NORMAN LEAR AND THE SPIRITUAL POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERALISM

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Division of Religion,

Drew University, in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree,

Doctor of Philosophy

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Madison, New Jersey

April 2016

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ABSTRACT

“Norman Lear and the Spiritual Politics of Religious Liberalism”

Ph.D. Dissertation by

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Graduate Division of Religion
Drew University April 2016

This dissertation explores the life and thought of television writer and producer Norman Lear through his career in media. Lear was both the creator of situation comedies such as *All in the Family* and *Maude* during the 1970s and a non—profit activist who founded People for the American Way (PFAW) in the early 1980s. I argue that Lear’s movements throughout this period help us understand three larger religio—political developments of the recent American past: the political mobilization of religious liberalism, the creation of the Christian Right, and the culture wars themselves. Contributing the first systematic treatment of Lear’s lectures, published and unpublished writings, personal papers, and television programs, this dissertation presents Lear’s influence on American public life as a distinct contribution to the longer history of American religious liberalism in a spiritual key. In fact, I argue that Lear’s career in media can be understood as a form of spiritual liberalism, one that recognized the Protestant heritage of religious liberalism, but added its own Jewish and spirit—centered formulations as “a life lived in the spirit.” Lear’s career in media also demonstrates a commitment to protecting liberal democracy and its subsequent regulation of diversity through the separation of church and state and the freedom of speech and religious practice found in the first amendment. Despite adhering to such liberal principles in the public square, however, Lear’s activism was ultimately not capable of recognizing televangelist speech as protected speech due to its at times incendiary and

divisive character. As such, I argue that Lear's activism illustrates the contradictions within liberal democracy itself in its attempts to celebrate, yet regulate, the very diversity it relies on for its own notions of civic vitality. This dissertation thus demonstrates how Lear's spiritual activism not only appeared on *All in the Family*, but also in his published correspondences with American presidents and his linguistic contributions to the discursive formation of the Christian Right and the electronic church.

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CHAPTER ONE
Introduction

In 1984, *Harper's* magazine hosted a spirited discussion between renowned television producer, writer, and creator Norman Lear and President Ronald Reagan. "Dear Mr. President," the letter began, "I am deeply troubled by what seems to be an endorsement of the so—called Christian Nation movement in many of your recent speeches. While I fully respect (and would fight to protect) your right to whatever spiritual and religious beliefs you prefer, I am concerned that you not use the office of the presidency as Evangelist in Chief or to further the notion that any particular group of Americans is to be accorded special standing because it practices any religion." Lear willingly accepted the fact that Americans, including the President himself, had the constitutional right to express themselves freely, yet he was hesitant to admit that conservative political religions were not attempting to curtail the very same individual liberties in an act of tyranny. "Mr. President," Lear elaborated, "without freedom *from* religion we could have no freedom *of* religion."[1]

The President's prompt response assured Lear that he had no intention of representing what Lear called "the Christian Nation movement" in any of his social policy decisions. "I certainly do not support the notion that any group of citizens is to be accorded special standing 'because it practices any religion,'" Reagan responded. "The goal of our nation must always be to achieve the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with an orderly society." Reagan's words proved quite prescient since his notion of an "orderly society," and the values and ethics through which it could be realized, would contribute to defining two very important shifts in late twentieth—century America: the emergence of the culture wars as both idea and social

[1] Norman Lear and Ronald Reagan, "A Debate on Religious Freedom," *Harper's* (Oct 1984), 15—20.

phenomenon, and the terms of a new conservative consensus.[2] More importantly, the discussion between Lear and Reagan spoke to the impact of Southern California and the larger Sunbelt on postwar American religious life as understood from the soundstages and writing rooms of Hollywood, California— what one anthropologist called the Dream Factory.[3] The disagreements between Lear and Reagan were clear, yet nevertheless dramatic, as a former television writer went head—to—head with a former actor over the terms of the orderly society itself in a pivotal moment in late twentieth—century America.

Research Problem and Argument

Lear's disagreement with Reagan was the product of nearly a decade of organizing and activism in defense of what he would later call, "the American Way."[4] Lear had been on the collective radar of conservative activists, journalists, and organizers since the premiere of his 1971 hit situation comedy *All in the Family.* Despite the inclusion of the word "family" in the show's title, the show eventually faced virulent criticism for its naive or "indecent" material by some of conservatism's most well respected names including writer William Buckley and later evangelist Jerry Falwell.[5] In fact, Falwell would declare Lear to be the "number one enemy of the family" in America during the show's run on CBS. This difference in opinion helpfully illuminates the contested character of the American family and the ways in which liberals and

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[2] For more, see Jeffrey K. Hadden, "Clergy Involvement in Civil Rights," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 387 (January 1970), 119.

[3] For more, see Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood, the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie—Makers* (New York, NY: Martino Fine Books, 2013 — reprint, 1950). For more on California's liberal religious cultures in contemporary settings, see Eileen Luhr, "Seeker, Surfer, Yogi: The Progressive Religious Imagination and the Cultural Politics of Place in Encinitas, California," *American Quarterly* 67:4 (Dec 2015), 1169—1193.

[4] Wendy Wall, *Inventing the "American Way" : The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[5] William Buckley, "The Nightmare of Norman Lear," *National Review* (November 27 1981), 1441.

conservatives understood it during "the culture wars." Throughout the same period, Lear also worked behind the camera on a number of projects having to do with first amendment rights in the Hollywood community including creating The Caucus of Producers, Writers, and Directors. This work became especially significant when Lear and other Hollywood writers sued the FCC and the three television networks in 1976 over a perceived curtailment of their first amendment rights as a result of adopting "the Family Hour" in primetime.

In this way, Lear's involvement in the entertainment industry drew his attention (whether he liked it or not) to the activities of conservative Protestants and their protests against his programming *much earlier* than many of the journalists and scholars who encountered them in the public square as part of a story or academic study of "the Christian Right."[6] As such, his decision to found the non—profit organization People for the American Way (PFAW) in 1981 came out of his observations and careful analysis of right—wing organizations, speakers, and preachers— namely those who constituted the ascending electronic church and the Moral Majority. In this sense, Lear should be understood as one of the most significant commentators on the "New Right," "the Religious Right," and/or "the new Christian Right" in the recent American past. These phrases not only functioned as terms of historically contingent description, but also as powerful rhetorical stereotypes of conservative religiosity run rampant in the public

[6] My understanding of "conservative Protestantism" follows the lead of historian Timothy E. W. Gloege, who argues that the term describes evangelicals who "emphasize that their individualistic relationship to God is with a person, generally a 'he.' Their individualistic, 'plain' interpretation of the Bible is superintended by dispensational assumptions that keep the most radical implications of the Bible in check...and generally, they consider social reform a fruit secondary to evangelism." While I appreciate Gloege's emphasis on a more expansive terminology for analyses of conservative Protestantism, I strongly support his notion that evangelicals have made themselves "the public face of conservative Protestantism." While this has been a remarkable "rhetorical achievement...it was precisely that." For more, see Timothy E.W. Gloege, *Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 13.

square.[7] In this sense, Lear's notion of consensus mirrored Judeo—Christian formulations in its attempts to "contain [religious] diversity within a single, unified normative vision of religion in America."[8]

Lear's religio—political work throughout the 1970s and 1980s drew on support from interfaith organizations such as the National Council of Christians and Jews and mainline Protestant organizations including the National Council of Churches and the *The Christian Century*. In light of this growing support, Lear decided to compose a satirical movie based on the lives of two preachers in order to articulate his criticisms of the Christian Right and its methods of exclusionary politics and tax evasion during the late 1970s.[9] Despite the assistance of fellow comedy writers Robin Williams and Richard Pryor, Lear decided to go in a different direction

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[7] These stereotypes were arguably the product of what literary theorists identify as (political) *metonymy* and *synecdoche*, specifically liberal ones. In each instance, a linguistic "part" stood in for a larger social "whole," whereby "the new Christian Right" functioned as a metonymy for conservative Protestant Christianity within the US by representing the social whole through the rhetorical part. These arguments, and their application to the study of religio—political discourse since the 1960s, are in the preliminary stages of development.

[8] Laura Levitt, "Judeo—Christian Traditions Reconsidered" essay 16, Section III, "World's Religions in America," *The Cambridge History of Religions in America (CHRA),* General Editor, Stephen Stein, (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 285—307.

[9] My emphasis on conservative Protestant "method" resonates with the work of Timothy E. W. Gloege, who argues that "The lasting significance of *The Fundamentals* project laid in its methods, not its contents. It pioneered a *means* of creating an evangelical 'orthodoxy' out of an ever—shifting bricolage of beliefs and practices, each varying historical significance and some entirely novel...*The Fundamentals* thus pointed the way forward for modern conservative evangelicalism by modeling the methodology for creating, and constantly recreating, whatever 'orthodoxy' the present moment required." There is no better evidence for this argument during the period under study than the actions and cultural productions of evangelist Jerry Falwell and his advocacy group, the Moral Majority. The creation of the bible scorecard, a document that evaluated the Christian character of a politician or person in office based on a predetermined conservative policy agenda, was arguably part of evangelicalism's ability to carry out and successfully execute instances of improvisational orthodoxy. For Gloege, *The Fundamentals* "replaced doctrine with the *performance* of orthodoxy facilitated by modern promotional techniques." Perhaps most importantly, "the work created an imagined community of Protestants united in their opposition to theological modernism." For more, see Timothy E. W. Gloege, *Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 11, 163, and 181.

due to the urgency he felt from the growing collective weight of televangelist influence over American media.

"Then one day, while working to realize the film we envisioned, my concern reached its peak. I had tuned in to Jimmy Swaggart and caught the reverend, Bible in hand, railing about a constitutional issue that was due to come before the Supreme Court and asking his 'godly' viewers to pray for the removal of a certain justice," Lear recalled. "That was the last straw for me—I had to do something."[10] Lear was not the only one to be disgusted by what he saw on the television screen during this period, yet it is *his* story that remains to be told in the recent history of American religion and the wars of culture that have characterized subsequent American political debate since the 1960s.

It is also a story that illuminates how our contemporary political moment has become so polarized over the last half century largely through culture and its adjudication in public based on the spiritual directives of largely oppositional political religions, one liberal the other conservative.[11] For the purposes of this project, culture most closely describes the artistic productions of Norman Lear that were disseminated over the airwaves in primetime by American television networks. In particular, my work examines the spiritual politics surrounding this cultural production in late twentieth—century America. My decision to describe this conflict thusly is a reflection of both the archive and the analytical. Many of my historical subjects relied on the language of "spirit" and "the spiritual" to both voice their religious concerns in public *and*

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[10] Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience*, 330.

[11] For more on political religions, see Jason Bivins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008). My articulation may seem like a binary one, but I am not arguing that there were *literally* only two religio—political perspectives at the time. Instead, I contend that thanks to the influence of the media and documents/genres like Bible Scorecards, there *appeared* to only be two choices due to the developing polarization of American public discourse in a key of cultural warfare by the early 1980s.

to add rhetorical weight to their public declarations. This usage of the spiritual also reflected a longer tradition of ethical or mystical liberalism typically associated with the history of American spirituality dating back to the eighteenth—century.[12] For PFAW, the most important aspect of spiritual liberalism were its attempts to facilitate civil deliberation in the public square on behalf of the nation's religious minorities, "Our highest purpose is to nurture a national climate that encourages and enhances the human spirit rather than one which divides people into hostile camps."[13]

In short, my inquiry examines the religio—political activism of television producer and writer Norman Lear as an example of liberal religious opposition to the proliferation and representation of conservative and at times militant Protestantism in the public sphere.[14] Lear's television career, which included the groundbreaking situation comedy *All in the Family*, communicated a consensus—values driven project of preserving a more civil and religiously tolerant America first through his programming and later through his non—profit organization

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[12] For more on this history, see Leigh Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (San Francisco, CA: Harperone, 2005). In his study of antebellum American religion, scholar of religion John Modern argues that spirituality was "recognizable as a formation of secularism, a liberal style of piety in which religion, politics, and epistemology congealed at the level of affect." In addition, "It was among liberals and their institutions that spirituality became increasingly associated with the human capacity for religion...This capacious concept of spirituality bubbled up, through, and with various cognates of 'spirit.' The grammatical vectors included spirit—filled, spiritual religion, spiritual discernment, spiritual activity, spiritual perception..." For more, see John Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 121. Like sociologist Courtney Bender, I argue that spirituality is *entangled* in social life itself, the church bulletin board replete with choice and markets of religious options. For more, see Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2010), 5.

[13] For more, see http://www.pfaw.org/about—us/founding—mission. Accessed May 9, 2015.

[14] For scholar of religion David Chidester, the term "religio—political power" attempts "to capture the inevitable interrelation between religious and political power within any social system." As such, "a religio—political system generates a legal force field which defines the public order within which religion may legitimately emerge." For more, see David Chidester, *Patterns of Power: Religion & Politics in American Culture* (New York, NY: Prentice Hall, 1988), 5—10.

People for the American Way (PFAW).[15] I trace Lear's style of activism back to the goodwill or interfaith movement of the interwar period in narrating a longer history of "the American Way" in American public life. I argue that this activism represented an instance of a late twentieth—century articulation of liberal—pluralist and consensus ideals over and against the perceived divisiveness and abrasive cultural and religious politics of the Christian Right.[16]

This story of contestation unfolded against the screens of color televisions the country over through various comedic forms of entertainment. In fact, television itself achieved much of its social power within the very families that both the left and the right appealed to through primetime programming, situation comedies, and the variety show special in the name of entertainment.[17] As a result, I argue that a new televisual arena of contest and debate emerged in the fierce battle between Lear and PFAW and various Christian televangelists over who would

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[15] My understanding of "consensus" has been informed by both historical and cultural studies. My useage of the term certainly refers to histories of America at its mid—century, but it is ultimately more concerned with the ways in which both the term and its deployment attempt to maintain particular religio—political arrangements— in this case, the civil public sphere as Lear understood it. "Indeed," argues literary scholar Sacvan Bercovitch, "its function was partly to mystify or mask social realities. Nonetheless it denoted something equally real: a coherent system of symbols, values, and beliefs, and a series of rituals designed to keep the system going" (30). For more, see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The RItes of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993).

[16] Based on the recent work of scholar of religion Isaac Weiner, Lear can be understood as both a "privatist" and a "pluralist." Despite the fact that Lear argued for a clear distinction between public and private so that "religion" could be safely contained, he also called for greater understanding of religious difference. "Although the pluralists sought to celebrate and bridge religious differences," Weiner argues, "their arguments ran the risk of effacing differences altogether by diminishing their significance." For more, see Isaac Weiner, "Calling Everyone to Pray: Pluralism, Secularism, and the Adhan in Hamtramck, Michigan," *Anthropological Quarterly* 87:4 (Fall 2014), 1049—1078.

[17] The "I Love Liberty" prime—time television special authored by Lear and PFAW aired on March 21st, 1982 on ABC. It was written primarily by Lear and featured a "non—partisan" board of directors and cast including Barry Goldwater, Jane Fonda, Robin Williams, Judd Hirsch, Valerie Harper, and many others. Aesthetically it very much resembled the televised rallies of the Christian Right, yet Lear disagreed with this notion vehemently. In short, "I Love Liberty" served as the quintessential example of how spiritual progressives attempted to mobilize according to their own notions of patriotism and religious freedom. It also demonstrated Lear's reliance on the Hollywood resources at his disposal in communicating his message of humility and civility over and against the divisiveness he saw operating on the Christian Right.

define the public script of American religious life in late twentieth—century America. For many journalists, politicians, and entertainers at the time, this was nothing less than a "Holy War" over the medium and communicative power television itself.

This project foregrounds the religious and political activism of Norman Lear in order to illustrate what I am calling the spiritual and cultural investments of the political left in the recent American past.[18] This is connected to my larger project of identifying Lear as one of many religious liberals in late 20th century America. However, Lear is not simply a religious liberal. He is also, I argue, a "theatrical liberal," to borrow a phrase from Andrea Most.[19] This latter dimension of Lear's writing and television work effectively highlights its Jewish characteristics as self—fashioning projects carried out within largely Protestant spaces where the theatre is always and already sacred. "The power of this popular culture resides not in its secular neutrality," Most argues, "but in its specific spiritual vision, one that makes use of secular cultural modes to express a morally coherent worldview."[20] Lastly, I argue that Lear is best understood as a spiritual (or ethical) liberal, one who is concerned about civic activism and correcting unjust societal structures in the name of the public interest.[21]

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[18] To be clear, Lear's politics were not radical or revolutionary, but they were quintessentially *liberal*. As such, Lear can be understood as one of America's most vocal proponents of "America" and its subsequent middle—class articulation, "the American Way," going back to the Puritan errand. In this sense, my work examines how Lear wielded the uniquely American "ritual of consensus" as a form of social control in order to both control and define the public interest in his own interests relative to a conservative threat, the Christian Right. For more, see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Rites of Assent*, 29—67.

[19] For more, see Andrea Most, *Theatrical Liberalism: Jews and Popular Entertainment in America* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013).

[20] Most, *Theatrical Liberalism*, 9—10.

[21] He also self—identifies as spiritual, in addition to naming his religious auto—biography, "Life in the Spirit." *Spirit*, as both category and descriptor I argue, assumes a much greater role in American public life during

This spiritual liberalism is intimately connected to what historian Leigh Schmidt has identified as "the spiritual left" in American history.[22] Much of Lear's activism, as well as PFAW later on, depended on both his connections to similar—thinking Hollywood actors and his willingness to use television as a means of arguing for spiritual and religious tolerance as an alternative to the abrasive style of Christian Right televangelists. Lear's spiritual labors in the various spaces of American politics during the 1970s and 1980s depended on a clear understanding of liberal sentiment undergirding the vitality of the public square itself.[23] In this manner, Lear shared a great deal with his religious liberal supporters including journalist Bill Moyers and former editor of *The Christian Century* Martin Marty.

For these three members of America's knowledge industry, developing an appreciation for "the spirit" was inseparable from defining the "broader values" of American democracy. In addition, their shared commitment to addressing injustice in American society reflected the very same liberal mindset found in progressive evangelical circles. "Because social justice provides the vital framework for balancing individual rights and the common good," argues scholar of religion Brantley Gasaway, "leaders regarded it as the highest ideal of public life."[24] Lear's fundamentally liberal vision of American public life possessed the same social investment in the

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this period (1960s—1980s). Both conservative and liberal Protestants, as well as liberal Jews, relied on a language of the *spirit* to detract from their political opponents.

[22] Leigh Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Publishing, 2005).

[23] In this manner, we can understand spiritual liberalism as equally dependent on epistemic forms of "Common Sense" as its political opposition, namely conservative evangelicalism. For John Modern, talk of spirituality assisted Unitarians "drawn to Common Sense because they could legitimate the empirical reality of spirit." Like Lear and other spiritual liberals, "The exercise of human reason became a pious end unto itself, the surest method to discover its divine source." For more, see John Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 141.

[24] Brantley W. Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 54—55.

common good, suggesting that there was much more to the civic vitality of the period's spiritual left than scholars have previously acknowledged.[25]

For Schmidt, and arguably for Lear as well, "The return of a more progressive political order goes hand in hand with the vitality and integrity of religious liberalism."[26] This type of civic spirituality did not limit itself to exclusively Jewish or Protestant modes of communication and instruction. For Most, Jewish entertainers readily borrowed concepts and ideas from other traditions, "drawing on aspects of liberal Protestantism and blues spirituality" that were "easily misunderstood by orthodox Christian as expressions of a religiously vacant (and hence debased) liberal secularism."[27] As a result, to conservative evangelists such as Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, Lear's spiritual liberalism was virtually unintelligible as a form of religious practice and politics in the public square beyond the familiar accusation of "secular humanism." For sociologist Wade Clark Roof, this epistemic incommensurability is the product of differing knowledge systems: one that foregrounds the content of religion when speaking of the public

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[25] Unlike their conservative colleagues in Christ, these evangelicals saw the state as playing an essential role in fostering social justice by "promoting politics of distributive justice" (Gasaway, *Progressive Evangelicals*, 54).

[26] Schmidt, *Restless Souls,* 287. I list *both* names in light of the fact that both individuals celebrate and analyze the tradition of which they are apart, namely American religious liberalism *and* the spiritual left. For scholar of religion Kerry A. Mitchell, much of this work (and the scholarship on "spirituality") "has been heavily informed by the discourse of liberalism, even to the point of celebrating this politico—intellectual tradition." This has led to the academic tendency to reproduce the discourse under study rather than to its critical explication. For more, see Kerry A. Mitchell, "The Politics of Spirituality: Liberalizing the Definition of Religion," in *Secularism and Religion—Making* edited by Markus Dressler and Arvind Mandair (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 126. See also "Managing Spirituality: Public Religion and National Parks," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture* 1:4 (2007), 431—449. For historian Eileen Luhr, this tendency is part of the "pluralist thesis," which "fails to account for the ideological work that religious pluralism does in an uneven global economic structure of exchange that valorizes individual spiritual and secular expression through choice while masking, continuing, and often deepening histories of expropriation, colonialism, and conquest." For more, see Eileen Luhr, "Seeker, Surfer, Yogi: The Progressive Religious Imagination and the Cultural Politics of Place in Encinitas, California," *American Quarterly* 67:4 (Dec 2015), 1172.

[27] Most, *Theatrical Liberalism,* 9.

good and another that prioritizes the civic principles that govern religion as part of the public interest.[28] While supportive of the former theoretically, Lear and his fellow liberals ultimately preferred and defended the latter as part of a custodial impulse to protect first amendment freedoms from theocratic malcontents.

What made Lear different from other entertainers and writers as a spiritual liberal, however, was that he wanted to entertain and make people laugh about something by using the genre of the situation comedy to express satirical analyses of America and its turbulent society.[29] I argue that Lear's understanding of "relevance" and deployment of satire, as well as their consequent programming, materialized as a direct product of his own religious biography, or spiritual vision, as an influential spiritual liberal with his own "moral order of American public life."[30] Like his Protestant liberal supporters, "'religion' names the excessive, fallible, and temporal residue that has gummed up the search for genuine spirituality and prophetic justice making."[31] Lear's desire to educate and entertain about something, a form of primetime televisual didacticism, both reflected and laid the groundwork for the liberal values he sought to maintain in American public life including civility, religious tolerance, and the separation of

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[28] For more, see his presentation at the Civility & Democracy in America Conference, Spokane, WA: Religion Session, March 4, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CByykqALjdo. Accessed January 10, 2016.

[29] For more on the relationship between sitcoms and liberal politics, see http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/confessions—of—a—hollywood—liberal—american—sitcoms—and—the—culture—wars—from—norman—lear—to—parks—and—recreation—by—l—benjamin—rolsky/. Accessed November 16, 2015.

[30] For more, see Mary Douglas and Steven M. Tipton, eds., *Religion and America: Spirituality in a Secular Age* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1982), v.

[31] Heather White, *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 7. White's analysis of progressive Protestantism is worthy of emulation. For White, liberal protestants adhere to what scholar of religion Webb Keane calls "the moral narrative of modernity," which posits religion as an obstacle to human development. "This way of telling religion and modern change," argues White, "is the constitutive tale of secularism, and it obscures the particularities of liberal Protestant influence" (7).

church and state as part of his spiritual vision. This process becomes especially visible once Lear moved out from behind the camera and entered the fray of early 1980s American politics, a religio—political landscape more reflective of the nation's neoliberal future than its fading New Deal past.

My objective is to apply the same critical attention that scholars have given the Christian Right to what I identify as the spiritual and political left through a case study of Norman Lear's career in media and non—profit activism.[32] One of the goals of this approach is to illuminate a politics of spiritual liberalism using Lear's writings and the literature of his non—profit organization People for the American Way.[33] Both the right and the left relied on the resources and personalities of Southern California in order to further their religio—political ends in public, yet it has been the political and Christian Right that has to this point dominated studies of media, politics, and religion in the field of American religious history. As a result, Lear's style of Hollywood—based religious liberalism has been concealed from our collective historiographic view.[34] Lear is a significant figure in American religious history because he both documented the

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[32] This work has already begun in Lily Geismer, *Don't Blame Us: Suburban Liberals and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015). For more, see her chapter in Andrew Preston, Bruce J. Schulman, and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Faithful Republic: Religion and Politics in Modern America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 117—130.

[33] For historian Matthew Hedstrom, religious liberals can be identified in two ways: laissez—faire and mystical/ethical. I argue that Lear is part of this latter group in his emphasis on "social activism and moral sophistication." For more, see http://religionandpolitics.org/2013/01/29/book—culture—and—the—rise—of—liberal—religion/

[34] For more on liberal religious mobilization in post war, suburban America, see Lily Geismer, *Don't Blame Us: Suburban Liberals and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015). For Geismer, such suburban spaces cultivated shared concerns among Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic neighbors respectively. "These activities revealed not only the common values of these various congregations, but also the ways in which their commitment to principles of anti—prejudice, equality, and community aligned with many of the core tenets of postwar liberalism." For more, see Lily Geismer, "More than Megachurches: Liberal Religion and Politics in the Suburbs," in *Faithful Republic: Religion and Politics in Modern America* edited by

rise of the Christian Right and produced knowledge about its organization(s), membership, and leadership in the form of sitcom episodes, public service announcements, primetime television specials, and non—profit organizations. In other words, Lear's writings and cultural productions can be understood as contributing to the metonymic entity scholars and journalists identified as "the Christian Right" during the late 1970s.[35] In this sense, Lear not only organized against the representatives of the Christian Right, but he also contributed to the idea of the Christian Right itself as both religio—political trope and stereotype.

Literature Review and Methodology

This dissertation is at once a religious history of Norman Lear's media career *and* a religious history of the Christian Right, one that is aware of its presence in so far as the Christian Right shaped Lear and his ability to disseminate his spiritual vision of civic life over the airwaves through network television and its primetime listings. The execution of this historical narrative is a reflection of Lear's own encounters with various representatives of both the New Right and the Christian Right. As a result, some chapters will feature material on Christian Right leaders like Falwell, or Wildmon, and/or Robertson, but others will not, or not to the same degree. Both the conservative and Christian Right "shadowed" much of Lear's programming due to its controversial content, which Lear understood as censorship and thus a violation of the first amendment. This narrative is experimental in that it primarily documents the movements of Lear, but to properly accomplish this, I must also include the *counter*—movements from the

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Andrew Preston, Bruce Schulman, and Julian Zelizer (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 122.

[35] For more on metonymy, see Kenneth Burke, "Four Master Tropes," *The Kenyon Review* 3:4 (Autumn 1941), 421—438. My use of Burke is in the service of applying metonymy and its rhetorical function to analyses of the culture wars and their resilience in public life and contemporary American politics. For Burke, metonymy and reduction are synonymous, telling us something about the *nature* of communication during the culture wars.

Right when and if they arose to complete the picture of Lear's significance in American public life since the 1970s.

In light of this analytical focus, I suggest a more top—down approach to the study of the Christian Right in order to balance the most recent historiographic focus on the grassroots, which has arguably defined its study since the early 1980s. While salutary, this body of work has tended to drift away from questions of power and the top—down in favor of questions oriented by social history and the bottom—up. However, more recent work by historians such as Bethany Moreton, Kevin Kruse, Axel R. Schäfer, and Darren Grem, as well as scholars of religion Jason Bivins and Tracy Fessenden, has reoriented our collective attention to the inextricable relationship between the federal government, evangelicalism, and corporate America within economic and religious histories of conservative evangelicalism in America since 1945.[36]

In this sense, the *Christian Right* would be better understood as a disparate collection of individual and organizational (grassroots) interests working on behalf of a broadly conservative political and cultural agenda set by nationally—oriented New Right strategists (top—down)

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[36] Many of the questions I (and others) bring to the study of the Christian Right have already been explored in Linda Kintz and Julia Lesage, ed., *Media, Culture, and the Religious Right* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). For additional examples, see Axel R. Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives: American Evangelicalism from the Postwar Revival to the New Christian Right* (Madison, WI: University of WIsconsin Press, 2011); *Piety and Public Funding: Evangelicals and the State in Modern America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Ed., *American Evangelicals and the 1960s* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013). Additionally, see Kevin Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2015); Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal—Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Jason BiIvins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008); Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American LIterature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); Darren Grem, "The Marketplace Missions of S. Truett Cathy, Chick fil—A, and the Sunbelt South," in Darren Dochuk and Michelle Nickerson, eds., *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Space, Place, and Region* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); William Connolly, "The Evangelical—Capitalist Resonance Machine," *Political Theory* 33:6 (Dec 2005), 869—886; Matthew Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Sarah Hammond, "God's Business Men': Entrepreneurial Evangelicals in Depression and War" (PHD diss., Yale University, 2010); Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015); Neil J. Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

during the 1970s and 1980s. In this sense, studies of Howard Phillips and Richard A. Viguerie should accompany those on their organizational footsoldiers, namely individuals such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, in order to better understand the social power of the Christian Right in the public square.[37] As historian Neil J. Young argues, “The New Right combined its radically free market impulses with a strident cultural conservatism, most visible through rabid opposition to abortion, gay rights, and the ERA, to create a potent political force with roots reaching back to the campaigns for Barry Goldwater, Richard Nixon, and George Wallace.”[38] In this sense, new right strategists maintained the connections between the New Right of the 1970s and the Old Right of the 1930s as part of the larger Christian Right’s conservative political agenda of the 1980s. Despite the fact that “the Christian Right” as a term is arguably as much a liberal/modernist construction as it is a conservative one, it can also be understood as another

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[37] As argued by historian Darren Grem, the recent attention to historical and theoretical studies of the relationship between capitalism and American religion(s) calls for more top—down approaches to the study of corporate religion and corporate influence on religious practice. My work can be understood as contributing to the study of corporate power/influence within largely *liberal* or “new class” communities including those in Hollywood and academia. For more, see http://usreligion.blogspot.com/2015/03/evangelicals—and—business—of—one—nation.html, as well as Darren Grem, *The Blessings of Business: How Corporations Shaped Conservative Christianity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, *forthcoming*). For more on the “new class” see Stephen Schryer, *Fantasies of the New Class: Ideologies of Professionalism in Post—World War II American Fiction* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006).
This emphasis on business practices, and their influence on the history of American Protestantism, is particularly useful when studying the history of American fundamentalism, *The Fundamentals*, and the Christian Right. This series of pamphlets “offered signposts and served as a center of gravity for an evangelical ‘orthodoxy’ that was impossible to capture in creedal form. This *means* of creating, and seamlessly re—creating, ‘traditional’ religion...came by business methods...one that was perfected and then regularly repeated over the next century” (192).

[38] Neil J. Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics*, 169. For more on Goldwater's legacy in the contemporary conservative movement and Republican party, see E.J. Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong: From Goldwater——to the Tea Party and Beyond* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2016).

fundamentalist and business—oriented attempt to create a "theological vessel that individuals could fill with their own doctrinal particulars."[39]

Lear's commentary on this burgeoning conservative movement reflected both the empirically—grounded observation and the hyperbolic exaggeration— both were reflective of their unsettled times, the first of two "evangelical scares" in the recent American past.[40] Once surveyed from this vantage point, one is able to comprehend how the Christian Right is as much a liberally—authored, discursive construction of journalists, concerned entertainers, and academics as it is an empirical reality in American public life.[41] One shortcoming of this recent literature, however, is its lack of critical or sustained attention to the indispensible role of media within the Christian Right beyond studies of individual televangelists. My emphasis on the electronic church as both idea and federally regulated institution with various conservative

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[39] For more on this argument, see Timothy E. W. Gloege, *Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism*, 192.

[40] Steven Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born—Again Years* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[41] Methodologically speaking, my approach to the study of history in general, and the Christian right in particular, reflects the interests of two distinct but interrelated methodologies: the critical (and admirable) empathy of scholar of religion Walter Capps and the genealogical work of critical theorists such as Theodor Adorno and religious studies scholars Kathryn Lofton and John Modern. For Modern, "If historians focus on change over time, genealogists seek to name continuity——or family resemblances——through comparative analysis of documents pertaining to a common theme. Genealogy is a kind of grey documentation, an effort to disabuse oneself of particular presumptions through examining how presumptions come to be. Genealogy, then, is a mode of analysis that addresses concepts that have become naturalized." For more, see Walter H. Capps, *The New Religious Right: PIety, Patriotism, and Politics* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990) and "Contemporary Socio—Political Change and the Work of Religious Studies," *The Council on the Study of Religion Bulletin* 12:4 (October 1981), 93—95; see also John Modern, "Did Someone Say 'Evangelical Surge'?" *Church History* 84:3 (September 2015), 630—636. For more on genealogy, see Mark Poster, "Foucault and History," *Social Research* 49:1 (Spring 1982), 116—142. The scholarly reception of the recent application of genealogical method to the study of American religion arguably mirrors that of Foucault's work in the 1960s, "Professional historians recognized it as being a work of history, and many others, who have an antiquated and no doubt completely obsolete idea of history, clamored that history was being murdered." For more, see Michel Foucault, "On the Ways of Writing History," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology* edited by James D. Faubion (New York, NY: New Press, 1998), 279—296.

representatives encourages a renewed attention to media within the study of religion more broadly.[42]

In addition to studies of the Christian Right, the interpretive evidence for this project draws primarily on two subfields within the study of America's religious history: culture wars studies and American religious liberalism. Both of these subfields are well—developed in their own right, yet their contributions become most evident when they are brought together in order to elucidate Lear's spiritual vision of civic life in its historical context, namely from within the culture wars themselves and its terms of religio—political engagement. Much of the work on the culture wars since the 1990s has explored the Christian Right and its political successes. In fact, the work of sociologists Alan Wolfe and James Davison Hunter represent two opposing views of the same American religious citizenry. While Hunter discovered orthodox and liberal communities of protest, Wolfe saw more pragmatist and conciliatory values at the heart of American public life.

