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## Entertainment as Propaganda

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By Philip Carl Salzman

Television programs not only entertain, but they also important influence our ideas about our society and culture. These messages are not meant to solely and accurately to reflect social reality accurately, but also to shape that reality. People and their actions and opinions are presented as if they are typical, normal, and to be emulated. Some people and actions are presented with approval, while others are presented with disapproval. These programs thus offer a view of what is desirable and what is undesirable.

One strategy is to over-represent certain segments of the population so as to normalize their presence and worthiness. In a recent episode of "911"<sup>1</sup> called "Karma is a Bitch," over half of the episode dealt with the experiences of a black, female police officer and a black, female paramedic. The message is that black females are important, which is fair enough, but, by implication, the message is also that others are less important. So too with homosexuals. The black, female paramedic is a lesbian, as is her wife, as is her ex-girlfriend with whom she has an encounter. The black husband of the black, female police officer is trying to deal with the fact that he is gay, and he now has found a new lover. Gays and lesbians are also prominent in "Six Feet Under,"<sup>2</sup> "Modern Family,"<sup>3</sup> "Will and Grace,"<sup>4</sup> and the CBC's "Burden of Truth,"<sup>5</sup> "Schitt's Creek,"<sup>6</sup> and "Workin' Moms,"<sup>7</sup> among others.

Certainly it is true that a portion of our population is gay and lesbian, but these programs over-represent blacks and gays. Blacks in the U.S. actually make up 13.3% of the population.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, Americans overestimate the percentage of blacks; the average guess is 33.3%; and 17% of Americans say that blacks make up over 50% of the population.<sup>9</sup> Only 3.6% of Americans identify as LGBT, although many Americans give much higher estimates.<sup>10</sup> In Canada, 1.7% of the population identifies as gay and lesbian, and 1.3% identifies as bisexual.<sup>11</sup>

But there were also whites portrayed on the "Karma is a Bitch" episode. One was a white, heterosexual, male, puppy abuser, who was roasted in a malfunctioning tanning bed. A second was a white, heterosexual male who abused his wife, and who was killed by a bullet shot into a tree by his wife, who had then committed suicide. A third was a white, heterosexual, male hunter of protected species who was eaten alive by a zoo tiger that he had previously abused. One of the main characters of the show is a white male ex-drug addict whose negligence had caused a fire that killed his wife and children.

Do you see a pattern here?

In this program, blacks and LGBTs are presented at much higher demographic levels than is the case in the actual population. Is there any wonder that Americans greatly overestimate the percentage of blacks and LGBTs in the population? Furthermore, black females and gays are presented in a sympathetic manner, while white, heterosexual males are presented as violent abusers who victimize women and animals, and consequently who deserve the gruesome deaths that they eventually suffer.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fox.com/9-1-1>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hbo.com/corpinfo/international/hbocanada.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://abc.go.com/shows/modern-family>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nbc.com/will-and-grace>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/burdenoftruth/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/schittscreek/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/workinmoms/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045216>

<sup>9</sup> <http://news.gallup.com/poll/4435/public-overestimates-us-black-hispanic-populations.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> <http://news.gallup.com/poll/183383/americans-greatly-overestimate-percent-gay-lesbian.aspx>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/dai/smr08/2015/smr08\\_203\\_2015](https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/dai/smr08/2015/smr08_203_2015)

Behind these crude characterizations is a neo-marxist theory or ideology called “social justice,” which divides the world into victims and their oppressors, leaving aside the minor details of what actual human individuals do and don’t do. “Social justice” identifies large classes of people by gender, race, sexual proclivity, nationality, and religion as the objects of its judgement: white, men, heterosexuals, the well-to-do, Christians and Jews, and Western Civilization are the oppressors, while people of colour, females, homosexuals, the poor, Muslims, and non-Western, “southern” people are the victims.

This is how the marxist advocacy of economic class conflict is expanded to conflict among people in many categories in society. The moral imperative of “social justice” is to aid the oppressed and undermine the oppressors. The oppressors must be shown to be unworthy and immoral, and as a result they should be marginalized and penalized. The oppressed must be shown to be worthy and virtuous, and should receive special benefits, especially advantage over oppressors. Thus “affirmative action” refers to measures to raise people of the oppressed categories, and consequently lower people of the oppressor categories. What better way to lobby for these goals than implicitly through entertainment, from which viewers will absorb the moral message along with the pleasure of a drama or a comedy, seemingly pure entertainment.

