, headed by Illinois governor Otto Kerner, was given a specific charge that included the question, “What effect do the mass media have on the riots?”⁷ The Kerner report was

released with a significant amount of fanfare at the beginning of March in 1968. A paperback version was distributed to bookstores, where it sold more than two million copies.⁸ It was summarized with in-depth coverage in major newspapers, and discussed at length on television news magazine programs.⁹ The commission's findings indicated that white flight from city centers had resulted in concentrated populations of black and Latino people in neighborhoods with failing schools and weak support from the social safety net. The Kerner report devoted an entire chapter to role of the media, stipulating that a lack of representations worked to exacerbate racial tensions. Thomas J. Hrach's *The Riot Report and the News* examines the marked impact that the committee's recommendations had on news gathering and reporting.¹⁰ The committee's recommendations also considered influential role of entertainment, noting, "In addition to news-related programming, we think that Negroes should appear more frequently in dramatic and comedy series."¹¹ The trade press emphasized that the report's recommendations carried an "added weight" for broadcasters, because stations are licensed to serve the public interest, and their licenses can be revoked.¹²

The New York City and State Commissions on Human Rights held hearings on the practice of discrimination against minorities in broadcasting, immediately following the release of the Kerner report. Over the course of ten days, representatives from each of the broadcast networks testified on behalf of their programming, defending their previous efforts and promising to accomplish more in the future. Michael Dann, senior vice president of programming at CBS, told the commission that there were few black characters on TV because, the medium, "likes to deal with America as it is for the most part. And for the most part, there are not that many Negro judges, Negro Governors, Negro executives, or Negro Senators. The producer or writer approaches the conceptual fact so as to reflect the scene as it is."¹³ In a *New York Times* editorial, noted black performer and activist Harry Belafonte countered Dann's perspective, noting that it "contains both a lie and a rationalization."¹⁴ The claim that television attempts to reflect reality was patently false, and the argument that black life was unworthy of representation in the medium of television as a result of the dearth of black people in positions of power was no justification at all.

The scrutiny of regulatory agencies and public interest groups like the NAACP was compounded by the national reaction to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. In the weeks that followed his death, CBS announced that network programming would seek to increase the quantity and improve the quality of its scripted black characters, and they additionally offered financial support to creative personnel for the development of "any new property that attempts to portray the Negro and Negro everyday life." Michael Dann, whose testimony before the NY Human Rights Commission had provoked controversy, noted that CBS was motivated by the "general racial situation as outlined in the Kerner report and a realization that television can play an important part in communications between Negroes and whites."¹⁵ The offer of investment indicated that the network was serious about motivating its program suppliers to make changes.

J. Fred MacDonald's *Blacks and White TV* terms the period from 1957 to 1970, "The Age of the Civil Rights Movement," and thus covers a broad range of programming, across many years; he notes that the latter half of the 1960s was a "golden age" for black performers in television.¹⁶ All of the broadcast networks made efforts to address the diversity issue in the 1968 season; coverage in the *Saturday Evening Post* noted that "Of 56 nighttime dramatic shows, 21 will have at least one regular Negro performer."¹⁷ These programs included new shows with

black characters in lead roles such as *Julia* (NBC, 1968-71), *The Mod Squad* (ABC, 1968-73), and *The Outcasts* (ABC, 1968-69). Some established series added black cast members; for example, Robert DoQui joined *The Felony Squad* (ABC, 1966-69) and Gail Fisher assisted the eponymous detective in *Mannix* (CBS, 1967-75). These and other recurring black characters opened a space to acknowledge and discuss race in prime-time television which had not previously existed. Token representations, in contrast, involved diversification through visibility, with little to no narrative engagement with issues related to race.