Like the larger field of American religion and politics, culture wars studies remain fixated upon conservative Christianity and its social and cultural power in public. This literature not only leaves underexplored the spiritual counter—opposition to such conservative power, namely Lear's spiritual vision, but it also leaves unexamined the place of liberalism as a form of religious establishment in the United States since the social programming of FDR in the 1930s. My project contributes to these ongoing conversations by examining the fundamental role that Lear's vision played in the attempted liberal maintenance, and later eventual conservative re—

[42] For more, see Jeremy Stolow, ed., *Deus in Machina: Religion, Technology, and the Things in Between* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2013).

definition of, mid—century consensus by the Christian Right and its political architects during the 1970s.

Unfortunately for Lear and his progressive supporters, the nature of conflict following the 1960s had shifted into a cultural register of the personal over and against one designed for explicitly public expression and consumption.[43] As a result, the culture wars were nothing if not negotiations over which forms of culture would be allowed to exist within increasingly calcifying politics of resentment and metonymy. Lear's satirical programming was often times at the center of these debates regarding television, violence, and its varied impact on American society. In addition, Lear's writing functioned seamlessly within the "public interest" for some, yet for others it contributed to an already substantive list of pornographic television programs that American television networks such as NBC and CBS continued to broadcast each and every week. In short, each side of the religio—political debate, regardless of membership, found traction for their claims and arguments because of culture and its power to function politically in public.

This is arguably why such contests were understood as cultural/culture wars during this time, namely because American politics began manifesting in different cultural registers in novel ways including primetime television and the situation comedy. "The key to understanding the political fallout of this pivotal era," argues historian Matthew Lassiter, "is that cultural explanations triumphed over economic ones in setting the terms of public debate and determining the direction of public policies."[44] Despite arguments to the contrary, political and

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[43] For more, see Whitney Strub, *Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011).

spiritual liberals like Lear have driven the terms of these culture wars instead of their conservative activist detractors since the 1960s.[45] For example, how you received Archie Bunker as the viewer said everything about the manner in which taste emerged as a contested category during the culture wars, which for some called for immediate legislative action on capitol hill. This was especially the case for those who composed "relevance" programming during the early 1970s including television producers such as Grant Tinker (*Mary Tyler Moore*), Lear (*All in the Family*), and Larry Gelbart (*MASH*). In this sense, liberals may in fact continue to win the culture wars, but at what cost?

These writers often articulated their disdain for the Christian Right and its reliance on mass media in terms resembling manners or etiquette regarding how the right articulated their political claims in public.[46] This discomfort was intimately connected to the fact that "religion" itself was already a protected category for liberals and liberal democracy more broadly, one that appeared in public only under specific linguistic conditions such that its partisan potential could

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[44] Matthew Lassiter, "Inventing Family Values," in Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 16—17.

[45] Scholar of religion Stephen Prothero takes these issues head on in his book, *Why Liberals Win the Culture Wars (Even When They Lose Elections): The Battles That Define America from Jefferson's Heresies to Gay Marriage*, arguing that is has been conservatives who have tend to set the terms of cultural debate in the recent past. One could argue, however, that Prothero not only reads "culture wars" back into American history in favor of a synthetic narrative, but also rehearses liberal arguments that assume conservative manipulation of its supporters due to a form of "status anxiety" or deprivation. As Prothero argues, "Culture wars are often seen as these battles between liberals and conservatives over cultural questions. But I see them more as dramas that are produced and acted in by conservatives. They are conservative projects whose purpose is to drum up support from traditionalists in society who perceive that something precious is being lost to them...In order to *activate that anxiety*, which is an important part of my book, which is going to create a political upsurge for your party, you need to find an issue that will agitate peoples' emotions [my emphasis]." For a more balanced treatment on virtually the same period, see E.J. Dionne, *Why the Right Went Wrong: From Goldwater——to the Tea Party and Beyond* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2016).

[46] For more on taste, see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983), 314—315.

not manifest too strongly in the process of public reasoning.[47] The Christian Right in general, and its electronic church in particular, violated virtually all of these unspoken measures assumed to be at the heart of American public life and its proper functioning. No one was more attuned to these developments then Norman Lear, namely because he was both victim of and commentator on conservative Protestant evangelists and their successful attempts to boycott the network's primary advertisers. The disintegration of America's aspirational mid—century consensus, a process intensified by the writings of conservatives, neo—conservatives, and Protestant conservatives throughout the 1960s, revealed the fact that the various means of cultural production were fast becoming the most important sources of social capital during the culture wars. As such, it was also a source of immense power and influence over how the nation transitioned from the turbulence of the 1960s to the divisive years of war during the early 1970s.

In both his situation comedies (*All in the Family*) and his political organizing (PFAW), Lear constructed a makeshift civics classroom out of both the Bunker's living room and the variety show stage. He displayed and gave voice to his liberal understanding of the fundamental

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[47] For more on how secularism shapes political expressions in the public sphere, see Finbarr Curtis, *The Production of Religious Freedom* (New York, NY: New York University Press, *forthcoming*). For more on the burgeoning relationship between a rebirth of studies of secularism/secularity/secular and American religious history (stemming largely from the work of anthropologist Talal Asad), see Joseph Blankholm, "The Political Advantages of a Polysemous Secular," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 53:4 (2014), 775—790; John Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, eds., *Secularisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Tisa Wenger, *We Have a Religion: The 1920s Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom* (Durham, NC: UNC Press, 2009); Rosemary Hicks, "Between Lived and the Law: Power, Empire, and Expansion in Studies of North American Religions," *Religion* 42:3 (2012), 409—424; Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: Gospel of an Icon* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011); Linell E. Cady and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, eds., *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Winnifred F. Sullivan, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, Saba Mahmood, and Peter G. Danchin, *Politics of Religious Freedom* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Mayanthi L. Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

social and cultural challenges of the day in each setting respectively through character dialogue and plot. This insight becomes clearest when the descriptions of liberal relevance programming merge with the narratives of American religious liberalism in the twentieth—century. In particular, Lear's pluralist vision found its motivation in the potential of humanity to work through its divisions for the good of the larger whole. In this sense, first *All in the Family* and later PFAW served as powerful media—based outlets for Lear's crusade against religious and racial intolerance in the United States. In his most private moments, Lear would gather with close friends at his home in Vermont, the former home of poet Robert Frost, in order to deliberate over the day's current events and social challenges through civil debate. An intellectual luminary, Frost, his writings, and his home served as the most appropriate sources of spiritual inspiration for Lear and his fellow "spiritual gropers" to meet and seek together as "one step removed from religion generally."[48]

Despite the clarity of such spiritual practices, including mystical exploration and liberal religious pilgrimage, I argue that this depiction of American religious liberalism remains incomplete without an examination of its illiberal tendencies, especially when it concerned conservative persons of faith in the public square.[49] When confronted by evangelists who "graded" television programs based on various decency measures, Hollywood's defense of its own freedom of expression was necessary and lawful. This defense, however, often meant protecting the liberal Hollywood writer's ability to satirize with a prophetic voice of social criticism. In times of civic and spiritual unrest, conservative religiosity often times became a

[48] Norman Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2015), 350.

[49] For analyses of the illiberal tendencies within liberalism and its representation within the academy, see Kerry A. Mitchell, "The Politics of Spirituality: Liberalizing the Definition of Religion," in *Secularism and Religion—Making* edited by Markus Dressler and Arvind Mandair (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011).

favorite subject of ridicule for writers in both the entertainment and knowledge industries. When Lear wrote or spoke about the Christian Right and its activities, he unknowingly contributed to a longer tradition of "framing" conservative religiosity dating back to the Scopes Trial of 1925 and the radio diatribes of Father Charles Coughlin in the 1930s.[50]

When Lear and others began hearing from conservative activists during the 1970s, they inaugurated their own chapter of social theory and analysis of conservative religiosity in a longer story, one that centered on a constituency of religious Americans who had finally "matured" enough to become involved in American politics.[51] This interpretation was not anomalous to mainline, interfaith, or Hollywood circles of religious liberals; it was rather *the* interpretation that guided much of the commentary on and responses to conservative mobilization around American culture.

Source Material

Researching Lear's activism as a subject of American religious history depends on primary and secondary material as well as a variety of multimedia resources including television shows and interviews. The primary sources for this dissertation include Lear's own published and unpublished writings, his corpus of situation comedies, a number of television specials and advertisements on behalf of People for the American Way, various public lectures and presentations, and the publications of PFAW themselves. This source material also includes countless newspaper and magazine articles from the period as well as denominational literature

[50] This period experienced its own form of social disorientation. The establishment of the New Deal was a spiritually uplifting time for many, including Roosevelt himself, yet for others it was a spiritually tormented one if you happened to think pre—millennially about the global apocalypse and FDR's role in it. For more, see Matthew Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014). For more on FDR, see Gaston Espinosa, ed., *Religion and the American Presidency: George Washington to George W. Bush, with Commentary and Primary Sources* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 209), 185—216.

[51] For an example of this type of mindset as understood in an editorial comment, see James M. Wall, "The New Right Comes of Age," *Christian Century* (Oct 22 1980), 995—996.

from periodicals such as *The Christian Century* and *Christianity in Crisis*. The archival material for this project can be found in the ephemera and memos of PFAW, which are housed at the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, as well as through Lear's personal online collection entitled, "A Life in the Spirit."[52] These Bancroft papers include meticulous records of the publications, presentations, and general activities of the Christian Right including multiple televangelists and their ministries as well as organizations such as the Moral Majority and The Christian Voice.

In addition, I have been able to interview Lear on two separate occasions— once in his home in Los Angeles, and once in his apartment in New York City. Both interviews proved immensely helpful in this dissertation's analyses and evaluations of Lear and PFAW in the public sphere. In particular, my conversations with Lear gave me the opportunity to use him as a sounding board for many of my own analytical descriptions of his television programming and its didactic motivations. Like Lear himself, these conversations were free flowing and unmoored from potential judgment in regards to my appraisals of his work in American religion and politics ongoing since the 1970s. I've also conducted short interviews with some of the key figures in the history of Lear and PFAW including former *Christian Century* editor Martin Marty, former executive director of the NCC's Broadcasting and Film Commission William Fore, and President of the Norman Lear Center, Marty Kaplan. These voices added immensely to my investigation of Lear as spiritual liberal during America's wars of culture in the recent past.

Significance

Lear's story is a significant one for scholars of post—World War II American religion because it assists us in understanding the demographic shift that took place within American

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[52] For more, see http://www.normanlear.com/life—spirit/. Accessed June 16, 2015.

Christianity in post—war America as an instance of "religious restructuring."[53] Lear's commitment to social justice, as witnessed weekly in his programming, arguably mirrored the commitments by countless priests, pastors, and rabbis who traveled to the American South to march on behalf of civil rights. For one commentator at the time, these decisions laid the groundwork for one of the "deepest schisms in the churches since the Protestant Reformation." "But just as certainly as there has been clergy involvement in the struggle for social justice…so, too, has there been opposition to this involvement—so much so that the issue threatens to tear the churches apart during the coming decade."[54] Lear's style of relevance programming, a byproduct of both the activism of the 1960s and his own preference for dramatic writing, mediated much of this conflict for hundreds of millions of people through his didactic comedies that explored racial bigotry and religious discrimination as evidence of the absurdity of the human condition.

The significance of Lear's criticisms of the Christian Right and its politics can be understood as one of many within a "whistleblower" tradition of American public life. Many whistleblowers sound the alarm when they sense that a conservative Protestant is about to upend the First Amendment in the name of theocratic rule. For these individuals, including Lear, "'religion' is not benevolent but dangerous, a divisive and disruptive presence in public life which deflects attention from material concerns or accepted forms of recognition onto scrims and screens that lure people from real world engagement with promise of messianic glory." Within these conditions, "religion" does not corrupt its surroundings. Instead, it is "what corrupts and

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[53] This description was inspired by Robert Wuthnow's *Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

[54] Hadden, "Clergy Involvement in Civil Rights," 118.

corrodes the secular, rational character of American ideals and procedures."[55] One of these ideals, one that Lear would later enshrine in his non—profit organization, was the notion of pluralism in both its civic and religious manifestations. Preachers like Falwell tended to disagree with this assumed value within liberal notions of consensus, which is why his programming often times received greater scrutiny from the FCC and why Lear's did not.

These disagreements revolved around the understudied, yet nevertheless significant notion of "the public interest," a principle developed in the 1930s by the FCC to guide the programming content of those who possessed a license to such a scarce resource as the airwaves. Because an understanding of pluralism was already built into the public interest as evidence of its content serving "public importance," I argue that Lear's programming more often than not slipped past federal regulations because his writing engaged subjects of public concern through his interest in pluralism of both voice and program, thereby fulfilling the federally mandated public interest requirement. In other words, to broadcast Lear's programs as a network, which meant hosting weekly discussions about controversial subject matter in primetime, was to program in and on behalf of the public interest because the content of the programming (the controversy/pluralism) matched its purpose (diversity of opinions/raising awareness). As a result, Lear used "the public interest" as leverage to defend his own programming and its subject matter in the name of the public interest, which included didactic storylines on bigotry, religion, and American politics.

Set against this particular religio—political backdrop, the emergence of the Christian Right as historical subject and media narrative is a significant historical and historiographic artifact of the 1970s and the nation's introduction to evangelicals and their newly defined

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[55] Jason Bivins, "Untitled Blog Post," *Religion in American History Blog* (Harvey and Blum).

politics, both liberal and conservative. Much of this encounter took place through various media and mediums including television, feature films, satire, and the situation comedy— a nexus of creativity and cultural influence Lear was all too familiar with. These representations did not simply reflect the ephemeral world of the popular; instead, these debates contested many of the fundamental assumptions guiding the relationship between religion and politics in American public life and the appropriate grounds for voicing "private" morality *as* "public" deliberation. Relative to Lear and his interfaith supporters, the Christian Right would be better understood as both a collection of organizations, groups, and individuals who organize on a grassroots level *and* rhetorical shorthand for a group of people led not only by televangelists, but also discerning political advisors who oversaw all administrative and organizational logistics. In this instance, the Christian Right has been, and continues to be, a unique work of both man and God— equal parts Edwards and Finney, man—made yet divinely inspired.[56]

For scholar of religion David Chidester, the Christian Right and its supporters combined two usually distinct Protestant positions in order to forge a renewed political agenda for the 1980s and beyond. "The political crusaders of the religious right combined a *premillennial* separatism in theology with a *postmillennial* religio—political vision of God's kingdom unfolding in America."[57] This latter vision explicitly challenged the one presented by Lear each week in primetime and later through variety shows with the help of People for the American

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[56] In this sense, I follow the exemplary work of political scientist Michael Lienesch, who argues that for many liberal academics and journalists, including Lear himself, "Conservative movements are the meteors of our political atmosphere. Awesome and unpredictable, they streak across our skies in a blaze of right—wing frenzy, only to fall to earth cold and exhausted, consumed by their own passionate heat." For more, see Michael Lienesch, "Right—Wing Religion: Christian Conservatism as a Political Movement," *Political Science Quarterly* 97:3 (Autumn 1982), 403—425.

[57] David Chidester, *Patterns of Power: Religion & Politics in American Culture* (New York, NY: Prentice Hall, 1988), 275.

Way. It was also the one named and criticized specifically by the National Council of Churches in the pages of *Christianity and Crisis* in 1981.[58] These were not wars over economic or American foreign policy, but rather over culture and the domestic federal policies that were supposed to arbitrate the proper and the improper, differentiate the tasteful from the tasteless, and most importantly, to protect the civil from those who did not know how. This was nothing short than a battle over cultural *power,* the power to disseminate, the power to broadcast, and the power to mobilize in the name of American ways and Moral majorities.[59] The spiritual left utilized the then recently formulated notion of "civil religion" in order to explain its rationale for valuing religious pluralism and the calls of one's neighbor over and against those made in the name of the unborn fetus.[60] What was properly "biblical," and what was not, was at the center of these debates— and Lear was front and center stage.

In light of this descriptive backdrop, the significance of my particular project for the study of American religious history is threefold. First, studies of evangelicalism in general and conservative (Christian Right) activism in particular have explored thoroughly the economic, political, and intellectual dynamics that have made evangelicals one of the most compelling

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[58] "The Remaking of America: A Message to the Churches," *Christianity and Crisis* (July 20 1981), 207—210. Two Americas emerged in this document: America as empire and America as compassionate neighbor— the former conservative, the latter liberal as understood from a liberal perspective.

[59] This dissertation will rely on scholar of religion David Chidester's writings on *power* for its analyses of religion and American politics. For Chidester, "*political power* is generated out of a conflict of interests, and it may be exercised to enforce one set of social interests over another, to set the terms within which social interests might be realized, and even to instill certain interests in those who find themselves under the control of a particular domain of power." In addition, "*power* pervades social relations; it produces the very strategies through which individuals participate in society; and it generates powerful symbols, myths, and ideologies through which contending individuals and social groups are defined and define themselves. *Power* is the dynamic energy that infuses a social system [my emphasis]." For more, see Chidester, *Patterns of Power: Religion and Politics in American Culture*, 8.

[60] For Chidester, civil religion is best understood as a form of consensus, one that has "achieved a relatively unified consensus by excluding others from full participation" (107). I would argue that conservative Protestants have been on the losing side of this formulation more often than not. It is productive methodologically to refer to civil religion as a formation of power in order to emphasize its consensus—generating capacities.

subjects to study. Lear's career intersects with this material from a distinctly media—focused angle that places Lear himself at the center of the Right's crosshairs. Examples of conservative Christian organizing along social issue lines such as abortion or the ERA tend to dominate tales of Christian Right ascendance, yet Lear's story reveals a slightly different set of priorities for evangelical architects like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson that focused on what "the family" should and should not view on television.

Put another way, this project on Lear and People for the American Way shifts our scholarly attention away from what has dominated the field of American religion and politics (the Christian Right) so as to reveal something novel about the contentious relationship between the center (conservative evangelicalism) and the periphery (religious liberals) in American public life. My hypothesis is that the culture wars can be best understood as a fierce contest between competing notions of consensus and the terms deployed to define it— one set dependent on the once powerful welfare state and the other thriving due to an ascendant neo—liberal economic regime epitomized in the economic politics of the Reagan administration.[61] Lear's consensus—based establishment position at the heart of America's entertainment industry served as the oppositional foundation for his political activism against the dangers he saw developing in televangelist rhetoric and in their organized political activism. The subsequent cultural fault lines that emerged from this confrontation, ones identified by sociologist James Davison Hunter in the early 1990s as the "culture wars," helped to shape our current forms of religio—political debate revealing much about the tumultuous nature of American public life over the past half century.

[61] For more on this period's economic history as intellectual history, see Imre Szeman, "Entrepreneurship as the New Common Sense," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 114:3 (2015), 471—490.

In addition, part of this project's contribution to the field of American religious history is to link religious and cultural inclusivist language to a spiritual liberalism that espouses the very same political and social values— namely "spiritual liberty, mystical experience, meditative interiority, universal brotherhood, and sympathetic appreciation of all religions."[62] The interfaith origins of PFAW also speak to a shared history with other similarly—minded organizations who sought to establish both an American discourse and set of behaviors that would adequately attend to the country's religious and ethnic others including Catholics and Jews including the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the National Council of Churches. Lastly, this work contributes to historical studies of the recent past, especially the 1980s— the most recent of which have explored the history of the New Deal state, the rise and institutionalization of neo—liberal economic policies under Ronald Reagan, and the culture wars as part of a larger restructuring of American religion. My work contributes to these discussions by demonstrating how the confrontation between Lear, Falwell, Reagan, and others captured the transition from the Great Society to the "age of fracture" as one form of consensus based on "the American way" ran headlong into an oppositional and confrontational community bent on reclaiming a public *and* prophetic voice in American politics.[63]

No one in the United States during the 1970s did as much to challenge yet ultimately support "the family" than Norman Lear. His signature sitcom *All in the Family* captured both the turmoil and resiliency of an institution that was undergoing drastic changes due to poor economic times, the rise of a service—based economy, and seismic social developments such as

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[62] Leigh Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Publishing, 2005), 9.

[63] Daniel Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

Roe v. Wade. Once Lear moved out from behind the camera directly into the realm of American politics, his People for the American Way applied the principles of tolerance and education first witnessed in *All in the Family* to his confrontation with the Christian Right. Lear's work through PFAW depended on print publishing for much of its organizing, yet it also employed television beyond the genre of the situation comedy to advertise for a more civil and spiritually grounded America. In short, Lear helps us to better understand the great strengths and weaknesses of spiritual liberalism including its cherished values of religious tolerance and civility, the transition from a New Deal to a Neo—Liberal state during the 1980s, the religious history of American television, and lastly, our current terms of religio—political debate.

Chapter Breakdown

Each chapter possesses its own content and method of execution. I combine historical narrative and ideological analysis in order to better understand Lear's heavily mediated spiritual vision of American civic life. Chapter two introduces the reader to Lear's understanding of the appropriate relationship between religion, American politics, and spirituality as a religious liberal. In doing so, I establish a connection between Lear's individual story, and those told by scholars of American religious liberalism, in order to identify *how* Lear's liberal politics manifested in public as a form of spiritual liberalism through his television writing and non—profit organizing. My preference for "spiritual" over "religious" when describing Lear's liberalism is a reflection of his own emphases, ones that tended to orient themselves towards "the spirit" instead of a particular institution or concept like "religion."[64] In fact, Lear's self—titled spiritual biography is, "A Life in the Spirit."

[64] Heather White, *Reforming Sodom*, 1—16.

The chapter contends that Lear is one of the most important religious liberals in the recent American past especially when considered within the context of the culture wars. Lear's spiritual liberalism (and arguably religious liberalism as a whole) remains incompletely described, however, without the appropriate acknowledgement of its illiberal tendencies when it came to conservative religiosity. In this way, we can identify Lear as both political and social theorist in his attempts to understand the Christian Right according to liberal notions of progress and maturity. In short, I describe Lear's social and political significance as a spiritual liberal during the 1970s and 1980s based on his own writings and those of others, including church historian and close friend Martin Marty. Lear's ability to "voice a larger vision for the nation" began and ended with the content of his liberal arguments and spiritual descriptions of American civic life, which included public citations of William James and a double—vision perspective for evaluating and pursuing relevance in the public square.[65]

In chapter three, I examine such descriptions and illustrations of American public life as they were understood by American audiences through the genre of the situation comedy. Lear's most well—known sitcom, *All in the Family*, premiered on CBS in 1971, thereby inaugurating a tradition of primetime television best described as "relevance programming." Reacting to the apolitical programming of the 1960s, Lear established both relevance and topicality as viable narrative structures as one of television's earliest *auteurs,* or showrunners, for situation comedies in the most highly sought after timeslot— primetime.[66] He did so because both narrative concepts were a direct product of Lear's spiritual liberalism as well as his *theatrical* liberalism.

[65] Martin Marty, "Another Pilgrim's Progress," *Christian Century* (1986).

[66] Robert J. Thompson, *Adventures on Prime Time: The Television Programs of Stephen J. Cannell* (New York, NY: Greenwood Publishers, 1999), 1-25.

As an *auteur*, Lear influenced the writing, producing, directing, and casting of his various programs including *All in the Family*, *Maude*, and *Sanford and Son* throughout the 1970s. In essence, an *auteur* "has a hand in writing, producing and casting, and dictate the overall look and feel of the show…they oversee the whole operation, and their vision is the one which is being followed from top down. The showrunner is the auteur of the small screen."[67] Drawing from the work of scholar of religion Andrea Most, I contend that Lear extended the theatrical Jewish tradition of cultural and artistic production to the medium of television as millions of Americans each and every week tuned into his shows including *All in the Family* and *Maude*. For some, this weekly number reached upwards of a quarter of the country at one time. Lear's style of satirical social commentary, as witnessed through the diatribes and arguments of the Bunker family, represented a form of "spiritual storytelling" in primetime, a narrative that is as didactic as it is entertaining. I locate Lear's pluralist project in primetime through ideological analysis of plot and character development as seen in *All in the Family*.[68] This was not simply television; This was television with a purpose, but was it universally understood as such?

Chapter four examines how primetime television itself became a contested, political space during the culture wars that followed the turbulence of the 1960s. Building off of the previous chapter's analyses of Lear's television programs themselves, this chapter investigates the relationship between the television networks, Hollywood, and the federal government when it came to the airwaves and their regulation. The chapter takes Lear's story back to the days of the

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[67] Colin Robertson, "Mad Men, True Detective, and the Rise of the TV Auteur." Available here: https://www.list.co.uk/article/60066-mad-men-true-detective-and-the-rise-of-the-tv-auteur/. Accessed April 19, 2016.

[68] For more, see Robert C. Allen, ed., *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

crystal radio, Father Charles Coughlin, and FDR in order to describe the historic federal preference for mainline or interfaith partners when it came to programming "in the public interest." I argue that the way in which the FCC has defined the public interest dating back to its founding ideally suited Lear's programming rationale as programs about "issues of public concern." Unfortunately for Lear and his supporters, the public interest was far from a consensus ideal during the 1970s. With the rise of televangelism and the electronic church came liberal and conservative reactions of support and derision. The constitutionality of this electronic church, and its political appeals during religious programs, concerned many including Lear himself. In this new world of boycotts and advocacy groups, primetime television was target number one for evangelists like Falwell, Robertson, Robison, and Wildmon in their attempts to rescue the nation from its own cultural depravity. In this culture war, Lear was enemy number one.

The last chapter foregrounds Lear's non—profit organization, People for the American Way (PFAW), as a form of interfaith activism during the ascendance of a conservative age of fracture. I examine how Lear's non—profit was an application of his spiritual liberalism to American politics. I also explore how this work was part of a larger "advocacy moment" in the recent history of the American past as organizations such as the Moral Majority and People for the American Way began re—organizing the religious landscape according to opposing camps and their respective "family values." As part of what sociologist Robert Wuthnow called "the restructuring of American religion," Lear's non—profit accomplished a great deal on behalf of first amendment and minority rights, but it also contributed to the polarization that Wuthnow and others saw developing during this period.

In addition, I argue that People for the American Way functioned as the civic and spiritual culmination of Lear's spiritual liberalism first witnessed on *All in the Family* and later

articulated in variety show specials on network television in primetime. Lear's work pulled on a storied tradition of Hollywood activism in the name of liberal causes such as freedom of speech in the face of conservative evangelist—supported censorship. Threats of censorship in the name of safety echoed ominously for those who remembered senator Joe McCarthy and his search for "subversives" within Hollywood, but they nevertheless held great power due to the significance of advertiser money when it came to broadcasting television programs in primetime. Drawing on previously unexplored archival data, the final chapter argues that People for the American Way was one of the foremost liberal and interfaith nonprofits during the 1980s as the product of one man's quest to protect the public square from the rhetorical inequities uttered by the likes of Coughlin, Falwell, and Robertson.

In short, this dissertation tells a story about spiritual politics in the recent American past, ones that continue to impact the nature of civic deliberation today and our ability to exchange ideas with one another as members of the public square. The term "spiritual politics" reflects such analytical and categorical work because it captures the nature of religio—political conflict at the time by demonstrating the reliance on and preference for "the spirit" by Lear, Falwell, Wildmon, and others. Despite the fact that Lear and Falwell may have used the same terms in their various writings, they most certainly meant different things by them. As such, my use of "spiritual politics" also reflects how religious liberals themselves understood politics as an extension of the life of the spirit and the search for the public good.

CHAPTER TWO
Norman Lear, Spiritual Liberalism, and the Framing of the Christian Right

On January 21st, 1987, the *The Christian Century* published a short piece by former senior editor and church historian Martin E. Marty titled, "A Profile of Norman Lear: Another Pilgrim's Progress." Looking back on a storied career in television production and writing, Marty relied on the image of the pilgrim, and his proverbial journey, to describe Lear's eclectic spiritual practices and writings and their positive relationship to American civic life. This was valuable information in light of the ongoing criticisms of Lear and his "atheist" programming authored by conservative televangelists such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. Both Lear and his programs were targeted specifically, including *Maude* and *All in the Family*, as evidence of Lear's depraved sense of taste and decency

Marty's article described Lear as a "seriously religious person" who relied on texts from the "mysticism—spirituality—metaphysics" genre for glimpses of the "transcendent" and "the eternal." Most importantly, Marty described him as a "prominent, unconventionally religious personality" who had assembled an impressive collection of texts including *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, *A Road Less Traveled*, and coffee table books on Jewish and Buddhist civilizations. For Marty, these spiritual practices demonstrated Lear's "'fitness' to be in on the debates about civic values and public virtues" that was most relevant to his readers in a decade beset by political and religious strife. For Marty, no one was better suited to address the nation's most divisive subjects, including racism, sexism, and religious discrimination, than television producer and writer Norman Lear.[1]

"In talk of values," Marty observed, "[Lear] regularly moves far beyond the television—producing or support of organizations like People for the American Way; he voices a *larger*

[1] Martin Marty, "A Profile of Norman Lear: Another Pilgrim's Progress" *The Christian Century* (Jan 21 1987), 56.

vision for the nation [my emphasis]."[2] Marty's words pointed to the fact that the "cultural victory" achieved by religious liberalism in the 20th century, an argument set forth by sociologist Jay Demerath III and echoed by scholars of American religion, was more than simply a Christian victory.[3] It was also a direct product of Protestant, Jewish, and interfaith organizing in the name of ecumenical cooperation.[4] For Lear and his supporters, these activities reinforced their already firm commitment to both preserving *and* defending America's civic fundamentals as they understood them: separation of church and state, religious tolerance, civil public exchange, and diversity of opinion.[5]

This chapter argues that Lear is a significant figure in the story of American religion because both his entertainment and political careers defended the most dearly held values of American religious liberalism including separation of church and state, religious diversity, and the free exchange of ideas as what I call a "spiritual liberal." I ask two interrelated but distinct questions to guide much of this discussion: what exactly is liberal and/or religious about Lear's spiritual liberalism? Drawing on the work of liberal theorists of democracy, I first argue that as a liberal Lear possessed a spiritual "double vision" that he relied on to evaluate which storylines could function as effective plot points for his situation comedies as vehicles for his religio—

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[2] Marty," A Profile of Norman Lear," 58.

[3] For more on this argument, see Jay Demerath III, "Cultural Victory and Organizational Defeat in the Paradoxical Decline of Liberal Protestantism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34:4 (Dec 1995), 458—469.

[4] For more on this argument, see David A. Hollinger, "After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Ecumenical Protestantism and the Modern American Encounter with Diversity," *Journal of American History* 98:1 (June 2011), 21—48. For Hollinger, "The leadership of ecumenical Protestantism, as it engaged the diversity of the modern world, enabled its community of faith to serve, among its other roles, as a commodious halfway house to what for lack of a better term we can call post—Protestant secularism" (46).

[5] The significance of Lear's leadership relative to the ecumenical mainline comes into sharper focus when understood as part of what Hollinger calls "the loss by the old Protestant establishment to secular enterprises of some of the energies that had made it a formidable presence in American life" (29).

political vision of America.[6] This type of vision, I argue, reflected not only liberal religious thought, but also liberal thought more broadly understood within the US.[7] Before delving into this analysis, however, I first offer a short biography of Lear in order to provide my readers with historical context and a sense of change over time dating back to the 1930s. The design and execution of this chapter, however, is less concerned with notions of historical progression, and more attentive to thematic continuity when it comes to Lear's liberal writings and analyses of conservative Protestantism.[8] In this sense, this chapter is less a history of Lear's liberalism, and more an analytical rendering of it and its most significant characteristics.

Next, I connect Lear and the rise of the electronic church to a story about the most common biases and stereotypes of the thinking, educated, or "chattering" classes. While religious liberals possessed a deep sympathy for other religions, they were also quite stringent about their collective abhorrence for orthodox or conservative religion due to their own discursive "framing." In fact, conservative mobilization achieved through the latest in telecommunications during this period resulted in its own form of liberal backlash in the form of Lear and his analyses of the Christian Right and later People for the American Way (PFAW).

Lastly, this chapter examines the thematic emphases of Lear's spiritual liberalism across his published and unpublished writings in order to highlight the commonalities between a longer spiritual tradition of American religious liberalism and Lear's television productions as seen in

[6] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2005). Schmidt has suggested a similar formulation for his own purposes, a "doubled perspective" that is at once open yet critical (xi).

[7] John Lardas Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 128n20. For Modern, "Religious liberals tended to define social justice as a religious issue because the object of such justice was the whole of humanity."

