



## **Race, Gender, and the American Mother: Political Speech and the Maternity Episodes of *I Love Lucy* and *Murphy Brown***

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Far from ridiculing motherhood, “I Love Lucy” has made it appear one of the most natural and normal things in the world.

Jack Gould’s radio and television column, *New York Times*, January 16, 1953.

These basic precepts are not lofty abstractions, far removed from matters of daily living. They are laws of spiritual strength that generate and define our material strength. Patriotism means equipped forces and a prepared citizenry. Moral stamina means more energy and more productivity, on the farm and in the factory. Love of liberty means the guarding of every resource that makes freedom possible—from the sanctity of our families and the wealth of our soil to the genius of our scientists.

Dwight D. Eisenhower’s first inaugural speech, January 20, 1953.<sup>1</sup>

You make me feel like a natural woman.

Candice Bergen as Murphy Brown (*Murphy Brown* episode “Birth 101,” first shown May 18, 1992).

It doesn’t help matters when prime time TV has Murphy Brown—a character who supposedly epitomizes today’s intelligent, highly paid,

professional woman—mocking the importance of fathers, by bearing a child alone and calling it just another “lifestyle choice.”

Vice President Dan Quayle, speech to the Commonwealth Club of California, San Francisco, May 19, 1992.<sup>2</sup>

In criticizing the fictional reporter Murphy Brown during the 1992 debate over “family values,” Dan Quayle was doing more than defining desirable—and undesirable—kinds of femininity. He was also insisting that womanhood be put at the service of the nation. This was not a new development in American political speech. As the above quotation from Dwight D. Eisenhower’s 1953 inaugural address implies, and we will describe later, notions of maternity were crucial to his figuring of national identity, even if only as a structuring absence, where femininity itself was never named. The controversy over “family values” in the early 1990s, to which Quayle’s remarks related, thus marked a certain shift in the relationship between American political speech, femininity, and maternity, rather than a newly wrought politicization of the family. What was new here was an explicit emphasis on representations in general and television in particular.

The pregnancy and birth narratives of *I Love Lucy* in 1952-53 and *Murphy Brown* in 1992 are arguably the most spectacular American media representations of pregnancy of the last fifty years. This essay focuses on these examples as snapshots from the 1950s and from the 1990s, where television representations of pregnancy can be read as highlighting the importance of notions of femininity and whiteness for the ongoing construction of national identity. What we hope to show is that representations of white women and maternity on American television in the 1950s and the 1990s have performed two related kinds of cultural work analogous to parallel representations in political speech. On the one hand, such representations have been produced and read in relation to real women, as models of identity which have been copied or rejected, celebrated or contested, and whose history is intertwined with the history of the women and men who watched them. On the other hand, such representations have also operated in relation to notions of collective rather than individual identity, such that maternity is configured not simply in terms of personal fulfilment but also in terms of national responsibility.

It is the first-mentioned of these two kinds of cultural work which has been foregrounded in the work of feminist historians and critics of television such as Annette Kuhn, Lynn Spigel, Bonnie J. Dow, Patricia Mellencamp, Ien Eng, William Boddy, and Charlotte Brunson. While this project is largely indebted to these critical traditions, we find ourselves going somewhat against the grain of some of this work, which for sound strategic reasons has constituted itself largely around a focus on, in Kuhn’s phrase, “women’s genres” and female spectatorship.<sup>3</sup> Critics such as Kuhn, Dow, and Mellencamp have sketched historical trajectories of gender representation on American television in the twin contexts of feminist

critical theory and the historical consumption of television by women. Such work has achieved many notable successes, including the critical unmasking of strategies of television representations, and the examination of television's modes of address as privileging female consumers. Television itself has thus become recognized as centering femininity both as representation and through the sense of women as primary consumers.<sup>4</sup> In turn, this critical work has demonstrated the importance of the study of gender and television.

However, the emphasis on gender in general and femininity in particular has tended to marginalize other relevant forms of identity. Two excellent examples of feminist television history, Tichi's *Electronic Hearth* and Dow's *Prime-Time Feminism*, focus their accounts via, respectively, gender difference in the construction of male and female modes of consumption, and the parallel relationship between historical representations of femininity on mainstream television and the historical development of feminism itself. The insights of both books have come at the cost of largely reproducing the white-centeredness of television. Two effects of this have been to marginalize the importance of non-white and non-heterosexual women in feminism, and to obscure the function of white ethnic and racial identity in producing dominant notions of femininity. Even when in the more recent of these works Dow acknowledges some of these limitations, she is constrained by them in order to sustain the linear histories of feminism and television representations of women central to her project. Our interest here is narrower, in the sense that we are concerned with two albeit important snapshots of the relation between representations of women, feminism, and politics, but also broader, through the conviction that analysis of such material must focus on considerations of race, ethnicity, class, and national identity. It should be clear that we in no sense seek to displace the critical tradition of work on "women's genres." Rather, our intention is to supplement it through a focus on the construction of whiteness and the uses of notions of white maternity for constructing national identity.

The current essay is therefore equally situated within a growing body of work which has investigated the construction of whiteness in American culture.<sup>5</sup> Such work has stressed the double function of whiteness as appearing to be both neutral and universal, while also particular. As Ruth Frankenberg has argued,

. . . whiteness refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination. . . . Among the effects on white people both of race privilege and of the dominance of whiteness are their seeming normativity, their structured invisibility.<sup>6</sup>

The particular case of white maternity then is doubly naturalized in mainstream American culture, epitomizing the association of femininity with the

natural which is well-worn and well understood, and at the same time forming a focal point of the cultural normalization of whiteness. As Richard Dyer has argued in his discussion of the representation of white American women, their status as child-bearers and child-rearers has positioned such women at the center of the reproduction of racial identity. For Dyer, “white women thus carry—or, in many narratives, betray—the hopes, achievements and character of the race.”<sup>7</sup> This double possibility of successful carrying or betrayal is crucial to understanding the representations of pregnancy in *I Love Lucy* and in *Murphy Brown*. This is part of the reason for the cultural and political commentaries that both shows attracted. At the same time, as we will argue, such commentaries, and other political discourses which utilize the model of the implicitly white family, are also concerned with the gap between what Dyer identifies as racial identity and national identity.

This essay is therefore offered at the intersection of traditions of critical work on femininity and on whiteness. Our choice of two snapshots from the 1950s and 1990s illustrates continuities and changes in the representation of white femininity. At one level, the juxtaposition of *I Love Lucy* and *Murphy Brown* serves to show the long history of the significance of maternity for national identity. At another level the increased visibility of femininity and of whiteness as such, due to the politicization of identity associated with the civil rights movement, feminism, and their adversaries makes for substantial differences in the later representation and its reception.

In brief, we will show how Eisenhower’s appeal to a consensual notion of national identity in his 1953 inaugural address was predicated upon a certain notion of naturalized white maternity. This notion was constructed to appeal through the medium of television, and functioned as a structuring absence both in Eisenhower’s inaugural speech and in the organization of his 1952 presidential campaign around his identification as a “man of peace.” It was made explicit by Mamie Eisenhower’s appearance through the presidential campaign, and at the televised inaugural speech, and also in the representations of Lucille Ball/Lucy Ricardo as working mother, and the modes of consumption associated with them.<sup>8</sup> Forty years later, the liberal representation of Murphy Brown as a working single mother provoked a more explicit discussion of white maternity in the national frame. While in some ways this later debate was structured by the opposition between a feminist campaign for women’s rights and a conservative insistence on the nuclear family unit which could only have happened in the 1990s, in other ways the use of white maternity as a focus for notions of the American nation is a long-standing one. Thus notions of whiteness fulfill crucial but different functions in constructing maternity for the nation.

### “I LIKE IKE” AND *I LOVE LUCY*

When during the second season of *I Love Lucy* (1952-53) the actual pregnancy of comedy performer Lucille Ball was written into her portrayal of sit-

com character Lucy Ricardo, the two Lucys incarnated equally public and intriguingly related models of maternity. As Lucy Ricardo gave birth to her first-born son on the evening of Monday, January 19, 1953, she fulfilled the American Dream of the 1950s. Here on prime-time television was a middle-class nuclear family with mother at home and father in skilled/managerial employment,<sup>9</sup> taking part in the baby boom. The episode was entitled “Lucy Goes to the Hospital” in the children’s book style adopted for the seven shows of the pregnancy narrative.<sup>10</sup> In it, Lucy’s own body triggers and directs her removal to the hospital, where organized medicine neither coerces nor induces, but simply provides a safe context for the birth of “Little Ricky.”<sup>11</sup>

By contrast, the medical organization and planning of Lucille Ball’s pregnancy could well be read in terms of an unnatural intervention in the “natural,” spontaneous and personal processes of maternity. Months in advance she was scheduled for a cesarean on the morning of January 19, 1953, the same day that her fictional alter ego was to give birth. This timing was apparently no more than coincidental, having been determined by the timetable of Ball’s physician, who performed all such operations on a Monday. Nevertheless, the conjunction of real and fictive births made great publicity and had, according to *Reader’s Digest*, an “electric” effect on newspapers.<sup>12</sup> From June 1952, the whole production cycle of *I Love Lucy* was reworked around the date set for Ball to give birth the following January. Staffers were called back from their vacations and relevant episodes were made in advance so that she could take four months maternity leave. Subsequent books and articles directed at fans have detailed both these processes and the marketing of the pregnancy narratives by the Desilu and CBS publicity machines, who themselves announced on Wednesday, January 14 that Ball would give birth the following Monday as planned.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the fictional pregnancy of Lucy Ricardo, then, Lucille Ball’s pregnancy was deliberately managed in order that she could sustain her professional activity. The integration of the birth into Ball’s professional life was turned into a joke by the show’s producer, Jess Oppenheimer. When told of the birth of Desi IV, Oppenheimer responded that since she had followed the pre-recorded script and, like Lucy Ricardo produced a boy, Ball could “take the rest of the day off.”<sup>14</sup>