A 1974 article for the *Journal of Broadcasting* examined the phenomenon of “tokenism” in the previous year’s prime-time lineup. For the purpose of the study, researchers defined tokenism as “an increase in the frequency of black faces appearing on the screen” that corresponded with “no change in the quality or importance of the roles.”¹⁸ Their findings confirmed that entertainment programming frequently relegated black characters to minor roles. In a more recent study, media scholar David Scot Diffrient defines tokenism briefly as, “limited inclusion within the dominant group.”¹⁹ His analysis of representations of Korean identities on television further explicates how racial tokens appear “as exotic seasoning sprinkled throughout otherwise monocultural TV series or, conversely, as bland, nonthreatening supporting characters positioned along the periphery of the frame.”²⁰ When broadcast networks were criticized for a lack of accuracy and inclusivity in representations in the 1960s, tokenism was a strategy that allowed productions to quickly increase the quantity of black representations without making corresponding alterations in program content. CBS had garnered negative attention with a weak defense of their popular, white-cast programming; in the months that followed, the network heavily promoted their integration efforts. Below, I discuss three popular CBS programs that utilized remarkably similar strategies of token representation in the 1968 season. Taken together, they effectively demonstrate how the network used “colorblind” diversity to avoid direct discussion of race and civil rights in family-friendly programming, during a time period of intense racial stratification.

***Gentle Ben* (CBS, 1967-69)**

This series about a white family communing closely with nature in the Florida wetlands was produced by Ivan Tors. Its first season established the show as a cousin to *Lassie* or *Flipper*, because each episode typically focuses on the mild-mannered black bear Ben, and young Mark (Clint Howard) who cares for him as a pet. Mark’s father (Dennis Weaver) is a game warden and his mother (Beth Brickell) is a homemaker; although they provide love and guidance, Mark is often allowed to roam and explore the wilds around their home with limited parental oversight. *Gentle Ben* aired at 7:30PM EST on Sunday evenings, sandwiched between *Lassie* and the popular *Ed Sullivan Show*. It was a typical network practice to target younger viewers at the beginning of the evening, and so this timeslot offers an indication that CBS felt the program held appeal for children. Nielsen ratings indicated that *Gentle Ben* was among the twenty most popular series on television in its first season.

In the summer of 1968, CBS announced that its efforts at integration would include *Gentle Ben*. Angelo Rutherford, a 14-year-old Florida native, was hired to portray Willie, a friend of Mark’s. He explained to an interviewer that his break came when Ivan Tors Studio contacted the nearby school he was attending, seeking to hire “a colored kid about 11 years old for this new role.”²¹ Despite being older than the character and taller than series’ star Clint Howard,



Mark and Willie are blocked to disguise their difference in height. Rutherford was four years older than Howard.

Rutherford won the part. He appeared in a total of seven episodes of the series' second season (which was also its last), but his presence in the family-friendly series did not open up a space to discuss race or issues related to racism.

Willie is introduced in "The Intruders" which originally aired in November of 1968. In the episode's opening scene, the camera is focused on Mark who is throwing a football. The camera pans left to show Willie catching the ball. The brief sequence establishes that they are friends, and they are comfortable with each other. No attempt is made at explaining how they met or how long they've been friends; the viewer is left to presume that they

have known each other for quite some time, even though Willie has never previously appeared in the program. After the boys hear two adults discussing a rumor that there are dinosaur bones nearby, they weigh the possibility of seeking this treasure. Mark tells Willie that he would like to be an explorer when he grows up, and Willie responds, "Me too. When I'm not busy being a famous lawyer." There is no indication in the actors' performances or the narrative context that there is any distinction between these two boys and the futures they imagine for themselves. The scene presents the boys and their interests as similar, asking the viewer to see this affinity as evidence of their friendship.

For the most part, Willie's appearances in *Gentle Ben* are characterized by hallmarks of tokenism. In "The Intruder," Mark decides to seek the dinosaur bones alone; after the initial scenes described above, Willie disappears from the episode and is not referenced again. Similarly, Willie is featured in one scene in "Keeper of the Glades, Part One" and appears only briefly in "The Competitor."²² Although Mark and Willie are friends, Mark remains the central protagonist. Willie is not a developed character with a clear set of a goals or a backstory. He is often surrounded by white people, but race is never discussed. In "Starr of Green Bay," the Green Bay Packers quarterback Bart Starr stops by to help coach the boys' football team. As Mark and Willie learn a lesson about teamwork through practice and gameplay, it appears that Willie is the only black child on



Willie is the only black player on the team in "Starr of Green Bay."