[8] In other words, this chapter draws on Lear—related and Lear—authored material from the 1960s through the 1980s in order to demonstrate (for sake of argument) Lear's spiritual liberalism through particular published and unpublished writings as well as television programs.

primetime. As such, this chapter, unlike the subsequent chapters, is primarily interested in highlighting Lear's spiritual liberalism thematically as it appeared in his writings roughly between 1970 and 1985 including reflections on civility, pluralism, and religious tolerance. I also identify those writings by authors besides Lear who drew their readers' attention to either Lear's political aspirations or spiritual predilections behind the camera.

Lear's spiritual liberalism, however, is difficult to describe in light of the terminology presently available to scholars of American religion. I argue that Lear's writings are characteristic of religious and theatrical liberalism(s), one outlined by scholars such as Leigh Schmidt, the other illustrated most recently by scholar of religion Andrea Most.[9] My contribution is to emphasize both the spiritual dimension of Lear's arguments due to his own discomfort with the wording of "religion" and "religious" and his preference for words and thoughts "of the spirit."[10] This spiritual liberalism is most evident in his deeply felt sympathies for the American people and his fiercely articulated disdain for the electronic church and its televangelist representatives.

Lear responded to his tumultuous times with an "ethical mysticism" grounded in the defense of the separation of church and state as part of a larger spiritual politics of religious liberalism.[11] My usage of the term "spiritual politics" implies both a politics having to do with the "spirit" and a politics that grows out of spiritual practice and values. The term also points to the thoroughly contested nature of "the spirit" in public life in the 1980s. Such mysticism, along

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[9] Andrea Most, *Theatrical Liberalism: Jews and Popular Entertainment in America* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013); Leigh Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 2005).

[10] After all, Lear decided to title his own online archive, "Living in the Spirit."

[11] The term "ethical mysticism" is an offshoot of what historian Matthew Hedstrom calls "mystical or ethical liberalism." For more, see Matthew Hedstrom, *Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 8—9.

with its moral sophistication and social activism, corresponded to other liberal values that Lear practiced and defended including empathy for the other, sympathy for religious diversity, and progressive politics. Ironically, Lear's ascendance to political and social prominence following his television career would not have been the same were it not for the oppositional force Lear himself arguably helped to identify— the Christian Right. In this sense, the two formed a symbiotic relationship that continues to fuel progressive and spiritual outreach to this day as part of a "spiritual left" in American public life.[12]

A Short Biography of Norman Lear

Norman Milton Lear was born July 27th, 1922, in New Haven, Connecticut. He spent much of his early life, however, in nearby Hartford as part of an extended Jewish family that included grandparents and uncles. His parents, Herman and Jeanette, both worked in sales, yet it was his father who would have the most lasting impact on Lear as a person and his career as a situation comedy writer. The Lear home was typically filled to the brim with voices— those of his family, and those of the radio. Yiddish and Hebrew turns of phrase, as well as the odd obscenity, sprinkled Lear's earliest experiences of language set at a high volume. In particular, his father (often referred to as "King" Lear) loved to listen to speeches, fights, and political diatribes from across the political spectrum from President Franklin Roosevelt to Catholic priest

[12] For more, see Leigh Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 2005), 4. I am following Schmidt's terminological lead in two ways: describing Lear as a religious liberal with a spiritual politics of tolerance and civility, and identifying Lear as a significant actor in the history of the spiritual left in the recent American past. In fact, Lear's spiritual liberalism manifested in both public and private settings. In fact, he established his own version of a retreat community where each Columbus Day Lear and others, including journalist Bill Moyers and church historian Martin Marty, set out on a pilgrimage to poet Robert Frost's former estate (now owned by Lear) as part of a gathering that has gone on since the early 1980s. Marty himself mentions this retreat by name in his *Christian Century* piece and recalls fondly how Lear responded to the notion of worship as gratitude. These yearly meetings cultivated multiple characteristics of religious liberalism identified by Schmidt including an emphasis on solitary contemplation, seeking, and mystical experience. In this way, Lear became part of (and thus representative of) the ecumenical mainline within American religious liberalism.

Father Charles Coughlin. As Lear is fond of saying, his family lived "at the ends of their nerves and the tops of their lungs."[13]

This particular cultural environment shaped Lear's earliest experiences of America and its citizens regarding their potential for both profound good and evil— for it was this period of his life when Lear first felt like an outsider within the American melting pot. Father Coughlin's unrelenting attacks against American Jews during FDR's presidency gave Lear his first experience of religious discrimination broadcast through the latest means in communication technology. At the same time, Lear also received an education in how best to govern a diverse people when times were tough. The New Deal and its social gospel philosophy demonstrated to Lear the need for federally—funded social programming in order to address national and local economic inequalities. He would carry both of these realizations (feelings of alienation and social welfare) with him into his career as a television writer and political activist on behalf of the American Way and the nation's first amendment rights of religious expression.

When Lear was only nine years old, his father went to prison for selling counterfeit bonds. This experience left an indelible mark on the young Lear, one that he still has difficulty talking about to this day. It also cultivated space for a deeper relationship to form with his uncle Jack and grandfather Solomon (Shya). In particular, Lear's relationship with his grandfather exposed him to a civic tradition that he would later implement himself in both deed and message in his political activism. Shya had a habit of writing letters to the President of the United States in order to express his deep support of or disagreement with particular policies or viewpoints originating in the oval office. This practice shaped Lear's sense of how best to express his own viewpoints on the major political issues of the day in a public setting. In short, Lear particularly

[13] Norman Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2015), 20.

enjoyed spending time with his grandparents, "The best time of the year was when my grandparents, Bubbe and Zayde, came to stay with us for the high holidays. Their arrival was preceded days before by two or three barrels of dishes, carefully wrapped in the Yiddish newspapers Zayde had read to the last word."[14] Lear would come to embody both his father's desire to make a quick buck and his grandfather's commitment to civic engagement and expression in his own life in his creative writing on television and his political organizing through the non—profit organization People for the American Way (PFAW).

Due to financial constraints, Lear did not think he would be able to attend college as a young, aspiring writer. He overcame this obstacle by winning a scholarship in an essay contest titled, "The Constitution and Me." Lear's subject was a sensitive one in light of his own experiences with the anti—Semitism of Father Coughlin. As a result, Lear "chose to speak to the specialness of being a member of a minority for whom the constitutional guarantees of equal rights and liberties just might have a more precious meaning."[15] Following his victory, Lear was able to attend Emerson College in Boston, Massachusetts, a university founded as a school of oratory. Lear's college career, however, was cut short when he dropped out and enrolled in the military in 1942.[16] Lear flew over fifty combat missions as a radio operator and a gunner in the Mediterranean and received the Air Medal for his service behind the rudder. Upon his return, Lear began looking for work in New York as a writer. In the early 1950s, he began writing with comedy writer Ed Simmons in an attempt to move beyond the limitations of writing behind the

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[14] Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience*, 34.

[15] Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience*, 51. Lear was aware of both domestic and global instances of anti—Semitism, which in turn influenced his spiritual liberalism. His hometown of New Haven, CT featured a university (Yale) that had a quota system for its Jewish applicants. Combined with Coughlin's broadcasts and news of Mussolini enacting anti—Jewish legislation in Italy, Lear began to feel out of place relative to the rest of the American melting pot.

[16] Lear had participated in his Bar Mitzvah only seven years before his decision to enroll. The ceremony took place in Shaari Zedek synagogue in New York City.

scenes for others. In time, the writing duo caught the attention of comedy team Martin and Lewis and worked on their "Colgate Comedy Hour" throughout the 1950s. In 1958, Lear decided to team up with fellow writer and creator Bud Yorkin in order to establish their own television production company, Tandem Productions.

As Lear established himself as a writer and producer in American television, he began to notice a disturbing trend in 1960s network programming. Unlike many of his counterparts who simply were unhappy with the selection of westerns and hillbillies in primetime, Lear noticed an inherent politics in the programming itself that suggested a great deal about his tumultuous times. Instead of identifying this simply as an example of vapid or "wasteland" programming, Lear argued that the networks themselves were sending a very specific if not latent message to the American people about the nature of conflict, or lack thereof, in the citizenry of the country. For Lear, 1960s programming, as mediated through the predominate network logic of "least objectionable programming possible," displayed an America that was not experiencing any sort of unrest or disturbance along racial, religious, economic, cultural, or psychological lines.

Not content to simply stand by as network television continued to invest in shows that were utterly removed from what was happening around them, Lear took it upon himself to add his own voice to the conversation in the form of situation comedy (letter) writing. Only this time, Lear's writing would not remain confined to letters to the President or to his local congresswoman. Instead, Lear addressed the American people directly out of a deep sense of respect for their collective capacity to think bigger and desire for a harder—hitting type of television comedy. Ironically, Lear's most significant impact on American television would not be home—grown, but rather a British import titled, "Till Death Do Us Part"— an appropriately titled sitcom that explored the working class in all of its admirable and less admirable qualities. It

was in this setting, in addition to Lear's own biography, that the character Archie Bunker emerged as one of the most impactful characters in the history of American television as part of Lear's seminal sitcom, *All in the Family*. Little did he know that the subsequent decade's most significant cleavages in American society would be played out through the very family that he composed each night for millions of Americans across the country.

Lear's discomfort with the sitcoms of the 1960s was only part of the reason why his show made it onto the network television. His arrival onto the primetime stage came at a time when both writers and executives were looking to do something different in regards to content and programming. Referred to by historians as "the age of relevance," shows such as *MASH* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* joined *All in the Family* as sitcoms that relied on the latest newspaper clipping for their content and plotlines. Compared to what had come before, this new material sought to grab its audiences in a manner unheard of in network sitcom history. Executives exchanged the policy of "least objectionable programming" for "relevance programming" in order to make room for the new edgier material by the likes of Lear, James L. Brooks, and Larry Gelbart while also appealing to a youthful demographic who found value in being "in the know."

As a result, Lear's material relied on contemporaneous events in order to speak to larger pressing issues at the time through his characters and storylines. Lear may not have seen such work as "social" or as communicating "a message," but his explorations of racism, women's liberation, American politics, and class nevertheless revealed the intentions of a concerned citizen acting on behalf of the public interest and the common good— as he understood them. Luckily for Lear, his causes would never lack vocal support from those in Hollywood and in the Protestant mainline.[17]

[17] For American religious historian Elesha Coffman, "the mainline" as both category and narrative descriptor is a retroactive one. "A coalition of highly educated, theologically and politically liberal Protestants"

Lear, American Public Life, and the Rise of the Electronic Church

Marty stood steadfastly by Lear and his spiritual idiosyncrasies because he knew that Lear had much to offer to those concerned about the nation and its public life. Along with other liberal, theologically minded academics such as Harvard theologian Harvey Cox, Marty was skeptical of what he understood as "the electronic church" and its efficacy relative to the more traditional pulpits of larger denominational church settings.[18] In essence, the term electronic church referred to the television—based ministries of countless evangelists and preachers in the 1970s and 1980s that were largely conservative in their politics. The term also serves as evidence for the liberal abhorrence of televised ministries for their profit motives, assumed tax evasion, and inadequate sense of community.[19] Terms such as "electric church" were also used to condescendingly describe televangelists and their media—driven work. Like the phrase "the Religious Right," the electronic church often times functioned rhetorically as a metonymy of conservative Protestantism in public.

Televangelist action and speech appeared most ominously during these years because their very existence characterized a significant reversal of private and public interests. Claims

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emerged during the first quarter of the twentieth century to establish themselves as the nation's moral and cultural guardians through their flagship periodical, *The Christian Century*. "The rise of the mainline coincided with a long reign of liberal politics, which began fitfully with the Progressives and gathered strength with the New Deal." For more, see Elesha J. Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York, NJ: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[18] For an example of how Marty could serve as *data* for journalists and scholars alike, see Margaret O'Brien—Steinfels and Peter Steinfels, "The New Awakening: Getting religion in the Video Age," *Channels of Communication* 5:2 (Jan/Feb 1983), 24—27, 62.

[19] My usage of "liberal" and "progressive" is interchangeable. These terms refer to individuals and organizations (such as Lear and People for the American Way) that set themselves against the politics and policies of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. I rely on a document titled, "The 'Remaking of America': A Message to the Churches" published in *Christianity and Crisis* for the content of this political and religious liberalism. For more on this historical context, see Christian Smith, *Resisting Reagan: The US Central America Peace Movement* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996) and Hilary Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande: Sanctuary and the Politics of Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995). For more on the NCC document, see the July 20th issue of *Christianity and Crisis* published in 1981. No author is listed, but the piece can be found in the "documentation" section from pages 207 to 210.

that had once been primarily private (morality/religion) had suddenly become the content of much of the public discourse of the time.[20] In fact, one could argue that the electronic church was the most visible and obvious evidence of the Christian Right and its potential impact on American public life during the late 1970s. In light of this challenge, Lear's task was to defend an otherwise free speech—oriented system of public deliberation from the autocratic actions and politics of the newly formed Christian Right and its support of political conservatism at both the local and national levels. If unsuccessful, parochial claims by extremist televangelists would continue to divide the American electorate along social and religious lines to the detriment of the most cherished of American political traditions for Lear and his ecumenical supporters— the American Way.[21]

The phrase, "the Christian Right," was one of many terms used by Lear and his supporters to first identify and later describe the collective mobilization of conservative Protestants during the 1970s who tended to support conservative political causes with the assistance and direction of "New Right" strategists and advisors. More specifically, it referred to the organizing of conservative Protestants who moved from the social margins of American life to its political center through their alignment with the candidacy of Ronald Reagan. Additionally, the term as times referred simply to the rise of the electronic church through the activities of

[20] For historian Thomas Borstelmann, "An unexpected and little noticed result of this peculiar confluence of egalitarianism and market values in the 1970s was a striking reversal in the contents of the public and private spheres of American society." For more, see Thomas Borstelman, *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 17.

[21] Wendy Wall, *Inventing the American Way: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008). Like Wall, I am also interested in "the ways in which Americans' common language and iconography both divided them and drew them together. This was especially the case with a phrase such as "The American Way," which was supported in both the private and public sectors by businesses, the federal government, and interfaith organizations such as the National Council of Christians and Jews. This common language emphasized a "shared public vocabulary" that established a "framework in which many social and economic issues were ultimately addressed. That framework privileged individual freedom, national unity, and a shared faith in God above all else" (10—11).

pioneering televangelists such as Jerry Falwell, James Robison, and Pat Robertson. These individuals, along with their collective audiences, play a central role in this story because Lear was keenly aware of their actions and the audience numbers that they drew each week.

In this way, Lear assisted in the construction of what eventually became known as "the Christian Right" by stressing its threat to the otherwise freely regulated airwaves. Alternative terms such as "Religious Right" and "the New Christian Right," in addition to more derogatory terms, tended to be interchangeable for Lear and other Hollywood liberals. Two of the more explicit examples of the latter were references to evangelist Donald Wildmon as "the ayatollah of the airwaves" and to middle and Southern America as "the fly over states." Many if not all of these terms functioned as metonymys for liberals like Lear for conservative religiosity and politics in America.[22]

Lear himself denied any and all intention on his part of trying to educate his audiences or promote a particular political point of view in any of his shows. In fact, such inquiries were received by Lear with a smile and a nod; "I'm simply an entertainer." Despite his deflection, I later argue that Lear's writing introduced the country to a form of situation comedy called "relevance programming" in 1971.[23] This type of writing was didactic, dramatic, and most importantly, relevant— at least to those doing the actual writing. As a result, Lear's programming functioned as a televisual space in primetime that facilitated national discussions

[22] For more, see Tina Rosenberg, "How the Media Made the Moral Majority," *Washington Monthly* (May 1982), 26—34. Original citation found in Steven P. Miller, *Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born—Again Years* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[23] The term "relevance programming" describes a transitional period in American television history marking the ascendance of a new type of primetime programming. It was controversial because it addressed the most divisive issues of the period including women's rights, racism, sexism, and religious intolerance in front of hundreds of millions of viewers weekly. This approach differed radically from the previous network policy of "least offensive programming." For more, see Gary Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007). Also, see Ella Taylor, *Primetime Families: Television Culture in Post—War America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).

about pressing social issues on behalf of America and its constitutional freedoms of free speech and the exercise of religion.[24] This attention to cultural relevancy was not the byproduct of Lear's spiritual labors, but in fact encapsulated his commitment to diversity in American public life as a spiritual concern. In this sense, Lear's work reflected a "mutual commitment to social action as a fundamental aspect of religious experience."[25]

Lear first demonstrated his multi—faceted understanding of religion, politics, and civic life in an edited collection for Columbia University's School of Journalism titled, "Liberty and Its Responsibilities."[26] His writing explored liberty and its responsibilities, an apt title for someone who monitored and defined public space through his entertaining and sitcom writing. Lear's arguments established both the general thrust of his vitriol against "moral monopolists" and his overarching theory of the pluralism and tolerance necessary for a healthy, liberal democracy. His first sentence elegantly connected his television career to his then burgeoning organizing career as a public figure and a spiritual liberal who sought relevance as both a television network and religious value. "It is the business of television," Lear contended, "to deal with, to reflect, and to report on the times."[27]

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[24] Lear's activism can be connected historically to two separate but related liberal responses to religious diversity. For historian David Mislin, these two traditions were those of the social gospel, which included "The effort to link religion and popular culture also inspired churches to make better use of the nascent advertising industry and growing mass media," and an approach that embraced religious pluralism as a spiritual value. For more, see David Mislin, *Saving Faith: Making Religious Pluralism an American Value at the Dawn of the Secular Age* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 8.

[25] David Mislin, *Saving Faith*, 65.

[26] Norman Lear, "Liberty and its Responsibilities," in *Broadcast Journalism, 1979—1981; The Eight Alfred I. Dupont Columbia University Survey*, edited by Marvin Barrett (New York, NY: Everest Publishers, 1982), N/A

[27] I refer back to this phrasing throughout the dissertation because it defines the relevance—thrust that lay behind each and every show Lear wrote during this period, not to mention those composed for Mary Tyler Moore and Alan Alda by individuals such as James Brooks and Larry Gelbart.

Echoing the sentiments of many of his liberal religious contemporaries, Lear argued that television programming could not simply stand by and reflect the culture that it found itself in. Like many others who produced sitcoms in the early 1970s including James L. Brooks and Larry Gelbart, Lear made it a point to foster discussion by reporting on what he and his writers had read that very day in the pages of newspapers such as the *New York* and *Los Angeles Times*. The marketplace of ideas Lear wrote about and sought to establish through first his programming and later by way of a non—profit organization may have been sound in principle, but its execution was anything but assumed in public.

Lear's ascendance to political relevancy, achieved largely through his television and non—profit work, coincided with the simultaneous emergence of what journalists and intellectuals called the electronic church. In fact, one could even argue that Lear's mobilizing unfolded in tandem with the organizational apparatuses of the electronic church. As part of a larger movement labeled the "Christian or Religious Right," this church found its niche in the ever expanding landscape of America's radio and television programming following the Second World War. This venue for the gospel was a relatively new discovery on the part of conservative Protestants who for many generations had focused on building a religious and cultural infrastructure within the proverbial Bible Belt, and later across the nation's Sunbelt, through a series of interconnected business schools and Bible colleges from Arkansas to California.[28] Conservative Protestants had certainly utilized the two mediums before the 1980s, yet they did not establish themselves definitively until the latter part of the twentieth—century.

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[28] For more of this story, see Darren Dochuck, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain—Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York, NY: WW Norton and Company, 2011).

These men and women utilized a form of "urban revivalism" for much of their mobilization since none of them answered explicitly to a denominational body.[29] The self—differentiated character of the urban revival format also encouraged experimentation in form and content among televangelists such that broadcasting over the airwaves came to embody many of the same genres associated with primetime programming and late night television.[30] One of the most prominent post—World War II examples of a conservative evangelist presence broadcast over America's airwaves was Pat Robertson. Robertson purchased a UHF station in 1960 that eventually gave way to the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) in the late 1970s. The year of Robertson's purchase proved to be one of many that would come to define much of America's political future by way of its newly contested, yet gradually less regulated, airwaves. This was especially the case for Lear and the Protestant mainline. Despite their differences, Lear and Robertson were arguably two sides of the same televised coin— one reacting to the biases of the other with programming grounded in their respective moral visions of the nation and what was best for its citizenry.

In light of this brief history, Lear's non—profit work as a spiritual liberal can be read as a stern reaction against and defense of airspace and broadcasting time once assumed to be the exclusive territory of the Protestant mainline. More importantly, Lear's actions symbolized the activities of a mobilizing rearguard in support of a fragile religious consensus that had remained largely intact over the airwaves since the first Radio Act of the 1930s. This act was particularly important because it was designed to keep all "religious extremists," including one Father

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[29] For more on this connection, see Jeffrey Hadden, "Religious Broadcasting and the Mobilization of the New Christian Right," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26:1 (March 1987), 1—24.

[30] For more, see Stewart Hoover, *Mass Media Religion: The Social Sources of the Electronic church* (New York, NY: Sage Publications, 1988). Also, see Jeffrey K. Hadden, "The Rise and Fall of American Televangelism," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 527 (May 1993), 118.

Charles Coughlin, out of the public interest by keeping them off of the airwaves due to their divisive politics and religious intolerance.[31] As a result, the proliferation of televangelists and their ministries throughout the 1970s was an all too familiar story to Lear despite the nearly half century that had passed between his childhood encounter with Coughlin and his career as a producer and non—profit organizer. The means of communication may have changed, but the content had remained relatively stable as ministry after ministry organized itself based on an exclusionary politics of certainty over and against Lear's own politics of pluralism and civility.[32]

Not only did particular evangelists address Lear by name in the news and over the airwaves during this period, but they also tended to reduce the vibrancy of religious or spiritual life that Lear defended down to a set of political concerns by way of "biblical scorecards." These documents represented a particular genre of religio—political argumentation, and a novel one at that. In short, they were the material manifestation of a largely conservative method of evaluating the moral or religious character of politicians based on how they voted according to a predetermined agenda of conservative politics.

Lear's disdain for these documents was multifaceted. The content of televangelist discourse, which included a fierce defense of "the family" along sexual, cultural, social, and religious lines, certainly concerned Lear, but he was more disturbed by its method of execution, which tended to rely on religious binaries between the Godly and Ungodly for much of its

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[31] For more, see Tona J. Hangen, *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion, and Popular Culture in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 153. Also, see Heather Hendershot, "God's Angriest Man: Carl McIntire, Cold War Fundamentalism, and Right—Wing Broadcasting," *American Quarterly* 59:2 (Jun 2007), 373—396.

[32] Based on the work of Courtney Bender and others, I argue that Lear demonstrates a "politics of spiritual pluralism" in his activism and organizing. For more, see Bender and McRoberts, "Mapping a Field: Why and How to Study Spirituality," *SSRC Working Paper* (Oct 2012).

political clarity and efficacy.[33] Despite the change in characters, the plot points remained eerily the same for Lear and called for a similar political response— a public defense of spiritual values in the face of an intolerant force of media—driven conservative ministries. "In our time of hardship," Lear declared in "Liberty and its Responsibilities," "we find the New Right and Religious New Right—a new breed of robber barons who have organized to corner the market on morals."[34]

Drawing on the words of Abraham Lincoln and his call to seek God's side during times of political strife, Lear defined a term in "Liberty and its Responsibilities" that would appear consistently in many of his writings on American public life and the Christian Right— the "spirit of liberty." In fact, Lear articulated his own interpretation of how best to balance competing interests in public based largely on the writings of Justice Learned Hand, who defended first amendments rights during America's mid—century.[35] For Hand, "The spirit of liberty is the spirit which seeks to understand the minds of other men and women; the spirit of liberty is a spirit which weighs their interests alongside its own without bias; the spirit of liberty remembers that not even one sparrow falls to earth unheeded; the spirit of liberty is the spirit of Him who, hear two thousand years ago, taught mankind a lesson it has never learned, but has never quite forgotten."

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[33] For more on the politics of the family during this period, including a discussion of breadwinner liberalism and conservatism, see Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2012). Much of my own story can be read as one of realignment and restructuring, in addition to the various liberal responses to the less than favorable political conditions that resulted from a conservative shift to the right beginning with the Reagan presidency in 1980.

[34] Norman Lear, "Liberty and its Responsibilities," 236.

[35] Lear was not the only spiritual liberal who referred to the writings of Justice Hand. Mainline supporters including Donald and Peggy Shriver also refer to his writings as a way of addressing the divisiveness that characterized much of religious politics during the 1970s and 1980s.

Lear championed Hand's values of understanding, non—biased evaluation, and assistance within a larger message of Jesus Christ. Like other religious liberals, Lear had no difficulty appropriating the insights of various religious traditions within his own writings on spirituality and American religion; in this case, Lear used the life Jesus led as an exemplar to others in difficult times. Based on these premises, Lear defined a principle of tolerance that contributed to cooperative living as "a people dedicated to achieving consensus through the expression of diverse and conflicting ideas."[36] This task would be more difficult than Lear anticipated.

For Lear, the principle of tolerance "is threatened by that extremist coalition of the New Right and some evangelical fundamentalists who would refuse a hearing to any conflicting opinion because they assume that their certainty is the same as absolute certainty." Lear continued, "To disagree with the conclusions of the New and Religious New Right on numerous matters of morality and politics is to be labeled a poor Christian—or unpatriotic—or anti—family."[37] To Lear, the Christian Right represented an autocratic movement designed to suppress intellectual and religious freedoms protected by the constitution. As he would later argue, the most pressing concern was the Right's method of division and judgment rather than the content of its public claims.[38] A politics of certainty rather than of civility threatened Lear's and others attempts to establish agreed upon rules for religiously informed public expression— ones defined and maintained largely by liberals themselves through social protests during the Civil Rights and

[36] Lear, "Liberty and its Responsibilities," 237.

[37] Lear, "Liberty and its Responsibilities," 237.

[38] Lear's claim here is debatable. I would argue that he had as much to disagree with the Christian Right about in terms of their claims as he did with their specific stances on social issues.

Anti—Vietnam War movements in the 1960s and 1970s.[39] In fact, Lear often claimed that his own reform efforts were directly descended from those first applied to public life by the protesters of the "the movement" for civil and human rights.

For scholars of American religious liberalism, there is an enduring and intimate connection between a liberal spirit of critique and acts of public social engagement including protests, non—profit organizing, and boycotts. "In this case," argues sociologist Courtney Bender, "an affirmation of spiritual pluralism becomes the frame through which political projects…articulate a developing evaluation of spirituality that plays off of ongoing political negotiations of the one and the many."[40] One of Lear's most pressing concerns when it came to these types of negotiations was airspace; in particular, he was worried about the Christian Right's increasing claims to and control of airspace on a national scale. His political and ethical concerns, ones that were explored comedically through a variety of movies in the early 1980s, found their focus in how the Right seemed to be on the verge of a media takeover as station after station began broadcasting what Lear heard as hate and at times ethnocentrism.[41] He was particularly attuned to this type of rhetoric because he had first felt like an ethnic outsider as a child listening to the diatribes of Father Coughlin on the radio in the 1930s. Lear grew up at the feet of both his father and grandfather, which often meant listening to the addresses of both Franklin Roosevelt and Coughlin over the radio.

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[39] For more, see the special issue of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* published in 1970 titled, "The Sixties: Radical Change in American Religion."

[40] Bender and McRoberts, "Mapping a Field: Why and How to Study Spirituality," 17.

[41] For examples of these, see *Pray TV* and *In God We Tru$t*. If Lear had gone on to produce a movie instead of going with thirty—second spots for his initial People for the American Way organizing, he too could be added to this list based on the title, *Religion*.

While Lear would grow fond of Roosevelt's ideas, he came to see himself as a social outcast because of his ethnicity based on Coughlin's words. This type of awareness heightened considerably throughout the 1970s as more and more televangelists began to make their way onto television screens the country over. Echoes of such intolerance, not to mention the means through which the federal government attempted to keep "extremists" off the air, made Lear uneasy about the veracity of many of the Christian Right's claims as heard in the writings, direct mailings, and speeches of televangelists such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, James Robison, and Donald Wildmon.[42] Drawing on an extensive tradition of liberal stereotyping of conservative Protestants in the United States, Lear argued that this generation of evangelist was not cut from the same social cloth as its predecessors. To the contrary— it presented an all new set of challenges for those toiling in the vineyard on behalf of the country's most cherished freedoms of speech and religious practice.

Framing the New Right: Lear as Liberal Theorist of Conservative Religiosity

Lear's criticisms and analyses of the Christian Right were neither novel nor particularly unexpected. In fact, in many instances they were quite derivative of past rhetoric and tropes developed and employed by progressive academics, writers, and intellectuals as illustrations of "framing" Christian orthodoxy.[43] Scholars such as Martin Seymour Lipset, Richard Hofstadter,

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[42] For more on Wildmon and his role in the culture wars, see Cynthia Cooper, "NBC and the Moral Majority: A Holy War over Violence and Television," in *Violence on Television: Congressional Inquiry, Public Criticism, and Industry Response* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996), 99—105; and Robert R. Mendenhall, "Responses to Television from the New Christian Right: The Donald Wildmon Organization's Fight against Sexual Content," in *Sex, Religion, and Media* edited by Dane S. Claussen (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 101—114.

[43] Framing describes the manner in which a group or community of people come to be understood according to the values and social conditioning of another group or community of individuals primarily through linguistic and discursive formations. Such formations do not have to include stereotypes, but in Lear's case they very much did according to preceding patterns first established by journalists who reported on the events of the Scopes Trial to a national audience. For anthropologist Susan Harding, this discursive tradition emerged in order to better represent "the repugnant cultural other." For more, see Susan Harding, "Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other," *Social Research* 58:2 (Summer 1991), 373—393.

and David Riesman published many antagonistic and ambivalent pieces about “Christian Orthodoxy” that not only took advantage of the hostile, anti—fundamentalist narratives generated in response to the Scopes Trial, but also took part in composing their own stories of progress and cultural ascendance over and against a conservative religious threat.

For scholar of government Jon Shields, this “elite class of Progressive—era intellectuals and journalists” focused their analytical attention not simply on particular Christian denominations, but instead on an abstracted Christian Orthodoxy that threatened the nation’s most cherished civic freedoms of constitutionally protected intellectual exploration and articulation. Academics of the 1920s who wrote on the relationship between science and religion following Scopes, including president of Cornell University Andrew Dickson White, laid much of the groundwork for the postwar scholarship of Hofstadter and others by focusing on a “traditionary and provincial faith” that rejected logic and scientific discovery at its own peril. Lear continued this tradition of liberal emplotment in his own writings on “moral monopolists” and “robber barons” within America’s marketplace of ideas.

Such bifurcated classifications established many of the intellectual categories that post—war intellectuals and religious liberals would rely on to understand periodic resurgences of conservative Protestantism in the United States. As a result, the descriptive affinities between the writings of the 1920s and the post—war period provided a substantial foundation for the analytical descriptions of Lipset, Hofstadter, and later Lear in regards to “the dangers of the orthodox mind.”[44] For Hofstadter, both Catholic and Protestant fundamentalists shared a “common Puritanism, a mindless militancy, and an ecumenicism of hatred.”[45] These phrases,

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[44] For Shields, this type of analysis was all too common even in the most academic of sources. In fact, this particular quotation comes from an issue of *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* published in 1948.

along with normative claims concerning manipulative evangelistic practices (electronic church vs. institutional pulpit), would become part of the common parlance for liberal academics, intellectuals, and journalists who studied the various cultural manifestations of conservative Christianity in both popular and professional publications. These proved to be especially significant to liberal writers and producers like Norman Lear because they functioned as the key methods and tropes of "framing" conservative Protestants when they began mobilizing in the 1970s.

Such framing, arguably an expression of liberal religious apprehension over the entrance of Christian orthodoxy into American public life, tells us as much about Lear's own spiritual liberalism as his defense of the separation of church and state does. By the time conservative Protestantism began mobilizing in the last quarter of the twentieth—century, Lear and others were ready with the subsequent frames, "When the Christian Right finally emerged intellectuals and elite journalists inherited a well—worn critique of orthodox Christians handed down uncritically from their Progressive heirs and further developed by mid—century scholars."[46] In this sense, Lear is a significant figure for scholars of American religion not only for his liberal religious productions, but also for his contributions to the study of the Christian Right itself as a concerned member of the Hollywood community.

Lear often cautioned his listeners not to confuse his religious opponents with those of the past. In "Liberty and its Responsibilities," Lear argued that "It's important that we do not be misled into thinking that these are simply old—fashioned throwbacks—like Bible—thumping,

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[45] For more, see Hofstadter's classic *Anti—Intellectualism in American Life*, which was published in 1962. In regards to the relationship between Catholics and Protestants, Shields argues that "It is remarkable that Progressive and postwar liberals were able to see deep affinities between Catholics and evangelicals, especially given the sharp tensions between them. It is even more remarkable that they articulated what some regard as the major fault lines in today's culture wars." For more, see Shields, "Framing the Christian Right," 650.