What seems remarkable, especially in the context of the 1950s, is that the wide dissemination of this information attracted practically no public criticism of Ball’s continuing to work after the birth of her first child in July 1951 and while pregnant for a second full term, nor of the professional management of the pregnancy. Instead, the pregnancy coverage actually functioned to increase her popularity and that of the show. On January 19, 1953 the arrival of Little Ricky Ricardo attracted an estimated forty-four million viewers to CBS for *I Love Lucy*, a peak for the already massively popular show and an all-time high Trendex rating of 71.1, far outstripping the 29 million viewers who watched Eisenhower’s inauguration as President the next day.<sup>15</sup> It was claimed that the Ball/Arnaz family had received over one million goodwill messages from the public concerning the

pregnancy and birth.<sup>16</sup> Even where criticism or caution was raised in public discourses about the pregnancy narratives, Ball's status as working mother was never at issue. Writing shortly before the birth episode was due to air, in the January 16 edition of the *New York Times*, radio and television columnist Jack Gould expressed concern on two grounds. What caused him some anxiety was the prospect that the exigencies of showbusiness would interfere with the upbringing of the child scheduled for birth by cesarean in a few days time. "If there's one thing the expected child does not need," he warned, "it's a press agent."<sup>17</sup>

A far more pressing issue for Gould and for 1950s media commentary generally was the matter of the tasteful representation of pregnancy on *I Love Lucy*. Anxieties over taste had preoccupied CBS network executives, sponsors Philip Morris, and the ad agency of Milton Biow, all of whom had strong reservations about the idea of focusing on a Ricardo pregnancy.<sup>18</sup> In response, the *I Love Lucy* production team submitted the show to a form of the self-censorship felt increasingly necessary to ensure maximum demographic appeal, the holy grail of network television. Each script dealing with pregnancy was vetted by a three-man committee comprising representatives of the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish faiths—a fine example of the limited ecumenicalism of the bottom line.<sup>19</sup> The space given to the issue of taste recently in books such as the autobiographies of Arnaz and Ball, and in Andrews' *The "I Love Lucy" Book* and Sanders and Gilbert's *Desilu* indicates that it continues to dominate attitudes toward the representation of pregnancy on *I Love Lucy*. On this, Gould, then the most influential television critic in the USA, went out of his way to defend the most popular program in the nation. "Far from ridiculing motherhood," Gould opined, "*I Love Lucy* has made it appear one of the most natural and normal things in the world."<sup>20</sup>

Again, remarkable by 1950s standards, the naturalness attributed to the treatment of Lucy Ricardo's pregnancy extended to that of Ball, even when both pregnancies were turned into media events and marketed heavily. *Desilu* released figures admitting to having received 207 letters disapproving of pregnancy on television, while Lucille Ball claimed she had had thirty thousand congratulatory telegrams and letters after the birth.<sup>21</sup> Notwithstanding Gould's reservations, by the first week of April *Desi IV* had appeared on the front cover of the first-ever edition of *T.V. Guide*. The cover story brought together seamlessly notions of Ball as performer, mother, and media professional. The cover is dominated by a photograph of the six-week old baby, labelled Desiderio Alberto Arnaz IV. At top right is a much smaller head shot of Lucille Ball "in character," wearing one of the stock facial expressions she employed as Lucy Ricardo. Across the top of the cover, a headline announces "LUCY'S \$50,000,000 BABY," referring simultaneously to *Desi IV*, Little Ricky Ricardo, and the estimated total sales of *I Love Lucy* merchandising stimulated by the births. Inside, attention is devoted to the arrival of *Desi IV* and the range and sales of promotional articles. Now in addition to the "Lucy" bedroom suites (one million sold in three months), living-room

suites, “Lucy” sweaters, lingerie, and dresses, and “Desi” dressing gowns, were available nursery furniture, baby layettes (insulated diaper bags), toys and games.<sup>22</sup>

The commercial and critical success of Ball’s professional pregnancy seems all the more surprising given Ball’s own statements in a contemporary interview and her posthumously published memoirs which register a high degree of anxiety over the decisions to have a cesarean and to work during and after her second successful pregnancy.<sup>23</sup> What kind of cultural work was being done by *I Love Lucy* to be celebrated by Gould and in the pages of the *T.V. Guide*? In one sense it epitomized 1950s sexual conservatism, confirming dominant contemporary notions of femininity: “wives,” even celebrity wives, were expected to bear children. In this reading Ball’s maternity simply over-rode any sense of her professional activity. As Elaine Tyler May has pointed out, this was one of a series of widely publicized celebrity pregnancies and mother/offspring stories which reaffirmed the experience of motherhood as fulfillment.<sup>24</sup>

Yet the massive marketing of the Ball/Ricardo pregnancies, and the integration of real-life and fictional motherhood mark them out as exceptional in two ways. While other television families were used to advertise products (famously, as Marling shows, the Ozzie Nelsons recommended Picture Craft painting-by-numbers<sup>25</sup>), the marketing around the Ball/Ricardo pregnancy focused on images, clothes, and furniture actually seen on the show. At the same time, the fulfillment offered by the purchase of these products was not simply dependent on the fictive representation of family life on *I Love Lucy*, but was guaranteed by Ball’s actual pregnancy. Thus Ball’s real-life pregnancy was an integral part of her work; through her, maternity could be understood *as work*. From this perspective Ball’s maternal work produced two “spin-offs”: the fictional Little Ricky and the talismanic status of *I Love Lucy* products.

Feminists and other critics have shown how the advertising of such products in the 1950s recreated the home as a site of consumption, and have demonstrated how television culture addressed female viewers as white and middle-class, offering them the pleasures of consumption (real or vicarious, according to class position) in place of the economic independence of reasonably paid work outside the home.<sup>26</sup> No doubt part of the appeal of the *I Love Lucy* aprons, dolls and the other products listed in *T.V. Guide* was their fulfillment of this function. Thus the *I Love Lucy* pregnancies played a part in developing dominant notions of femininity, and, in particular, in redefining maternity and purchasing goods for home and family as appropriate and necessary activities for women to produce the ideal American family.

Ironically, Lucille Ball was not contained within these appropriate spheres of maternity and shopping (or at least not those of the average viewer). What did link her with them was her status as working mother, or at least her work as an actress to portray a mother while being one: the latter authenticated the former. Many of the female workers of this time were in families, as was Lucille Ball, but

their prime site of identity was as mothers and in the home, as was Lucy Ricardo. Therefore it was only in combination that Lucille Ball and Lucy Ricardo could represent the “working” mother of the 1950s. The “births” of Desi IV and Little Ricky emblemized this fusion.

In sum then, the combination of Lucy and Lucille set up by the parallel births presented as coexisting what were ideologically incompatible but historically lived activities for women: working and mothering. Moreover, as elsewhere in 1950s television, these representations of women, maternity and the home had as much to do with the reproduction of the American nation as the wishes for self-fulfillment of American women.<sup>27</sup> The magical synthesis achieved by *I Love Lucy* took on further significance in this national frame, as can be seen by comparing it with Eisenhower’s negotiation of similar problems of gender, productivity and national identity in his inaugural speech.

We have already noted the temporal proximity of the first transmission of “Lucy Goes to the Hospital” and Eisenhower’s inaugural address. The significance of these two television events was noted by Walter Winchell the following Sunday, January 25, when he commented on air, “This was a banner week: the nation got a man and Lucy got a boy.”<sup>28</sup> Though delivered, no doubt, with the archness of the gossip columnist, the conjunction noted by Winchell makes clear not only what the preferred roles of men and women were, that is, leading the country and bearing children respectively, but also the comparative importance of these activities. Coming from a military rather than a political background, the keynote of Eisenhower’s campaign, as for most of his career, was his desire for consensus and a certain kind of inclusivity. A major means of producing Eisenhower as the man of consensus was through discourses of productive activity that sought to address, via television, all Americans as producers and to cohere American identity around acts of production. Such discourses figured heavily in Eisenhower’s first presidential campaign and, as is demonstrated by the quotation at the head of this essay, they were cemented in his 1953 inaugural speech.

In this passage, which comes from the middle of the speech, Eisenhower aimed to show how the precepts of foreign policy he had enunciated earlier were rooted in the daily life of Americans. He did so by reversing the chronological order of his own biography, moving from his best-known and most recent experience in the army (“equipped forces”), to his rural boyhood, “on the farm,” which is linked as a site of “productivity” with the “factory.” Thus here, the notion of productive activity was integral both to Eisenhower’s claims to presidential authority and to his project of cohering American identity. He went on to expand on the theme of productivity:

Love of liberty means the guarding of every resource that makes freedom possible—from the sanctity of our families and the wealth of our soil to the genius of our scientists. And so each



citizen plays an indispensable role. The productivity of our heads, our hands, and our hearts is the source of all the strength we can command, for both the enrichment of our lives and the winning of the peace.

In this section of the inaugural speech then, Eisenhower presented ordinary life as lived by Americans in terms of the translation of the war front to the home front. Farms, factories, and families are all conceived as sites of the generation of wealth, both spiritual and material. Eisenhower's intention, avowed at his pre-inaugural cabinet meeting, to connect "a philosophy of government" with "our daily living,"<sup>29</sup> was accomplished by grounding a notion of the everyday in productive activity, which is taken as having universal application to all Americans. Clearly, at least from the vantage of the 1990s, this address to consensus and universality was made in terms of masculinity, moving from soldier to worker, protecting and producing on American soil the values proved in the war theatre of Europe.