Willie and the other scouts learn to tie knots in "Lifeline."

the field.²³ Willie is the only black member of the scout troop that Mark's mother leads on a camping trip in "Lifeline."²⁴ Willie and Mark are students in the same class, players on the same football team, and scouts in the same troop; the series presents all of these environments as integrated, by virtue of the fact that Willie is in them.

Simultaneously, however, the absence of other black children seems to suggest that these environments are not fully open to the participation of all.

"Elephant on the Lam," the final episode to feature Willie, also gives him the most to do. Mark and Willie find an elephant, and they agree that they'll share "Sheba" as a pet if they can't locate her owner. In contrast to "The Intruder," in which Mark proceeded on the quest by himself, Willie is Mark's partner in "Elephant." The boys discover that Sheba has run away from the circus, and they suspect this

was the result of rough treatment by her owner. They seek counsel from adults, but throughout the episode, Mark and Willie are the only two characters who know the full story. In the last act, the owner agrees with the boys that Sheba would be happier in a natural zoo; in the final scene, Mark's dad takes both boys to see her there. This episode is of interest because it presents Mark and Willie as true friends, allied with each other in the name of adventure. Additionally though, as the boys discuss whether to return Sheba, they discuss freedom, captivity, and rights. These conversations can be read as a symbolic commentary on racial oppression, and viewers might be more likely to interpret them this way because of the series' total lack of engagement with race issues. Mark tells Willie that the elephant "wants her freedom!" Willie responds, "Sure. Everybody does. It's in the Constitution." The boys take their constitutional queries to Mark's dad, who tells them that he would return the runaway animal to its owner: "Freedom for animals is different from freedom for people." He does *not* go on to explain that different groups of people have historically been accorded different freedoms, or that the Constitution originally stipulated that a black person in slavery would count as three-fifths of a white citizen for the purposes of representative democracy. The episode's narrative points to a discussion that could be had about history, justice, and freedom, but it does not fully engage this possibility.



Mark and Willie are partners on a quest in "Elephant on the Lam."

The addition of Angelo Rutherford to *Gentle Ben* did not result in significant changes in the family-friendly series. It continued to be a show about a white family that predominantly focuses on a young white boy and his engagement with nature and wildlife. Willie is effectively a minor character, appearing in fewer than half of the episodes that aired in the 1968 season. When he does appear, however, the narrative insists that he and Mark are good friends and that the audience should see them as equals. The character (and by extension his friendship with Mark) meets no hurdles or barriers based on racial inequality, assuring viewers that the next generation might be completely untouched by the prejudices of their elders.



Willie and Gentle Ben

Mayberry R.F.D. (CBS, 1968-71)

The Andy Griffith Show (CBS, 1960-68) was one of the most popular shows on television in the 1960s, but Griffith decided to pursue other projects after eight seasons as the series' lead. The last few episodes of *Andy Griffith* set up a spin-off, *Mayberry R.F.D.*, which premiered in the fall of 1968. The new series included many of the supporting cast members from the former hit, but focused on a new central character, the widowed farmer Sam Jones (Ken Berry). Griffith continued to appear as Sheriff Andy Taylor in a limited number of episodes. The series aired on Monday nights at 9PM EST, in the same timeslot that *Andy Griffith* had occupied. It was positioned in the middle of a block of popular family-friendly sitcoms that began with *Here's Lucy* (CBS, 1968-74) and concluded with *Family Affair*, which is discussed in the next section. *Mayberry R.F.D.* was not a favorite of television critics,²⁵ but its initial season was very popular with viewers; Nielsen ratings indicate that it was the fourth most popular show on television that year.