[46] Shields, "Framing the Christian Right," 650.

openly racist, blatantly anti—Semitic rough—hers whackos of another era," Lear warned. "These are smooth, buttoned—down, middle—class Americans, business—oriented evangelicals…revivalistic salesmen – entrepreneurs – who have a genius for responding to the market's desire for stable values."[47] Not only was Lear aware of a longer tradition of such "Bible—thumpers," but he also added his own interpretive thrust to an already well—established progressive framing tradition of encapsulating conservative Protestants within various forms of media. As anthropologist Susan Harding has argued, since the 1920s fundamentalists had been victims of "modern discursive practices" and an "apparatus of thought that presents itself in the form of popular 'stereotypes,' media 'images,' and academic 'knowledge.'"[48]

These forms of knowledge were assisted by a "modernist code" that assumed primacy in the manner in which conservative Protestants in general, and fundamentalists in particular, appeared in the public imagination as part of a larger "storyline of liberal progress." It is in this moment that Lear took on the role of educator of his fellow (religious) liberals and political progressives in naming exactly what they were up against in the marketplace of ideas. Perhaps more importantly, Lear arguably contributed to the creation of the very force he meant to counter by perpetuating its presence in the American public through the very media outlets he himself relied on. By doing so, Lear inadvertently placed restraints on the space that he fought so passionately to protect, namely the larger public discourse he so aptly shaped through his programing in the 1970s. Lear did his best to counter the division he saw (and more importantly

[47] Lear, "Liberty and its Responsibilities," 238.

[48] Susan Harding, "Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other," *Social Research* 58:2 (Summer 1991), 374. Also, see Harding, "American Protestant Moralism and the Secular Imagination: From Temperance to the Moral Majority," *Social Research* 76:4 (Winter 2009), 1277—1306.

heard) emanating from what he understood as conservative "entrepreneurs of the spirit." Often times, however, his own demands for understanding and un—bias evaluation went unheeded.[49]

Despite his best efforts, Lear's spiritual liberalism often times turned in on itself as an expression of intolerance for the intolerant. This did not mean that he was simply a defender of Americans' free speech. His writings and speeches tell us much about his own reading habits, the ways in which Lear translated spiritual values into political processes, and how religious liberalism found its footing within public spaces of ideas and contestation in the form of spiritual politics. Writing for *USA Today*, Lear argued that "It is not the substance of what is imposed but the imposition itself that is objectionable to free people."[50] Regardless of the assumption Lear made concerning the distinction between form and content, he focused his attention on the means, and more importantly the manner, in which the Christian Right articulated their claims over the airwaves. To Lear, their divisive and oppositional tactics were to the detriment of the majority of their listeners on both civic and religious grounds. Because of the Christian Right's gains in media and print in the form of televangelism, conservative advocacy groups, and think—tanks, nothing less than the means of cultural production were at stake in Lear's bid to remind the country of the American way of doing politics.[51]

Lear's more acerbic moments in public, however, were equally counterbalanced if not more so by his reflections on liberal religion itself, which foregrounded empathy, sympathy, and

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[49] This statement comes from a talk titled "America Has Not Yet Awakened to the Threat" that Lear gave at the Beverly Hills Bar Association in June of 1986. In it, he reached back to what historian Leigh Schmidt has documented as priestcraft by calling such entrepreneurs of the spirit "talented manipulators" out to give simple answers to not so simple questions.

[50] Norman Lear, "Our Political Leaders Mustn't Be Evangelists," *USA Today* (August 17th 1984), N/A

[51] For more from the production side as well as the media side of the culture wars, see James Davison Hunter, *The Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1991).

a willingness to search for the transcendent's deepest recesses in everyday life.[52] Echoing the concerns of his progressive mid—century forerunners, Lear "took pride in the modern welfare state as an evolving set of solutions to social problems, testable and adaptable, the antithesis of rigid ideology." For historian George Marsden, liberals were generally pragmatic and also "passionately committed to principles such as individual freedom, free speech, human decency, justice, civil rights, community responsibilities, equality before the law, due process, balance of powers, economic opportunity, and so forth."[53] However, liberal principles or ideas only tell part of the story. Liberal sentiments, such as empathy, are equally as important to consider—especially in light of Lear's empathetic programming of satire and tragic comedy. For English scholar Amanda Anderson, liberalism's most distinctive feature is its "double—vision" structure of thought and analysis.[54]

Anderson argues that liberalism is best understood as a "liberal aesthetic." As such, "Liberalism is best understood…as a philosophical and political aspiration conceived in an acute awareness of the challenges and often bleak prospects confronting it."[55] This somewhat

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[52] One could argue that this appreciation for the spiritual character of one's surroundings was a transcendentalist one that had been appropriated by Lear (and other religious/spiritual liberals) in his understanding of spirituality. For scholar of religion Cara Burnidge, "From nature walks to reading, transcendentalists expanded acceptable forms of religious practice for liberal Protestants." I would also add for Jews as well who were interested in interfaith cooperation, like Lear. For more, see "Protestant Liberalism." In *Encyclopedia of Religion in America*, edited by Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, 1783—91. Washington, DC: CQ Press., 2010. doi: http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.drew.edu/10.4135/9781608712427.n301.

[53] Both of these citations come from Molly Worthen, "Faithless," *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas* 32 Review of *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment: The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief* by George Marsden (New York, NY: Basic Books, Spring 2014), 77—85. The latter quotation is Marsden while the former is Worthen.

[54] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2005). Schmidt has suggested a similar formulation for his own purposes, a "doubled perspective" that is at once open yet critical (xi).

paradoxical arrangement leads Anderson to describe liberalism according to a "double—vision structure" that utilizes both moral (self—development) and sociological (mass behavior) insights for much of its explanatory power. In this sense, liberalism encourages the optimism and sympathy associated with its religious counterpart, yet it also fosters feelings of pessimism and irony if the ideal is not realized successfully. "Liberals do not have a monopoly on this split view," argues Anderson, "but it tends to cause them more angst, since there is an ideal of reflective enlightenment in liberalism that cannot rest easily with a gap between a sociological condition seen to characterize what the masses do and believe, and its own progressive ideals."[56]

In other words, due to this gap between economic realities and liberal ideals, political and religious liberals direct much of their energy towards rectifying the difference between what is envisioned and what can actually be realized. Lear and his supporters shared this understanding of religion as inherently relevant to its times. This notion reflected a broader liberal understanding of religion, which for some American Protestants meant an emphasis on works for the sake of others. "Eternity and salvation were less important than moral action, proper behavior, and social and political progress," argues Cara Burnidge. "This blurred the lines between sacred and secular behavior as liberals initiated public reforms through voluntarism, legislation, and professional careers."[57]

At times, however, the gap between the real and the idealized cultivated a sense of judgment of those who either resist such reflective enlightenment or privilege a different set of values concerning their own self—development. In cases such as these, the distance between the

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[55] Amanda Anderson, "The Liberal Aesthetic," in *Theory after Theory*, eds., Jane Elliott and Derek Attridge (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 249—261. For more, see Amanda Anderson, "Aesthetics: The Case of Trilling and Adorno," *Critical Inquiry* 40:4 (Summer 2014), 418—438.

[56] Anderson, "Liberal Aesthetic," 251.

[57] Cara Burnidge, "Protestant Liberalism."

ideal and the actual determined to a large extent the level of criticism directed at those who remain in the gap or fall short of the ideal according to what Harding referred to as a “storyline of liberal progress.” For someone like Norman Lear, this gap between the idealized and the realized fostered simple solutions to complex problems within the American populous— ones suitable to frictionless delivery over the airwaves through a religio—political apparatus such as the electronic church.

In addition, Anderson also identifies a number of epistemological strategies that support the examined and self—interrogated life of Protestant and spiritual liberalisms including “rigorous scrutiny of principles, assumptions, and belief systems; the questioning of authority and tradition; the dedication to argument, debate, and deliberative processes of legitimation and justification; and the commitment to openness and transparency.”[58] Once articulated, these “principles and practices” are turned into “a way of life” as they “are infused into political institutions” as part of a larger liberal project of education.[59] Not only do these characteristics resonate with other descriptions of liberal philosophy and religiosity, but they also capture the efforts and values of Lear and others to build a more just and understanding country by way of discussion, argumentation, and most importantly, civility in public. The influence of Lear’s mediating position in primetime as writer and producer depended greatly on his ability to execute scrutiny and argument effectively through his television characters as well as through his non—profit organizing for People for the American Way. In this way, Lear is a productive and

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[58] Another important element of religious liberalism to consider in light of Norman Lear’s biography is its self—interrogative impulse relative to its own truth claims and those of others. For historian David Hollinger, ecumenical self—interrogation is one of the most important aspects of liberal Protestant thought because it has encouraged its practitioners to venture beyond the borders of their own traditions as part of a larger seeking culture that has characterized US religious life since its mid—century. For more, see David Hollinger, “Afterword and Commentary: Religious Liberalism and Ecumenical Self—Interrogation,” in *American Religious Liberalism*, eds. Leigh Schmidt and Sally Promey (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 374—387.

[59] Anderson, “Liberal Aesthetic,” 251.

substantial example of how spiritual liberalism mobilizes itself by way of rigorous self—examination and visions of the societal ideal.

Anderson's framework seems especially appropriate for someone like Lear who established much of his early success by composing art on television in primetime through sentiment and empathy— a theatrical imagining of another's pain and discomfort by way of the stage. For historian Molly Worthen, liberalism "is less an ideology than the spirit of empathy incarnate in politics. It is not perfect, but it is the best we have."[60] For spiritual liberals like Lear, the mutually—reinforcing relationship between sentiments such as empathy and idealism within a larger double—vision helps explain why liberal religion continues to manifest in public spaces through various forms of spiritual politics. Despite the limits of these sentiments, along with the gap between civic ideal and material reality, they still grounded much of the Lear—authored activism and sitcom writing throughout 1970s along with the non—profit and interfaith organizing in the name of People for the American Way (PFAW) in the early 1980s. This was one of many thematic continuities linking Lear's television writings to his advocacy groups as a product of his particular religio—political commitments as a spiritual liberal.

Lear, Liberal Religion, and the Varieties of Religious Experience

Despite the public nature of his claims against what he understood as the constitutional improprieties perpetuated by the Christian Right, Lear's spiritual liberalism was arguably as public as his televised and printed denunciations of conservatism writ large. In fact, he discussed his passion for seeking "the transcendent," however it appeared to him, in a variety of heavily mediated settings including universities, press clubs, and trade publications like *Time* magazine.[61] In a public address to the National Press Club in Washington, DC titled, "The

[60] Worthen, "Faithless," 85.

Search for E Pluribus Unum," Lear addressed the subject of his religious background explicitly. "I am a Jew and I love my people and our culture…but that is not what makes me religious. What makes me religious is the way I experience all of creation; what makes me religious is the way I experience the Almighty, and, perhaps, the way I experience life and the way I try to live it."[62] Not only did Lear's words illuminate a particular understanding of being Jewish, but they also demonstrated a "post— or extra—" denominational sensibility within a longer history of American spirituality and liberal religion.

He acknowledged the importance of Judaism to his spiritual makeup, yet it did not have the last say in influencing how he embodied his liberal religious sensibilities in public. This was a most useful approach to self—conception as well as to the world's manifold religions—namely, to have one foot within a tradition so as to free the other for more exploratory projects of discovery. For historian David Hollinger, not only did liberal self—interrogation create space for exploration and seeking, but it also facilitated the impact of secular or non—religious actors on largely Protestant and/or religious individuals. By identifying and documenting such self—reflexive behaviors and ways of thinking among less traditionally religious subjects, Hollinger concludes that American religious history becomes less about religion and more about religious

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[61] One such address took place at Harvard Divinity School in 2002. The title, "Power and Principles: Leaders in Media and Finance," conveyed Lear's interest in harmonizing spiritual values with ethical business practices. This impulse lead Lear and former Chairman of Johnson and Johnson James Burke to found the Business Enterprise Trust in 1989 with help of many of America's most prominent figures in business including Warren Buffett, Katharine Graham, and Henry B. Schacht. Lear and others focused their attention on business leaders who set positive examples in times of what Lear identified as "bottom line thinking." In their words, the Business Enterprise Trust "identifies and honors acts of courage integrity, and social vision in business" by way of a strong, "constructive business ethic." This is but one manifestation of Lear's influence in the corporate world. For more, see David Bollier, ed., *Aiming Higher: 25 Stories of How Companies Prosper by Combining Sound Management and Social Vision* (New York, NY: Amacom American Management, 1996).

[62] This document, like others in my Lear archive, does not possess page numbers. The particular words in this citation are arguably as important as their location within the speech itself. The longer Press Club speech has in fact been broken down into subsections including this excerpt's section, "Confessions of an Unaffiliated Groper." The subsection's title says a great deal about how Lear conceives of his own spiritual journey of discovery in addition to his notion of affiliation in regards to a religious or spiritual tradition. For more, see http://normanlear.com/backstory_speeches.html

engagement(s) between oppositional and sympathetic communities.[63] For the purposes of this project, "engagements" as deliberation and rhetorical contest between liberals and conservatives in public captures the dynamic of Lear's spiritual politics best in the early 1980s.

Despite the freedom that this "post/extra" language offered Lear, he nevertheless recognized the difficulties in naming himself a "religious" person. "I am reconciled to the fact that not everyone who reads these words will agree that I qualify as a religious person, because I have not expressed myself in a manner they could accept," Lear observes. "My words lack scripture, theology, ecclesiastical authority. Still…I have felt and said that if there was no other reason to believe in God, it would have to be the Havana leaf. I have said the same thing while biting into a ripe peach, a just ready piece of Crenshaw melon, or a great ear of sweet summer corn. I have experienced God's presence in the faces of my wife, my children, my grandson—and every time throughout my working life when I have gone to bed with a second—act problem and awakened in the morning with the solution." Lear's willingness to locate experiences of the divine beyond the confines of institutional expressions participated in a longer, liberal religious tradition dating back to the writings of Thomas Paine, Walt Whitman, and William James as well as Transcendentalists such as Henry David Thoreau.[64] In fact, Lear regularly cited such writers in his public addresses and publications in order to better express his civility—centered vision for

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[63] David Hollinger, "Afterword and Commentary: Religious Liberalism and Ecumenical Self—Interrogation," in *American Religious Liberalism*, eds. Leigh Schmidt and Sally Promey (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 374—387. For Hollinger, "If the field of religious history were to be understood not so much as the history of various religions, but rather as the history of *engagements* with religious issues…[we] could direct attention to the ways in which religious communities sustain themselves, transform themselves, or decline, in relation to intellectual critique as well as in response to social conditions (385).

[64] These names composed a short selection of authors Lear cites in public. One could argue that these sources also serve as influences on Lear and his writings as part of a broader reading list.

the country. In particular, it was James' work that first gave Lear an appreciation for living "between the lines, between the experiences."[65]

James' writings played a very similar role for other reading—minded, religious liberals of middlebrow culture because they provided their readers with a way of thinking about the world rather than a particular understanding of that world's human and non—human subjects. In this sense, James' work is significant beyond the fact that much of it can be connected to the spiritual philosophy of religious liberalism. He not only contributed heavily to the content of religious liberalism itself, but he also has served as a reference for spiritual liberals including Lear himself throughout the twentieth—century. This suggests that other religious liberals viewed James as a source of authority and enlightenment for their own spiritual development and articulation.[66] Politically speaking, scholars have identified this particular spiritual politics as "ethical mysticism" through which a "spirituality of social vision and transformation" can be realized and enacted in public.[67] Despite the fact that progressive politics did not seamlessly map onto a progressive spirituality, "political progressivism, socioeconomic justice, and mystical interiority" came together in such a way as grounds for the development of a "spiritual left" in American religious life.[68]

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[65] Both Lear's wife and historian Martin Marty suggested to Lear that he read James' *Varieties* according to Lear's presentation.

[66] For historian Matthew Hedstrom, "The Jamesian emphasis on religious experience permeated American religious liberalism in the twentieth century and branched in a variety of directions." For more, see Matthew Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 8.

[67] For more, see Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[68] Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, 57.

In addition to James, Lear was also a great admirer of writers such as George Bernard Shaw, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Berry, Robert Bellah, and Joseph Campbell.[69] In describing his own "spiritual journey" and its essentials, Lear explains "I take with me every great piece of religious writing I have the strength to carry."[70] In one moment, this might be the words and deeds of Jesus. In another, Lear uses the Yiddish "mama—loshen" to convey his sense of harmony in the universe since "the spiritual life of the human species occupies a much larger, more heterogeneous realm than any one organized religion can lay claim to."[71] For Lear, James' work "positioned religious experience, rather than church, creeds, or systematic theology, at the center of religious life."[72] In many ways, this perspective gave Lear the means through which he was able to articulate a religious sensibility in public despite the dominance of largely Protestant vocabularies for such contested epistemological work.[73] In the end, Lear's advice for deeper spiritual experiences for those still groping for it was simple, "I'd like to propose that you

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[69] Lear is particularly drawn to Bellah's writings on "civil religion" and its prophetic qualities. In fact, Lear favors civil religion as a way of thinking about religious diversity and free speech in the US.

[70] This sentiment comes from a private correspondence from Lear written to a Mr. Kohl thanking him for making Lear apart of the Woodland Historical Document Collection. I have not been able to determine which society Kohl represents or who Kohl himself is. The title given to this letter is, "Packing for the Spiritual Journey."

[71] This citation comes from Lear's "The Search for E Pluribus Unum" given at the National Press Club on December 9th, 1993. For Lear, mama—loshen is "a Yiddish word describing the understanding that comes when one's common sense derives as much from the soul as the mind. The Sermon on the Mount is simple mama—loshen. And anything that ain't mama—loshen doesn't square with my religious sensibilities." More of this can be found here under the title, "A Church for People Like Us": http://www.huffingtonpost.com/norman—lear/mamaloshen—a—church—for—p_b_480896.html. Accessed December 10, 2015.

[72] Despite the anti—Catholicism that coursed through James' writings in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Hedstrom argues that it helped "twentieth—century moderns retain spiritual vitality." The text also was important "because of its applicability to those seeking meaning, happiness, and wholeness in a modern, consumerist, psychologically oriented culture." For more, see Matthew Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 8, 93.

[73] For more on this slippage and its relationship to Jewish theatricality, see Andrea Most, *Theatrical Liberalism: Jews and Popular Entertainment in America* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013). I will draw on Most's writings in the next chapter on television and spiritual liberalism in order to highlight the particularly *Jewish* aspects of Lear's programming in regards to liberal democracy and its defense of free speech and separation of church and state.

set up your own William James School of Investigative Journalism. This will not be easy, I realize."[74] More about form than content, Lear's usage of James reveals much about how he appropriated James' insights for his own spiritual development— namely as a framework or way of thinking about experience, religion, politics, and the spiritual.

When speaking of religious and cultural diversity, Lear's public addresses and writings utilized an important analogy that revealed much about how liberal religious traditions understand difference in public life. Lear neither limited himself nor others to a particular box of religious or spiritual identity. In fact, he encouraged as much exploration as possible. Such explorative practices opened the individual up to how diverse the world's spiritual resources were to the traveling pilgrim. "Let's not let religious categories get in the way," Lear suggests. "If one were to look at a very long river, one might see flora and fauna, trees and shrubs of varying nature along the many miles of its banks. If we think of our many and varied religions as uniquely different trees along a thousand mile river—and appreciate that they are all nurtured by the same waters—any member of the press should be able to report on the river, the common nurturer of all of our spiritual traditions and common values."[75] More reliant on essences than on particularities, Lear contended that despite the distinctions differentiating one tradition (or tree) from another, there nevertheless exists a common, fluid denominator that binds varying religions together in accord with a larger source of spiritual congruence. This sign of appreciation functioned well alongside Lear's own sense of sympathy for the other in cultivating a keen sense of wonder at how diverse human spiritual expression could be.

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[74] Lear, "The Search for E Pluribus Unum," (Dec 13, 1993).

[75] Lear, "The Search for E Pluribus Unum," (Dec 13, 1993).

For thinkers like Lear, no single religion could claim a monopoly on truth, spiritual or otherwise. These ideals "supported spiritual seeking across religious expanses hitherto little explored and helped create a liberal religious culture that opened outward into an eclectic spirituality."[76] Lear's rendering of difference, however, belied the conflict necessary to find the one out of the many. For those who limited the spiritual expanses that beckoned attentive and sympathetic observers by reducing religious traditions down to their voting records, Lear had swift and very unsympathetic remarks that ranged from cautious to downright condemning. The unadulterated imposition of explicitly Christian options within the marketplace of ideas by the Christian Right threatened much of what Lear saw as essential to American public life— namely the possibility for tolerance, diversity, and understanding within moments of difference. In this sense, Lear sought a spiritual or discursive form, which included rules governing discussion in the public sphere for example, rather than content in his confrontations with the Christian Right. Lear's descriptions of the Right as "absolutist" and as "monopolists" gave voice to the sentiment that in order to participate in national conversations, individuals must possess an appreciation for the truths of other voices and opinions. Despite the fact that Lear himself could not extend his own appreciation for the exchange of ideas to those Christian fundamentalists who differed from him, he still regarded such values to be essential for seeing the river that united all in its ever wandering path.

Lear's spiritual vision of American civic life perhaps found its clearest articulation in front of an audience of fellow academic seekers and gropers.[77] In 1989, Martin Marty invited

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[76] Leigh Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, 114 and 138.

[77] My use of "seeker" here reflects both analytical and popular usages. In a 2008 address to his fellow PFAW supporters, Lear observed that groper may not have been the best term to describe his journey. "In light of recent headlines, friends have advised me to change groper to seeker…to some extent, it would seem we are all

Lear to speak at the largest annual gathering of scholars of religion in the world, the American Academy of Religion (AAR) national conference.[78] Politically speaking, the 1980s had been a very productive decade for Lear. He had launched his non—profit organization People for the American Way (PFAW) with the help Marty and others, he organized the star studded "I Love Liberty" television special in hopes of fostering non—partisan discussion of social issues, and he established the Business Enterprise Trust for those who had social vision and "moral imagination" in the world of business.[79] Lear's ability to utilize media in the form of the sitcom, thirty—second spot, and two—hour special was matched only by Marty's well—honed counsel on how best to reach the American people when discussing contentious issues such as religious freedom and free speech.

Lear titled his AAR talk, "Nurturing Spirituality and Religion in an Age of Science and Technology." As expected, he discussed his work with PFAW, the Christian Right, and the means for overall spiritual health. To Lear, the Right threatened the nation's most cherished traditions: pluralism and tolerance. In order to work more cooperatively, Lear suggested focusing on the sacred, "If we can't find what is sacred in that tree, in that butterfly, in each other, then the sacred symbols of our several religions will never satisfy that yearning for connection? of which

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seekers." These words come from "Why I Am a Born Again American" given March 19th, 2008. The title alone suggests that Lear has attempted to challenge normative applications of terms such as "spirit" and "born—again" with his own, unique understanding.

[78] The fact that Lear spoke at all at a gathering such as this speaks volumes about how scholars conceive of Lear's significance in conversations about values and religion. It also further supports Martin Marty's original *Christian Century* contention that Lear deserves to be a part of discussions concerning human well—being in a late modern age regardless of the setting.

[79] These topics will be explored in depth in subsequent chapters. For more, see Norman Lear, "Rewriting the Bottom Line: Hollywood, Profits, and the Life of the Spirit," *Image: A Journal of the Arts and Religion* 27 (Summer 2000), 117—123.

I speak."[80] In short, sacrality transcends religious particularity within nature and the environment as part of a broader, eclectic Lear—authored spirituality.

Due to the perceived intolerance and intransigence of conservative Protestants, Lear emphasized the very same interfaith values that People for the American Way would represent in its own educational activities— church/state separation, pluralism, and ongoing public discourse. Such discussions were also to carry over into the public schools so students could understand just how important religion was to the nation's history and its spiritual formation. For Lear, teachers "must inspire students to nurture that inner world, where humans from the very beginning of the species have shared the same sense of awe and wonder as they groped for meaning." This task had to be accomplished, however, "without preaching a sectarian creed or degenerating into a moral nihilism."[81]

Despite the passion behind these words, it was arguably tempered by a caution all too familiar to one who had experiences with conflicts over religion in public. Not only had Lear's organization been accused of partisan politics by his conservative opponents, but televangelists had also argued that his television specials and ad spots served as propaganda for a political organization rather than for an educational one. Lear's qualifying conclusion suggested that there were not only clear answers, but right ones as well to the problems he and others addressed in American public life that stood outside parochial interests and moral skepticism. Unfortunately for Lear, such arguments could not escape their religious particularities.

Lear's blindness to his own notions of consensus and perspectival singularity, one cultivated by a sense of being more representative of the mainstream than was actually the case,

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[80] Norman Lear, "Nurturing Spirituality and Religion in an Age of Science and Technology," (April 1990).

[81] Lear, "Nurturing Spirituality and Religion," (April 1990).

is again apparent in his discussion of schools, "A chorus of diverse voices has grown into a consensus that, yes, we do need to do a better job of teaching about religion in the schools," he argued. "This sentiment is now shared by the National Council of Churches (NCC), the US Catholic Conference, and the American Jewish Congress." Lear's dependence on largely ecumenical Protestant and liberal Jewish institutions signified a religious authority that possessed its own politics and values in the public square. As a result, Lear's religious allegiances to the Protestant mainline as evidenced by his relationship with church historian and Pastor Martin Marty, as well as his institutional backing by the NCC, aligned him at times with the cultural and religious investments of an interfaith, consensus center more so than the political or radical left.

This tendency would come to define much of Lear's non—profit work despite his claim to an inclusive and pluralistic American Way.[82] "We must begin to make commitments to higher values, live a moral code that connects us with each other and with eternity," Lear explained in a 1992 interview for the Catholic periodical *Commweal*. "Ninety percent of Americans believe in a higher meaning—God. It seems so foolish for all the people who care to use religion properly—I mean privately, personally—to cede so much to the fringes to the fundamentalists and the new—age people." For Lear, religion had rules. Particular expressions and their corresponding formats were allowed while others remained on the sidelines of a discussion larger than any one individual. This was necessary because of the various abuses perpetrated by Christianity's most ardent defenders during Lear's childhood and as an adult in the ministries of Father Charles

[82] For more on the history and interfaith quality of this phrase, see Wendy Wall, *Inventing the American Way: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008). The interfaith cooperation inherent in the American Way dating back to the interwar period suggests that the very notion of consensus itself is a product of liberally minded religious and spiritual actors acting on behalf of their own self—interest. Unlike other claims to public space, this one in particular seemed to map seamlessly onto broader concerns for the well—being of the nation and its cultural and political institutions. The effort and means necessary for such demographic mapping are considerable, but with mainline resources, in addition to those of Lear's, a tenable consensus could be established over and against its antithesis, the Christian Right, in the name of the American Way.

Coughlin in the 1930s and Jerry Falwell in the 1970s. If individuals could simply appreciate religion without using it to divide, then a "spirit led philosophy" could be enacted in politics— one that held toleration, civility, and diversity in very high regard as the basis for civic life in America.[83]

Conclusion

Unlike many of his spiritual forebears, Norman Lear did not author formal treatises or memoirs on the intricacies of sympathy and religion. He never held a position within a university or a church setting in a traditional sense. He also did not attend religious services consistently, Jewish or otherwise. When I asked about his Jewish background, Lear stated that he was grateful for it, but that it did not define his religious or spiritual capacities.[84] For the purposes of this project, these linguistic characteristics illuminate an alternative approach to the study of spiritual liberalism— one that asks its first questions outside of institutionally religious spaces. This is a productive method for studying liberal religion because in order to understand the proliferation of liberal sensibilities through American culture in the twentieth century, one must look to the various "mechanisms of popular religion" for evidence of widespread dissemination as expressions of late twentieth—century American religious middlebrow culture.[85] Such mechanisms, including book clubs, ad—spots, television specials, and non—profit organizations, possessed a power equal to that of more identifiably "religious" or Christian means of information broadcasting.

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[83] Thomas M. Landy, "What's Missing from this Picture: Norman Lear Explains" *Commonweal* 119:17 (October 1992), 17—20.

[84] My interview with Norman Lear was conducted on April 28th, 2014 at his home in Brentwood, CA. This took place after I fulfilled all of Drew University's IRB protocols.

[85] For more on how I understand the relationship between popular culture and religion and its effective study, see R. Laurence Moore, "Religion, Secularization and the Shaping of the Culture Industry in Antebellum America," *American Quarterly* 41 (1989): 216—42.

Cultural productions like Lear's, including his situation comedies, provided their audiences with a model for understanding American politics and the debates contained within. In particular, "these cultural portraits not only reflect the religio—political agenda of their creators, they also serve as templates for inhabiting a political world."[86] The specific content of this model originated in the interfaith cooperation inherent in the American Way dating back to the interwar period. This suggests that the very notion of consensus itself, something Lear consistently appealed to, was a product of liberally minded religious and spiritual actors acting on behalf of their own self—interest. Unlike other claims to public space, this one in particular seemed to map seamlessly onto broader concerns for the well—being of the nation and its cultural and political institutions. The effort and means necessary for such demographic mapping are considerable, but with mainline resources, in addition to those of Lear's, a tenable consensus could be established over and against its antithesis, the Christian Right, in the name of the American Way.

Regardless of the venue primetime or otherwise, Lear's writing was palpable. It made his viewers sit up straight, laugh out loud, and shed the odd tear. It was dramatic, comedic, and theatrical— one act plays strung together in the form of a situation comedy. As many interpreters have commented, Lear wore his emotions on his sleeve. Empathy for the other, sympathy for religious diversity, and appreciation for religious experience formed the core of Lear's spiritual and religious practice. "I have found that my involvement with People for the American Way has only quickened my spiritual interests. By listening more closely to the deeper message animating so much of the Religious Right's rhetoric…I came to appreciate the depth of spiritual yearning among so many Americans." Lear went on, "The charlatans of TV ministries were, and are,

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[86] Jason Bivins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 214.

connecting with a vast population of parched souls. Our culture has become a stranger to its own inner needs."[87]

Lear's prescription for the country's ailments was simple: find balance between the bottom line and the inner spirit, cultivate a broadly civil religion in order to establish an arena for public discourse, define the nature of said public discourse as consistently civil in regards to religious differences, and support the total separation between church and state in order to avoid a politically sanctioned religious hegemony. Religious and political liberals like Lear can be proud of the fact that many of these realities are in fact liberal ones as part of a "cultural victory" in exchange for organizational defeat.[88] The story of Norman Lear's spiritual liberalism is notable, however, not simply for its participation in the cultural victory, but also for its resistance to the organizational defeat of liberal and ecumenical Protestantism after the Second World War.

Lear's impact on American religion and politics first became noticeable during the early 1970s when shows such as *All in the Family* and *Maude* began to grace the television screens of Americans in primetime. These shows functioned as mechanisms of popular religion by facilitating televisual space for a discussion of the social issues of the day such bigotry, feminism, and race in the name of relevance. Lear embarked on yet another spiritual journey when he decided to leave television for the nonprofit realm of education. Once there, with the help of politicians and mainline Protestant religious leaders, Lear built the most significant post—World War II interfaith organization in People for the American Way in order to address the rhetorical iniquities in the public sphere committed by the electronic church.

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[87] Lear, "Rewriting the Bottom Line," 121.

[88] For more, see N.J. Demerath III, "Cultural Victory and Organizational Defeat in the Paradoxical Decline of Liberal Protestantism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34:4 (Dec 1995), 458—469.

Based on the primetime numbers Lear received for his television writing, his political activism and reputation within Hollywood itself, and his nonprofit work and engagement with politics in the name of the American Way, one could argue that Lear is one of the most important yet overlooked figures in American religious liberalism in the last half century. Like many of his future PFAW programs and campaigns, Lear's television work "provided a springboard for discussion, a conduit for understanding, and a means of obtaining 'nourishment for the soul.'"[89] Prompting discussion was Lear's bread and butter as both a producer and non—profit organizer, yet in his own estimation he was only doing what he thought was best. "Look, I'm a fucking entertainer. We're storytellers. But we *think*. And the things we think of are much harder to deliver on. It's a bitch to get it right."[90]

This chapter has argued for understanding Lear and his careers in entertainment and non—profit organizing as a spiritual liberal, one who was able to move in tandem with fellow religious and theatrical liberals due to their shared notions of seeking as groping and the separation of church and state. I also argued that Lear's liberalism tended to turn in on itself when it facilitated the framing of conservative religiosity as spiritually retrograde at best. Lastly, I identified a number of themes associated with the history of religious liberalism in Lear's writings and speeches including one given at the American Academy of Religion meeting on spiritual values in an age of science. Luckily for the American people, Lear's television programming got it right more often than not— even if it meant politicizing the very genre he had made possible with topical and relevant programming. *All in the Family* was just this type of show.

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[89] Jim McKairnes, "The Meaning of Lear," *American Way* (1991), N/A.

[90] Gerry Nadel, "All in his Family," *New Times* (July 9 1977), NA. Available here: http://www.normanlear.com/backstory/press/all—in—his—family/. Accessed March 5, 2014.