Throughout the speech, Eisenhower manipulated gendered language in order to secure notions of universal appeal. At the beginning and the end, he described his audience in terms of indeterminate gender. He began (of course) "My fellow citizens," going on to use phrases such as "we . . . as a people," "our own country," and ending up addressing "home," "community" and "America." In the middle section of the speech, Eisenhower used male-specific words such as "man's history," "the abiding creed of our fathers," "the faith of our fathers and the lives of our sons," and "We are free men." It was thus clear from this context as well as by the conventions of male-centered language that Eisenhower, like most other leaders of his era, hailed his addressees as active Americans via dominant notions of productive masculinity. As a returned soldier and successful presidential candidate, he sought quite early in the speech to confer on everyday activities the aura of national responsibility, referring to "the men who mine coal and fire furnaces and balance ledgers and turn lathes and pick cotton and heal the sick and plant corn," all of whom "serve as proudly, and as profitably, for America as the statesmen who draft treaties and the legislators who enact laws." Here as at the heart of the speech, the guarantee of American identity is the ability to produce. Explicitly here, as more implicitly in the longer passage, the ability to produce is associated with being male. Femininity, along with international communism, structured the speech by their absence. Neither of them were named, but it is clear that one constituted the "enemies of . . . faith" in American and Divine Providence, while the other defined those most in need of defence against those enemies.

Subsequent historians have pointed to the economic and political exclusions practiced in post-war national reconstruction. In this context Eisenhower's framing of national identity in the inaugural speech has been seen as part of an attempt to open the terms of national consensus as widely as possible. For

example, Stephen E. Ambrose and Fred I. Greenstein both utilize later memoirs and access to files of pre-inaugural meetings to suggest that Eisenhower expressed the intention in private to widen the notion of productive activity so as to include females as well as males. Ambrose argues that Eisenhower

... wanted to convey the message that the preacher, the teacher, the *mother* [our emphasis], the workman, “can help to produce something more to allay this starvation and distress in the world.” He wanted to find some way to stress the theme of productivity, the idea that if everyone in America would do just a little bit more at his or her job, productivity would rise and then America could do more to fight the Communist menace.<sup>30</sup>

The use of “everyone,” and “his or her” here, more explicitly than the “families,” “citizens,” and “scientists” cited in the passage quoted earlier from the actual speech itself, might signal an awareness that even given the post-war propaganda push for domestication and the downgrading of women’s jobs, many women still worked outside the home. As Stephanie Coontz has pointed out, in spite of the ill-paid and unchallenging nature of most jobs available to women, and the growing weight of popular sociological work arguing for a return to the home and warning that professional work meant illness or lack of fitness for motherhood, by 1952 there were two million more wives at work than at the peak of wartime production.<sup>31</sup> However, to acknowledge this would have been to go against the grains both of the ideological apparatuses at Ike’s disposal and his self-construction as the man of consensus. The speech as a whole configured gender difference according to the traditional binaries of domesticity and public action. This strategy enabled the speech to connect private and public subjectivities, as Eisenhower put it, the “enrichment of our lives,” and “the winning of the peace,” so long as those subjectivities were masculinized. More than this, via the implicit use of his own biography as we have described, this work of bridging and consensus-making took place in the name of Eisenhower’s own manliness.

Writing after second-wave feminism had called attention to the gender exclusions of the post-war consensus, Ambrose and Greenstein present Eisenhower as privately sensing the limits of this strategy but being finally unable to rethink it. Very obviously in retrospect, the appeal to universal American identity is predicated on masculinity, and femininity can thus figure in the inaugural speech only peripherally, and then in terms of domestic objectivity, hidden behind “the sanctity of our families.” As other historians such as Coontz have shown, a problematic sense of this traditional strategy was already abroad in the mid 1950s, manifested in post-war anxieties over women and work which generated a perceived need to educate or otherwise direct women towards motherhood. A further impetus to reshape this gender-bound model of consensus came from the growing importance of television as a mode of addressing primarily a female

audience. The 1952 Presidential election is generally regarded as the first time that the medium of television played a major part in official U.S. politics. In his popular history of the 1950s, David Halberstam credits Eisenhower's use of television advertising techniques as having crucially affected the election result.<sup>32</sup> As critics such as Lynn Spigel and William Boddy have shown, 1950s television was constituted by a range of popular discourses as directed to female viewers in the home.<sup>33</sup> The notion of female productivity as *maternity* attributed to Eisenhower by Ambrose would go a long way to successfully remodelling American consensus so as to position women specifically within it. This innovation would preserve the gendered binary of public and private work, thereby allaying the fears of popular writers on the family and reinforcing the economic privileges of masculinity. Significantly though, it reconceptualized the home such that women were not simply returned to domesticity as if the war effort had never happened. Instead the home was made a workplace, the site of production of a valued product that America needed: children. Had Eisenhower succeeded in fitting this into his inaugural, truly to love Lucy would have been to like Ike.

As Carl N. Degler has pointed out, the cultural work of rethinking the home in this way had already begun, and by 1953 it was being undertaken by a range of educators, advertisers, popular anthropologists and others. Lynn White Jr., president of Mills College, had argued in *Educating Our Daughters* (1950) for a revitalization of women's education away from a "subservience to masculine values," through a more intellectualized approach to domestic subjects.<sup>34</sup> Following Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia Farnham's 1947 *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, White regarded the problem as not that women were failing to marry, but that they were failing to be good mothers:

[T]he tragedy is not that our career-minded higher education has diverted some girls from marriage [but that it has] prevented them from flinging themselves into the pattern of life which they had chosen. A symptom and result is the small number of children they bear.<sup>35</sup>

Degler goes on to underline the project of rethinking maternity and domesticity as professional work by quoting popular anthropologist Ashley Montagu's 1958 contribution to the *Saturday Review*, to the effect that "a homemaker is the most important of all occupations in the world."<sup>36</sup> Remarkably to contemporary observers, Eisenhower had practically nothing to say in his inaugural speech about national domestic policy, let alone its effects on individual domestic situations.<sup>37</sup> He skirted the issues made explicit by White, Farnham, and Lundberg, coming close only when seeking to ensure the "sanctity of our families." With booming birth rates, it was becoming apparent in the 1950s that the actual numbers of children was less a problem than ensuring their proper upbringing. Among the discourses of persuasion, coercion, naturalization, and anxiety to

which this gave rise, many of which form the object of Betty Friedan's critique in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), was the redirection of maternity as productive activity.

*I Love Lucy* exactly represents the successful working out of the "pattern of life" described by Lynn White. Ironically, for a woman who co-owned what was fast becoming the largest television production company in the United States, and who used medical science to control the process of birth, as Lucy Ricardo, Lucille Ball became the pre-eminent national icon of naturalized maternity. Lucille Ball the working mother was valorized because of the terms of representation of *I Love Lucy*, that is, motherhood working in the American way. In the more detailed analyses of *I Love Lucy* episodes that follow, we will be seeking to make clear two major and hitherto neglected ways in which the show reproduced this notion of motherhood. First, the reorientation of its narratives around preparation for and the bringing up of children, and, second, the importance of representations of ethnicity, and especially whiteness, in normalizing, naturalizing, and giving national significance to Lucy's productive motherhood.

### MAKING (WHITE) MATERNITY WORK

Having focused so far on the relationship between femininity and the nation, we now turn to the importance of ethnicity in *I Love Lucy*. The show set up a domestic setting to be consumed in American homes, with exemplary narratives, as Patricia Mellencamp has pointed out, of Lucy's attempts to escape the confinement of the home and her eventual containment.<sup>38</sup> The stock instance for this was her desire to appear onstage at the club run by her husband Ricky. Commenting retrospectively in *T.V. Guide*, CBS executive Harry Ackerman described how Ball's pregnancy initially seemed disastrous for this scenario. "We had every intention of keeping 'I Love Lucy' right where it was," Ackerman was quoted as saying, with "Lucy always trying to get into show business." Yet he added with hindsight, "as it turned out, it was the best thing that ever happened" to the show.<sup>39</sup> In fact what did happen was that the pregnancy narrative and the later shows focused around Little Ricky developed the founding scenario, so that Lucy's personalized desires for self-improvement, education and paid work outside the home, which drove the narratives of the first season of *I Love Lucy*, were refocused onto narratives of self-improvement and education for the family as a whole, oriented around the welfare of the expected child. It was as the initiator of such narratives that Lucy Ricardo was constructed as the role model of productive maternity, of working motherhood. We will now demonstrate the importance of whiteness in assuring the success of this representation.

The episodes of *I Love Lucy* explicitly concerned with maternity are comparatively few.<sup>40</sup> It was therefore all the more crucial that they be seen to have dealt with Lucy's motherhood satisfactorily. This cultural work was concentrated in the seven episodes from the announcement of pregnancy in "Lucy is Enceinte" (episode 50) up to and including "Lucy Goes to the Hospital." These episodes

show the preparations undertaken for the birth and upbringing of the child by the Ricardos and by Lucy in particular. They clearly demonstrate the gradual refocusing of the “classic” *I Love Lucy* narrative as outlined in the previous paragraph. In episode 52, “Lucy’s Show Biz Swan Song,” Lucy pleads to go on stage before she becomes a mother. By “Lucy Becomes a Sculptress” three episodes later, Lucy’s desires for self-improvement have become fused with the wish to become a good mother. Here, she takes up sculpting in order that the expected child may grow up with artistic influences. Although tensions remain between Lucy’s desires for personal development and her wishes to be a good wife and mother, it is as if she has demonstrated her fitness for maternity in this episode, which is immediately followed by the birth itself. As a model for American women, Lucy’s presentation in these episodes may be softly normative in terms of class; race/ethnicity is not at issue.