The fictional town of Mayberry is located in North Carolina, a state with a substantial African American population. Nevertheless, there is only one black character with a speaking role in eight seasons of *The Andy Griffith Show*; Rockne Tarkington appears as Flip Conroy, a former pro football player, in “Opie’s Piano Lesson.”²⁶ *Mayberry R.F.D.* went into production as the television industry was pledging a new commitment to diversity, which may have impacted the producers’ decision to include black characters. The series hired African-American actor Charles Lampkin to play the role of Ralph Barton, a neighbor in the rural white community. Barton is a minor character, appearing on the periphery in a handful of episodes. In his history of the *Andy Griffith* franchise, Gustavo Perez Firmat notes that Barton, “amounts to little more than a token black clone of the show’s white protagonist.”²⁷ The episode in which Barton first appears, “Youth Takes Over,” features another black performer, Calvin Peeler, as his son Martin. Peeler, who was thirteen years old at the time, was not a professional actor.²⁸ Promotional items about the episode explained that he was a fan of *Andy Griffith* who had written to inquire about the sitcom’s lack of black characters. The production offered him a role on the show, and then issues a press release to promote the unusual tale.²⁹ Peeler’s brush with fame helps to illustrate how racial tokenism operates as a network strategy. The Ralph Barton character appears in the series on a semi-regular basis, but so lacks development that the character of his son appears in only a single episode.³⁰ The network was able to promote its efforts to address charges of racial exclusivity with a relatively simple, and ultimately empty, gesture.

“Youth Takes Over” opens at a planning meeting attended by six white men who work as



Three boys have been selected to participate in "Youth Day."

officials in Mayberry’s government. They discuss the idea of inviting a few strong students to work with them for a day. Sheriff Andy Taylor explains that the exercise will “make ‘em feel like they’re members of the community.” As they agree to move forward, the scene dissolves into a classroom where a teacher has selected Mike (Buddy Foster), Arnold (Sheldon Collins), and Martin to participate on the basis of their strong performance in civics class. The teacher leads the boys in preparations to serve as sheriff, head of city council, and county clerk, respectively.

Martin’s position receives a special amount of narrative emphasis. When the teacher initially introduces their roles, all three boys express confusion about what the role of county clerk entails. In a later scene, as Ralph Barton assists the other fathers in setting up for the day’s events, Howard Sprague (Jack Dodson) asks if Martin is looking forward to taking over his job. Ralph responds that his son, “holds things in pretty good,” a laugh line meant to underscore the distance between the clerk’s perception of the desirability of his job and everyone else’s.

The central story of the episode, which was scripted by James L. Brooks, is the contrast between how the boys and the adults view “Youth Day.” The boys prepare extensively to take on their roles; as the day begins, they convene to discuss their nervousness. Martin tells the other boys, “Mr. Sprague told me that today might be the turning point in my life.” The adults, however, have put little thought into how they will allow the boys to take over their duties. Their plan for the day was just slightly more than a photo opportunity, and they are caught off guard when the kids show knowledge of and interest in their government jobs. The episode’s events reach a climax at a public luncheon where the boys are asked to give extemporaneous speeches

about what they have learned. As each boy awkwardly fumbles, the adults are forced to realize that the event has not been a significant learning experience, and they pledge to make it more meaningful in future years.

The episode makes no overt mention of his blackness, but it takes little effort for the viewer to see racial implications as Martin participates in Youth Day. The state of North Carolina was one of many southern states that resisted the integration of public schools following the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954. By the late 1960s, public schools



The boys are asked to speak at a celebratory luncheon.

in the state were somewhat integrated, but local school boards continued to use the busing system to prevent full integration.³¹ In fictional Mayberry, Martin is a black student whose success in school is equal to that of white children. When the town elders wish to impart a sense of ownership to the town's future leaders, he is welcomed with no hesitation. After he speaks with Ralph, Mr. Sprague reports to the other town leaders that he thinks it would be great if Martin really wanted to be a county clerk. Before the boys split up to spend the morning doing their official tasks, Mr. Sprague takes them out to Main Street and gives them a short speech. With his hands on Martin's shoulders, he tells the boys, "This is your town. One of these days you'll be picking up the torch and carrying it forward." These scenes help to demonstrate the



Mr. Sprague tells the boys, "This is your town."

ways that Martin's full citizenship is depicted in "Youth Takes Over." The all-white government has deemed him a future leader and future owner of the town of Mayberry, completely indistinguishable from his white school friends. In other words, the narrative elides the very real racial tensions that impacted southern life at this time, in favor of painting a picture of a simpler and better reality.