CHAPTER THREE

Norman Lear, *All in the Family*, and the Spiritual Politicization of the American Sitcom

Before Lear established his command of the primetime airwaves, relatively few writers and producers explored controversial topics over a medium viewed by the entire family. In fact, a noticeable disconnect existed during the 1960s between televised storylines and national events.[1] From the networks' perspective, least objectionable programming to the widest possible audience ruled the day. Not only was Lear's situation comedy writing an explicit reaction against such network policy, but it was also the product of a discerning and concerned mind. It took some time for Lear to admit that his programming reflected the interests and social vision of a religious liberal accustomed to the rhythms and practices of Judaism and the extended family, but he eventually acknowledged his own complicity in the backlash against his situation comedies. "When I was asked whether I had a *right* to say the things that were said in the shows, in the early days I would avoid admitting that we did more than entertain," Lear explained. "Then I began to realize that I was 50 years old, a grown man, with responsibilities and attitudes, and why wouldn't I have thoughts and why wouldn't my work express them?"[2]

For Lear and other Hollywood liberals of the period, situation comedy writing functioned as a valuable platform from which to articulate their own sense of right and wrong when it came to American politics and society. Lear's programming defined the initial contours of this tradition of topicality in primetime as a form of didactic, spiritual storytelling that relied as much on the language of morality and religion as his conservative religious detractors did. These television narratives, part of what historians identify as the "age of relevance," utilized

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[1] For competing views, see Lynn Spigel and Michael Curtin, eds., *The Revolution Wasn't Televised: Sixties Television and Social Conflict* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997) and Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

[2] Horace Newcomb and Robert S. Alley, *The Producer's Medium: Conversations with Creators of American TV* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983), 177.

contemporaneous events and debates as frameworks for exploring subjects such as race, religion, and gender according to the appropriate ethical and civic parameters of public deliberation.[3] "Lear gives us a comedy with a purpose," argued *Christian Century* editor James Wall, "He is a village elder…successfully telling tribal members gathered about the campfire/tube that individuals are different but valuable…sly jokes about sex, rather than being intended as dirt, give the inarticulate a way to express affection."[4] Lear's programming possessed a "style of social criticism" all its own, one that often times emanated from his own form of an electronic church, his own "personal bully pulpit."[5] Exemplified by Lear, this brand of televisual criticism was a hallmark of relevance programming, a type of primetime, situation comedy writing that used entertainment in an instructional manner to educate the populous on current events and their political ramifications in the public square.

Those who supported Lear and his writing, including Wall and others in the Protestant mainline, insisted that he not pay too much attention to the calls for less "sexnviolence" on television and instead focus on what he did best— offer an enlightened, instructional word on the social controversy of the day. For Wall, Lear's task was simple, the "preaching about moral and social issues in an entertainment setting, purveying his message in a way that captures and retains the attention of more people than does another other preaching we know." These words typified Lear's method of communication as manifested in primetime. Shows like *All in the Family* relied on a form of satirical comedy that created a space for Lear's brand of social and

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[3] "It was largely as a new marketing device," argues historian Ella Taylor, "that the turbulence of the middle to late 1960s and the adversarial spirit of the generation coming of age during this period found their way into the genres of television entertainment." For more, see Ella Taylor, *Prime Time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 42. My contention is that while I agree with the economic origins of the term, it is also thoroughly a product of Lear's own spiritual orientation towards the social and raising awareness of how best to address its shortcomings.

[4] James Wall, "Norman Lear in his Pulpit: Editorial Correspondence," *Christian Century* (Nov 12th 1975).

[5] James Wall, "Norman Lear in his Pulpit," 1020.

cultural criticism. In addition, he utilized satire and irony to "throw a humorous light on our frailties, prejudices, and concerns." More importantly, "By making them a source of laughter, we hope to show— in a mature fashion— just how absurd they are."[6] Lear's aspiration not only reflected his own rationale for the numerous situation comedies he wrote and produced, but it also functioned as a network disclaimer before the airing of the pilot episode in 1971.

This chapter examines Lear's primetime programming, with particular attention paid to *All in the Family* and its critical reception, in order to say something about the relationship between religious liberalism, entertainment, and liberal democracy. In addition to many of his published writings, Lear's televised, one—act plays in the form of the sitcom contributed specifically to the development of relevance programming, a genre of primetime network comedy established by Lear that relied on the surrounding culture for much of its narrative coherency and topicality with a didactic intent. First, I argue that as a sitcom showrunner he at once introduced new content to prime time audiences and reflected the broader spiritual clarion call of the decade to be "socially relevant" relative to the surrounding world as part of a "New Morality" in the 1970s. As such, Lear's programming can be understood as part of the same "relevance" moment, one that applied first to the American churches both Protestant and Catholic, but nevertheless designed with the same questions, purposes, and aspirations in mind— to remain relevant (read as topical in TV speak) in a constantly changing world.[7]

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[6] These were the words before the official premier of *All in the Family* in 1971 on CBS. The show had gone through three different pilots and two networks before it landed, rather slowly, on CBS. The full disclaimer read as follows, "The program you are about to see is *All in the Family*. It seeks to throw a humorous spotlight on our frailties, prejudices, and concerns. By making them a source of laughter, we hope to show— in a mature fashion— just how absurd they are."

[7] For more, see Daniel Callahan, "The Quest for Social Relevance," *Daedalus* 96:1 (Winter 1967), 151—179.

Lear understood the purpose of his chosen medium as an instructional, almost pedagogic instrument in the name of awareness and making a cultural impact.[8] At the time, reviewers categorized shows like *All in the Family* as cultural productions authored by a well—respected liberal in both Hollywood and eventually political circles. In fact, those who write about his legacy continue to regard him as a writer who aimed to "purge prejudice by exposing it…to help liberate American TV viewers."[9] As such, I argue that Lear's programming represents one of many extensions or manifestations of an otherwise Jewish—inflected religious liberalism that found its initial cultivation at the knee of his grandfather and at the dial of the crystal radio in the names of tolerance, civility, and the protections of the first amendment.

Unlike his conservative detractors, Lear's comedy writing did not identify a Christian or Jewish perspective on any given topic. Instead, he chose to foreground debate itself, admittedly in its consensus model, as the preferred way of making informed decisions concerning the nation's perennial racial and cultural challenges. In this way, I argue that Lear contributed to two on—going religious traditions in the US dating back to the nineteenth—century: religious and theatrical liberalism.[10] As I argued in the previous chapter, my usage of the term reflects my larger desire to locate the uniquely Jewish characteristics of Lear's spiritual or religious liberalism within a larger spiritual left in late twentieth—century America. Lear's theatrical liberalism shared many of the characteristics that define religious liberalism more broadly

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[8] Besides his fellow religious liberals, Lear also found inspiration for his programming in the writings of renowned journalist Edward R. Murrow. For Lear, "Murrow said that television could and should illuminate, inspire, and educate, or it would be just wires and lights in a box." For more, see "Television: Its Culture, Its Impact, Its Ethics, Its Future," The Norman Lear Seminars at the Museum of Broadcasting: The Mark Goodson Seminar Series (June 1986). Referenced here: http://www.normanlear.com/backstory/interviews/television—its—culture—its—impact—its—ethics—its—future/. Accessed March 20, 2014.

[9] Emily Nussbaum, "The Great Divide: Norman Lear, Archie Bunker, and the Rise of the Bad Fan," *The New Yorker* (April 7th 2014).

[10] This term comes from Andrea Most, *Theatrical Liberalism: Jews and Popular Entertainment in America* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2013).

including a cosmopolitan sensibility about religious diversity and an ethical commitment to engaging one's surroundings in the name of moral improvement. In this sense, theatrical liberalism can be understood as a Jewish contribution to the longer history of American religious liberalism dating back to the colonial period.

Another common denominator between the two liberalisms is that they both share a liberal disposition towards religion and religious truths, which includes a willingness to adapt one's religious thought to social—economic conditions. As scholar of religion Cara Burnidge argues, "In religion, liberalism refers not to a political paradigm but to philosophical and religious positions with social, economic, and political implications."[11] As a result, the term liberal religion may also be helpful in describing a liberal understanding of religion outside of any particular Protestant register regarding Lear and his published writings. Moreover, Lear's ability to demonstrate his social awareness through the genre of the situation comedy, which included storylines on abortion, rape, hate crimes, and sexuality, gained further narrative coherency through his appreciation for measured deliberation in public debate— even if at high volume. In these moments, the sound stage that Lear thrived on morphed into a primetime classroom where the subjects of study were religious toleration, civility, and diversity in front of audiences numbering in the hundreds of millions.

Lear's theatrical liberalism foregrounded a deliberative space where each perspective received equal participatory weighting according to first amendment protections, while his religious liberalism drew his viewers' attention to the spiritual deficiencies of the time including discrimination, profit—driven thinking, and the racism of Archie Bunker. Like his SDS contemporaries, Lear put culture to use in both satirical and ironic modes as a vehicle for more

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[11] For more, see Cara Burnidge, "Protestant Liberalism." In *Encyclopedia of Religion in America*, edited by Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, 1783—91. Washington, DC: CQ Press., 2010. doi: http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.drew.edu/10.4135/9781608712427.n301.

than simply comedy or entertainment as understood through various representations of the American family in situation comedies.[12] In short, I argue that Lear's politics was a blend of two interrelated elements— expressing both a liberal politics of empathy and a political liberalism that found much in common with the ethical and mystical practices of his fellow Jewish and religious liberals of the 19th and early 20th centuries. It also caught the attention of the ecumenical and Protestant mainline as seen in the writings of Martin Marty and James Wall in the periodical *The Christian Century*.

For American religious historian Elesha Coffman, "the mainline" as both category and narrative descriptor is a retroactive one. "A coalition of highly educated, theologically and politically liberal Protestants" emerged during the first quarter of the twentieth century to establish themselves as the nation's moral and cultural guardians through their flagship periodical, *The Christian Century*. "The rise of the mainline coincided with a long reign of liberal politics, which began fitfully with the Progressives and gathered strength with the New Deal." In addition, the social capital of these Protestants spilled over into ostensibly "secular" spaces including the "consensus school" of American historical writing. This "establishment," as historian William Hutchinson has observed, demonstrated its power by way of the Washington National Cathedral, advocacy through the National Council of Churches, and preferential treatment when it came to broadcasting.[13]

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[12] This is one of the foundational arguments in Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[13] For more, see Elesha Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of Mainline Protestantism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013). For another slightly different interpretation of "the mainline," see J. Terry Todd, "Mainline Protestants and the News Narratives of Declension," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the American New Media* edited by Diane Winston (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 185—198. For more on establishment, see William Hutchinson, ed., *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900—1960* edited by William R. Hutchison (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

For my purposes, the mainline is first a Protestant category used to describe a collection of American Protestant churches, but it also refers to a notion of the mainline that developed after the Second World War that was the product of ecumenical and interfaith organizing and cooperation over and against more conservative, evangelical forms of American Protestantism. A hallmark of this type of religious community formation was diversity as both principal and organizing logic, something that encouraged mobilization and attracted potential members. In this sense, my understanding of the mainline and its politics encompasses individuals ranging from television producer Norman Lear to church historian Martin Marty to journalist Bill Moyers.

Both middling and mainline, this middling—mainline or "chattering" community of liberals occupied media—dependent positions within the "new class" or "knowledge industry," terms developed by neoconservatives such as Irving Kristol and others during the 1960s and 1970s. As such, they represented a manifestation of "the establishment" identified by historian William Hutchinson and others, one that had remained largely intact since its formation in the 1930s. This continuity was especially evident in the history of the federal regulation of the airwaves, which documented a religious preference for mainline groups and organizations for religious programming.[14] In this way, Lear's programming was heralded by mainline sources including *The Christian Century* on multiple occasions. As such, I argue that the relationship between Lear and the mainline assumed different roles at different times ranging from mutually supportive partners to advisor and advisee. For one author writing for *Christianity Today*, Lear's leadership was indispensable to mainline leadership, "Many liberal churchmen, threatened by the

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[14] For more on the ecumenical/evangelical typology in studying post—war American Protestantism, see David Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013). For more on Neoconservatism and the "new class," see Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

rise of the Religious Right, are marching under his banner."[15] In order to understand Lear's ascendance within ecumenical Protestantism during the 1970s that culminated in the formation of the interfaith non—profit People for the American Way (PFAW), we must begin with the programming itself and its uniquely liberal characteristics.

Lear as Theatrical Writer: A Thematic Overview

Lear's programming dominated the 1970s with no less than six different sitcoms airing throughout the decade including *Maude*, *Sanford and Son*, *Mary Hartman Mary Hartman*, *Good Times*, and *The Jeffersons*. Such dominance spoke not only to the programmatic tendencies of network executives at the time, but also to Lear's commitment to entertaining and making people laugh through a dramatic interpretation of the situation comedy. What distinguished him from other entertainers and writers, however, was that he wanted to entertain and make people laugh about something. This "something" reflected Lear's own understanding of what role television should play in the education and entertainment of a national polity.

For Lear, "Comedy with something serious on its mind works as a kind of intravenous to the mind and spirit."[16] He understood the power of this medium as a child of the radio and utilized its nearly ubiquitous reach to entertain and educate his American and international audiences about the challenges facing American families in the 1970s— bigotry, discrimination, and economic restructuring.[17] Lear's "something" was also a product of the tumultuous events of

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[15] For more on this development, see "Meanwhile: Norman Lear and Spirituality," *Christianity Today* (Apr 23 1982), 42.

[16] Norman Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2015), 235. Lear's use of "spirit" prefigures much of his spiritual politics that would later surface through his non—profit organization, People for the American Way in the early 1980s

[17] Lear's childhood experiences of Father Charles Coughlin mirrored those of the critical theorist Theodor Adorno, who made similar arguments to Lear's in terms of the social theory of conservative religiosity. For more, see Theodor Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000) and Paul Apostolidis, *Stations of the Cross: Adorno and Christian Right Radio* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

the 1960s— the details of which began reaching primetime audiences during the same era as the Lear, James Brooks, and Larry Gelbart shows began dominating nightly ratings and awards shows including *M.A.S.H.* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. These men left lasting legacies in the annals of television history and its study as a form of televisual literature, but it was Lear who forever altered the situation comedy genre in accordance with his spiritual vision of the nation.

Unfortunately for Lear, many laughed at what they saw not because of the satirical treatment of Archie Bunker, but because of what he said— literally. Those who got it, got it. Those who didn't, still got it, but in an entirely different register. This difference in reception tells us as much about the political and socio—economic restructuring of American religion that took place in post—World War II America. Lear's labor in and on behalf of the entertainment industry established what scholar of religion Jason Bivins has identified as a largely liberal "political culture of American religion," which encouraged civil religious remedies for the nation's socio—economic ills— deliberation, argumentation, and civility.[18] Despite the high volume of most of his shows, Lear's writing did not single out the "correct" or "most legitimate" position or opinion concerning the topic of the week. He instead foregrounded the space itself, and the exchange of ideas that took place within, as the valued and valuable aspect of American civic life. The content would vary from episode to episode and from week to week, but the format remained consistent— introduce controversial subjects to your viewership through the

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[18] Jason Bivins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 10—11. This description builds on Bivins' previous work on Christian Anti—Liberalism. For more, see Jason C. Bivins, *The Fracture of Good Order: Christian Antiliberalism and the Challenge to American Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). For Bivins, mainline to liberal Protestant organizations such as Sojourners "present their activism as a politics beyond politics; their concerns are frequently neither legislative nor programmatic but exemplary of what they call the 'prophetic' nature of Christian activism, which the rigidity of political logic cannot capture" (14).

everyday interactions of an intergenerational American family that does its best to weather the throes of change and progress.

Reacting against the programming of his predecessors, Lear accomplished three goals by emphasizing real—world events in his scripts: he dealt with, reflected, and most importantly, reported on the times in which he wrote.[19] This journalistic impulse undergirded the relevancy programming that he and others became known for in the early 1970s with shows like *All in the Family* and *M.A.S.H.* Lear's dedication to cultivating relevant programming to his times and audience illustrates his instructional style of situation comedy writing, one that relied on satire for much of its moral and social critique. His programs were relevant because he and his team of writers made it a point to expose (and sometimes introduce) their audiences to the moment's most divisive social flashpoints including racism, bigotry, and sexual discrimination. Such topicality reflected the desires of a serious man interested in serious subjects, but it also spoke to the longer progressive tradition of ethical liberalism that sought a robust voice in public debates

For American religious historian Leigh Schmidt, the blending of "political progressivism, socioeconomic justice, and mystical interiority" grounded the development of a "spiritual left" in American religious life, a front of robust religio—political aspiration that found much to celebrate in Lear's programming and political activism in the names of tolerance and civility.[20] Lear's work in television and non—profit organizing as a manifestation of theatrical liberalism falls squarely within the parameters of religious liberalism as one of its most significant contributors in the second half of the twentieth century.

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[19] For more, see Norman Lear, "Liberty and its Responsibilities," in *Broadcast Journalism 1979—1981; The Eighth Alfred I. Dupont Columbia University Survey* edited by Marvin Barrett (New York, NY: Everest House, 1982), 236.

[20] Leigh Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality,* 19.

However, I contend that despite the fact that Lear shared the same understanding of religion and spirituality as his religious liberal and liberal Protestant supporters, his emphasis on the ethical and moral dimensions of a given religious tradition was more a product of his liberalism than it was of a uniquely Protestant formulation. “Protestant liberalism altered the purpose of religion,” argues scholar of religion Cara Burnidge. “Religion centered on ethics and morals for liberal Protestants. According to most liberals, Christianity should improve society by bolstering ethical standards and improving social conditions.”[21] In this sense, Lear’s spiritual liberalism was equal parts religious and liberal, with the former emphasizing spiritual enlightenment and the latter encouraging ethical rigor and critical examination for their own sake.

Like his unpublished and published writings, Lear’s television programming narrated a vision for the nation through plot, character development, and dialogue. His desire to educate and illuminate through drama and satire found its realization in the topicality of *All in the Family* and the inevitable water—cooler talk that followed in offices and living rooms around the country. The sound stage itself took on additional spiritual value for Lear as countless audiences throughout the decade laughed, cried, and gasped at the performances. “I have sensed God’s presence sitting in the back of a dark theater when a comedy was playing, watching an audience of 600 strangers coming forward, rising in their seats and then falling back, as people do when they are laughing from the belly…and every time throughout my working life when I have gone to bed with a second—act problem and awakened in the morning with the solution.”[22] For Lear

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[21] Cara Burnidge, "Protestant Liberalism." In *Encyclopedia of Religion in America*, edited by Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, 1783—91. Washington, DC: CQ Press., 2010. doi: http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.drew.edu/10.4135/9781608712427.n301.

[22] For more, see http://www.normanlear.com/life—spirit/the—search—for—e—pluribus—unum/. Accessed March 5, 2014.

and other theatrical liberals, the stage functioned as a sacred space as comedy and communal obligation came together in both writing and performance.

For scholar of religion Andrea Most, Lear's experiences speak to the intimate connection between word and spirit on the stage. "These works reconstruct the theater as sacred space, a venue for religious expression, and the performance of acts of devotion, thereby turning theatricality into a respectable cultural mode."[23] In light of Lear's reliance on and deft utilization of media, Most's insight resonates well beyond the confines of the studio or theater stage— for it is this mode, the mode of culture, which emerged in the 1960s as the preferred medium of Lear and others for liberal politics. As such, Lear's writing can be understood as theatrically liberal because it emphasized public action over internal reflection and the human capacity to self—fashion despite external constraints.[24]

In addition, Lear's politics reflected the characteristics of the period's Jewish liberalism, which emphasized intellectual independence, social justice, and worldly engagement.[25] These largely Jewish values found much common cause with the tenets of ethical or mystical liberalism, which also emphasized public engagement and progressive social projects. For one scholar of American religion, "Mystical and ethical liberals typically championed a more progressive politics, including a robust social welfare state and, on occasion, pacifism."[26] Lear's ability to enact his concern for the spiritual health of the country through primetime television in

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[23] Andrea Most, *Theatrical Liberalism: Jews and Popular Entertainment in America* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2013), 10.

[24] This typology can also be found in Most's *Theatrical Liberalism*.

[25] For more, see Charles S. Liebman, "Toward a Theory of Jewish Liberalism," in *The Religious Situation 1969* edited by Donald R. Cutler (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969), 1034. Additionally, see Michael Parenti, "Political Values and Religious Cultures: Jews, Catholics, and Protestants," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6:2 (Autumn 1967), 259—269.

[26] Matthew Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth—Century* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 9.

general and the situation comedy in particular added another chapter to a longer story about spiritual politics in a liberal key in late 20th America.

Each familial relationship, as well as the interrelationships between the characters on *All in the Family*, represented an amalgam of American social and cultural values in flux in the early 1970s— old and young, man and woman, conservative and liberal, all given voice in a span of twenty three minutes. It is in these senses that we can call Lear's programming theatrically and religiously liberal based on its topicality and willingness to adapt to its social surroundings as an expression of relevance programming. "Theatrical liberalism represented for Jewish writers not only a spiritual calling but also a means by which to model a self, to integrate into American society, to gain the freedoms inherent in social and economic mobility, and to insure the widest possible application of these freedoms for all Americans."[27] Through careful study of these various techniques and narrative conventions, we are able to visualize the greatest strengths and weaknesses of Lear's religious liberalism in serialized action throughout the decade under study.

This attention to the deliberative dimensions of American public life, and the rules and regulations that govern them, guided Lear's programming in the name of demonstrating the goodness of this system and contributing to its maintenance and dissemination weekly through episodes of and programs like *All in the Family*. Movements and individuals who articulated different understandings of civic life and its composition in conservative evangelical and Pentecostal registers may have been entertained by Lear and his interreligious supporters, but they were ultimately seen as threats to an otherwise well—structured public life according to the dictates and linguistic parameters of public reason.

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[27] Most, *Theatrical Liberalism*, 67.

Both of Lear's chosen mediums and genres, television and the situation comedy respectively, embodied his commitment to a civil religious understanding of American public life, which emphasized unity through and often at the expense of diversity in the name of understanding and toleration. As a result, television itself became a makeshift forum for debate and deliberation in the name of enlightening entertainment. "Theatrical liberalism guaranteed secular Jews the freedom to perform the self," argues Most, "a freedom cherished by a people so often denied the right to self—definition, whether by Christian dogma or racial science."[28] It was this freedom of expression, and the threats to it posed by the Christian Right, that most disturbed Lear. This especially became the case when Falwell, Robertson, Viguerie, and others began organizing the electronic church and the larger conservative movement around single—issue campaigns, Bible scorecards, and claims concerning the legitimacy of Jewish prayers amidst analogous Christian ones.[29]

In short, the "liberal vision" that historians, cultural critics, and journalists have associated with *All in the Family* resonated with Lear's own spiritual vision of America, one that was socially inclusive, but largely religiously exclusive when it came to conservative Protestantism. This reality was a product of both Lear's individual biography and the longer tradition of liberal framing that had been on—going since the Scopes trial of the early twentieth century.[30] Simply put, Lear's commitment to broadcasting material drawn directly from the news

[28] Most, *Theatrical Liberalism*, 11.

[29] The comments concerning Jewish prayers were uttered by then Southern Baptist Convention President Bailey Smith during the Religious Roundtable's National Affairs Briefing in Dallas on August 22nd, 1980. Smith's words are an example of a particular event or television program that helped catalyze Lear's transition from television producer and writer to non—profit activist. Another similar incident took place during a Jimmy Swaggert program in which he asked his viewership to pray for the removal of a Supreme Court Justice. To Lear, this was a fundamental violation of the civic rules that govern such utterances in public and a violation of the separation of church and state in light of various churches' tax—exempt status.

headlines of the day in the sitcom format facilitated numerous national conversations about sex, race, gender, and religion each and every week in primetime. This thematic emphasis linked Lear to other religious and spiritual liberals who championed freedom of expression, dialogue, and open debate regardless of the topic under discussion.

Lear as Theatrical Producer

In its heyday, Lear's *All in the Family*, was the most watched show for five consecutive years by drawing upwards of sixty percent of the viewing public.[31] This translated into close to fifty million viewers nationwide each and every Saturday evening.[32] Once broadened to include all of Lear's shows broadcast throughout the 1970s, the numbers become even more extraordinary as close to 120 million Americans watched his programs weekly.[33] On set, however, Lear was the quintessential "bleeding heart liberal" who was also a humanist, a pacifist, and a fierce defender of free speech.[34] "In the course of our many taping sessions, it became clear to me that Norman is a laboratory specimen of that all—but—vanished species, the bleeding—heart liberal…his staff is a model of racial and sexual integration, [and] his shows are miniature morality plays for the social causes to which he devotes himself off—screen."[35] Both in front of the camera and behind it, Lear was an active participant in securing rights for his

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[30] For more, see Jon A. Shields, "Framing the Christian Right: How Progressives and Post—War Liberals Constructed the Religious Right," *Journal of Church and State* 53:4 (Autumn 2011), 635—655.

[31] In an interview for the documentary, *America in Primetime*, actor Rob Reiner estimated that close to a quarter of the country had seen an episode of *All in the Family*.

[32] For more on Lear's televisual impact see Martin Kasindorf, "Archie and Maude and Fred and Norman and Alan," *New York Times Magazine* (June 24 1973), 12—13, 15—19; Horace Newcomb, "The Television Artistry of Norman Lear" *Prospects: An American Studies Annual* (1975), 109—125; Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch, "Television as a Cultural Forum," in W.D. Rowland and B. Watkins, eds., *Interpreting Television* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985), 68—73; and Horace Newcomb and R. Alley, *The Producer's Medium* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983).

[33] N/A, "King Lear," *Time* 107:14 (April 5 1976), 80.

[34] The term in quotes reflects Lear's usage as well as various journalists' who made the similar observation.

[35] Norman Lear and Barbara Cady, "Playboy Interview: Norman Lear," *Playboy* (March 1976), 54.

fellow writers in addition to battling and eventually suing the FCC and the networks for infringing on their free speech in primetime.[36] In this sense, Lear's status as one of Hollywood's earliest showrunners, or *auteurs*, undergirded his larger religio-political agenda of defending the American Way and its civil public sphere through the medium of television and the genre of the situation comedy.

As an *auteur*, Lear possessed the rare power to define the social vision of his programming across his considerable televisual catalogue. "At times, the differences over economic and creative interests result in programming fit for the widest possible audiences. However, for individuals like Lear, such conditions only encouraged him to push beyond what the network executives thought the country could handle as a "voice of social commentary."[37] Considered within this analytical framework, Lear's entertaining appears as a much more complex process of statement—making, entertaining, and comedic monitoring of social values and norms through television programming. As a result, Lear cannot help but be concerned with how his artistic contributions participated in a larger conversation about civic life in America. "While concerned with the responses of his individual characters," Horace and Alley point out, "he is equally concerned that his presentations be considered as contributions to a wider social discourse. [Lear] injects his own ideas, via his television shows, into the national debates on general problems: racism, sexism, class conflict, and personal rights."[38]

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[36] Lear's emphasis on academic and religious freedom of speech were foundational emphases of both Protestant liberalism and Theatrical liberalism.

[37] Horace Newcomb and R. Alley, *The Producer's Medium* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983). 14.

[38] Newcomb and Alley, *Producer's Medium*, 42.

Unlike his entrepreneurial media colleagues on the political and Christian Right, Lear did not intend to articulate a coherent position on a given set of issues of social or religious consequence while he was a producer. Instead, Lear vehemently supported the idea of the free exchange of ideas itself rather than advocate for a particular position on an issue in question. In this manner, Lear could be understood to simply be "entertaining" and educating and not taking political stances in primetime (thus remaining in complete accordance with the federally created and maintained Fairness Doctrine). On the other hand, Lear's insistence on free exchange also included sets of discursive rules for how such exchanges took place (civility) and over what political issue (women's/first amendment rights). Those who seemed overly divisive or combative on television or over the radio were more than likely left out of the ongoing conversation. In short, social facilitators like Lear defined the parameters of televised public discussion by entertaining viewers and thereby monitoring the topics under discussion, the participants, and their collective values.[39]

In light of this evaluation, it is not surprising that in the late 1970s Lear eventually admitted his concern for American society and culture beyond simply the network arena, which included everything from bigotry and sexual discrimination to religious intolerance. For Lear, "Television offers the excitement of having an idea on the fifth of September and seeing it dramatized and delivered to forty million people on the fourteenth of November…the exciting thing in television is to pick up a headline on one day and have a story about it three months later on the air for a vast audience, much larger than ever imagined in the 1950s."[40] Lear's concern for the public resonance of his programming spoke to his civic desire to both entertain and to

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[39] For Newcomb and Alley, "He asked the viewer to debate the issues, confront the problems, disagree…In making television comedy a forum for the exploration of ideas about the social order, Lear has placed on the public agenda attitudes about some very serious questions" (Newcomb and Alley, *Producer's Medium*, 178—179).

[40] Norman Lear, "Interview with Norman Lear," in *The Producer's Medium* by Newcomb and Alley, 185.

educate viewers on the subjects of race, class, and gender while carving out a space in public for such a conversation to begin with. This venue allowed Lear to present his understanding of racism or women's rights in a given episode of his programming on his own civically—minded terms. Once Lear began to think seriously about leaving television for another venue of entertainment and politics, he began to speak more forcefully about the benefits of religious diversity and civility in public life. He also had much to say about the differences between his own sense of the religious or spiritual and the faith of the electronic church. It is at this intersection, one that was as much about contrast as it was about co—constitution of opposing forces, that we find Lear's most articulate expressions of his own religious liberalism— in primetime.

This study of primetime programming is particularly interested in how Lear executed his programs as a product of both liberal storytelling and theatrical liberalism in regards to the nation and its civic life. I focus my attention on the themes and narrative conventions of the television program in order to identify the religious or cultural logic that organizes events and character development from week to week.[41] For many contemporaneous commentators, Lear's programs possessed their own internal moral logic for conveying that week's message, or storyline. This is not to say that Lear designed each episode to teach his audience a lesson about the dangers of bigotry and discrimination (although this may indeed be the case). Nevertheless, I argue that Lear's programs possessed distinct characteristics that help us identify his writing as spiritually liberal beyond (yet inclusive of) his liberal politics. In this sense, we can say that my investigation explores the cultural mechanics of spiritual and theatrical liberalism as seen each week in primetime.

[41] In this sense, I am attempting to locate and describe what I'm calling the "epistemic infrastructure" of a particular situation comedy in order to determine how its characters and its author come to know the world around them.

Such analytical clarity does not stem from an ability to identity a particular "message," or more importantly a political position in a given episode, but rather from the show's structure and form as well as its controversial subject matter. Despite the limitations of the situation comedy, Lear enthusiastically utilized its conventions in order to project an image of America that was conducive to both consensus and interfaith values of civility, public deliberation, and religious toleration. His programming sought a reinvigorated public life along the lines and regulations of liberal political theory including bifurcations between public and private and a civil religious model of public reason.[42] Unfortunately, this model was only applied to the involvement of less—than—liberal constituencies in the country's political and social life, including Archie Bunker himself. As a result, Bunker became the paradigmatic character that reminded his viewers through satire why civic life required as many rules as it did protections of first amendment rights.

It is in this sense that Lear's *All in the Family* can be understood as a product of religious liberal theorizing— it frames debates rather than ending them, it facilitates discussion rather than curtaining them, and it informs its audience rather than talking down to them (although this was certainly not an impossibility). The sheer dominance of Lear's situation comedies throughout the 1970s suggests that his position within the industry was not a politically or socially insignificant one. In fact, I argue that Lear's programming in general and *All in the Family* in particular contributed to the spiritual formation of an increasingly televisual culture according to the

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[42] Lear's understanding of, application, and usage of "civil religion" as a category and tool of civic maintenance became clearer over the course of the 1970s as he began developing the idea for his non—profit organization People for the American Way (PFAW). I would argue, however, that whenever Lear argued for greater civility in public life (a call made by numerous concerned members of the middling mainline), he was deploying a nascent form of Robert Bellah's notion of "civil religion" as a uniquely (religious) liberal conception of American public life. For an example, see chapter one of Jim Castelli, *A Plea for Common Sense: Resolving the Clash between Religion and Politics* (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988). For Castelli (*A Plea for Common Sense* was a PFAW published text), "Many of those on the Religious Right today use the language of religion to attack the most fundamental beliefs of the American civil religion" (19).

dictates of a theatrical and religious liberal.[43] This formation, however, did not unfold without its fair share of resistance and commentary. In fact, it possessed a moral context all its own, at once a reflection of and contributor to the decade's cultural turmoil in a key of increasing polarization.

Lear and the New Morality

Lear's relevance programming coincided with the emergence of "the New Morality," a heightened concern for the speed at which American society seemed to be progressing in regards to its time—tested and religiously protected sexual, racial, and cultural norms.[44] Sitcoms were no longer populated by exclusively white or nuclear families like the programming of previous decades. In fact, it was this narrative vacuity that catalyzed Lear to formulate *All in the Family* as an explicit response to the lack of conflict or diversity depicted in the programs of the 1950s and 1960s. This experimentation and network—supported risk taking reflected a larger social development at the time, namely a New Morality in both American culture and society.[45]

Predictably, both Lear and fellow producer James L. Brooks (*Mary Tyler Moore Show*) were implicated in the emergence of this New Morality and its corrosive influence on American society. For one impassioned critic, television invited the backlash it helped to create due to the fact that it served as the gateway for less—than—desirable characters to enter into peoples' homes on a nightly basis. "That set is no longer a welcome guest in my home. I would no more

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[43] In this usage, spiritual formation describes the process through which a medium (television in this case) facilitated the formation of a particular type of citizen (a civil, privately religious one) based on the philosophy/value system of a theatrical and religious liberalism. This argument is the spiritual equivalent of the one made by sociologist N. Jay Demerath III in "Cultural Victory and Organizational Defeat in the Paradoxical Decline of Liberal Protestantism," *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 34:4 (1995): 458—469.