We have chosen to discuss in detail show 53, “Lucy Hires an English Tutor,” first shown on December 29, 1952, because it is here that Lucy’s role as working mother is brought most explicitly into relation with notions of gender and ethnicity. While this episode’s narrative is paradigmatic of *I Love Lucy*’s representation of Lucy Ricardo as working mother, it consistently foregrounds notions of gender and ethnicity which are more usually implicit or only occasionally made explicit in the show generally. Our focus on this single episode, supported by reference to others, is therefore offered partly as a key to the construction of identity in *I Love Lucy*, and partly as exemplification.

In “Lucy Hires an English Tutor” Lucy’s desires for self-improvement are clearly redirected by her concerns for the education and status of her expected baby. She will work for the family unit and for the baby. From the start, the episode presents the bifurcation of male and female desires; as Lucy says, “I guess it’s true: women want girls and men want boys.” This binary is further defined in terms of ethnicity. Lucy wants a girl who will go to college in the United States, while Ricky wishes for a boy who will attend Havana University. Their exchange sets up a binary opposition between male/female and Cuban/American, and it looks as if the child cannot help but be the subject of conflict as to which categories it fits into. It is precisely this conflict that Lucy is presented as working through for her family and for the American family in general, having accepted what she calls the “responsibility [of] having a baby and bringing up a child.”

After this realization of responsibility, Lucy determines to transform herself into a “walking book of knowledge” so that as a mother she will be able to answer her child’s questions. This implies both that Lucy will be the primary caregiver, and that Ricky will be the economic provider. Essentially for the rest of the episode, knowledge is represented in terms of having an educated accent, the acquisition of which is not only a token of possessing knowledge but also a sign of fitness for a college education. This enables Lucy to propound what looks like a resolution to the male/female, Cuban/American tensions. She hires a tutor to teach the family (Lucy, Ricky, and neighbors, the Mertzes) “good English,” that

is different from their habitual speech, whether American or Cuban. The child will grow up speaking neither slangy “American” nor regular Spanish, since the English tutor will teach the Ricardos and the Mertzes something none of them have: “perfect English.”

Initially the tutor, Mr. Livermore, alone possesses this good English, with Lucy, Ricky, Ethel and Fred all falling far short of his standards. However, after Livermore tests their vowels, a distinction is made between Lucy, Ethel, and Fred, who simply have trouble with their use of slang, and Ricky, who is isolated through his ethnically marked Cuban accent. As the episode unfolds then, the classic “battle of the sexes” formula of *I Love Lucy* is redefined twice. First, as we have seen, the gender binary is imposed on the ethnic difference between Cuban and American. This ethnic binary is then worked through via the rival versions of masculinity incarnated by Ricky and Mr. Livermore.

The second half of the show dramatizes the competition between their rival styles of masculinity, which are differentiated in ethnic terms: Ricky’s “Latin lover” passion, sex appeal, and economic dynamism, as compared with the educated, effete “Percy” Livermore. Ricky sings a Havana U. victory song<sup>41</sup> with gusto whereas Mr. Livermore’s own sickly composition begins, “I tippy tippy toe through my garden.” Always antagonistic to the tutor’s criticisms, Ricky finally exerts the economic and physical power associated with his style of masculinity to win out. He makes a deal with Livermore to take on his Cuban accent and they give an impromptu rendition of Desi Arnaz’ own theme song, “Babalu.” The obvious dichotomy between Ricky’s exuberant performance and Livermore’s embarrassment only serves to emphasize the ridiculousness of Livermore’s pretensions to masculine power and to naturalize Ricky’s.

“Lucy Hires an English Tutor” re-works the standard *Lucy* narrative in complex ways. Typified by the phrase “battle of the sexes,” often applied to the show, the basis of comic tension in *I Love Lucy* is gender difference. Time after time, tension arises between male and female characters (primary Ricky and Lucy but also Fred and Ethel) and initiates a comic adventure that is finally resolved through the restitution of male authority. Within this scenario, Lucy’s femininity is the dynamic term, through her repeated, and repeatedly frustrated, attempts to evade patriarchal containment. This pattern is utilized in “Lucy Hires an English Tutor,” but with a significant difference. Here Lucy again attempts to usurp the position of head of the household, but this is understood in terms of maternal responsibility rather than personal fulfillment. At the same time, patriarchal power is doubled on the basis of ethnicity through the characters of Ricky and Mr. Livermore. Thereby in the second half of the episode the dominant tension follows ethnic rather than gendered lines; the question is not whether male or female characters will win out, but what kind of masculinity will be chosen. Thus the episode invokes gender conflict only to naturalize it, as is anticipated by Lucy’s line near the beginning that “It is true what they say—men want boys and women want girls.” What is not normal is for a conflict between a Cuban and an

American to take place within a marriage. By resolving this conflict via styles of masculinity, the show positions Lucy, and white femininity, at the stable centre of the show, whose primary function is to witness the playing out of tension between Ricky and Mr. Livermore. Fitness to be American is presented in terms of fitness for fatherhood. Installed in the “default” position as the judge of this fitness is the white American mother, whose acceptance of Ricky as a father stands for America’s acceptance of him as a citizen.

Here Lucy’s incarnation of a specifically *white* maternity performs two kinds of work in addition to the more general significance of her femininity outlined earlier. At one level she labors to produce a well-educated child. At another level, white maternity is presented as working to secure the acceptance of Cuban ethnicity into definitions of American identity. In this latter sense, white maternity works by basically remaining unchanged, but growing and accepting knowledge on the basis of its prior strength. More directly, Lucy’s work as a mother is presented as being divided between preparing to care for the child and choosing the right father. While in general, *I Love Lucy* binarizes America into male and female, private and public, here it figures America as accepting Latino identity via the already normalized binary of heterosexual gender. This temporary shift in focus is reflected in the episode’s narrative structure. In the standard *Lucy* narrative, Mr. Livermore’s act would be used as a means for Lucy to get on stage, as looks likely at the halfway point of the narrative. Instead though, it functions here to show Ricky’s fitness as a father.

Television critic Jack Gould’s comment that, “far from ridiculing motherhood, ‘I Love Lucy’ has made it appear one of the most natural and normal things in the world” conjures up some of the assumptions, repressions, and anxieties of dominant 1950s culture.<sup>42</sup> Gould invokes powerful beliefs which naturalized and normalized maternity. Yet his fears of ridicule and his sense of the television show as determining popular understandings of motherhood bring to the surface long-standing fears about female sexuality in western culture such as those described in Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*. It was precisely because such fears were normally policed by distinctions between public and private that the representation of pregnancy on national television provoked the debate over taste discussed above. The following discussion of “Lucy Goes to the Hospital” will demonstrate just how hard the show’s signifying practices had to work to “make” motherhood “natural and normal.”

Lucy is the calm and still center of the episode. Its first half builds comedy around the discontinuity between her self-control and the over-excitement of husband Ricky and the Mertzes. Lucy knits patiently and goes to lie down, while Ricky, Fred, and Ethel alternately plan and panic. While Lucy is offstage the other three members of the ensemble rehearse their roles in getting her to the hospital. Then, having finally started to go into labor, she alone remains unruffled while mayhem breaks out among them. The episode thus sets up the same gendered binary as the “English Tutor” episode, with one small revision. Here, Ethel falls

into the male category with Lucy alone on the female side. This presumably reiterates the naturalness of maternity for women such that femaleness is defined by having given birth or being about to do so. Lucy is in control, she knows her role, does not need a rehearsal; in all these she is shown to be the natural mother. Just after half-way through the episode Lucy is seen for the last time as she leaves the entrance lobby of the hospital for the second floor. Reflecting contemporary medical practice, fathers are excluded from the birthing process. The hospital is represented as a maternal space controlled by white, professional, female nurses, where, as the reception nurse states, “men are not allowed.” (Presumably an exception is made for professionals; sharp-eared audience members may have picked up from the first half dialogue that Lucy’s doctor is a man.) Female nurses are shown to dominate this space and to direct its use. Lucy herself does not appear again, even after the birth. Contemporary taste dictated that anything close to the physical process of childbirth not be shown, while in any case an understanding of birth as “natural” dictates that the audience already knows what is happening anyway. The latter is further emphasized in comments from Ethel and Fred in part one, to the effect that “. . . it’s a perfectly natural thing,” and “babies are born every day.” Thus, if in order to conform with 1950s patterns of repression, Lucy’s narrative cannot be shown directly, the invocation of 1950s patterns of naturalization rendered this unproblematic in narrative terms. What Lucy’s enforced absence did necessitate was a revision of the show’s standard comic premises.

As in the “English Tutor” episode, the representation and the function of Lucy’s femininity here is so overdetermined by the role of maternity that it cannot function as the disruptive (though still circumscribed) femininity identified elsewhere in the shows by Mellencamp.<sup>43</sup> As we suggested above and will now show, the disruptive role normally played out by Lucy in terms of femininity is in these episodes taken on by the “other other” of the 1950s: ethnicity, in connection with masculinity. In the first half of the show, Lucy’s calmness throws the onus of comedy on to Ricky and the Mertzes. During her prolonged absence in the second half, the narrative and the comedy focus on Ricky himself, throwing into relief the role of fathers in general and his relation as a Cuban to normative representations of American masculinity.<sup>44</sup>

The narrative role of Ricky and the Mertzes as regards the birth is fairly minimal. They provide comic relief via skilled ensemble playing, and Ricky puts down a deposit for the hospital bill. In this way the episode highlights the comparative redundancy of fathers in connection with the physical process of birth. Having provided the financial support, maleness has nothing to do but to wait, as do Ricky and Fred in the expectant fathers’ room. This exclusion of maleness from birth processes is nothing new in 1950s film and television, and the *I Love Lucy* scriptwriters followed the generic forms in representing Ricky and Fred. They both faint, while Ricky is so overcome on the way to the hospital that he needs a wheelchair and cannot remember his name and address. In all of this the centrality and control of femininity is reaffirmed even while, or in fact because, Lucy is offstage.