Martin can easily be classified as a token because of the lack of development accorded to his character, and because he is featured in only one episode. "Driver Education," which aired later in the season, reveals that Ralph Barton also has a teenage daughter, Dorothy June (Brenda Sykes).³² Ralph is featured in other episodes, but neither of his children appears in other installments. He is present in the community, but not really a part of it. The existence of the Bartons means that Mayberry is not completely a racially exclusive space, but their limited appearances highlight its incredible lack of diversity.

Family Affair (CBS, 1966-71)

Mayberry R.F.D. provided the lead-in to *Family Affair* in its third season on CBS. *Variety* noted that the 9:30PM EST timeslot was ill-advised for a show that wanted "to catch the juve audience,"³³ but the series remained a top five hit with viewers in 1968. It focuses on an atypical family structure; Brian Keith stars as Bill Davis, a wealthy engineer who agreed to care for his nieces and nephew after the death of their parents. Cissy (Cathy Garver), a teenager, is capable of helping out with Buffy (Anissa Jones) and Jody (Johnny Whitaker), her younger twin siblings. Much of the comedy, however, is derived from Mr. French (Sebastian Cabot), a proper English valet who effectively becomes a nanny to the twins. The series places a strong emphasis on the family's wealth and comfortable lifestyle, but also on the type of values-oriented lessons that are typically associated with family-friendly programming.

In May of 1968, while the season was still in its planning stages, *Variety* reported that Michael Dann met with a number of producers who worked on CBS programs, in order to encourage them to increase and improve their diversity efforts. The coverage quoted *Family Affair* producer Edmund Hartmann on his positive reaction to the network's initiatives: "It's a relief to be told you are not restricted by past prejudices, and very encouraging. They realize the country is in a crisis and tv can and should make an important contribution."³⁴ Hartmann noted that his series would make efforts to include more black characters and contribute to a positive change.

The 1968 season of *Family Affair* demonstrates a commitment to diversity in casting that is evident in many episodes. The series is set in New York, and to a far greater extent than *Mayberry R.F.D.*, its episodes demonstrate that the city is a diverse place. The family's friendly mailman (Guy Edwards) is black, and classroom scenes at Buffy and Jody's school make clear that they have black classmates. In "Your Friend, Jody," Bill takes up boxing with Ruby, played by real-life prizefighter Archie Moore. Ruby confides that he thinks his son needs to toughen up, and so he's sending him away to camp. Bill is persuaded that Jody would also benefit from the experience, and camp is depicted as an integrated environment where Jody and Ruby's son Mike (Ezekiel Williams) bunk in the same cabin.³⁵ *Family Affair* featured non-white performers in minor roles in many episodes that aired in the 1968 season.



Bill and Ruby discuss their boys in "Your Friend, Jody."

"Albertine" is distinct from the rest of the season because the episode focuses on a black character.³⁶ Albertine (Alycia Gardner) is a little girl who has recently joined Buffy and Jody's class. It is evident from the episode's first scene that she will be the focal point of the story, because she is seated in the front row of the classroom, in the center of the shot, between Jody and another white boy. There are other black children in the class, but Albertine is foregrounded. The teacher catches Albertine trying to pass a ball from Jody to the other boy, and Jody immediately takes responsibility for the act. Later, as he apologizes to the teacher in private, she asks him how "the new girl" is doing, which establishes that Albertine has not been a part of their class for very long. Jody responds, "I don't play with girls a lot – except Buffy!" This line, delivered for laughs, indicates that from his perspective, Albertine is no more or less appealing than any other girl his age; the fact that she is black does not factor into her social status.