[44] For one of the earlier studies of this phenomenon, see Daniel Yankelovich, *The New Morality: A Profile of American Youth in the 70's* (New York, NY: McGraw—Hill, 1974).

[45] Two much viewed media sources, the *Los Angeles Times* and *TV Guide*, hosted extended discussions of this shift in moral sensibility during the early 1970s and how it was shaping the interests and purchasing decisions of the nation's youth.

plug it in today than I would invite a prostitute to dinner."[46] Much of this fervor found its characteristic expression in the activism of fundamentalist Billy James Hargis who published a faulty report about a then recently purchased CBS movie archive of supposed "filth." Organizations such as Morality in Media and Stop Immorality on TV joined Hargis in criticizing network programming due to its pornographic and at times indecent content.[47]

Like other cultural conflicts during this period, the differences of opinion (and taste) over the appropriateness of television programming possessed their corresponding political expression in the public sphere along liberal and conservative lines. "One polarized group feels America's moral backbone is decaying and is sure TV's new liberalization is both a cause and symptom of that decay. At the opposite pole are those who sneeringly dismiss the first group as far—right political nuts or religious fanatics."[48] Not only is this observation indispensable evidence of the burgeoning Culture Wars developing in America during the 1970s, but it also pointed to how television in general and primetime TV in particular was one of the many cultural entities under siege from various conservative and liberal political action and advocacy groups in the name of tolerance.

Lear directed his own criticisms against televangelists Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson for giving "simple answers to complex questions." For fellow producer and writer Ed Weinburger (*Mary Tyler Moore Show*), the "New Morality" reflected the changing times more so than it did the nefarious machinations of Hollywood and intellectual elites as an expression of

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[46] Max Gunther, "TV and the New Morality," *TV Guide* (Oct 14 1972), 8—13.

[47] Both organizations utilized writing campaigns to both get the word out about their respective organizations and to challenge the networks to broadcast more wholesome programming. Much of this organization energy can be understood as an nascent form of what would become the Christian Right through the formation of the Electronic church and the election of Ronald Reagan as president.

[48] Gunther, "TV and the New Morality," 12.

their freedom of speech.[49] Both Lear and Weinburger relied on a first amendment argument to defend their respective programming against both the network—devised "Family Viewing Hour" and conservative attacks against the medium and its primetime lineups.[50] For Weinburger, the most popular shows "deal with real issues. We can't hide from the real world." They also contributed something intangible, for better or for worse (taste), to the American polity, "And I don't think this society is going to get any better by sticking to shows like Petticoat Junction."[51] Not only did Weinburger's conclusion assume that television could indeed influence its viewing public, but it also held the implicit assumption that shows like *Petticoat Junction* did not pass intellectual muster in light of the shift to situational realism in the 1970s.

Despite the public antagonism directed at "permissive" sitcoms, numerous commentators identified Lear's programming as "moral" or "moralizing" relative to both his predecessors and his contemporaries. This characteristic marked his writing as a unique contribution to the history of the situation comedy and to the public debates at the time over economics, race, and culture. Writing in the pages of the periodical *American Film*, historian Robert Sklar described what he called "Electronic Americana" based on the programming of Lear and his tendency to moralize in primetime.[52] "The Lear formula is like the Grand Canyon or the Mount Rushmore of contemporary television, one of the major landmarks of Prime—Time America."[53] But what exactly was the content of such a tradition? "Nearly all the [Lear] comedies are built around a

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[49] This "new morality" was understood at the time as expressing values antithetical to "traditional values."
[50] There will be more on this in the following chapter, "Lear Goes Primetime."

[51] N/A, "New Morality on TV Debated," *Los Angeles Times* (Mar 25 1976), E16.

[52] Sklar is perhaps most well—known for his *Movie—Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*. For more, see Robert Sklar, *Prime—Time America: Life on and Behind the Television Screen* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982).

[53] Robert Sklar, "Electronic Americana," *American Film* 2:5 (Mar 1977), 61.

gross caricature or stereotype, a kind of holy fool or lovable sinner, an errant egotist…who gives voice to forbidden, socially ostracized thoughts in a way that excites us without implicating us," Sklar argues.[54] In addition, "The moral equation is always carefully balanced. The more aggressive, the more weakness, error, foolishness…little lessons for the viewer on the right way to live."[55]

For fellow academic David Marc, these characteristics supported his argument that Lear was television's first *auteur*, an individual who singlehandedly "turned the political philosophy of Hubert Humphery into his own American commedia dell'arte."[56] Lear's very visibility as a mainstay of early 1970s network programming added to the impact his writing made on the entertainment landscape of the period. The novelty of his programming in its ability to spark both condemnation and admiration differentiated Lear from the rest his left—leaning colleagues, "So clear were the Lear trademarks…that he emerged as the first sitcom maker identifiable to the public."[57] The fact that Lear was able to both instill and entertain simultaneously through dramatic social analysis in a single situation comedy signaled his primary contribution to the history of the situation comedy and to the history of spiritual and theatrical liberalism, "The

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[54] For American studies scholar Lawrence E. Mintz, characterization within a sitcom tells us a great deal about the social values and beliefs of the writer or production team. This is especially the case when characters and character types take on additional cultural weight due to their popularity across time and space. The "wise fool" or "negative fool" tradition helped audiences understand and comprehend Archie Bunker and his behavior in primetime by reminding the audience on an ideological level that "the wise fool represents the democratic credo that the common man has an innate wisdom superior to the 'book learning' of the upper classes and intellectuals." For more, see Lawrence E. Mintz, "Ideology in the Television Situation Comedy," *Studies in Popular Culture* 8:2 (1985), 46.

[55] Sklar, "Electronic Americana," 62.

[56] David Marc, "TV Auteurism," *American Film* 7:2 (Nov 1 1981), 52. Marc also contends that the most effective way to identify television authorship is to focus on "thematic continuity" across a group of shows.

[57] Marc, "TV Auteurism," 54. For a largely conservative and working class reading of *All in the Family*, see Mike LaVelle, "Biases of All in the Family," *Chicago Tribune* (Jan 2 1973), 18. LaVelle's reading of Lear's sitcom is unrelenting and ruthless. For Lavelle, Lear's comedy is simply a product of money and New Class power, "It seems that we in America have fostered a new class whose members have, like those in Communist countries, taken power to their breasts and their banks and heaped scorn on those below them" (18).

contribution of Norman Lear is certainly going to be less in the issues he aired or the way he confronted them than in his role establishing the genre as an appropriate vehicle for discussing social mores and concerns."[58]

In short, Lear and his fellow producers, including Garry Marshall, simply tried to "be useful" by including pressing social or serious concerns in their weekly table reads and weekly episodes. This practicality, or "realism" as some critics described it, reinforced the show's most significant social dimension— the ability to encourage people to take a moment to think about what they were watching. "He has made almost everyone think," argued *Chicago Tribune* journalist Clarence Peterson. "*All in the Family* is the first television comedy ever to accomplish that. Some would say it's the first TV comedy that ever tried to make *anybody* think."[59] It certainly took some time for American audiences to adapt to Lear's social realism and theatrical style as an expression of the New Morality, but in short order the show dominated headlines, Nielsen ratings, and Emmy award ceremonies because of its ability to balance self—reflexive programming and audience engagement with controversial storylines and Lear's often times implicit social analysis.[60] This reception of Lear's programming, however, revealed only part of how the wider populace received the Lear—style sitcom. In reality, the show's broader reception said as much about American television as it did the American electorate, as Lear's programming found traction largely in conjunction with its ability to politicize primetime itself in the name of relevance.

[58] Mintz, "Ideology in the Television Situation Comedy," 48.

[59] Clarence Petersen, "Scope: Bigoted, Dumb, Clumsy, TV's Archie Bunker," *Chicago Tribune* (April 16 1972), 22.

[60] *All in the Family* was not an immediate success critically or popularly based on reviews and the Nielsen Ratings. It also took some time for it to be recognized for what it was— hard hitting, social commentary in the form of a primetime, network sitcom.

Critical Reception of Lear Programming: The New Class

Despite the positivity of its reception, however, *All in the Family* also possessed its fair share of critics on both racial and political terms.[61] One such critic composed a short piece for the *Chicago Tribune* titled, "Carroll O'Connor: A Tight—Lipped Type of Liberal." Quoting the likes of conservative commentator William F. Buckley in her own analysis of Lear's work, journalist Kay Gardella argued that *All in the Family* made "any right—wing ideas sound 'intrinsically looney, prejudiced, and anti—intellectual.'" Lear's situation comedy was guilty of capitalizing on the idea that "the hardhat conservative won't listen or discuss things intelligently, while the great, open—minded liberals are always willing to listen to all sides. This has to be the best promoted fallacies of all time."[62] This criticism echoed the analyses of other journalists and academics who saw rampant liberal bias throughout Lear's catalog during the 1970s. It also took advantage of a newly minted analytical category developed by the soon—to—be—named "neoconservatives" and their "New Class" analyses of American society and culture.[63] In this school of thought, a particular socio—economic class had begun to emerge in post—war America that accumulated power not by way of property as traditionally had been done in industrialized societies, but rather by way of knowledge itself. Not unsurprisingly, the name of this New Class was the "knowledge industry," largely because it perpetuated itself culturally and

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[61] Numerous articles and studies were written and conducted during the early 1970s out of an effort to discover if the show ultimately reinforced or challenged bigotry on both societal and individual levels. For one example, see Lear's response in Norman Lear, "Laughing While We Face Our Prejudices'," *New York Times* (April 11 1971), D22.

[62] Kay Gardella, "Carroll O'Connor: A Tight—Lipped Type of Liberal," *Chicago Tribune* (Aug 26 1974), B9. Lear goes so far as to quote a favorable review from an African—American source to counteract criticism of his writing style. There is perhaps no better example of liberal patronizing then Lear's method of argumentative defense— cite a favorable, minority response in order to defend one's racial innocence while demonstrating one's tolerance of difference.

[63] For more on this school of thought and its history, see Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015). For a condensed version, see Andrew Hartman, "The Neoconservative Counterrevolution," *Jacobin Magazine* (April 23 2015): https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/04/neoconservatives—kristol—podhoretz—hartman—culture—war/. Accessed April 30, 2015.

politically through its influence in the federal government (welfare state), think tanks, and most importantly, the entertainment industry.

Gardella deployed this type of analysis in her own criticisms of Lear and *All in the Family* by arguing that O'Connor the man was anything but the "open—minded liberal" who "believes in people's rights and the exchange of free ideas."[64] Archie, Edith, and the rest of the Bunker family visited countless American families weekly throughout the decade by helping its viewership recognize Archie's fallibility, yet this aspiration often came across as Hollywood all—knowingness and condescension. "It's a series that sets out to deliberately cause a false polarization, politically, socially, and intellectually, argued Gardella. "It suggested that liberals are the only people concerned about humanity, their country, women's rights, and those of the world of other colors, creeds, and allegiances…when *All in the Family* gets off its political soap box, and stops thinking it has a mission to fulfill on television, it has its amusing moments.[65] For individuals such as Garry Marshall, James Brooks, and Norman Lear, their attempts to "be useful" in regards to giving voice to the serious issues of their times were nothing less than failed attempts to missionize their audiences on the topics of empathy and compassion in primetime. In short, the collective negativity of Gardella and others was the other side of the proverbial coin of the largely positive and liberal reception of Lear's primetime programming. It also demonstrated

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[64] Gardella's mentioning of "exchange of free ideas" could have been better phrased as "free exchange of ideas" to reflect the criticisms of conservative televangelists such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, who also attacked Lear and his defense of the Fairness Doctrine as smokescreens for his own aspirations and those of the federal government and the FCC. There is in fact a great deal of resentment in Gardella's writing directed towards liberals, even on talk shows, who cut conservative dialogue off from the get go. This article is a fantastic snap shot of a developing conservative ressentiment in response to the liberal vision that put a bigoted, working class man on television in order to "throw a humorous light on our frailties" as the disclaimer read that anxious evening in 1971.

[65] Gardella, "Carroll O'Connor," B9.

the thoroughly liberal character of the Lear sitcom as a product of New Class interests and liberal religious sensibilities.[66]

The mixed reception to Lear's programming in *All in the Family* foreshadowed the cultural divides that were forcefully emerging during the 1970s— ones that Lear contributed to through his own primetime offerings. Periodicals such as *Time* and *Esquire* published responses to Lear and his writing as groundbreaking contributions to the history of American television. "[The] home screen is beginning to be a little less of a window on a void," commented *Time*, "It is becoming a little more of a mirror."[67] As early as 1972, a year after the show's official premiere, political pundits were already discussing a "Bunker Vote" that represented a volatile constituency on the verge of revolutionizing America's political landscape as part of "the silent majority." The urban hardhat in Archie found his political antithesis in another of Lear's characters, Edith's sister Maude. Their interaction represented Lear's own political biography as a product of the social programming of FDR during the New Deal and the Great Depression.

Despite this political diversity, researchers argued that the show appealed to its audiences in two socio—political directions simultaneously. For one journalist at the time, "It is a cheap way for tolerant upper—middle—class liberals to escape their own prejudices while the bigots get their views reinforced."[68] These two concurrent receptions belied the sheer number of individuals who watched the show on a daily basis, but they said a great deal about the thoroughly contested character of cultural production in the US during a tumultuous time in American television history. Rather than remain on the social sidelines, Lear's writing

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[66] For more, see Stephen Schryer, *Fantasies of the New Class: Ideologies of Professionalism in Post—World War II American Fiction* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006).

[67] N/A, "The Team Behind Archie Bunker and Co.," *Time* (Sept 25th 1972), 9.

[68] "The Team Behind Archie Bunker and Co.," 9.

foregrounded the contentious issues of the day through primetime drama and situation comedy. For some, this was pure artistry.[69] For others, this was another indication of liberal moralizing over the airwaves. “It’s as if Lear wanted to use television—*television!*—to make a personal statement. And maybe he does.”[70]

Considered from an academic vantage, Lear’s programming was also quite well received for the very same reasons— namely his tendency to moralize in primetime. In fact, one could argue that many of Lear’s situation comedies gave the earliest scholars of American television their first subjects *as data* for analysis both historical and contemporary.[71] For most of these authors, Lear’s writing possessed a “liberal vision” that understood progress as measured and liberal in character by casting bigotry as identifiable and laughable once considered with the ironic distance of satire.[72] The Lear program was the first “media drama,” a type of programming that united through a shared “contemporary consciousness of media” by way of television’s ability to “propel…surface and political and social involvement through the national bloodstream.”[73]

Lear’s first primetime family was both extended and nuclear— a reflection of both the post—war aspiration and inter—war practicality of its author. The volume of the show’s

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[69] Horace Newcomb, “The Television Artistry of Norman Lear,” *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 2 (Oct 1977), 109—125.

[70] Gerry Nadel, “All in his Family,*” New Times Magazine* (July 8th 1977), N/A.

[71] Horace Newcomb ed., *Television: The Critical View* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1976). The first edition of *Television: The Critical View*, the earliest collection of academic television criticism, featured *All in the Family*, *Maude*, *Sanford and Son*, and *The Jeffersons* in a majority of its chapters.

[72] James W. Chesebro and Caroline D. Hamsher, “Communication, Values, and Popular Television Series,” in *Television: The Critical View* edited by Horace Newcomb, ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1976), 12. For more, see Michael Suman, ed. *Religion and Prime Time Television* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1997). This text features a number of chapters written by scholars of American religion.

[73] Michael Arlen, “The Media Dramas of Norman Lear,” in *Television: The Critical View*, 33. This chapter was first published on May 10th, 1975 as an essay in *The New Yorker*.

arguments (or discussions as Archie reminded his viewers) reflected Lear's own upbringing in a Jewish home with extended family in Hartford and New Haven, Connecticut. This notion of family, however, transcended the simple physicality of familial relations, "America, one of the founding myths holds, includes all peoples, all races, all religions, the young, the old, the Black and the White, Catholic and Jew. This is an article of faith in *All in the Family*, *all* of us are of the family."[74] This observation served as both content and democratic form— an indication of Lear's investment in the idea of public deliberation and civility in the face of reactionary religious belief and unreflective bigotry.

"Each character on the 'Family' is a counter in a larger reality of social conflict," argues cultural theorist Philip Wander, "White racist, Black racist, non—violent White saint, non—violent Black saint, young White liberal, young black liberal, woman's liber, domestic slave, middle age reactionary, middle age liberal…symbolic worlds press in on one another in face—to—face conversation creating a space to explore the personal experience of social conflict."[75] These counters, or tropes, populated virtually every episode of *All in the Family* over the course of its eight year run.

Despite the novel didactic aims of this type of programming, especially when understood as part of a spiritual vision of intellectual uplift, enlightenment, and relevancy, Lear's debate—centered program depended on particular forms of civic maintenance for both its own cultural logic and its contribution to American political discourse. Echoing his fellow commentators, Wander identified three characteristics of Lear programming: 1) all conflict is non—violent, all

[74] Philip Wander, "Counters in the Social Drama: Some Notes on *All in the Family*," in *Television: The Critical View*, 35.

[75] Wander, "Counters in the Social Drama," 37.

political and social views are balanced, and lastly, a sense of tolerance.[76] Each tenet worked seamlessly with the next as part of a theory of liberal democracy within the longer orbit of American religious liberalism. The liberal religious defense of first amendment rights, including the freedom of worship and free speech, was portrayed dramatically by Lear through the interactions of characters and the negotiation of racial and political difference set at high volume.

In this sense, both content and form mattered to the execution of Lear's situation comedy, but they ultimately receded into the background as part of the show's larger cultural logic of civility. For communications scholar Phillip Wander, "*All in the Family* raises social issues, but does not offer political solutions. Instead, it offers a frame within which to understand social conflict…[it] has come to be a secular Sunday school, gently exhorting us to do the right thing, hinting at a better world if we will only lovingly persevere in what we are already doing."[77] For some, these narrative tendencies spoke to a humanistic understanding of the world and its inhabitants, one that bent towards optimism and idealism for the future.[78] Lear's trust in the American people to handle his programming without any televisual marginalia or commentary was the quintessential expression of this very idealism, yet in this instance it was as much a product of humanistic thinking as it was Lear's own naiveté concerning the manner in which his writing would be received. As one analyst remarked, Lear's satirical representation of bigotry and discriminatory behavior allowed for multiple interpretations simultaneously— ones that found humor in Archie's racially—charged tirades and his moments of enlightenment. In both instances, Lear's empathetic storytelling helped to amplify the topicality and thus relevancy of

[76] Wander, "Counters in the Social Drama," 38.

[77] Wander, "Counter in the Social Drama," 40.

[78] Carol Taylor Williams, "It's Not So Much 'You've Come a Long Way, Baby' – As 'You're Gonna Make It After All,'" in *Television: The Critical View*, 43—53.

his situation comedies thereby establishing an identifiable primetime tradition of liberal religious entertainment.

The Lear—style situation comedy attempted to raise the collective awareness of those watching at home, yet it did so through a process of polarization. Those who picked up on the self—reflexive and satirical character of *All in the Family* felt better about their corresponding desire to inform and advocate for a social cause. They also viewed Archie's diatribes as evidence of a mindset destined for the dustbin of history once located along a developmental schema anthropologist Susan Harding has identified as a "storyline of liberal progress," which ultimately ended with enlightened, liberal forms of Christianity as most suited to democratic life.[79] Among the many responses to Lear's programming, *Life* magazine's John Leonard declared that it "demanded a moral response" for its audience, which conservatively numbered close to fifty million each and every Saturday night. The topicality of the Lear sitcom, along with his willingness to subject content to form, reflected his spiritual and religious predecessors' attempts to adapt their own spiritual or religious convictions to the conditions of time and space, a thoroughly modernist move that harkened back to the Social Gospel movement of the interwar period and the Civil Rights Movement of post—World War II America.[80] "It's very nice when you can say something about the structure of society and still get plenty of laughs," remarked fellow producer and writer Mel Brooks, "And the first one to do that was Norman."[81]

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[79] Susan Harding, "Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other," *Social Research* 58:2 (Summer 1991), 374.

[80] This is to say two things: one, that Lear and others in the middling or chattering mainline identified their religious liberalism within the same tradition of progressive Christianity and Judaism that was on the ground marching with King and others. And second, I am also suggesting the Lear's religious liberalism shared a common concern for remaining socially relevant *as* a spiritual value with his fellow supporters in the interfaith and ecumenical communities. For more, see Kathryn Lofton, "Commonly Modern: Rethinking the Modernist—Fundamentalist Controversies," *Church History* 83:1 (March 2014), 137—144.

***All in the Family*: Civility and Satire in Primetime**

Situation comedies such as *All in the Family*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and *M.A.S.H.* that premiered during the early 1970s introduced America to television characters never before seen in primetime. These new shows had a different understanding of how primetime TV could connect with its diversifying audiences. Network executives were on to this slightly before the creative material reached their desks, anticipating the methods of niche—based programming that would come to dominate network programming in the 1980s, but in the end it was the combination of corporate interests and creative storylines that led to the emergence of "relevance programming," a tradition of storytelling that pulled much of its subject material from contemporaneous events and newspaper headlines as a form of topical story writing.

The humorous light and tone of Lear's relevance writing upset many, especially those who saw Archie Bunker as the domestication of bigotry rather than its corrective. In addition, the mature fashion called for an appreciation and understanding of self—reflexive comedy, which required a discerning audience that could pick up on the satirical presentation of Archie beyond his epithets and one—liners as a deeply flawed but human character. Many understood the satire in the name of tolerance and understanding despite the need for a fall character. Many others, however, interpreted the show according to their own dictates, which relied very little on Lear's own desires to educate through comedic reporting and satire.

In this way, the character of Archie Bunker signified two socio—economic realities that continue to inform contemporary debates— the disgruntled white ethnic worker seemingly left behind by societies both great and small and a growing racial plurality and the working class bigoted family man battling his inner prejudices through confrontations with his son—and—law

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[81] Neal Kotch, "Why Mel Brooks and Bill Moyers Will Always Idolize Norman Lear," *Huffington Post* (Nov 11 2014). Available here: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/neal—koch/norman—lear—pen—award_b_6130620.html. Accessed January 20, 2016.

and those around him. Despite the consistency of Lear's programming in regards to his desire to report and to create conversation, the ultimate reception of his cultural productions was as diverse as his American viewership.

This tactic created conversation and debate by naming the cultural faultlines of the period according to the dictates of a spiritual liberal, one who made common cause with various mainline communities of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Lear's decision to write and produce *All in the Family* revolutionized primetime situation comedy, but it did so at the expense of the televisual consensus so reviled by Lear and others who saw the programming of the 1960s as utterly vapid and devoid of substance. As a result, Lear was arguably as responsible for politicizing the American family through the culture and genre of the situation comedy as his conservative detractors were— especially those who would challenge his media supremacy from the pulpits of the electronic church. While Lear's conservative counterparts criticized his programming as indecent and pornographic, it nevertheless projected a vision of human interrelation that depended on satire and satirical presentations for much of its social efficacy.

For historian Stephen Kercher, satire "deploys irony to criticize vice and raise awareness. Spurred often by anger or scorn and informed by serious moral concern, satire is humor with a social purpose—protest…couched in wit."[82] Defined in this manner, satire functioned as the ideal vehicle for Lear's vision in a business based largely on the bottom line of advertising dollars and viewership. The combination of the growing network preference for programming suited to upwardly mobile, urban youth and Lear's brand of hard—hitting social commentary in the form of the situation comedy marked the beginning of not only niche or demographically

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[82] Stephen Kercher, *Revel with a Cause: Liberal Satire in Postwar America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 1.

specific television, but also relevance programming itself informed largely by Lear's religious liberal sensibilities. His writing and producing for *All in the Family* reflected the emphasis on topicality that the networks were beginning to monetize through programs like Lear's and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*.

In fact, one could argue that relevancy programming itself developed out of Lear's commitment to a vigorous public sphere and the negative freedoms that theoretically protected minority communities from the religious tyranny of the majority. The narrative emphasis on the "here and now" reflected Lear's larger educational goals for both his programming and the medium itself. His at times confrontational attitude towards network tastes for the bland stemmed largely from the realization that he could always write something else, but also from his commitment to educating regardless of the venue. Even if the network cancelled his show, Lear was content knowing that "we gave them plenty to think about." For actor Carol O'Connor, Lear's sentiment meant everything to his own liberal commitments as a Hollywood actor, "But that, in the television industry, was a revolutionary and all but unattainable goal—the stimulation of serious social thought through comedy! I think, it must be Norman's greatest pride, in which we all share, that he achieved his goal."[83]

Lear's topical writing, combined with the developing attractiveness of being "hip" to current events, eventually found a supportive home on CBS after being passed over by the two other television networks, NBC and ABC. The idea for the show came from a British situation comedy called *Till Death Do Us Part*. Like *All in the Family*, it focused on the life and extended family of Alfred Garnett, a working class, bigoted male who lived in the East End of London. Each character possessed its own representation not unlike Lear's sitcom. The husband of

[83] Carroll O'Connor, "Foreword," in *God, Man, and Archie Bunker* by Spencer Marsh (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1975), xii.

Garnett's daughter is a socialist—leaning "layabout" and Alfred's wife Else, along with Alfred himself, characterize the widening generation gap between adult and youth at the time. Both shows were written as satire, yet in each case such storytelling left everything up to the viewer despite the best efforts of the respective writers. In this sense, each show was immensely popular for radically different reasons simultaneously.

Due to the controversial nature of the shows' language and use of racially charged words and phrases, some viewers reveled in what Archie or Alfred said as a source of laughter or entertainment. In many cases, Archie *was* a member of the viewing public's family, like it or not. On the other hand, many other viewers "got" the satire of the show. This resulted in the realization of a "critical distance" between Archie's words, their social function and the individual viewer, which for both Lear and *Till Death* was a product of their satirical take on working class racial politics. The class—centered universe of *Till Death* assisted Lear's initial formulations about his own show. Instead of focusing solely on the class politics of Alfred's world, however, Lear decided to add sexual, racial, and religious dimensions to the conflicts on *All in the Family* in order to reflect the nature of the burgeoning American wars of culture in the 1970s between hard hats like Archie (who worked as a foreman on construction sites) and hippies like Mike (Meathead) and his friends. Additionally, Lear drew heavily from his own biography in crafting the characters of Archie, Gloria, Edith, and Michael despite his reliance on *Till Death* for much of his program's narrative coherency.

In many ways, Lear's world was Archie's world— that of the Great Depression and World Wars. In fact, much of *All in the Family*'s look can be directly related to the conditions of

Lear's own upbringing, which were modest yet extremely loud.[84] The arguments that Edith would complain about between Archie and Michael in the show were simply "discussions" to Archie and to Lear himself, nothing less. In short, *All in the Family* could not have existed in the manner it did without the rich, autobiographical contributions of Lear himself. Countless Bunker diatribes were those of Lear's own father, who also commanded a great deal of authority from the cushioned seat of his living room chair.[85] This intimacy of narrative, between biography and situation comedy, may be typical of all cultural artifacts. In the case of *All in the Family*, however, this connection is that much more important when examining the theatrical and religious liberalism of its creator because of how thoroughly the show reflected the spiritual predilections of its author.

All in the Family: Episodes

The first season of *All in the Family* reads more like a syllabus then it does a primetime lineup of network programming. Beginning with the pilot episode, appropriately titled "Meet the Bunkers," Lear's inaugural sitcom drenched its audience from the get go in what could only be called high—volume entertainment with a didactic twist.[86] Titles such as "Writing the President," "Judging Books by Covers," "Lionel Moves into the Neighborhood," and "Gloria Discovers Women's Lib" give us a glimpse into the initial narrative arc of the show in both episodic and season—terms. In fact, "Meet the Bunkers" was the third of three titles for Lear's pilot. Earlier versions of the pilot possessed titles such as "Justice for All" and "Those Were the

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[84] The volume of the show's dialogue struck many commentators at the time as strange and out of place. Writers and creators such as Norman Lear and Jackie Gleason before him made it a point to model their sets and locations after their own childhood homes in either New York City or Hartford, CT.

[85] The chair from *All in the Family* currently resides in the Smithsonian. Such diatribes and turns of phrase included "Meathead," "Dingbat," "Laziest white boy," "Stifle," and countless others. For Lear personally, Archie's chair meant everything to him because it was this chair, the chair of his father, that was first taken when Lear found out that he would be moving out of New Haven because his father had been arrested for selling fake bonds.

[86] Lear's strategy for breaking the show to the American people was to "drench" both the network and the audiences with as much characteristically controversial material as possible. From that point on, audiences would be more inclined to commit their time to watching the show on a week—to—week basis.

Days." While the second title resonated with the show's willingness to explore generational differences in uncertain social times through the character of Archie Bunker, "Justice for All" perhaps spoke better to Lear's spiritual sensibility as a theatrical and religious liberal—especially in light of his non—profit future in the realms of school curricula, first amendment rights, and the separation of church and state.[87]

As church historian Martin Marty would later argue, Lear's comedic vision was not solely determined by the conventions of entertainment, advocacy, or comedy exclusively, but rather by the terms of deliberative democracy itself— giving voice to the variety of political arguments and perspectives that were in the headlines at the time. Each episode possessed its own unique topic or theme, such as the racial integration of neighborhoods or the feminist analysis of Bunker—style patriarchy, but they all demonstrated a common form, or method, for delivering their content to the millions of viewers at home. This included largely theatrical performances in front of a live studio audience for the actors as part of a Lear—designed one—act play. This style turned the televised situation comedy into a makeshift radio experience since much of the comedy of the show could be heard as well as it could be seen. My emphasis on Lear's form is a reminder that his spiritual liberalism, as understood through his theatrical tendencies, comes into clearest view less for its "messages," and more for how it structures ideas and debates from week to week about the nation's public life.

The pilot episode was purposely designed by Lear to thoroughly soak its audience in the conventions of the liberal morality play— topicality and controversy in the name of relevance. The opening number of *All in the Family* established the temporal parameters of the situation comedy by situating it as a product of the interwar interreligious liberalism of the National

[87] Lear later named a People for the American Way (PFAW) primer, *Liberty and Justice for Some*, suggesting that certain constituencies within the US were abusing their first amendment right to free speech by being religiously intolerant.

Council of Christians and Jews (NCCJ), the social programming of Franklin Roosevelt, and the legislative agenda of Johnson's Great Society.[88] At the start of each episode, husband and wife joined one another at the family piano to celebrate the glory of past days when Hubert Hoover reigned supreme and the Depression forced everyone to appreciate what little they had.[89] The final two stanzas of the theme song revealed a great deal about the mindset of the central protagonist, Archie Bunker, and his political orientation. "And you knew who you were then/Girls were girls and men were men/Mister we could use a man like Herbert Hoover again."

From the very first moments of the pilot, Lear orients us to the world of the Bunkers—which not coincidentally has much in common with Lear's own upbringing in Connecticut during tough economic times. The shrill character of Edith's singing prefigured the volume that the show's argumentation assumed each week between the central characters. The number's third and final stanza crystalized the political sensibility of the show as a form of liberal satire. "Didn't need no welfare state/everybody pulled his weight/Gee our LaSalle ran great/Those were the days." Not only do we learn of one of the show's scrapped titles, namely *Those Were the Days,* but we also begin to hear a clarion call that would rival those of the 1960s including "the personal is the political."

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[88] While writing *All in the Family*, Lear actually received a Humanitarian Award from the NCCJ in 1976 for his television programming and its promotion of tolerance and religious diversity. Lear's religious sensibilities also reflected those of the NCCJ in its initial formation in the 1930s. As historian Wendy Wall has argued, the NCCJ was responsible for a number of "Tolerance Trios" and promotional campaigns on behalf of religious toleration as part of "the American Way," a phrase that Wall traces back to this very interfaith—interwar moment a quarter of the way into America's twentieth—century. Lear would later adopt this phrase as the organizing motif for his non—profit organization People for the American Way (PFAW) formed in 1981. The history of this non—profit is intimately tied to Wall's narrative of liberal religion and commercial advertisers coming together to defend religions of Democracy, consensus ideals, and unity out of diversity. For more, see Wendy Wall, *Inventing the American Way: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[89] For a similarly themed examination of primetime television, see George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1990). In particular, his chapter titled, "The Meaning of Memory: Family, Class and Ethnicity in Early Network Television" is an underutilized source in the critical study of television and popular culture.

The myth of the lone individual pulling himself up by the proverbial bootstraps could be heard loud and clear in the words of the Bunker patriarch, yet it was not completely individual centered. Due to the actions of "the welfare state," fewer and fewer individuals were encouraged to pull their own weight, especially those on the racial and ethnic margins of American society—at least to Archie. These individuals were guilty of relying on the system without any recourse to their own agency in order to influence their surroundings. Bunker would rehearse this argument multiple times during the show's run, typically in the key of white resentment of federal entitlements and protections for persons of color amidst worsening occupational forecasts for the working classes.[90]

These narrative statements were as much a reflection of Lear's upbringing as they were of Archie's own racial biases. In this sense, any portrayal of Lear's as depicted in one of his situation comedies, particularly *All in the Family*, was an intimate reflection of his own analysis of American society in the 1970s. "In many ways," argued writer A. Scott Berg, "Norman's progressive agenda is as accomplished and influential as those of Woodrow Wilson, LBJ, and Archie Bunker's bête noire, Franklin Delano Roosevelt himself."[91] Lear's political sensibilities were forged in the crucibles of Depression and the New Deal in addition to the optimism of the Great Society and the Civil Rights Movement for those on society's edges.