In these examples Ricky and Fred bring a certain disruption into the female-dominated hospital environment, but they are ultimately containable. However, Ricky's incarnation of masculinity goes beyond these generic conventions because of his ethnic identity. The episode uses ethnic and racial signifiers in a dangerous, if not explicitly racist manner in order to confer upon him a fully mainstreamed white identity. We have shown how in "Lucy Hires an English Tutor" the ethnic stereotype of the "Latin lover" was deployed to fit American masculinity. There, Ricky's Latino identity was thrown into relief in comparison with the effete Anglocentric whiteness incarnated by Mr. Livermore. Here a more invidious racial stereotype is employed, that of "blackface," in order to present Ricky as a fit American father.

Much of the comedy in "Lucy Goes to the Hospital" is generated by Ricky's attempts to be as close as possible to Lucy during the birth of his child, against his work commitments. Near the beginning of the episode Lucy tells him he must prioritize his duties at the club over his wish to attend the birth, in order to ensure his continuing financial support for the family. This helps to set up the major comic disruption of the show's second half, that is when Ricky's professional life breaks into the hospital environment. In order to extend his time there, Ricky puts on his make-up for his nightclub performance, a "Voodoo number," in the men's washroom attached to the fathers' waiting room. So far as narrative and comedic structures are concerned, Ricky can be seen here to be taking up the role of disrupting the distinction between public and private space that is the regular basis of Lucille Ball's performance as Lucy. As with Lucy's repeated attempts to get on stage, Ricky wears costume and make-up, and there are several close-ups of his face. However, the racial signification of Ricky's appearance, and the reactions it elicits, are significant over and above this basic structure.

Ricky prepares for the performance by putting on particularly grotesque blackface: heavy face make-up with exaggerated teeth and war-paint, and a black frightwig. His appearance is so frightening that when a nurse sees him through the picture window that separates the father's waiting room from the birthing and nursing section of the hospital, she screams and calls in the hospital security. Not knowing of his pursuit by a uniformed policeman and a male nurse, both white, he leaves to perform at the club. A quick cut from the hospital to Ricky's face in extreme close-up reproduces for the television audience the frightening effect he had had on the nurse. Called back in the middle of the number, he reappears at the hospital still in full make-up and now in costume also. Ricky is promptly captured by the forces of the law and, with Fred in a faint, is only released when Ethel vouches for his authenticity as Mr. Ricardo. It is then, still fully made-up and in costume, that Ricky is allowed to gaze on his first-born son through the picture window. Further close-ups switching between Ricky and his baby son affirm his fatherhood.

The scary effects of Ricky's made-up appearance on the hospital personnel are marked by loud audience laughter as being highly comic. Whether this was

the live reaction or a deliberate signal to television audiences, the comic effect here depends on playing on the fears of white audiences which are, in some part at least, based on racist stereotypes.<sup>45</sup> For such audiences, the crux is the distinction between the “real” Mr. Ricky Ricardo, Cuban, orchestra leader, father, and American, and the extremely marked ethnicity of his appearance. The episode shows that the ethnic identity Ricky puts on is not his own through its exaggeration and its narrative justification as part of his professional life. Audience understanding of this distinction is assured at the very beginning of the show, which opens on Ricky perusing a book on masks and making exaggerated faces, and explaining his use for them to Lucy. Thus at the climax of the episode Ethel’s authentication reminds audiences what they have always known, that Ricky is separate from his highly ethnicized appearance. The fears aroused by Ricky’s blackface appearance are made funny because he can come out of costume, be de-ethnicized, and only then become the father to Lucy’s white baby.<sup>46</sup>

In sum, then, “Lucy Goes to the Hospital” deploys the exaggerated ethnic signification of blackface to secure Ricky’s status as white. The show thus utilizes markers of ethnic and racial identity in a way analogous to Cornel West’s description of whiteness in dominant American culture as “a politically constructed category parasitic on “Blackness.” As West exemplifies,

... European immigrants arrived on American shores perceiving themselves as “Irish,” “Sicilian,” “Lithuanian,” etc. They had to learn that they were “White” principally by adopting an American discourse of positively-valued Whiteness and negatively-charged Blackness.<sup>47</sup>

It should be no surprise that Ricky’s ethnicity is most at issue in connection with his fatherhood. Having established its whiteness in “Lucy Goes to the Hospital,” later *I Love Lucy* shows construct Ricky’s ethnicity along similar lines, as a specific variety of whiteness. Thus in “Ricky Loses His Temper” (episode 85), Lucy remarks playfully that “I should never have married a hot-blooded Cuban; I should have married a cold-blooded Swede.” In “Tennessee Bound” (episode 112), he edges closer to the center, being less strongly marked in terms of ethnicity than the Ricardos’ friend Tennessee Ernie Ford.

It is worth noting that the continued absence of Lucy, as the incarnation of white maternity, plays an important function in stabilizing these dominant discourses of race, ethnicity and gender. Although, or rather because she is not present, the episode’s narrative and signification are focused around her. In “Lucy Goes to the Hospital,” as in Eisenhower’s inaugural speech, white maternity is the absent center that stabilizes the discursive construction of a white, masculinized America. We will now move forward to consider the implications of the destabilization of white maternity for these discourses, as exemplified by the *Murphy Brown*/Dan Quayle controversy

## MURPHY BROWN: IT TAKES MORE THAN PRACTICE AND ESTROGEN SUPPLEMENTS TO MAKE "A NATURAL WOMAN"

As we have seen, what was not at issue in the media, nor apparently for the vast majority of the television audience, was the status of Lucille Ball as a working mother. Thirty-eight years later the representation of the fictional reporter Murphy Brown's decision to have a baby outside marriage and to retain her professional career attracted the attention of Vice President Dan Quayle. Quayle's response to Murphy's pregnancy and giving birth in May 1992 generated front-page reportage in national newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and figured as the lead item on ABC's *World News Tonight*. This media spectacle was in turn utilized in a later episode of the sit-com which explicitly took on the Vice President's comments and defended Murphy's decision.

What causes the major difference between these two spectacles of pregnancy is a historical shift in discourses of gender. Between the battle of the sexes format of *I Love Lucy* and the arguably post-feminist treatment of working single motherhood as pre-eminently a gender issue in *Murphy Brown* lies an explicit politicization of notions of femininity. This is not to deny the political importance of representations of femininity up to the 1950s, but to emphasize the importance of women's movements and those who oppose them in producing overtly politicized discourses of gender.

It is therefore important to consider the media spectacle of Murphy Brown's pregnancy in the context of these pro- and anti-feminist discourses as disseminated in both television culture and the mass media generally. Feminist work by Patricia Mellencamp, Tania Modleski, Susan J. Douglas, Bonnie J. Dow, and others has demonstrated clearly the connections between the political, social, and cultural activity of women's movement(s) and mainstream media representations of women from the 1960s to the present day.<sup>48</sup> In the most sustained and relevant of this work, Dow positions *Murphy Brown* specifically on a historical trajectory of the use of feminist ideas in situation comedy. It was, she points out, one of the first 1990s shows to be marketed and consumed explicitly as "a sitcom with feminist implications," as opposed to dealing simply with a gendered consciousness.<sup>49</sup> However, for Dow, the particular strategic uses made of feminist ideas in *Murphy Brown* articulate what has become known as "postfeminism." The nub of this critique is what Dow shows is the show's elision of radical feminist critiques of gender roles, while articulating only the liberal feminist demand for equal entry into the public sphere of work. As a result, Murphy is presented as being masculinized by her pursuit of success in a competitive environment. Either by choice or accident, she lacks both knowledge of childbirth and truly feminine "maternal instincts," and it is out of these lacks that the show generates its major comic effects. Therefore, Dow regards Murphy Brown (the character) as "postfeminism personified," comparing unfavorably with the more challenging representations in a show such as *Designing Women*.<sup>50</sup>

Dow's account of the uses made of feminism in *Murphy Brown* is clearly both accurate and telling. What we would like to add is a sense of its postfeminism as being constituted slightly differently in relation to the two spheres of domesticity and biology. Throughout the run of the series, Murphy Brown embodies a femininity that no longer has to seek the *Lucy* narrative of identity outside domesticity, because her status as a productive worker is never under question on gender grounds. In simple terms, Murphy is presented as an "honorary male" in her workplace. Her struggles for recognition are framed by a simple demand for equal treatment given equal ability. Even when the show deals with personal (familial, or biological) themes, these are either presented as temporary add-ons to her professional work (as with the isolated stirrings of her maternal feelings in shows five and six, "Murphy's Pony" and "Baby Love"), or in terms of their potentially disruptive relation to her career. Thus, for example, even when Murphy's difficult relationship with her mother (herself a forceful single parent) is brought into view in "Brown Like Me" (episodes 32-33; originally a double episode), this is narrated primarily through its raising of complications for Murphy's receipt of a journalism award. In this way the show established its postfeminist credentials by erasing the pre-feminist distinction between private and public, while at the same time refusing pro-feminist essentialism by deferring the issue of biology. Murphy is never presented as being contained within either the professional or the personal worlds. She epitomises a successful working through of postfeminism, but only so long as she remains a working woman, rather than a working mother.

The pregnancy and birth scenario raised the question of the importance of reproductive biology in defining femininity. The show presents this issue by using the already familiar strategy of framing "personal" issues within Murphy's professional life, here via an attempt to portray her as becoming a mother without becoming defined by maternity. But because, as Dow points out, the show lacks a feminist critique of gender roles, the femininity associated with Murphy Brown is modelled on dominant notions of dynamic American individualism which are themselves determined by masculinity. However dynamic or open this individualism can be made to seem, without a feminist critique of gender roles it remains bounded by masculinity and therefore closed to maternal femininity. Accordingly, Murphy demonstrates her manliness by working right through her pregnancy, overcoming the ways in which her "natural" body interferes with her ability to fulfill the role of an autonomous, self-directed and productive worker. Murphy's giving birth is thus a crux for the show's postfeminism, since the honorary masculinity through which she has so far been represented, and which enables her to traverse the realms of domesticity and biology without becoming defined by them, clearly becomes inadequate at this point. As her co-worker Corky states in the episode following the birth, Murphy will make a good mother, given "a little practice [pause] and estrogen supplements." Murphy's passage from pregnancy to maternity is thus constructed in terms of the tension between

the “new” liberated femininity modelled on traditionally masculinized working activity, and “old” femininity determined by maternity.