Albertine is framed to indicate that she will be the focus of the episode.

In the next scene, Mr. French is accompanying Buffy and Jody home when they spot Albertine seated in the lobby of their posh apartment building. The children immediately invite her upstairs, but she demurs, indicating that she must wait for her mother, who is attending a party in the building. The next day at school, the twins join Albertine at lunch. It is clear they wish to pursue her friendship; they pepper her with questions and Buffy offers to trade lunches. At the end of the day, Albertine is alone in the lobby of their building again, and the twins insist that she visit them. She has told them that her father, a chess champion, has taught her to play and the children want her to challenge Mr. French to a game. As Buffy and Jody show off their apartment, it becomes clearer that Albertine is spinning tall tales about her father. She tells them that he also flies airplanes, was a hero "in the war," and plays major league baseball. Despite the improbability of her story, she delights the twins by



Albertine wins a game of chess against Mr. French.

handily defeating Mr. French in a game of chess. Cissy expresses skepticism about Albertine's background, but it is clear that the younger children believe her every word.

The next day, Buffy and Jody convince Mr. French to take them to Albertine's house. She has told them that her father is returning after a long trip, and that her block will be throwing a celebration to honor him. Mr. French's discomfort is evident as they approach her address in a rundown neighborhood. They ask for directions from a black child who is playing outside, and he scoffs, "Albertine doesn't have no father ... he ran away a long time ago." Albertine emerges from her building, sees the trio of visitors, and does not visibly react. The neighbor kid taunts her, and she does not respond. Albertine does not come to school after this, but when the twins spot her in the lobby of their apartment building, they are as anxious to play with her as they were before the discovery. She turns away from them, and will not respond to their invitations. Bill explains that she must be embarrassed, and the twins respond, "But we didn't hurt her! Or embarrass her!" Indeed, the narrative has presented their diligent pursuit of her friendship, which was not dissuaded by the revelation of her dishonesty.

Buffy and Jody beg Bill to help solve the problem, and so he takes them on another visit to Albertine's apartment. This time, they go inside. Bill speaks to Mrs. Smith (Mittie Lawrence) who works as a maid to provide for her daughter; she is unaware that Albertine has stopped attending school. She tells Bill that her husband left because he couldn't keep a job. Bill then speaks to Albertine, one on one. He tells her that Buffy and Jody don't have a father either, making clear that the three children have more in common than they might realize. In the final scene, back at home, Buffy and Jody report to Bill that Albertine has returned to school and when they said hello to her, "She said 'hi' back!" The episode doesn't indicate that all of the underlying issues have been dealt with, but it does stress that the twins' overtures of friendship are capable of overcoming obstacles.

In the narrative of "Albertine" the primary obstacle is not race, but class status. No overt or subtle comment on race is ever offered by any party, but the episode makes clear that there is a disparity between the living situations of the twins and Albertine. When Albertine first sees their apartment, she says, "Oo-ee!" in amazement. When the twins see Albertine's neighborhood, they suspect based on its condition that they are in the wrong place. Albertine doesn't just long to have a father; she longs to have a famous father who is a chess champion and a pro ball player. More than a simple wish for a nuclear family, she has a fantasy of wealth. The twins, who also don't have a father, are an embodiment of this specific fantasy. Despite the stark difference in their economic class status, the episode claims, their friendship is possible. The episode supports one of the most common tropes of the family sitcom: they are more alike than they are different from each other.

"Albertine" is similar to the "Youth Takes Over" episode of *Mayberry R.F.D.*, in that it is a standalone appearance for a black character. The episode supports an ideology of "colorblindness" by omitting any discussion of race. In addition, the episode is strikingly similar to other episodes from the 1968 season of *Family Affair* that foregrounded white characters. In the season premiere, for example, Buffy befriends a latchkey kid.³⁷ The girl is often alone in a



The twins visit Albertine's neighborhood.