As a result, Lear interpreted his socio—political surroundings according to the classically liberal Protestant tradition of FDR and the establishment Protestantism that backed his administration. "Social policies championed by the [Federal] Council became less controversial

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[90] For more, see Jefferson R. Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2012).

[91] For more, see Neal Koch, "Why Mel Brooks and Bill Moyers Will Always Idolize Norman Lear." Available here: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/neal—koch/norman—lear—pen—award_b_6130620.html. Accessed October 15, 2015.

as they became more familiar, and many of them were implemented in the New Deal," argues scholar of religion Robert A. Schneider. "Council apologists were fond of quoting President Roosevelt's quip, when charged with radicalism, that he was 'as radical as the Federal Council of Churches.'"[92] This radicalism found its voice in the disagreements between Archie and his wife Edith over the nature of the sermon they hear during the opening scenes of the pilot episode.

For Edith Bunker, forces too big to comprehend were at work in the transformations of American society during the late 1960s and early 1970s. "Why fight it? The world's changing. That's what the reverend Felcher was sayin'. You two shoulda heard him. Of course, Mr. religion here wasn't seein' eye—to—eye with the sermon."[93] "What sermon?" Archie responds, contesting both Edith's description and categorical use of the term "sermon." "That was socialist propaganda, pure and simple. And don't give me that look." For Archie, the Reverend Felcher represented a growing Christian constituency in the US that decided to back the various social movements of the period in the name of morality and ethics.[94] These pastors, priests, and rabbis were on the front lines of a newly formed spiritual front that responded to the needs of those denied civil rights throughout the US south. Compared to the writings of Jerry Falwell during the same period, which condemned the use of the Gospel for purely social causes, the actions of this inter—religious (or ecumenical) front were radical beyond compare. In the hands of these able

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[92] Robert A. Schneider, "Church Federation in the Twentieth Century," in *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900—1960* edited by William R. Hutchison (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 110. For historian Gary Scott Smith, "To the extent that Roosevelt embraced a theological perspective, he largely affirmed the tenets of early—twentieth—century liberal Christianity. He most highly valued the Bible's ethical teachings and stressed God's goodness and love, the Ten Commandments, and Christ's Sermon on the Mount. Like other theological liberals, he rejected the doctrine of human depravity and asserted, instead, that people were essentially good." For more, see Gaston Espinosa, ed., *Religion and the American Presidency: George Washington to George W. Bush with Commentary and Primary Sources* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009), 185—210.

[93] Felcher only appeared in one episode of *All in the Family*, and as such was not a recurring character.

[94] Feltcher was not a recurring character on *All in the Family*.

men and women, the Gospel became a mobile entity on behalf of a people still under the wrath of Pharaoh in a foreign land. For sociologist Jeffrey K. Hadden, this social allegiance between largely liberal Protestants, Catholics, and Jews and their African—American counterparts signaled a sea change in American Christianity— one that contemporary scholars continue to ignore at their own peril.[95]

Reflecting on the shifting religious demographics of his existentially trying times, Hadden argued that a widening gap between pew and pulpit, not unlike the *cultural* gap between those in on the liberal satire and those looking in from the outside, threatened American Christianity from within. "The occupants of the pews continue to resist change, but those who occupy the pulpits have, to a considerable degree, experienced a deepening commitment to, and involvement in, the struggle for social justice. This is leading to the deepest schism in the churches since the Protestant Reformation."[96]

Lear's programming may not have explicitly contributed to this deepening schism in a religious register, but it most certainly provided the spiritual support for the very same social values defended by those on the front lines of the Civil Rights Movement through relevancy. The argument, or discussion, between Mike and Archie located this theological rift in real time in front of a live studio audience. Instead of identifying the "correct" side of the schism, Lear used his sitcom to facilitate a *debate* over the limitations of "bleeding hearts" and Archie's silent majority conservatism. No one voice was privileged over another, but the manner in which the

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[95] For a concise introduction to the politics of the "New Breed" clergy and how it reflected the religious restructuring outlined by Hadden, Wuthnow, and others, see Harvey Cox, "The 'New Breed' in American Churches: Sources of Social Activism in American Religion," *Daedalus* 96:1 (Winter 1967), 135—150.

[96] Jeffrey K. Hadden, "Clergy Involvement in Civil Rights," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol 387 (Jan 1970), 118—127. Various works by sociologists Robert Wuthnow and James Davison Hunter support Hadden's early conclusions in the language of "restructuring."

characters discussed the issue revealed Lear's commitment to civil deliberation under the right linguistic conditions.

Not only did Lear himself reflect such a commitment, but his programming and weekly storylines also embodied the values of the spiritual left as an extension of Civil Rights activism, imagined or otherwise.[97] His cultural contributions to this widening gap mirrored those taking place in mainline and ecumenical congregations over issues like civil rights and the Women's movement.[98] Lear used satire and dramatic comedy in order to challenge his audiences to think more reflexively about their daily interactions with others through the character of Lear's father, Archie Bunker. In short, Lear sought a raised awareness in his audiences through a theatrical didacticism executed through vigorous debate at high volume. All were heard regardless of political position. Unfortunately for Lear and his fellow "subversives," this vision of a deliberately balanced public square was largely the product of civil religious theorizing and inter—religious aspiration, more the result of hypotheticals then it was of liberal democratic practice. The content of this vision left little in doubt to those on the frontlines of the welfare state, but its political application left much to be desired. In fact, Archie's dialogue conjured many a liberal stereotype that continues to haunt progressive social activism.

Archie's comments about Felcher captured the religious tenor of a moment just completed. Airing in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, *All in the Family* featured an explicit representation of "The Movement's" goals and aspirations through the character of Mike, or Meathead, Archie's son—in—law and sociologist in training. Mike's sole academic

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[97] Here, I argue that Lear's organizing shared similar concerns and methods with the Civil Rights Movement, but I would also argue that Lear and his supporters *imagined* themselves into such a tradition in both print and publicly spoken word.

[98] For more, see David Hollinger, "The Realist–Pacifist Summit Meeting of March 1942 and the Political Reorientation of Ecumenical Protestantism in the United States," *Church History* 79:3 (Sept 2010), 654—677.

desire is to receive an education so he can "help people," a simple yet telling desire of the liberal constituencies that Mike represented as a sitcom character. After a brief exchange about the sermon, Archie names his true discomfort, "I ain't sittin' still for no preacher tellin' me That I'm to blame for all this breakdown in law and order that's goin' on."

Bunker's words expressed more than simply his own feelings about the racial strife building up around him. His concerns reflected a growing displeasure with what appeared to be preferential treatment by the federal government for the country's racial and ethnic minorities and their fight for equal rights. Despite his frustration, Archie still manages a counter—explanation to the one authored by Mike, "I'll tell you the cause of it—— these sob sisters like your reverend Felcher And the bleedin' hearts and weepin' nellies like youse two." Not only does Lear point us to a moment of whiteness—as—guilty in the form of Mr. Bunker, but he also addresses the pejorative "bleeding heart" term and its potential origins in the interactions between liberal and conservative Protestants during the 1960s. "I suppose the black man has had the same opportunity in this country as you," Mike asks. "More," Archie responds, "he's had more. I didn't have no million people marchin' and protestin' to get me my job."

In typical Lear fashion, Archie's words functioned as a political statement within his dialogue as a sitcom character, yet it was balanced with other viewpoints according to the deliberative logic of the show itself and thus were all "equal." In this instance, Lear gives voice to a very real conservative concern at the time over rising crime rates and an expanding federal government. Archie's words have little time to ring, however, before such bluster is neutralized by the "Christ—like" Edith Bunker punchline, "No, his Uncle got it for him." Conservatism finds its voice on *All in the Family* as one of many opinions on a given issue, but it ultimately loses some credibility in Lear's programing since its lone articulator is Bunker himself. "All that

sociology and studyin' that welfare stuff, I don't call that no hard work," Archie argues. "Oh, daddy, leave him alone," responds his daughter Gloria, "I think it's beautiful that Michael wants to help the underprivileged." "Listen, if he wants to help the underprivileged, let him start with himself."

Within this simple, yet loud exchange, competing societal ideals met head on— one largely dependent on the institutions and resources of the university and the other aligned with a burgeoning, grassroots conservativism both populist and anti—intellectualist in its appeals to the beleaguered white majority. The decision to ground virtually every social conflict within the family unit itself reflected the growing rhetorical saliency and traction of "the family" as a political wedge issue. While groundbreaking in its own right, another "family" would ascend to the highest office in the land in direct opposition to the portrayal of family as seen on *All in the Family*.[99]

Lear's pilot episode exemplified the Lear sitcom in both content and form. Littered throughout were offhanded comments about skirts being too short, Cosmo being too racy, and Mike's love for Gloria being too public for Archie's tastes. Each comment in itself, however insignificant, marked a generational consciousness not quite comfortable with the changing times of fashion and relational expression. This was both purposeful and designed. To encounter Archie's diatribes and subsequent reconciliatory moments was to experience a liberal ritual of race and racism. It assured the erudite viewer that her once powerful bigotry or discriminatory opinions were simply residue of a gladly forgotten past. To this viewer, Archie's behavior also

[99] For more on this transition, see Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York, NY: MacMillian, 2012). For Self, two forms of the breadwinner competed for social acceptance during this period— one liberal and the other conservative. Each possessed its own value system and understanding of the role of the federal government relative to the family each system lionized. For more, see this online review at *The New Republic*: http://www.newrepublic.com/book/review/family—values—robert—self—archie—bunker. Accessed June 13, 2015.

confirmed several liberal stereotypes and assumptions about conservatives and their less than sophisticated racial sensibilities. In this way, the episode titles following the pilot during the show's first season read more like a course syllabus on sociology than a description of a network sitcom in primetime.

Lear's spiritual liberalism, expressed most succinctly in his support of classical liberal principles and values in the public square, found common cause with a broader tradition of American religious liberalism and its cosmopolitan and ecumenical sensibilities when it came to religious diversity and toleration. As luck would have it, these were the very same qualities and characteristics that found institutional grounding in the formation of his non—profit People for the American Way (PFAW). In this sense, the spiritual (or civic) vision of which Marty spoke in his defense of Lear in the *Christian Century*, one that extended beyond the televisual landscape of primetime, found its fullest expression in *All in the Family* each and every week.

Less than a decade later, Lear relied on this vision to build and organize a counteroffensive against a religious constituency that paid little heed to civic pre—requisites like civility and public reason. "In the war for the American mind," argues historian Kathryn Montgomery, "entertainment programs have become political territory."[100] In this sense, it was Lear and his fellow Hollywood writers and producers who (counterintuitively) first "politicized" television by bringing topicality and relevancy into primetime based largely on a moral imperative to speak out against social injustices. By doing so, spiritual imperatives to protect first amendment rights to speech and religion contoured Lear's programming by mixing religion and politics in a manner conducive to largely liberal sensibilities of fairness and equal time.

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[100] Kathryn C. Montgomery, *Target Prime Time: Advocacy Groups and the Struggle Over Entertainment Television* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989).

The manner in which Lear engaged his subjects every week, including the feminist movement, religion, and bigotry, generated much of its discursive power less from the specific topics themselves and more from the framing of the discussion and the discussion itself. Many of the period's most divisive conflicts found their dramatic representation in Lear's *All in the Family* as an expression of his own desires to illuminate and educate on a mass scale through satire and topical writing. His presentations did not suggest one position over another in regards to Civil Rights or the women's rights movement, but rather foregrounded the conversation itself as the most important dimension of American liberal democracy— informed deliberation over the serious matters of the time. In other words, to understand the liberal character of Lear's situation comedy is to examine the *how* of debate and conversation in addition to the *what* of content and plot analysis.

"It would also be good for the country to have the dissonant variety inherent in our pluralistic society find its way to the tube," Lear remarked, "people of all races and religions and lifestyles—the 'hotheads, sybarites, ascetics, the poets, mockers and madmen."[101] As the product of both theatrical and religious liberalism, Lear's programming on *All in the Family* propagated a spiritual vision of the nation articulated through character dialogue and argumentation (or discussion as Archie put it). This vision possessed a social dimension that found its clearest expression through the use of the "TV as Classroom" model demonstrated by various social and advocacy groups of the period including Lear's own People for the American Way (PFAW) in the early 1980s. In particular, the show possessed its own theological assumptions about God, humanity, and their interconnected relationship that found expression through plot and character development.

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[101] Norman Lear, "Liberty and its Responsibilities," in *Broadcast Journalism 1979—1981; The Eighth Alfred I. Dupont Columbia University Survey* edited by Marvin Barrett (New York, NY: Everest House, 1982),

Lear also had a very specific role in mind for his characters, especially Edith. "Now, there are two books written about Edith Bunker…we knew she was a totally Christian lady by her every instinct—a Sermon on the Mount type of Christian, not a Pat Robertson type of Christian."[102] Lear's intent found common cause with local Presbyterian pastor Spencer Marsh, whose text *God, Man, and Archie Bunker* examined Edith's role in the show in a similar fashion. "Her understanding penetrates our moral darkness, and for this reason Edith is the 'Christ figure' in most of the episodes. Not only does she stand for what is good and right, but she is the humble lamb who goes to slaughter again and again."[103] For Lear and Marsh, Edith's character exuded the idealized characteristics of the figure of Jesus Christ as teacher rather than source of salvation. This point is significant because its representation of Jesus was heavily inflected with a religious liberal emphasis on Jesus as mediator, moderator, and medium of global communication rather than as personal savior.

In short, Lear revealed his own religious preferences and biases through both character development and satirical storytelling on *All in the Family*. Despite his desire for a diversity of religious and cultural expressions on television, Lear was nevertheless subject to his own critical analyses and observations of conservative religiosity dating back to his youth in New Haven, Connecticut and the diatribes of Father Coughlin. Looking back on a long career in media as a "Born Again American," Lear described the impact of Coughlin's speeches on his childhood according to the tenets of tolerance. He listened in secret because "I had already developed what turned out to be a life—long sensitivity to religious intolerance and the intrusion of any one

[102] Unpublished interview between Lear and director John Rich. For more, see this site: http://www.normanlear.com/backstory/interviews/television—its—culture—its—impact—its—ethics—its—future/. For Lear and his writers, Edith's character exuded the idealized characteristics of the figure of Jesus Christ as teacher rather than source of salvation. This representation of Jesus was also heavily inflected with a religious liberal emphasis on Jesus as mediator, moderator, and medium of global communication.

[103] Spencer Marsh, *God, Man, and Archie Bunker* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1975), 10—11.

religion in the public square where all religions are welcome and no one of them favored."[104] This sensitivity was on full display during the writing and filming of *All in the Family* through Lear's empathetic examination of bigotry and its human face in primetime. The future organizing that Lear would do on behalf of the American way was empathy mobilized— catalyzed into an institutionalizing movement in defense of the first amendment and in the name of pluralism and civility.

We see Lear's sensitivity to all subjects religious during the final episode of the first season titled, "The First and Last Supper." The episode opens with a debate over the origins of humanity, both sacred and profane. Archie is on the offensive, "We didn't crawl out from under no rocks. We didn't have no tails, and we didn't come from monkeys, you atheistic, pinko meathead!" Used to this sort of tirade, Mike responds calmly, "Archie, that's a fairy tale. The whole idea of taking a rib out of Adam and making a woman, it's mandrake the magician time." These were two antithetical interpretations doing battle within the confines of the American (sitcom) family. Unlike the public square, no one had to technically "lose" or "win" the exchange of ideas as encountered at the Bunker dinner table.

However, such interactions spoke to the headlines of the times— at least those read by Lear and his considerable team of writers. His ability to frame television plotlines within a larger religio—political vision of the nation spoke to Lear's impact as a religious and theatrical liberal, one who used comedy and satire as vehicles for larger civic aspirations. This vision found its comedic voice through the mode of argumentation within *All in the Family* and the topicality of

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[104] For Lear, to be "Born Again" was to realize the threat that the Christian Right posed to individuals the country over (to Lear and his supporters) and to act on that realization. In this case, Lear decided to leave television proper in order to enter into American politics in a more official capacity through the formation of his non—profit organization, People for the American Way (PFAW). For more, see: http://www.normanlear.com/life—spirit/why—i—am—a—born—again—american/. Accessed February 12, 2016.

the show itself. “We don't have anything against God or the notion of God,” argued Mike, “it's what people do in his name that we don't like. People hate in his name, people kill in his name. Look at Vietnam. We're there with his blessings, because God is on our side.” Meathead’s contention resonated with those of his generation— critical of institutional power without grasping fully the entirety of the combat. More importantly, this argument was eagerly supported by Lear and his fellow knowledge industry subversives who also used culture to enact their political inclinations and ambitions.

“Well?” Archie responded, chuckling, “You ain't gonna tell me he's on the side of them godless gooks.” Archie’s eloquence may have come at the expense of racial sensitivity, yet it is a powerful indication of liberal storytelling nonetheless. His swift analysis rendered America on the side of cultural triumph and Southeast Asia on the losing end of civilization on both religious and racial terms. Instead of leaving the audience with these words, Mike responds in kind, “Why not? God created them gooks, too, didn't he?” The two verbal combatants fail to explore the point further, a narrative weakness on the part of Lear and his writers because the issue is never properly adjudicated. There is no “right” answer or response based on the character dialogue.

Ironically, however, this is perhaps the point. Lear’s intention with *All in the Family* was never to identify the single best option when it came to politics and American religion, but rather to expose his viewers to the diversity of a single issue in all of its complications under the protection of the first amendment. Such clarity of purpose would become a founding principle when Lear established People for the American Way (PFAW) in 1981 with the help of *Christian Century* editor Martin Marty. For both Marty and Lear, their principal mode of shaping public discourse was instructional rather than conversionary. The screenplays of *All in the Family* did not will your adherence to an explicitly religious or Christian system of belief, but it most

certainly subjected its audience to a more subtle form of control— namely *influence* as both historical reality and categorical apparatus.

Reviewing the first televised rally for PFAW in March of 1982, Marty insisted that their organization "should not take a stand on the great religious issues of the day (Panama Canal, Department of Education), but should help provide a *framework for debate* about them" (my emphasis).[105] People for the American Way would pride itself for achieving this type of cultural and political influence through its relentless drive to raise awareness about serious moral and spiritual issues in American public life. This statement of purpose, however, was not simply a product of liberal religious and interfaith organizing on behalf of largely liberal political causes in Reagan's America.

Considered historically, PFAW's mission represented the institutionalization of everything Lear and his writers attempted to convey through *All in the Family*, a serialized situation comedy on network television broadcast in primetime. The storylines may have varied from week to week, which was cause for its own sources of discomfort within a growing constituency of conservative Protestants, but the cultural logic of the show, the framework if you will, remained consistent as the fundamental characteristic of liberal religious storytelling through the forms of satire and comedy. In short, theatrical liberalism had gone primetime in the 1970s with the help of Lear and his relevancy programming.

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[105] Martin Marty, "I Love Liberty," *Christian Century* (March 17 1982), 294—296. Those events or causes that qualified as a "great religious issue," in addition to the manner in which such an identification took place, is arguably the central narrative catalyst of any story about the recent religious past in the US since the 1960s. It is in this period, specifically between the mid—1960s and mid—1970s, when religious or spiritual fronts began to form in opposition to their political antitheses in the public square. Marty's selection of education and the Panama Canal as great religious issues was an indication of the restructuring American religious landscape largely in opposition to a determined, grassroots mobilization campaign that foregrounded explicitly social and cultural issues as the most significant indicators of America's spiritual vitality and efficacy. Largely conservative in both its politics and theology, this movement was part of a constituency of Americans that looked upon Archie and his antics favorably, without the necessary distance from the bigoted subject that Lear and other religious liberals seemingly possessed. In short, Marty's selection said as much about largely liberal, mainline American Protestantism as it did the broader currents of American religion.

All in the Family presented a family under siege from a variety of racial, economic, religious, and political vantages. In this sense, Archie Bunker the character served as the most significant part of the show in its attempts to educate and uplift, but he was only part of a larger portrayal of American family life, which at times grafted seamlessly onto contemporaneous events in American society due to the show's topicality. As a result, due to Lear's own spiritual and political idiosyncrasies, *All in the Family* represented a model of American civic life, one that depended on the classical (religious) liberal notions of civility, tolerance, and diversity despite the volume of the arguments and debates in the Bunker household. It was this vision of society that grounded the work of both Lear and Marty once the two began working together on behalf of a frustrated constituency of political and religious liberals who felt systematically excluded from politics due to two interrelated factors unique to the time period: the forcefulness of the nascent Christian Right and the inroads it was making into the largely liberal—controlled entertainment and knowledge industries.

Conclusion

In an interview with *Ebony* magazine in June of 1972, actor Carroll O'Connor described how he played Archie when Lear wrote the character to educate and instruct in the name of tolerance and understanding, "You laugh as you watch him, but that man is in pain. You're laughing at a *loser*; a loser because of his misconceptions…We show a man who is a racist and a bigot and who is digging his own grave on Earth." For O'Connor, this portrayal unfolded according to the didactic dictates of Lear himself and other sympathetic Hollywood liberals, "The lesson is—if you think this way, *change*. That's the lesson. But we don't come out and say so, because that is a very bad way to teach."[106] Influence instead of adjudication, exploration

[106] Charles L. Sanders, "Is Archie Bunker the Real White America? Nation's New Hero is a Beer—Bellied Bigot with 60 Million Fans," *Ebony* (June 1971), 186—192.

over certainty— these were two of the thematic and cultural tenets that guided Lear's scripts from week to week before almost a quarter of the viewing country.

Unfortunately for O'Connor, Lear, and other Hollywood liberals, their interpretation of white progress when it came to race was presumptuous at best and naïve at worst despite the show's adherence to civic and spiritual values such as tolerance and diversity. "He's a minority of white people. I think the rest of the whites are, as I said before, moving away from that, argues O'Connor. "They can still laugh at Archie because there is reminiscence involved…most of the white people I run into and who talk to me about the show tell me, 'Archie was my father; Archie was my uncle.' It's always *was, was, was*. It's not *now.*"[107] O'Connor's confidence in identifying Archie with the "minority" of whites stemmed from the some idealistic optimism (or naiveté) that held another set of whites to a more progressive trajectory of racial competency and understanding— namely the Hollywood community of political and religious liberals that O'Connor and Lear were themselves apart. Despite the fact that Lear denied the accusations made by political commentators, journalists, and religious figures that he intentionally inserted controversial subject matter into his programming in order to enlighten his audiences, O'Connor understood the show in exactly these liberal, didactic terms.

Much of this noble intention, however, ultimately depended upon the audiences' reception of Lear and other's writing *as satire*, meaning that Lear's comedy depended upon the viewer possessing an awareness for how a television character can possess both content and form (or function): Archie's diatribes were full of offensive and never—before—heard—on—TV racial slurs, yet this content served the all—important secondary satirical purpose of moral instruction. In other words, *what* Archie said was not as significant as *why* he said it in Lear's

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[107] Sanders, "Is Archie Bunker the Real White America?" (June 1971), 192.

attempts to expose his audience to divisive and controversial subject matter in primetime. "Now our intention is not to make the racist laugh and enjoy himself. Our intention is to show him just what he is…whether he *does* laugh at that or whether he shrinks from it, we cannot foretell," O'Connor admitted. "We cannot plan for it. All we can do is show him honestly what he is doing and let the chips fall where they may. And I think the chips are going to fall on the right side."[108]

Unfortunately for O'Connor, Lear, and other members of the primetime community, this prediction turned out to possess a great deal of truth that had very little to do with their attempts to enact their progressive politics through culture. In this particular instance, O'Connor's "right side" resembled less the aspirations of his fellow laborers in the broadcast fields of the knowledge industry than it did the passions of those tilling the Sunbelt soils of entrepreneurial, anti—statist, and evangelical conservatism in both word and grassroots deed.

In between the elections of Jimmy Carter in 1976 and Ronald Reagan in 1980, Lear would begin to emerge from behind the camera in order to take his spiritual vision of civic life to the very audiences that he had entertained for nearly a decade in the name of civility and intellectual freedom.[109] His ability to do this, however, was made counterintuitively that much more difficult due to his own successes at incorporating topicality into the sitcom narratives of primetime television. Lear's contributions to and philosophy of American television set a structural precedent that did not require the same political concerns for its successful deployment in primetime. In other words, the Lear sitcom's success was based on its ability to remain and disseminate "relevancy" as both product and storyline. As such, Lear's programming exemplified the "social issue group" usage of the medium as mostly an educational instrument

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[108] Sanders, "Is Archie Bunker," 192.

[109] For a study that examines progressive evangelical organizing that possessed a similar set of political concerns during this period, see Brantley Gassaway, *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

within a larger "electronic classroom" model of communication. Unlike his more conservative counterparts in the American public square, who deployed television in an conversionary effort to support their burgeoning ministries, Lear entertained in order to influence his audiences when it came to his weekly one—act plays of discussion, argumentation, and liberal deliberation.

The topicality of Lear's writing, his willingness to pull storylines from the daily headlines, represented yet another attempt to mobilize culture in the name of politics from a politically progressive vantage point. However, these narrative choices had consequences—namely the impact that Lear's writing had on the rhetoric and reality of the American family itself. In fact, one could argue that it was not Jerry Falwell or Pat Robertson who first politicized the American family over the airwaves or subjected it to the political interests of the American party system. Rather than portray the family as a refuge from an otherwise inhospitable world, a hallmark of network television since the 1950s, Lear "portrayed the family as a political arena—as *the* political arena…the Bunker household was, in short, a microcosm of America."[110] In this sense, Lear was the first individual to politicize "the family" over broadcast network television in the short history of American media.

The willingness to adapt to one's cultural and social surroundings by making the American family the subject of his television writing locates Lear firmly in a modernist tradition of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews who viewed urban dilapidation and societal decay as communal sins committed against the nation and its citizenry. The theatre was a sacred space for Lear and his fellow theatrical liberals dating back to the heyday of Broadway, but it was not exempt or removed from the contentious politics of the Vietnam War or the Civil Rights Movement— quite the opposite in fact.

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[110] Richard Adler, ed., *All in the Family: A Critical Appraisal* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 1979), xxxix.

Lear's programming functioned as an application of the activist clergy tradition of the same decade to network television during primetime hours.[111] Like his fellow activists, Lear's interests and concerns were firmly those of the present— systemic racism, sexual discrimination, and bottom—line thinking were to be examined and researched for the betterment of the country's minority communities. The counterintuitive results of these thematic emphases, however, ultimately overshadowed the liberation—based aspirations of the various freedom movements of the period. This was so because of the cultural gap that formed between those who were on the frontlines of the movement, either in physical or televisual manifestation, and those who saw such activism as detrimental to both their local congregations and American Christianity itself.

In light of this, Lear's involvement in the entertainment industry as a liberally—minded primetime entertainer is significant because he challenged seemingly self—evident distinctions between comedy and entertainment, politics and popular culture, religion and the naked public square that he himself was invested in maintaining. This was especially the case when he was confronted by a vocal and vociferous grassroots effort to mobilize conservative voters across the religious and political spectrum around the clarion calls against government overreach and increasing secularization at the hands of the nation's highest court. As a result, the debates surrounding the increasing imbrication of religion and politics with Reagan's election during the late 1970s and early 1980s included Lear more often than not as a voice of authority in the nation's public life.

[111] Both the activist or "New Breed" preachers of the 1960s and Lear's middling mainline of the 1970s shared a common cause and method: to act as cultural and spiritual custodians to the nation through the use of the latest intellectual, scientific, and social developments. The use of media in this project is ambivalent at best, since many within these communities value community over what they deem televisual spectacle as witnessed in the Electronic church.

Unbeknownst to Lear, this televisual tendency stretched back to the earliest days of the FCC and the federal regulation of the airwaves in relation to ecumenical and mainline Protestantism. As a variety of historians have observed, federal policy concerning who received broadcasting licenses and who did not throughout the 1930s revealed the government's preference for more liberal forms of Christianity over and against conservative evangelicals or fundamentalists who were also clamoring for airtime. "The purpose of network programming for the religious groups was not to convert, and they did little direct preaching *a la* today's electronic church," argues former director of communications for the National Council of Catholic Men Richard Walsh, "the point was to foster dialogue."[112]

Beginning with the premiere of *All in the Family* in 1971 on CBS, in addition to programs such as *MASH* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, spiritual liberals like Lear enacted their own political aspirations and those that defined the previous decade's social tumultuousness through their television writing instead of more formal articles, treatises, or position papers authored by a non—profit or think tank.[113] This reality, however, was not far off as both liberals and conservatives battled one another over the primary means of cultural production in the 1980s— the television.

[112] Margaret O'Brien—Steinfels and Peter Steinfels, "The New Awakening: Getting Religion in the Video Age," *Channels of Communication* 5:2 (Jan/Feb 1983), 27.

[113] For earlier examples of liberal programming in the 1960s, see Mike O'Connor, "Liberals in Space: The 1960s Politics of *Star Trek*," *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics, and Culture* 5:2 (Dec 2012), 185—203.

CHAPTER FOUR
Lear, the FCC, and the Holy War over American Television

Lear's relevance programming set the tone for primetime lineups across the three networks throughout the 1970s.[1] Along with programs like *M.A.S.H.* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *All in the Family* established a type of realism—based situation comedy that entertained according to a set of civic principles based on contemporaneous events— namely those that Lear supported himself, such as unfettered debate and civility in public life. However, Lear's depiction of family life was radically different from his predecessors.[2] This was not only a thematic observation by Lear himself, but also a vocational charge to write "about something" in primetime. Despite the controversy that surrounded many of his individual episodes, including those that explored the feminist movement and male impotence, among some of his many subjects, it was an episode from one of Lear's many spinoffs that generated the most controversy and mobilization against entertainment television— a first in the medium's short history. *All in the Family* certainly received its fair share of negative mail, including a death threat directed at Lear himself, but it was the organizing that followed a controversial episode of *Maude* that foreshadowed the contentious decade to come in American public life.

This decade witnessed a radical retuning of American political life according to the dictates of culture and those who evaluated its efficacy based on the "public interest," a tried and tested concept originating slightly before the establishment of the Federal Communications

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[1] Numerous commentators at the time commented on how primetime content post—Lear began to shift towards edgier, less "family safe" material. The most common way of identifying this shift was to name and sometimes list the subject matter of various television programs, which now include racism, feminism, domestic violence, and nuclear destruction.

[2] For more on how this impacted the political history of this decade, see Robert Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 2013).

Commission in 1934.[3] Unfortunately for Lear and others in the "middling mainline," the nation's public interest was anything but public, especially in times of mature programming and its subsequent vociferous criticism.[4] "How could they beam a program such as *Maude* into the American living room?" asked one concerned citizen in a *Los Angeles Times* editorial, "Pregnancy, vasectomy, abortion, 'don't pat me below the wasteland, that's how this all got started!' What a show for 8 p.m.! And to think they are taking Bonanza off in favor of this trash…the vast tasteless TV sea."[5] Compared to something like Alistair Cooke's *America*, Lear's program offended as much as it entertained.

Featured directly below a picture of actress Beatrice Arthur, an indication perhaps of the linkage in the public eye between Arthur, Lear, and the subject matter of his shows, the editorial relied on a particular vocabulary that not only established the author's authority, but also defined

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[3] There is little governmental or academic consensus on what exactly "the public interest" is and what it means to act on behalf of it. In 1924, President Herbert Hoover argued that radio itself "is not to be considered for private gain…it is a public concern impressed with the public trust and is to be considered primarily from the standpoint of public interest." In 1929, the *Great Lakes Broadcasting* decision defined it as requiring radio stations to present "all sides of important public questions fairly, objectively, and without bias." A decade later, the FCC argued that "radio can serve as an instrument of democracy only when devoted to the communication of information and exchange of ideas fairly and objectively presented." In 1946, the FCC's *Public Service Responsibility of Broadcast Licensees* named fourteen components of the public interest including educational programs, public affairs programs, news programs, and religious programs. In 1949, the FCC introduced the Fairness Doctrine, which was intimately connected to "the public interest" because such interest "requires ample play for the free and fair competition of opposing views, and the commission believes that the principle applies to all discussion of important to the public." This doctrine was interpreted as the primary component of "the public interest." Behavior falling outside of these parameters, including defamation, racial or religious intolerance, and obscenity, did not serve the public interest. Throughout the 1970s, Lear and other religious liberals were not shy in using these federal stipulations to keep some voices off of the airwaves and others on in the name of "fairness." The fuzziness surrounding the notion of "the public interest" demands further investigation, especially since much of its content seemed to be ideally suited for Lear and his People for the American Way. For more on this history, see Heather Hendershot, "God's Angriest Man: Carl McIntire, Cold War Fundamentalism, and Right—Wing Broadcasting," *American Quarterly* 59:2 (Jun 2007), 373—396. For more on the public interest, see the FCC's own "Policy and Regulatory Landscape" available here: https://transition.fcc.gov/osp/inc—report/INoC—26—Broadcast.pdf

[4] My usage of "middling" is shorthand for "chattering," as in the "chattering classes," those who occupied influential positions within US society (entertainment, university, federal government) that depended on the skillful use of media to achieve much of their political aspirations in a liberal key. For neoconservative writers, this group of individuals was best known as the "knowledge class" or "New Class."