“Rise” is another program<sup>12</sup>, about a discouraged high school English teacher who takes over the school’s drama program. The first thing he does is to demote the acknowledged competent students in stars of acting and singing, in order to promote a female Hispanic to the female lead and a black, male football player to the male lead. It is unthinkable in today’s “social justice” climate that he would have demoted a Hispanic and a black and replaced them with whites. The white families of the demoted stars are shown to be, in one case, status-seeking and closed-minded, and, in the other, rigid Christians who try to discourage their son from portraying a gay character. Another actor promoted is a white female transitioning to a male. Hardly any programs today do not feature transsexuals or cross-dressers.

“Here and Now”<sup>13</sup> offers observers viewers a “diverse” model family: two white parents, an adopted black female child, an adopted South American gay male child, and an adopted male Vietnamese child, and a sad biological female child. The birth child’s good friend is a male, but presents himself as a gender neutral, Muslim cross-dresser. His family is Persian and Muslim, and the mother appears quite religious. One other interesting character presented as admirable is the imam of that family’s mosque, who is a white, male and of European descent, and apparently a convert.

Now, as it happens, my two children have been adopted from Thailand and China. I have, of course, no objection to international and cross-racial adoptions, but I would not present my family as ideal, or as typical or representing the statistical norm for Canada. Nor would I imply that white families that produced children the old fashioned way are somehow deficient in “diversity.”

Even the new Roxanne show<sup>14</sup>, with Roxanne as the stalwart enemy of political correctness and defender of President Trump, features a cross-dressing boy (her grandson) who identifies as male but likes wearing women’s clothes, and a sympathetic mother (her daughter) who proclaims that children should be allowed to be “who they are,” and not forced to live as something they are not.

Of course there is no reason why individuals of every racial, gender, sexual, religious, economic, and national category should not be represented and portrayed sympathetically in entertainment programs. It is perfectly reasonable that people of every category should be the main characters in some programs.

But, are we content that mainstream entertainment programs have a hidden, marxist ideological agenda, advancing some categories of people over others? Is our society, and our lives, improved by the demonising white people, males, heterosexuals, Christians, and those of Western ancestry?

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nbc.com/rise?nbc=1>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.hbo.com/corpinfo/international/hbocanada.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ctv.ca/roseanne>

## About the Author



**Philip Carl Salzman** B.A. (Antioch), M.A., Ph.D. (Chicago) is Professor of Anthropology at McGill University, appointed in 1968. He founded the Commission on Nomadic Peoples of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, and its international journal, *Nomadic Peoples*, for which he received the IUAES Gold Award. In recent years he has also served as Senior Fellow at the University of St. Andrews, Open Society International Scholar at the American University of Central Asia, Erasmus Mundus International Fellow at the University of Catania, and Visiting Professor at the University of Sydney. Extensive ethnographic field research in Baluchistan (Iran), Gujarat and Rajasthan (India), and Sardinia (Italy) provided the foundation many articles in academic journals, and for book publications such as *The Anthropology of Real Life: Events in Human Experience* (1999), *Black Tents of Baluchistan* (2000), winner of the Premio Pitagora–Salomone Marino, *Understanding Culture: An Introduction of Anthropological Theory* (2001), *Pastoralists: Equality, Hierarchy, and the State* (2004), *Culture and Conflict in the Middle East* (2008), *Postcolonial Theory and the Arab-Israel Conflict* (2008), and *Thinking Anthropologically 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.* (2010). His latest book publication is *Classic Comparative Anthropology: Studies from the Tradition* (2012). In public affairs, he was a member of Middle East Strategy at Harvard (2008-2010), a member of the Board of Directors of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (2004-2012), and is currently a Senior Fellow at the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, a member of the Academic Council of the Canadian Institute for Jewish Studies, a Fellow of the Middle East Forum (2015-), and a member of the Board of Directors of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (2016-). His articles have been published by the Frontier Centre, the Middle East Forum, the Gatestone Institute, the Canadian Institute for Jewish Research, the Macdonald Laurier Institute, and Areo Magazine.