The set design emphasizes the lower socioeconomic status of Buffy's new friend in the season three premiere.

shabby apartment because her mother is working or socializing. The episode concludes that Buffy and the girl can remain friends, although their home lives are very different. Buffy meets and befriends a very sick little girl, played by Eve Plumb, in “Christmas Came a Little Early.”³⁸ Her new friend is bedridden, but as in the other episodes, Buffy is devoted to her despite their very different lives. The synopsis of the “Albertine” episode that appeared in major newspapers to promote its airing made no mention of race, summarizing the story as, “The twins are fascinated by Albertine, a shy little girl who tells stories about her father and beats French at chess.”³⁹ This brief summary provides further evidence that the

same story could easily have been produced with white performers. The episode’s script clarifies that the role of Albertine was written for a black performer. Writers Ernestine Barton and Edmund Hartmann introduce the character as a “seven year old colored girl” in the first scene.⁴⁰ The script includes a racial designation for both Albertine and her mother, but these are the only indications of the story’s intent to engage with race.

The story itself may be colorblind, but there are elements of “Albertine” that viewers might have been more likely to interpret as racial coding, due to the fact that Albertine is black. The Moynihan Report, released in 1965 and frequently discussed in the media, examined poverty in black communities from a sociological perspective. The report noted that a dearth of economic opportunities available to black men led to the disintegration of the family unit. A combination of social forces related to prejudice and discrimination had resulted in high rates of black households headed by single mothers, which the report claimed was contributing to continuing economic insecurity in black communities.⁴¹ In *Family Affair*, Albertine’s mother is a menial laborer and her father deserted the family because he was unable to provide for them. White viewers may have interpreted these story points in relation to the characters’ racial identities, based on their awareness of the national discourse about black families and economic distress. Viewed within the context of the larger series, though, it becomes harder to make a claim that the episode conveyed a statement about racial identity. The story of “Albertine” is not substantially different from “The Latch Key Kid,” which focused on a white single mother and daughter living in similar circumstances. The way that racial identity is actively avoided in “Albertine” suggests that the series is less invested in exploring racial identities than it is in denying the relevance of class distinctions.

Conclusion

The three CBS series discussed above were already in production prior to the shift in national discourse with regard to representations of race that occurred in early 1968. Viewers were already familiar with the white families of *Gentle Ben*, *Mayberry R.F.D.*, and *Family Affair*. CBS was the dominant national network, and the most popular shows on television were rural sitcoms like *Andy Griffith* and westerns like *Gunsmoke* (CBS, 1955-75). The network’s lineup would likely have remained popular even if they had not made moves to increase and improve representations of African-American identities, but executives addressed their responsibility to serve the public interest by attempting to enact change. Token representations were just one strategy of diversification, and CBS was not the only network to pursue this avenue. An examination of the popular, family-friendly programming at CBS however, reveals

that token representations were utilized in strikingly similar ways across the network's programming, in depictions of children.

In each program, white children are positioned at the center of the story. In the fall of 1968, each production told at least one story about the interaction between white protagonists and a black child. Each of these episodes demonstrated that white and black children could engage in friendships that were uncomplicated by racial barriers. The focus on child characters, who lack experience and knowledge of the world, contributes to their relative plausibility. There were much more complicated and painful stories that could have been told, but that type of storytelling is less likely to attract the sizable audiences that commercial broadcast networks expected to garner in the late 1960s. These series maintained their tremendous popularity by avoiding controversy; as in the *Peanuts* comic strip, their main emphasis was to present friendship between black and white kids as "utterly normal." The strategy of tokenism allowed CBS to make some of the most popular programming on television "integrated," without becoming truly diverse. The presence of black performers in these programs opened up the opportunity for viewers to consider race, even though the program content actively avoided engaging the discussion.

Notes

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Each of the images included are screenshots from episodes that aired during the 1968 seasons of *Gentle Ben*, *Mayberry R.F.D.*, and *Family Affair*.

¹ Her original request is quoted in Kamp, "Guess Who's Coming to 'Peanuts.'"

² Ibid.