In “Birth 101,” the concluding episode of the 1991-92 season of *Murphy Brown*, this tension is made visible by the strong antithesis which is represented between the body about to give birth and the professional world of work. The show locates Murphy’s body on a continuum between the uncontrollable and the monstrous. In an early scene a live interview is interrupted by Murphy’s water breaking, while she later complains that lactation “is like one day suddenly you find that you can get bacon out of your elbow.” Grossly antifeminist readings are discouraged by the show’s history of building episodes around sympathetic treatments of Murphy’s on/off desire for children, starting with the sixth show, and the ways in which during the season the Murphy character has pointed to the difficulties presented by the masculinised work environment to pregnancy and maternity. For example, near the beginning of “Birth 101” Murphy’s executive producer Miles is made to sing “Blue Moon” to the studio crew as payback for questioning her ability to work while pregnant. Nevertheless, the diametrically opposed models of femininity invoked by the episode open up spaces for contradictory readings. Murphy’s difficulties could make sense according to anti-feminist beliefs in the incompatibility of work and maternity, if not of work and femininity altogether, or could serve to underline pro-feminist critiques of the failure to organize work to accommodate human reproduction.

The representation of Murphy’s labor and giving birth in “Birth 101” calls for a resolution of the tensions between these contradictory notions of female identity. The major way in which the episode resolves this antithesis between Murphy as worker/masculine/new woman and Murphy as mother/feminine/natural woman is through the deployment of constructions of racial identity, in particular the binary of blackness/whiteness.

While there are continuities between the functioning of race/ethnicity in the episodes of *I Love Lucy* discussed above and in *Murphy Brown*, the 1990s show must be seen in the light of two significant historical developments: first, the major shifts in the kinds of African American stereotypes and their deployment on television generally since the 1950s; second, and relatedly, the ways in which avowedly liberal shows such as *Murphy Brown* and, for example *ER*, *Designing Women*, and *Spin City* can be seen to have a casting policy which reflects a multicultural agenda.

Identifying this general shift, critical work on television by J. Fred MacDonald and Herman Gray has traced a progressive if uneven movement from negative stereotypes such as the mammy and the coon to the present situation. Currently black-centered situation comedies such as *Cosby*, and *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* feature strong and positive characterizations and are prime-time, networked shows. In contrast, Gray states,

In the televisual world of the early 1950s, the social and cultural roles of race relations between blacks and whites were

explicit: black otherness was required for white subjectivity;  
 blacks and whites occupied separate and unequal worlds . . .  
 black humor was necessary for the amusement of whites.<sup>51</sup>

Here Gray outlines in general terms the structure of racial representation within which the use of blackface to denote otherness operates to confirm Ricky Ricardo's status as "white." *I Love Lucy* also conforms to the separation of blacks and whites into separate worlds noted by Gray, seeking to sanitize its use of blackness as otherness by connoting blackness through the use of blackface rather than presenting it directly via an African American character. Black-centered programs such as *Cosby* and *Fresh Prince* are clearly able to break decisively with such structures of meaning. However, the representation of non-whites on white-centered shows remains to some extent defined by these structures. While the presence of African Americans in prime-time sit-coms is undoubtedly more numerically representative, the types of roles played and their narrative significance retain some elements of the structure of meaning defined by Gray. As MacDonald has pointed out, "In the main, white centred sitcoms are still void of meaningful minority presence."<sup>52</sup> While agreeing with MacDonald in the sense that "meaningful" denotes substantial, we will show how the meanings generated by the representations of African Americans in *Murphy Brown* are nearer to those of the 1950s than might be supposed from the show's avowed social liberalism.

While Murphy is in the hospital in "Birth 101" she is attended by four medical staff, all of whom are female: two white nurses who ensure her comfort in the early stages of labor, and two African Americans: the doctor who delivers the baby and another nurse who brings in the baby for Murphy's (and the audience's) first sight of it.<sup>53</sup> All of these are marked as being different than Murphy. All four speak with colloquial or ethnically marked accents, and all four are presented as possessing knowledge about childbirth and child-rearing that Murphy lacks. The first nurse explains the fetal monitor belt worn by Murphy and the machine that monitors it, and later describes Murphy's lack of readiness for birth in the context of the 7,000 other patients she has seen. The second treats Murphy with bluntness, calling her to "giddy up" and put on the birthing stirrups. In the case of both of these nurses it is strongly implied that their knowledge comes from experience and character, though it is also articulated as a kind of "earthiness" associated with a certain stereotype of working-class identity. Like the white nurses, the African Americans are presented as possessing knowledge Murphy lacks, but unlike them this knowledge is not accounted for in these ways. We would suggest that such characterizations were not perceived as necessary because the African American nurses are positioned in proximity to birthing and the natural by the echo of earlier stereotypes. This reading can be substantiated by a closer attention to the deployment of racial representations on this episode. In what follows then we will try to show how the representations of African Americans here, and also the subsequent attention focused on the episode by Dan Quayle, are part of a complex negotiation between whiteness and national identity.

In *Watching Race* Herman Gray describes three emblematic instances of 1990s media representations of blackness. Since each of these is highly useful for understanding *Murphy Brown* we quote at some length:

First are representations that excavate or mine a racial past on which the twin operations of desire and nostalgia are enacted. Second are representations and constructions that offer blackness as mediation “among and between” whiteness, mediations that are underwritten by processes of repression and selection. And third are those representations, staged as spectacle, that disarticulate blackness from social and sociological locations as struggles over power and challenges to structured racial and gender inequality.<sup>54</sup>

Gray’s understanding of the first and second modes of representation can be used to explicate “Birth 101,” while the rebuttal episode to Dan Quayle’s attack utilizes the third mode, that of spectacle.

Without doubt the representation of the African American nurse and doctor as healthcare professionals is an example of both the generally progressive history and the specific liberal casting agenda described above. Yet set against this is the way in which these characters function in the episode, which is primarily symbolic in creating a feminized world of child delivery and *childcare*, a world which crucially Murphy can enter and move through because it is codified in terms of blackness. This is made most explicit in a scene shortly after the birth itself where the African American nurse acts as a foil for Murphy’s comic lack of maternal knowledge. The nurse is silent and out of shot while Murphy asks her a series of questions which locate the white woman as ignorant and the black woman as knowledgeable about children. “There are so many things I need to know,” says Murphy, “Is he too young to watch television? If he doesn’t grow any teeth is there a number I can call? If I don’t come up with a name for him in, say, a year, is that a very bad thing?” Throughout this monologue the camera shot frames mother and baby, excluding the nurse who never gets a chance to demonstrate her knowledge or explain where it comes from. The cut to a wider shot in which she comes into view barely takes place before she delivers the only response she is allowed, “You’re so funny,” and leaves.

The professional status of the African American doctor is also undercut. Her delivery of Murphy’s baby is set up but not shown. Instead, the first sight of the baby is when the African American nurse wheels it into the room for Murphy to hold. A sense of Dr. Barton’s professional expertise is further undermined by her need to enlist the help of Eldin, Murphy’s housepainter and Lamaze coach during the birth. His singing of “Chantilly Lace” all but drowns out her commands to Murphy. It may be that the show offers African American viewers some satisfactions from seeing black women as possessing knowledge as women and

as trained medical professionals, especially in the case of the doctor, whose representation can scarcely help calling to mind the profession chosen for Bill Cosby in the *Cosby Show*.<sup>55</sup> However, the narrative marginalization of both African American characters necessitates that this would be a reading against the grain. Their primary function in the hospital scenes is to mine a nostalgia for maternal femininity that has as historical points of reference the black woman looking after the white child, and the associated stereotype of the mammy.

Taking up the second strategy described by Gray, Dr. Barton and the nurse can be seen to mediate between incarnations of whiteness here in two ways. In the literal sense they mediate between Murphy's body and the baby by delivering it from her and to her. Both literally and symbolically, they mediate and explain the baby to her, give her the knowledge of maternity (and therefore the "right" kind of femininity) that enables her to become a mother. Of course, as Gray points out, this second strategy no less than the first is dependent on selective processes—here an association of African American femininity with natural maternity, which represses the past history of the mammy stereotype on which the association is predicated.<sup>56</sup> The racialization of the world of childbirth naturalizes it in such a way that Murphy can move into and through it. White femininity is thereby constructed as fluid and mobile, most at home in the world of media professionalism, but able to traverse the space of childbirth, coded as "natural" and "black."

This episode ends with Murphy singing to her baby words from the song "(You make me feel like) A Natural Woman." At the end of the song the camera zooms in on Murphy with the baby in her arms. He extends his hand towards Murphy who then turns dewy-eyed and naturalized, to look directly to camera. Co-written and originally performed by the white singer-songwriter Carole King, whose long hair, apparent lack of make-up, and long flowing dresses encoded another kind of naturalness in the 1960s, this song is primarily associated with Aretha Franklin. White viewers and critics have noted the conservatism of this construction, querying why it should be that a woman is required to produce a baby before she can be natural.<sup>57</sup> It seems to us at least as problematic that the terms in which such associations of naturalness are encoded are racial ones.