³ Lichter and Amundsen, "Distorted Reality," 59. As television programming diversified in 1968, the trade press also referred to the "all-white world" of television past (see Kaufman, "Dann's Pitch," 39).

⁴ Lemon, "Black is the Color," 44.

⁵ Bogle, *Primetime Blues*, 125.

⁶ The committee included members from the Screen Actors Guild, the Writers Guild, the Directors Guild, and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. A survey of nearly 600 prime time programming hours in late 1967 indicated that minority representation had declined in "most types of programs." See "Decline in Minority Artists," 1.

⁷ National Advisory Commission, *Kerner Report*, 362.

⁸ See Heitner, *Black Power TV*, 6.

⁹ See for example "Text of Summary of Report" in the *New York Times* and Burke, "City Riots Laid to White Racism," in the *Los Angeles Times*. The networks' plans for coverage of the report were announced a week in advance of its release, as outlined by Clay Gowran in "TV Today: 3 Will Report on Work in the White House," W11.

¹⁰ See Hrach, *The Riot Report and the News*.

¹¹ National Advisory Commission, *Kerner Report*, 386.

¹² See "TV Advised to 'Think Black.'"

¹³ Qtd. in Dallos, "TV Explains," 62.

¹⁴ "Look, They Tell Me," D29.

¹⁵ Qtd. in Windeler, "CBS Will Seek," 95.

¹⁶ MacDonald, *Blacks and White TV*, 107.

¹⁷ Lemon, "Black is the Color," 43.

¹⁸ Hinton, et al., "Tokenism and Improving," 424.

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- ¹⁹ Diffrient, "Beyond Tokenism," 42.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.
- ²¹ Langley, "Meet Angelo," 10.
- ²² "Keeper of the Glades, Part One" originally aired on 12 Jan 1969. "The Competitor" aired on 9 March 1969.
- ²³ "Starr of Green Bay" originally aired on 1 Dec 1968.
- ²⁴ "Lifeline" originally aired on 16 Feb 1969.
- ²⁵ Les Brown's initial review in *Variety* noted that the show was marked by the "kind of straining for funniness that gives situation comedy a bad name." See "Television Reviews: Mayberry R.F.D.," 47.
- ²⁶ "Opie's Piano Lesson" originally aired on 13 March 1967.
- ²⁷ Firmat, *A Cuban in Mayberry*, 61.
- ²⁸ "Youth Takes Over" originally aired 11 November 1968.
- ²⁹ See "Little Peeler," 22. Calvin Peeler appears in the episode "Youth Takes Over" which originally aired on 11 November 1968.
- ³⁰ The *New York Times* item about Peeler's casting indicated that he might be asked to appear in more episodes, but this did not come to pass. See "Boy Deals Himself," 95.
- ³¹ The Supreme Court ordered North Carolina public schools to desegregate effectively by busing students in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971).
- ³² "Driver Education" originally aired on 27 January 1969.
- ³³ Brown, "Television Review: Family Affair," 52.
- ³⁴ Qtd. in Kaufman, "Dann's Pitch," 39.
- ³⁵ "Your Friend, Jody" originally aired on 14 October 1968.
- ³⁶ "Albertine" originally aired on 2 December 1968.
- ³⁷ "The Latch Key Kid" originally aired on 23 September 1968.
- ³⁸ "Christmas Came a Little Early" originally aired on 11 November 1968.
- ³⁹ This synopsis ran in the TV Listings for 2 December 1968 in many city newspapers. See for example *Hutchinson News*, 30 November 1968, p. 7A and *The Daily Chronicle* (DeKalb, IL), 30 Nov-1 Dec 1968, p. 7.
- ⁴⁰ "Albertine" revised script, 24 June 1968, vol. 8022 no. 150-153, Don Fedderson Productions collection, UCLA Special Collections.
- ⁴¹ The report was initially well-received by the Johnson administration, and frequently discussed in the mainstream press. See for example, Eliot Fremont-Smith's tellingly-titled, "Books of the Times: The Family Affair."

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