### WHOSE POVERTY? WHOSE VALUES?

In spite of the strategies outlined above which served to renaturalize Murphy as a good mother, the representation of her maternity could never be acceptable to Dan Quayle because there was no father to her baby. This suggests that for Quayle and those who agreed with him the strategic deployment of racial representations might have been able to naturalize the working mother, but it could not serve to validate single motherhood. During the spring and summer of 1992, *Murphy Brown* became linked with the discourses of "family values" that were becoming a political hot potato during the early stages of that year's presidential campaign. On May 19, 1992, the day after "Birth 101" was aired, the Vice President touched off a general media furor by singling out *Murphy Brown*



as one of the cultural representations adding to a contemporary moral crisis. In a speech to the Commonwealth Club of California during the Bush/Quayle campaign for re-election, Quayle set out to explain the recent disturbances in Los Angeles. Ultimate responsibility for the L.A. riots, he implied, was a “poverty of values” among “Black Americans,” and especially the irresponsibility of poor single mothers. He went on to add

It doesn't help matters when prime time TV has *Murphy Brown*—a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid, professional woman—mocking the importance of fathers, by bearing a child alone and calling it just another “lifestyle choice.”<sup>58</sup>

Although this was something of an aside in a speech whose primary purpose was to hold blue-collar African American single mothers responsible for the Los Angeles riots/uprising, it was Quayle's remarks about *Murphy Brown* that made the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *World News Tonight*. Further media coverage followed, including attempts by the White House press spokesperson Marlin Fitzwater to ameliorate Quayle's remarks, and feminist interventions as by Diane English (creator and producer of *Murphy Brown*) who argued that if he meant what he said Quayle ought to support abortion rights.<sup>59</sup>

As Bonnie J. Dow and John Fiske have pointed out, the construction of the issue in the current affairs media proceeded according to different imperatives than Quayle's original speech. Dow puts this effectively:

Media emphasis on the “Murphy Brown angle” transformed a vicious attack on poor, presumably black (given the emphasis on the inner cities and the L.A. riots) women into a debate about Hollywood liberalism and middle-class morality, and the constitution of the nuclear family.<sup>60</sup>

Fiske elaborates further, placing the Quayle/Brown media event in the context of critiques of the continuation of covert racism within an ostensibly post-racist (because post-civil rights) culture developed by theorists such as Herman Gray, Stuart Hall, Edward Said, and Toni Morrison.<sup>61</sup> Dow and Fiske further claim that the sit-com's noted direct response to Quayle aired as the premiere episode of the 1992 fall season to maintain the use of this frame of debate. Utilizing what Fiske calls “nonracist racism” the “reply” episode of *Murphy Brown* “foregrounds gender and marginalizes or silences race.”<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Dow argues that despite its topicality, the show in general elides issues of “male responsibility, female solidarity, sexual politics, and the significant differences in women's experiences and problems created by race, class, and sexual identity.”<sup>63</sup> In this program, entitled “You say potatoe, I say potato,” the Murphy character is shown watching

footage of Quayle's speech and goes on to defend her actions and to directly address the issues of the alleged glamorization of single motherhood and definitions of the family. The episode closes with a parade of non-"standard" families, some of whom are African American, though, as Dow says, predominantly white,<sup>64</sup> and also likely to be read as heterosexual.

While Fiske and Dow can be seen to identify certain elements of *Murphy Brown*'s mode of signification, as our discussion of "Birth 101" implies, the show manipulates gender and ethnicity/race in more complex ways than they suggest directly. Rather than simply silencing race, *Murphy Brown* strategically manipulates blackness in order to secure its representation of white maternity. Needless to say, such a procedure effectively silences certain racial identities while preserving dominant white control of the category of race itself.

This strategy is maintained and significantly revised in the "You say potatoe" episode. Quayle's invocation of explicitly negative notions of black maternity made it impossible for *Murphy Brown* to use black maternity to accomplish the same symbolic work for which it was used in "Birth 101." Neither does the show spring to the defense of black single mothers. Instead, images of African Americans continue to be manipulated in the service of white politics as in the previous episode. These representations are denied narrative agency, and with it access to social and political agency. Instead, the show instances of the third kind of racial representation described by Herman Gray—that of staging race as a spectacle. In its climactic scene, a few African American families are displayed in the studio to shore up Murphy's personal defense against Quayle's criticisms. Viewers (of *Murphy Brown* and the implied viewers of *FYI*, the fictive news show for which she works) are given no information about them whatsoever, except in one or two instances their names, so have no way of placing them in terms of sexuality or class. This is in keeping with the episode as a whole, which uses avowedly postfeminist or even prefeminist strategies to counter Quayle. Rather than opening up the political questions of race and gender suggested by Quayle's initial attack on single mothers, the whole impetus of "You say potatoe . . ." is to stigmatize Quayle in particular and the news media in general for daring to drag into politics what *Murphy Brown* presents as the personal and *private* lifestyle choices of its fictional heroine.

The narrative of the episode is quite simple. Murphy's house and the *FYI* studios are under siege from journalists. Murphy initially seeks to avoid the publicity generated by Quayle's attack and is eventually persuaded to use her slot on *FYI* to respond. In an extended early scene in her bedroom, Eldin persuades her to go public in order to deal with the legions of reporters camped permanently outside, in the face of Murphy's stated preference for escaping into a 1956 copy of *Life* magazine, which coincidentally dates back to the pre-feminist and pre-media saturation conditions of the prime-time run of *I Love Lucy*. As if to spell out the issue, Murphy initially contends, "He's a baby, not a political statement," going on to ask rhetorically "Why can't I just get the time to know him without fifteen million people watching. Why can't they just leave us alone?" Having

been persuaded to respond, Murphy broaches the subject of blame for America's "social ills" to imply that Quayle was seeking to divert responsibility from possible targets such as the media and Congress, the administration of which he was a part, onto (not blue-collar African American single mothers, who are not mentioned), but simply, "me."

Now it could be argued that *Murphy Brown* is deploying a sophisticated strategy here, whereby political points are smuggled in behind a display of reluctance. Such an argument might stress the ambiguity of Murphy's "me," taking it to refer to a composite of Murphy Brown/Candice Bergen/Diane English, who occupy the position of the "real" in differentiation from the "media" stigmatized in her speech, and whose predatory operations are represented throughout the episode. Even were this the case, however, this strategy depends on appropriating images of African Americans in the defense of white middle-class privilege. By coupling the use of normalizing images of African Americans with a discourse that rejects politicization in the name of the sanctity of privacy, the episode goes further than merely dissolving racial difference and reinscribing white centrality. This is not simply marginalization but appropriation.

*Murphy Brown* can therefore be seen to follow not only Quayle's appropriation of notions of black identity but also the subsequent displacement in the current affairs media of Quayle's scapegoating of African American single mothers to media representations of professional white single mothers. Certainly one reason for this was the emphasis it placed on the importance of the show itself. It would have been hard to resist the ensuing publicity after a single paragraph, an aside in a speech that had put *Murphy Brown* on the front page and arguably at the center of debates over national identity during the 1992 presidential campaign. But there were also more complex reasons for this omission that were governed by the ways in which *Murphy Brown* represents gender and race, and the wider political context. At the base of this complexity was the status of black single motherhood both within the show's own textual system and in official politics.

The importance of the "family values" issue in the 1992 campaign demonstrates that Dan Quayle was not alone in raising the "problem" of inner-city poverty only to displace its resolution onto the sphere of morality. *Murphy Brown* operated little differently in this respect than the Republican and Democrat party campaign machines. Similarly, within televisual signification, it is apparent that there has been little space for positive representations of black working mothers who are single. Again, *Murphy Brown* is little out of the ordinary in being unable to find terms to represent these mothers, except as the "real-life" figures who are placed at the end of the "You say potatoe . . ." narrative.

What was specific about the representation of race in "You say potatoe . . ." was its overdetermination by the uses made of blackness in "Birth 101." Murphy's ability to rebut Quayle depends upon the combination of her skills as a professional investigative reporter with her newly acquired maternal status, in

which her ability to synthesize the personal and the professional is again what empowers her. As we have seen, Murphy's status as a good mother was constructed in "Birth 101" through the symbolic use of black femininity working hand in hand with positively defined images of black women. To introduce the negative associations of black maternity invoked by Quayle, even in order to contest them, would be to accept the debatable status of real African American women and thereby undercut the symbolic association of blackness, femininity, and the natural. Thus any intervention made by *Murphy Brown* in the larger political debate is constrained by the show's internal economy of race and gender.

As with *I Love Lucy* then, in *Murphy Brown* maternity is again the site where national identity is constructed. Unlike *Lucy*, in which the symbolic significance of white motherhood was unproblematically assured, in part by what we have called the notion of productive maternity, in *Murphy Brown* it needed to be guaranteed. As we have shown, the presence of whiteness and femininity together is not enough to stabilize itself or national identity in a postfeminist context. In fact, the "You say potatoe . . ." episode resolves the national debate about family values by redefining the professional, working mother as its natural arbiter. Murphy's answer to Quayle is validated through her bringing together two kinds of value derived from her double status as professional investigative reporter and as mother. She seeks after truth while he is a Vice President who can't even spell. She has real experience and understanding because she is a mother who works to provide economic and emotional support for her child, whereas he is a male politician incapable of experiencing childbirth. In terms of this economy of value it is Murphy's motherliness that is crucial. This position of valued maternity is not in itself explicitly ethnically marked, but, as we have seen, it is constructed for whiteness by the systematic invocation and repression of blackness.

It is finally the combination of her private and public roles that allow Brown to take the high ground. In this sense *Murphy Brown* reinterprets the 1970s feminist slogan "the personal is political" in a highly essentialized way. Brown is represented as winning a strategic victory in the political debate on family values because of her personal experience of maternity. As is made clear by the later comments of Rush Limbaugh and other contributors to the subsequent controversies over family values and cultural representations, without this experience Brown could not have entered the debate. John Fiske has pointed out that Limbaugh's appeal to common sense succeeds in ridiculing theories and political platforms by defining them in contrast to "experience."<sup>65</sup> Both authoritative positions, Limbaugh's *common* sense and Murphy's experiential authority, depend on the manipulation and repression of ethnic and racial difference.

In conclusion then, while the advent and the working through of feminism has resulted in a shift in the terms of representation of white maternity between *I Love Lucy* and *Murphy Brown*, it continues to occupy substantially the same cultural space and is called upon to perform similar cultural work. Notions of white maternity were crucial in defining American identity for both Eisenhower and Quayle. The former invoked feminin-

ity as a structuring absence, while the vice president was unable to discuss African American single mothers in poverty without raising the subject of mainstream representations of white middle-class single mothers. Undoubtedly, between these two moments feminism has drawn attention to the construction of gendered identities. What also needs to be understood are the ways in which the progressive trajectory in representations of women is qualified by two things. In these sit-coms and in political rhetoric, white maternity remains symbolically important to a sense of the nation. Additionally, images of femininity both as symbolizing the nation and as representing real women continue to depend upon the strategic manipulation of representations of race and ethnicity.

## NOTES

1. For most readers Eisenhower's first inaugural is most easily found at <http://griolier.com>. Subsequent quotations are also from this site.
2. Dan Quayle, "Restoring Basic Values: Strengthening the Family," in John Fiske, *Media Matters: Everyday Culture and Political Change* (Minneapolis, 1994), 68-9; 69.
3. Annette Kuhn, "Women's Genres: Melodrama, Soap Opera, and Theory" *Screen* 25 (Spring 1984), 18-28; Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago, 1992); Bonnie J. Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement Since 1970* (Philadelphia, 1996); Patricia Mellencamp, *High Anxiety: Catastrophe, Scandal, Age and Comedy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1992); Ien Eng (trans. D. Couling) *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London, 1985); William Boddy, "Archaeologies of Electronic Vision and the Gendered Spectator," *Screen* 35 (Summer 1994), 105-122; and Charlotte Brunson, *Screen Tastes: Soap Opera to Satellite Dishes* (London and New York, 1997), Chapter 12 of which (189-198) broaches from a slightly different perspective some of the issues addressed below. It should be noted that many of these critics have in later work not only assessed some of the limitations of a focus on female spectatorship but also suggested useful ways of continuing feminist work in this and in other directions.
4. On the links between women, television and national culture from the 1950s, see in particular Cecilia Tichi, *Electronic Hearth: Creating an American Television Culture* (Oxford and New York, 1991), and Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1994).
5. See, for example, Richard Dyer, *White* (London and New York, 1997); Michelle Fine et.al.(eds) *Off White: Readings on Race, Power, and Society* (London, 1997); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991); Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London, 1992); and Frankenberg quoted below.
6. Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (London and New York, 1993), 6.
7. Dyer, *White*, 29.
8. Karal Ann Marling has shown how Mamie Eisenhower's appearance at the inaugural functioned to embody new modes of consumption for women, especially via the Americanization (and democratization) of the New Look, in ways which complemented and reinforced the political mode of address of her husband. See Marling, "Mamie Eisenhower and the New Look," *As Seen on TV*, 9-49.
9. Ricky Ricardo (played by Desi Arnaz) sings and plays the drums in the house band of the nightclub that he also manages.
10. Attention is drawn to the use of children's book style titles in Patricia Mellencamp, "Situation Comedy, Feminism and Freud: Discourses of Gracie and Lucy," in Tania Modleski (ed.), *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1986), 80-95; 88.
11. The means by which the episode secures a reading of the pregnancy and birth as natural and normal will be analyzed below.
12. Bart Andrews, *The 'I Love Lucy' Book* (New York, 1985), 101, 104.
13. *Ibid.*, 94, 104.

14. *Ibid.*, 106, 115.
15. Coyne Steven Sanders and Tom Gilbert, *Desilu: The Story of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz* (New York, 1993), 69.
16. Sanders and Gilbert, *Desilu*, 69; Lucille Ball, with Betty Hannah Hoffman, *Love, Lucy* (New York, 1996), 222.
17. Jack Gould, "Radio and Television: Nearing Birth of (?) Arnaz Is Engendering Interest of the Fans of 'I Love Lucy'," *New York Times*, January 16, 1953, sec. 1, 29.
18. Andrews, *I Love Lucy*, 92-3.
19. See Andrews, *I Love Lucy*, 98, Sanders and Gilbert, *Desilu*, 66, and the more detailed account in Desi Arnaz, *A Book* (New York, 1976), 281.
20. Gould, "Birth," 29.
21. Andrews, *I Love Lucy*, 105.
22. *T.V. Guide* Vol. 1 No. 1, April 3-9, 1953, cover, 5-7. Andrews compares the \$50 million estimate with the \$3 million a year earned by contemporary Hopalong Cassidy promotions, which was regarded as successful. See Andrews, *I Love Lucy*, 108.
23. Interview quoted in Sanders and Gilbert, *Desilu*, 68; Ball, *Love, Lucy*, 203, 212-3.
24. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, 1988), 141-2.
25. Marling, *As Seen on TV*, 50.
26. See in particular Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York, 1992), and Mary Beth Haralovich, "Sit-coms and Suburbs: Positioning the 1950s Homemaker," in Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann (eds), *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer* (Minneapolis, 1992), 111-41.
27. As Tichi, Marling, and May have pointed out.
28. Broadcast remark attributed to Walter Winchell in Andrews, *I Love Lucy*, 106, and in Ball, *Love, Lucy*, 222.
29. Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (New York, 1982), 109. See also Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower the President* (New York, 1984), 37.
30. Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 37.
31. Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 31-7.
32. On the use of television and newly developed advertising techniques by Eisenhower and Nixon during the 1952 campaign, see David Halberstam, *The Fifties*, (New York, 1993), Chapter 17, 224-42. Eisenhower hired Rosser Reeves, Head of the Ted Bates advertising agency, who decisively repackaged the campaign in advertising "spots," in contrast to Adlai Stevenson's retention of the half-hour speech format.
33. Spigel, *Make Room, Boddy*, "Archeologies"; full references given above.
34. Quoted in Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York and Oxford, 1980), 440.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 43.
38. Mellencamp, "Situation Comedy, Feminism, and Freud," 81, 95. This analysis is revised and expanded in *High Anxiety*, 315-353.
39. Ackerman quoted in Andrews, *I Love Lucy*, 93.
40. Part of the reason for this concentration was that, as Andrews points out, because of Ball's absence on pregnancy leave, the five episodes immediately following Little Ricky's birth took the form of flashbacks to a time before Lucy was pregnant. Also, gradually after the birth the importance and the screen time devoted to Little Ricky and to Lucy's status as a mother was decreased, and the foundational premise of the show reasserted itself. If nothing else, the "battle of the sexes" format predicated on the tension between husband and wife provided more comic potential than the split between Lucy's individualistic desires and her maternal responsibilities.
41. According to Bart Andrews (*I Love Lucy*, 265), Ricky's tribute to his alma mater is based on the Notre Dame Victory song.
42. Gould, "Birth," 29.
43. Mellencamp, "Situation Comedy," 89-90; Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*, 331-3.
44. For a suggestive but tantalizingly brief reading of the birth narrative as a means of conferring the status of full assimilation upon Ricky Ricardo, see May, *Homeward Bound*, 146.
45. No doubt a defense of the utilization of the Voodoo stereotype could be mounted by distinguishing, on the one hand, between its direct signification of African or Afro-Caribbean identity, and, on the other hand, as simply an exaggerated signifier of ethnicity. We reject such a defense on several grounds, including that its signifying function as described below depends on a slippage between both of these modes.

46. As if to reassure white audiences of the whiteness of the Ricardo baby, it is shown in long shot with triplets newly born to an Irish-American father.

47. Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," in Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West (eds), *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990), 19-36; 29.

48. Mellencamp, *High Anxiety*; Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age* (New York and London, 1991); Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media* (New York, 1994); Dow, *Prime-Time*.

49. Dow, *Prime-Time*, 137.

50. *Ibid.*

51. Herman Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for "Blackness"* (Minneapolis and London, 1995), 74-5.

52. J. Fred MacDonald *Blacks and White TV: African Americans in Television since 1948* (Chicago, Second Edition 1992), 273.

53. There is also a third white nurse in a non-speaking role who is visible in a few shots standing near Murphy's head during the birth.

54. Gray, *Watching Race*, 166.

55. On this see Herman Gray, "The Endless Slide of Difference: Critical Television Studies, Television, and the Question of Race," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 10 (June 1993), 190-7; 195, and Fiske, *Media Matters*, 40-41.

56. See Jude Davies and Carol Smith, *Gender, Ethnicity and Sexuality in Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Edinburgh, 1997) for discussion of a parallel instance in which the deployment of the stereotype of the "buck" underpins the attempt to utilize a positive image of an African American lawyer (played by Denzel Washington) in *Philadelphia*.

57. See Dow, *Prime-Time*, 152, 162-3.

58. Dan Quayle, "Restoring Basic Values: Strengthening the Family," in Fiske, *Media Matters*, 68-9.

59. The media coverage is well documented in Fiske, *Media Matters*, 21-74, and Dow, *Prime-Time*, 153-4.

60. Dow, *Prime-Time*, 154.

61. Fiske, *Media Matters*, Chapter 1: Murphy Brown, Dan Quayle, and the Family Row of the Year, 21-74; 36, 38-9 and passim.

62. Fiske, *Media Matters*, 39.

63. Dow, *Prime-Time*, 160.

64. *Ibid.*, 156.

65. Rush Limbaugh's comments on *Murphy Brown* are reproduced and discussed in Fiske, *Media Matters*, 28-31.