[5] Dorothy Stone, "Maude's Abortion Evokes Protests," *Los Angeles Times* (Nov 29 1972), D25.

the deficiencies of Lear's programming according to what can only be described as taste, in both descriptive and categorical terms.[6] The author's anxiousness grew in proportion to the nature of the programming she perceived as either tasteful, or in this case, tasteless. Although Stone was clear about the difference between better and worse programming in primetime, the viewing public was anything but as they witnessed the tense negotiations between the networks, Lear, and his conservative opposition. The fact that the author used the word "beam" was also indicative of a discomfort with the ease at which television found a voice in homes across the country, a fear shared by Lear and others when it came to conservative religiosity in general and later in the decade to the electronic church in particular.

This largely taste—based dynamic shaped the directions of public debate in the 1970s over the relationship between politics, entertainment, and the American family.[7] Perhaps better known as "the culture wars," these disagreements over what was "mature" and what was "tasteless" reflected the broader social and cultural shift towards a cultural register of politics that surrounded the broadcast of *Maude*, the ensuing protest that followed, and numerous other instances of cultural skirmishes over reproductive rights, pornography, or free speech during the decade. Although one might think that this discursive migration of politics towards the cultural

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[6] The subject of taste is an unavoidable one in the study of the culture wars. For more, see Raymond Williams, "Taste" in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983), 313—315.

[7] For theorist Raymond Williams, "taste" can be understood as being equivalent to "discrimination: the word Taste…means that quick discerning faculty or power of the mind by which we accurately distinguish the good, bad, or indifferent." I argue that the category of taste assists the study of the religion and politics during the 1970s and 1980s because of the nature of the conflict that unfolded across the decades, which in this case was mostly cultural in terminology. Much of the language of this conflict was also dependent on rhetorical (and ontological) binaries such as good/bad, civil/uncivil, rural/urban, educated/uneducated, and religious/secular. Those in the knowledge industry, the socio—economic strata Lear and others in the media occupied, possessed a particular investment in the idea of being the "mainline" or "mainstream," which implied discriminating faculties and learned relationships with similarly accomplished individuals. For more, see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983), 313.

favored those who deployed culture on their own behalf in the name of politics, namely political and religious liberals, it in fact assisted the political and Christian Right even more in their formulation of a "family values" politics.[8] This religio—political agenda took advantage of the growing gap between cultural and religious authority figures and those in the pew according to a claim to a superior "morality."[9] For historian Kathryn Montgomery, these debates represented a new front in the ongoing negotiation of the idea of America and its representation in public life in late twentieth—century America. "In the war for the American mind," she remarks, "entertainment programs have become political territory."[10]

This chapter explores further the relationship between primetime television *as* political territory and various federal regulatory institutions in light of Lear's programming and its cultural impact during the mid—1970s. Lear's concerns about conservative religiosity were initially a reflection of his deeply felt commitment to minority rights and the first amendment regardless of the social setting, including Hollywood. In fact, an emphasis on free speech was a direct outgrowth of his childhood memories of Catholic radio preacher Father Charles Coughlin and his awareness of the blacklisting that took place in Hollywood during the 1950s.[11]

Lear made it a point to speak out for creative freedom when it came to television writers and producers who were slowly realizing that their programs were no longer seen simply as

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[8] For more, see Seth Dowland, *Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

[9] Whitney Strub, *Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011), 118. For Strub, "One of the New Right's major innovations, then, was the conservative cooptation of morality in politics, equating liberalism with libertinism at every available opportunity."

[10] Kathryn C. Montgomery, *Target Primetime: Advocacy Groups and the Struggle Over Entertainment Television* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989), 5.

[11] For more, see Norman Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2015).

forms of primetime entertainment. Not only did this have cultural and political implications, but it would also have legal repercussions as well when it came to federal regulatory policy of the airwaves executed in the "public interest."[12] In light of this, I argue that the historical difference between those religious groups that received sustaining time, ones who possessed public interest programming, and those who had to pay for their air time commercially, usually conservative Protestant groups, plays a significant role in this story. This is the case because Lear's religious liberalism found much in common with the goals of sustaining programming and public television more generally, which were largely educational and didactic in nature.[13]

Additionally, various advocacy groups began forming at this time in both liberal and conservative guises largely in response to what the three networks were broadcasting over the airwaves. Lear's worries over conservative Protestantism had first been expressed in a key of civil liberties; however, a more accurate description highlights Lear's cognizance of how conservative programming threatened to consume the airwaves themselves in the form of a hostile takeover, something akin to what would unfold in the collective minds of liberals

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[12] For more on this understudied topic, see Frederick W. Ford, "The Meaning of the 'Public Interest,' Convenience or Necessity,'" *Journal of Broadcasting* 5:3 (1961), 205—218; Lee Loevinger, "Broadcasting and Religious Liberty," *Journal of Broadcasting* 9:1 (1964), 3—23; Robert R. Smith, "Broadcasting and Religious Freedom," *Journal of Broadcasting* 13:1 (1968), 1—12; Ellen August, "Writers Guild v. FCC: Duty of the Networks to Resist Governmental Regulation," *Syracuse Law Review* 28:2 (1977), 583—607; Charles L. Firestein, "*Red Lion* and the Fairness Doctrine: Regulation of Broadcasting 'In the Public Interest,'" *Arizona Law Review* 11:807 (1969), 807—821; Andrea J. Grefe, "The Family Viewing Hour: An Assault on the First Amendment?," *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly* (Fall 1977), 935—989.

[13] While the relationship between Martin Marty and Norman Lear was an important one for the formation of People for the American Way, another significant partnership was between Lear and journalist Bill Moyers. In fact, at Marty's retirement ceremony, Moyers served as the MC while Lear spoke as a special guest of Marty's. Lear remarks in his autobiography that Southern Baptists like Moyers influenced how he thought about religion, politics, and censorship in America.

following the Iranian Revolution in 1979.[14] This was especially disturbing for liberals because they tended to read domestic events through analogous events abroad. Sociologist Peter Berger perhaps demonstrated this tendency best when he wrote, "The fanatical mullahs have been let loose in the land, *this* land. They travel all across America in the flesh; even more alarmingly, they fill the air with the electronic projections of their presence."[15] These words demonstrate Berger's concern for presence, both physical and spectral. Not only are "they" here "in the flesh," namely televangelists and conservative entrepreneurs, but they are also present as "electronic projections" of presence. For academic commentators like Berger and Marty, this presence represented a serious threat to not only civic life, but also institutional church life itself as television relativized physical space and various mainline notions of community forged within.

Set against this historical backdrop, I argue that Lear's programming benefitted from the historic tendency of the federal government to privilege certain forms of religion over others in the public square and over the airwaves. I rely on three case studies to demonstrate how his situation comedy writing shaped network policy and the federal adjudication of taste differences in determining what was explicitly "political" and what was "entertainment" before the law. These case studies, which include the "Family Hour" controversy, the abortion episodes of *Maude*, and a Hollywood retreat to Ojai, California, demonstrate the breadth of Lear's impact not only on the primetime shows themselves and on their relevance content, but also on the very structure of primetime itself, in addition to the laws and regulations that governed it.

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[14] For an example of how global events influenced largely liberal descriptions of conservative religion, see the first lines of Peter Berger, "The Class Struggle in American Religion," *Christian Century* (Feb 25 1981), 194—199.

[15] Peter Berger, "The Class Struggle in American Religion," 194.

Following investigations of Lear's theatrical liberalism and his primetime programming in *All in the Family*, this chapter explores the deep unease that coursed through the entertainment industry during this period as burgeoning advocacy groups aimed their politically—inflected sights at Lear and others for their inaccurate portrayal of minority groups and their pornographic content depending on the viewer in question. I argue that Lear's involvement in these various moments in the recent past further illustrates both the scope of his cultural impact through his programming, and perhaps more importantly, his spiritual involvement in the public square in the name of such liberal tenets as civil liberty, tolerance, and religious pluralism over and against his conservative adversaries. In this sense, Lear's spiritual liberalism was the product of not only a rich tradition of theatrical and religious liberalisms, but it was also the product of a contemporaneous encounter with its civic antithesis in the public square— namely the Christian Right. In fact, one could even argue that such metonyms for conservative religiosity were the direct product of both the politics of spiritual liberalism during this period and Lear's biographical particularity. Unfortunately for Lear, much of his own complicity in these events remained unexamined or obscured from introspective view until pressed for explanation in a court of law in defense of the "public interest."

These religious liberal tenets experienced their first examination in the mid—1970s in the form of a federally mandated policy known simply, as "Family Hour." For Lear and his fellow Hollywood supporters, this act was the first instance of federally—authored "censorship" in primetime due to their programs' explicit material. Despite the cultural continuity that existed between Lear's writing and the federally—defined "public interest," a rhetorical move not lost on his lawyers, Lear and others still feared a conservative takeover of the airwaves due to the expanding televangelist presence of Falwell and Robertson. I argue that widespread concern for

violence on television at the time served as the perfect opportunity to question not only Lear's usage of "public interest" in defending his programming, but also his deployment of federal policies as defensive measures against his conservative opponents. It also encouraged a re—examination of just how the federal government adjudicated scarce broadcast time among a variety of religious communities, both conservative and liberal, who viewed broadcast television as the next frontier for their respective religio—political agendas. For some, this usage meant new opportunities for proselytization. For others, it meant the equally important desire to influence and raise awareness about the pressing issues of the day presented in dramatic fashion and at high volume.

Regulating Television: History, Religion, and the Public Interest

In 1974, NBC broadcast a television movie in primetime titled, *Born Innocent*. Starring actress Linda Blair in her first role beyond *The Exorcist*, the movie explored a number of controversial themes including childhood trauma, domestic abuse, and violence against women and children. One of many realist programs offered to audiences in the wake of Lear's *All in the Family*, the movie focused on the story of Blair's character, one that resulted in her living in an all—girls detention center at the age of fourteen due to her criminal indiscretions. During her stay at the center, Blair was subjected to countless beatings and violent acts by her fellow female inmates. One particular instance of a violent attack against Blair's character would catch the attention of not only the viewing public, but also network censors and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regarding what was appropriate, or not, for primetime viewing.

The scene in question was the first of its kind. It featured Blair and her attackers in a graphic scene of children gang raping another in the communal showers with a plunger handle.

Despite the fact that numerous individuals and organizations had been organizing against violence on television since the early 1970s, this singular event catalyzed public debate and demanded a federal response. Not only was primetime TV fast becoming a significant front in the culture wars, it was also becoming a “contested zone” due to the organizing of both liberal and conservative advocacy groups against their respective televisual transgressions.

The first such TV reform groups to emerge in the 1970s were largely liberal in aspiration and composition. A product of “the Movement” of the previous decade and its strategic justice—oriented goals, various liberal activists organized against two offenses in particular as part of a newly emergent “media reform movement”— the misrepresentation of minority communities on television and segregation writ large in US society. Liberal Protestant denominations such as the United Church of Christ and organizations like the National Organization for Women and the NAACP found common cause against racism and discrimination, televisual or not, during the early 1970s. Such organizing began much earlier, however, with the actions of the Office of Communications in the United Church of Christ against Jackson, Mississippi television station WLBT in 1964. Organizers succeeded in denying the station its license through the filing of a “petition to deny” with the FCC in regards to the station’s broadcast license and its habit of discriminating against black employment and programming. The end result of this encounter between liberal advocacy groups and the federal government resulted in the eventual denial of the station’s license because of its racial discrimination, the evidence of which had been reported by UCC operatives through careful monitoring and reporting of anomalies in the WLBT broadcasts.[16]

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[16] This monitoring tactic found its culminating application when Lear and others founded People for the American Way (PFAW).

This was a landmark decision in the history of television and its regulation because it allowed citizens to take part in license hearing protocols for the first time. Not only did this mirror Lear's own preference for "the people" to make their own decisions when it came to television programming, but more importantly it set a precedent for groups and individuals to articulate and protect their interests as part of the community that television served in the name of the "public interest."[17] Lear found common cause with individuals such as William F. Fore, who became the Executive Director of the Broadcasting and Film Commission of the National Council of Churches during the same year.[18] Fore was also concerned about the relationship between programming in the "public interest" and programming in the "partisan interest" once stations received their federally mandated licenses. In light of the ongoing, post—war conservative mobilization of funds that would eventually culminate in the formation of the electronic church during the late 1970s, Fore argued that federal regulation did not inherently challenge first amendment rights to speech broadcast over the airwaves. "The freedom of religious expression is not threatened," he argued, "What may be threatened is the 'freedom' with which some religion stations have operated a *public* facility in the interest of *private* sectarian causes [my emphasis]."[19]

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[17] The history of "the public interest" deserves its own treatment beyond this dissertation. In fact, I would argue that this formulation was as inclusive as it was exclusive in that Lear could wield said "public interest" against those who did not seem to contribute to it, i.e. the televangelists of the late 1970s, while benefitting from the protections of the federal government.

[18] Fore is a very important figure during this tumultuous period of federal regulation of the airwaves. He wrote a number of texts and articles on religion and popular culture including a short piece titled, "A Short History of Religious Broadcasting." Later in the decade, Fore was intimately involved in the initial meetings that led to the formation of People for the American Way, another indication of how Lear's religious liberalism found support from mainline Protestant church organizations such as the NCC and arguably the FCC itself during the 1970s, which had privileged mainline preachers and speakers on television over their more conservative counterparts dating back to the 1930s.

For some commentators at the time, however, the FCC was in violation of the separation of church and state because it required its license holders to include religious programming in their respective schedules. This resulted in the FCC essentially determining what was and was not "religion" according to its own stipulations. Due to the historic preference for mainline traditions by the FCC when it came to radio and television broadcasts, other less well known or recognized traditions could not attain a similarly powerful platform due to the perceived incongruity between programs that served the "public interest" and those that did it. As a result, the FCC, "through its licensing process, has in effect graded religions by the standards of what a few people have defined as the 'public interest.'"[20] Luckily for Lear, his programming was understood largely as contributing to the "public interest" due to the topicality and seriousness of his storylines told through situation comedy. In this sense, Lear can be understood as benefitting from such federal dynamics in the name of "the public" interest.

Fore's words, however, foreshadowed the upcoming decade's religio—political challenges that would face Lear and others in the public square— namely, whose interests reflected publicly agreed upon principles and whose did not. In other words, who agreed to the terms of public reason when entering political deliberation, and who did not. For Lear, this question was answered during the 1930s through the diatribes of Father Charles Coughlin, an individual who represented anything *but* the public interest due to his anti—Semitism. After giving a particularly explicit speech pertaining to the Treaty of Versailles in 1932, CBS decided

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[19] William Fore, "Religion on the Airwaves: In the Public Interest?" *Christian Century* (Sept 17 1975), 782—783.

[20] For more on the FCC and religion, see Marcus Cohen, "Religion and the FCC," *The Reporter* (Jan 14 1965), 32—34.

to stop selling airtime at commercial prices for religious broadcasts. This policy followed the same one executed by the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) less than ten years before.

Coughlin's rhetoric reached a fevered pitch when he began identifying wealthy Jewish businessmen with the most sinister machinations *as Jews*. In response, the National Association of Broadcasters altered its own radio code in 1939 in order to ban attacks against others made on the basis of race or religion.[21] Such a change, however, did not stop the networks from broadcasting programs on "sustaining" or free time as part of their collective service to the "public interest" in the name of balance. In 1944, the Joint Religious Radio Committee of the Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian USA Churches, and the United Church of Canada formed the first nationally syndicated religious programs in addition to awarding individual ministers funds to attend radio institutes.[22]

With titles such as, "Church in the Air," these radio programs represented a variety of denominational interests in spirit, yet they were ultimately most reflective of the mainline and the NCC. In addition, such programs purposefully did not solicit funds from their audiences—the classic tenet of commercial programming usually associated with conservative viewpoints. "We feel that religious broadcasting is a public service," argued CBS founder William S. Paley, "which should be administered as far as possible under the guidance of persons closely associated with the religious endeavor and definitely capable of handling such broadcasting in the public interest."[23] For Paley and countless others first in radio and later in television, the

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[21] Heather Hendershot, "God's Angriest Man: Carl McIntire, Cold War Fundamentalism, and Right—Wing Broadcasting," *American Quarterly* 59:2 (Jun 2007), 373—396.

[22] William F. Fore, "A Short History of Religious Broadcasting," 1968. Part of author's private collection.

"most capable" individuals were those organizations and individuals who also sought balance and service in the public interest, namely mainline and liberal Protestants.

This network preference would continue throughout the course of the twentieth century, especially when it came to Lear's programming and later his non—profit organizing on behalf of the American Way. The events and decisions of the 1930s pertaining to media and its federal regulation would be felt during 1960s and 1970s in the courts and in the general political discourse of the period, which grew more dependent on newly emergent, yet all too familiar, rhetorical binaries such public and private, and partisan and public interest. These terms, including the public interest itself, influenced the next decade of church/state debates and political confrontations in the public square between individuals such as Lear, televangelist Jerry Falwell, and even President Ronald Reagan himself.

For former FCC Chairman Frederick W. Ford, the act of defining "the public interest" was best left to a Congressman of the 1920s, who argued that the public interest is "service to the public; service of the highest order reasonably and practically possible. This means, first of all, the availability of programming of an acceptable signal quality, and secondly it means content designed to serve a *useful social purpose*" [my emphasis].[24] Despite the amount of time that

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[23] James A. Brown, "Selling Airtime for Controversy: NAB Self—Regulation and Father Coughlin," *Journal of Broadcasting* 24:2 (1980), 199—224.

[24] Frederick W. Ford, "The Meaning of the 'Public Interest,' Convenience or Necessity,'" *Journal of Broadcasting* 5:3 (1961), 214. The context of this article is arguably as important as its content in narrating a religious history of American broadcasting post—World War II. Three years later, FCC Commissioner Lee Loevinger published his own analysis of the history of FCC policy regarding religious broadcasting. By this time, a version of the article had already been presented at a conference of religious broadcasters and generated what was described as "wide attention" (Loevinger's previous professional posts included Assistant U.S. Attorney General in charge of the Anti—Trust Division of the Department of Justice). In a footnote, Loevinger draws his readers' attention to a definition of "the public interest" from 1951 authored by then FCC Commissioner Wayne Coy. For Coy, the public interest was public precisely *because* of its religious character, as understood and defined by the FCC. "The FCC has always held that adequate time for the religious activities of the community is necessary to a well—rounded program service," argued Coy. "And a well—rounded program service is necessary to meet the

separated Ford's words from those of his example, there existed in between and beyond these years a remarkable level of epistemic consistency when it came to "the public interest" and its execution over the airwaves— an expression of an institutional form of "common sense."[25] The FCC itself admitted the less—than—clear consensus that existed concerning questions of definition, but its members could nevertheless agree on one thing— the public interest called for a definition and thus an understanding of religion and appropriate religious programming according to the dictates of political and religious liberals, an established federal tradition arguably dating back to the likes of FDR, the NCC, and the New Deal.

Lear took advantage of this history because the politics of his spiritual liberalism aligned perfectly with the liberal common sense that undergirded the federal notion of programming in the public interest. For scholar of religion John Modern, "common sense" refers to the socio—economic conditions that normalize particular understandings of the religious and the secular in a given moment in time. Based on this definition, I would argue that Lear's secular formation was more conducive to the state's in light of their common emphasis on public reason and its public/private binary. Lear's understanding of relevancy as demonstrated in his television writing and behind—the—camera activism reflected the very same assumptions that undergirded the public interest in its pursuit of balance, tolerance, and fair representation across the scarce resource that was the federally regulated airwaves.

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statutory requirement that licensees serve the public interest…Serving religious needs is part of the general pattern of public service that we expect from all broadcast licensees." This definition was anything but context specific. "I can envision no time in the future when that requirement will be changed." Once this comment is placed alongside the others cited in these notes, one begins to see the outlines of "the public interest" as both definition and category, content and knowledge—generating. For more, see Lee Loevinger, "Broadcasting and Religious Liberty," *Journal of Broadcasting* 9:1 (1964).

[25] John Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 7.

The days and nights Lear spent listening to his crystal radio as a child were certainly filled with the vitriol and condemnation of Father Coughlin, but there were also moments of encouragement and positivity expressed in the key of a *social* gospel, a new deal for a depressed people. “The liberal theologians of the Social Gospel movement tried to derive from the Christian message a motive for social reforms in the factories, tenement slums, and streets of urban America,” argues scholar of religion David Chidester, “Christianity was to become *relevant* to the problems of the modern world by forming a base for social action by which the social welfare…of all people in America might be improved” [my emphasis].[26] For those following Lear’s moves beyond the formal stages of *All in the Family*, *Maude*, and *Sanford and Son*, his storylines arguably retained much of their didactic and dramatic character as understood through social relevance. They were, however, articulated in a slightly different register— one suited to both the conditions and timbre of American politics. In short, Lear identified his own programming as contributing to and a product of “the public interest.”

We are able to identify and thus describe the religious investments of the public interest as uniquely liberal and religious based on what can be understood as a custodial imperative of social uplift. “According to most liberals,” argues Cara Brundidge, “Christianity should improve society by bolstering ethical standards and improving social conditions.”[27] Unlike their conservative counterparts, religious and political liberals benefitted greatly from this notion of the public interest because it was conducive to particular formations of the religious and the

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[26] David Chidester, *Patterns of Power: Religion and Politics in American Culture* (Englewood Hills, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988), 270. Chidester’s theoretical analysis of civil religion as a “pattern of religio—political power” guides much of my own understanding and discussion of civil religion as both descriptor and category.

[27] Cara Burnidge, "Protestant Liberalism." In *Encyclopedia of Religion in America*, edited by Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, 1783—91. Washington, DC: CQ Press., 2010. doi: http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.drew.edu/10.4135/9781608712427.n301.

secular— namely those authored by religious liberals like Lear, Moyers, and Marty along a trajectory of liberal progress and enlightenment. This argument found its paradigmatic application and expression in the "Family Viewing Hour" controversy of the 1970s, one in which Lear was a focal point as one of Hollywood's leading proponents of freedom of creative speech.

Family Viewing Hour

"There have been notable changes in the activities of religious groups as well as in the character of the public utterances made by their leaders," observed scholar of communications Robert R. Smith. "In speaking of contemporary religious activity, commentators frequently find that they are not speaking of religious activity as a special realm of experience, but that they are discussing foreign policy (peace movement), civil rights, urban renewal or the distribution of the school budget."[28] In addition to taking part in this religious trend, Lear's commitment to defending the Hollywood community's first amendment rights in the face of possible censorship grew out of his discomfort with the manner in which "the blacklist" silenced (yet again) a largely Jewish community of writers and directors. In this sense, Lear interpreted the calls for a mandatory Family Viewing Hour as a product of federally—administered discriminatory policies. The policy was simple, yet its interpretation was anything but, "Entertainment programming inappropriate for viewing by a general family audience should not be broadcast during the first hour of network entertainment programming in primetime and in the immediately preceding hour."

No longer a vast wasteland of programming, television had instead become the stuff of politics, of policies, and (thus) of power. Even those who continued to bemoan the networks acknowledged the medium's newly discovered power, "So the apocalyptic struggle between

[28] Robert R. Smith, "Broadcasting and Religious Freedom," *Journal of Broadcasting* 13:1 (1968), 1—12.

darkness and light will, finally, be waged not on the heavenly fields of cosmic space but, perhaps more aptly, in the dismal swamp of network television."[29] The Family Viewing Hour was a singular yet powerful reaction to the public outcry over "sex and violence" on television as seen in TV movies such as *Born Innocent* starring Linda Blair. More importantly for Lear, it was also an attempt to re—establish control over a medium whose tragio—comedic faculties had been unleashed in the name of relevance and realism as witnessed in the one act plays of Lear and others in primetime. Through pressure from the FCC and meetings between its chairman and the presidents of the three networks, the Family Viewing Hour became institutional practice beginning in February of 1975. Lear's reaction was equally swift and well organized.

"We want American families to be able to watch television in that time period without ever being embarrassed," argued CBS President Arthur Taylor, proponent of Family Viewing Hour. For Lear, this statement implied that there was a single "American family," which reacted uniformly and negatively to the same televised content. Not only did this remind him of the 1960s network content policy of "least offensive programming possible," but it also suggested a de—politicization of television airspace itself— the very same space politicized originally by Lear earlier in the decade with programs like *All in the Family*.

"I said there was no way I was going to—or would have any idea how to—change America's most popular show to meet the vague standards of *decency* that the Family Hour demanded," observes Lear in his autobiography *Even This I Get to Experience*. "*All in the Family* was virtually devoid of sex and violence, but its propensity for dealing with topical subjects was evidently deemed equally unfit for children…the creative climate was becoming

[29] "Norman Lear vs. The Moral Majority," *Columbia Journalism Review* 20:1 (May/Jun 1981), 77.

increasingly oppressive."[30] Lear's identification of the policy's concern with notions of taste and decency is yet another indication of the terms of culture warfare that were gaining rhetorical and political traction during this period. If Lear and Hollywood stood on one side of this religio—political divide, then conservative senators and FCC chairmen stood on the other, at least in this particular instance. In short, Lear argued that the Family Viewing Hour implicitly targeted his programming because of its topical and socially relevant nature.

When challenged by the networks, or in this case the federal government, Lear acted with focused abandon because it concerned matters of social significance, principled questions of serious concern. In this instance, the Family Viewing Hour was a veiled attempt to censor the creative agenda of Hollywood's best and brightest in the name of social responsibility. Not only was this a move to scapegoat Lear and his supporters for the violence in the industry, but it also infringed on their first amendment rights regardless of time of viewing. The reception of this case, then, becomes paramount to understanding Lear's spiritual agenda in front of and behind the camera during this period leading up to the formation of People for the American Way. Not only was the Family Viewing Hour a violation of free speech for Lear, but it was also a direct intervention into a realm of culture dominated largely by political and religious liberals and their tales of diversity and racial tolerance.

By 1975, all three networks had signed onto implementing the Family Viewing Hour for their upcoming programming schedules. The subsequent lawsuits filed against the FCC and CBS in particular by Lear, his production company, and various Hollywood guilds such as the *Writers' Guild* questioned the legality of the networks' decision to approve such a regulated segment of programming in primetime. More importantly for Lear, the outcome of these filings

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[30] Norman Lear, *Even This I Get To Experience* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2015), 284.

had the potential of affecting his and others' access to the airwaves themselves. "The question before the court was not the desirability of the family viewing policy, but 'who should have the right to decide what shall and shall not be broadcast and how and on what basis should these decisions be made.'"[31] Lear had been used to acting without constraint, without editorial marginalia. The network's office of standards and practices was impeding enough, but this incident was one of many to come, played out across stages both political and entertaining, which shaped Lear's ability to maintain his position of authority within the knowledge industry as one of its primary religio—political representatives. The rise of the electronic church would serve as another moment of pause for Lear and his supporters as they realized that they were no longer the only game in town in primetime.

The terms of Lear's rhetorical defense in court against a federally mandated act of censorship administered by the FCC tells us much about how he understood his own programming and its relationship to the nation's civic life. It also assists us in identifying the characteristics of spiritual and theatrical liberalism according to the genre of the situation comedy. "*Writers Guild* plaintiffs considered the FVH [Family Viewing Hour] to be a threat to television's move toward realistic and socially important themes," observed one commentator in 1977, "*Tandem* plaintiffs also asserted that the FVH deprives the public of *diversity* in entertainment programming [my emphasis]." In respect to *All in the Family*, the FVH "excluded a program that often deals with issues of serious concern and significance to the American people."[32] These arguments were made by numerous individuals on the plaintiff side of the case,

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[31] Ellen August, "Writers Guild v. FCC: Duty of the Networks to Resist Governmental Regulation," *Syracuse Law Review* 28:2 (1977), 593.

which included not only Lear, but also Larry Gelbart, Susan Harris, Ed Weinberger, and Paul Witt, who were responsible for various television programs at the time including *M.A.S.H.*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Rhoda*, and *Barney Miller*.

The arguments above stated that Lear and others' programming was guilty of not only using too much "sex and violence" in the storylines, but also of tackling subject matter unsuited for family viewing. In other words, *because* of the nature of Lear's relevance writing style, his and others' programs were being singled out by Congress and the FCC as evidence of a faulty regulatory system in regards to the country's scarce airwaves. The court concluded, however, that the dealings between the FCC and the networks that resulted in the FVH altering primetime scheduling and content compromised licensee independence, including Lear's. Testifying in front of the Communications Subcommittee of the House of Representatives in 1976, producer Larry Gelbart and others stated their case simply as supporters of the first amendment, "We want the right, not just in our own interest, but in the country's, to be able to discuss mature themes on television, to illuminate our concerns and yours. We think more freedom, freedom with responsibility, is the answer, instead of more censorship."[33] Reflecting the liberal, mainline tendency of reading individual interest as communal interest due to the custodial nature of religious liberalism, Gelbart argued that Hollywood possessed a unique opportunity to engage serious topics in a "mature" fashion in primetime for the betterment of not only the individuals

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[32] Andrea J. Grefe, "The Family Viewing Hour: An Assault on the First Amendment?," *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly* (Fall 1977), 945.

[33] Grefe, "The Family Viewing Hour: An Assault on the First Amendment?," 985.

writing and producing the shows, but also for the viewing audience— understood *as* the country itself.[34]

The fact that Lear was Jewish did not affect his ability to participate in the custodial politics of the spiritual left through his own writing of theatrically liberal productions such as *All in the Family*.[35] In fact, the two idioms of social responsibility articulated by Gelbart and Lear functioned as part of a larger Hollywood ethic of illumination, a project stemming largely from the public interest itself and its own national logic. "It is the right of the public to be informed, rather than any right on the part of the Government, any broadcast licensee or any individual member of the public to broadcast his own particular views on any matter, which is the foundation stone of the American system of broadcasting."[36] In short, Lear produced, wrote, and performed *All in the Family* on a weekly basis to a quarter of the country as part of his own understanding of the public interest as defined by the FCC and the Supreme Court in cases such as *Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. FCC*. As a result, he was able to defend the content and purpose of his programming in the name of the public interest since his writing was both public and of interest to American viewers because of its topical, relevance—driven subject matter.

Unlike his conservative counterparts, who appeared to him as "Stop Immorality on TV people," Lear was able to rhetorically align his interests with those of "the public interest"

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[34] "Mainline Protestants." In *Encyclopedia of Religion in America*, edited by Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, 1310—18. Washington, DC: CQ Press., 2010. doi: http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.drew.edu/10.4135/9781608712427.n212.

[35] For historian James W. Lewis, Mainline social engagement assumed a "Mainline Protestant sense of custodial responsibility for society," which resulted in religious liberals and liberals in general feeling "entitled to speak for the common good, even after their dominance of American religious life had passed away." For more, see "Mainline Protestants." In *Encyclopedia of Religion in America*, edited by Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, 1310—18. Washington, DC: CQ Press., 2010. doi: http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.drew.edu/10.4135/9781608712427.n212.

[36] *Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. FCC*, 395 U.S. 367, 382 (1969).

because he and his Hollywood supporters saw them as one in the same.[37] "Those of us who create the shows you see on television feel that *the public interest* will not be served so long as the decisions about everything on television continue to be made monopolistically by a handful of dollar—oriented network executives," argued Lear. "We think that what goes on the air should be determined by the personal judgment, good taste, and creative imagination of professional showmen" [my emphasis].[38] This quotation speaks particularly well to the nature of cultural and spiritual conflict in the 1970s as understood from the religious left: Since Lear and his supporters possessed a superior sense of taste when it came to entertainment (exemplified by comments such as, "the great unwashed get what they deserve"), their collective "New Class" opinion inherently outweighed that of their executive "business class" counterparts in the networks.[39] The differences in *taste* between these two sets of class interests reflected the larger cultural cleavages of the time, resulting in the New Class assuming more "liberal" concerns over and against the "conservative" interests of network executives. Examples of liberal organizing in

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[37] This particular reference reveals Lear's awareness of conservative mobilization against his programming during the mid—1970s. I would also argue that this reference located the nascent Christian Right in one of its more grassroots manifestations against an explicitly *social* malady of the times— immoral television. In this sense, to track Lear's movements and their counter—movements is to narrate a history of two [inextricable], religio—political movements in America's recent past [of cultural warfare] — American religious liberalism and the Christian Right. What Lear and others did not realize, however, was how closely related in function and desire the largely liberal "violent television" movement was to the mostly conservative "immoral television" movement. This re—deployment of a 1960s single—issue campaign strategy by conservative interests mirrored the larger re—appropriation that took place during the 1970s of largely liberal organizing techniques of "The Movement" against poverty and racial injustice by conservative activists and organizers in the name of a silent but moral majority. For more on how the FCC handled "moral" programming, see "Morality and the Broadcast Media: A Constitutional Analysis of FCC Regulatory Standards," *Harvard Law Review* 84:3 (Jan 1971), 664—699.

[38] Barbara Cady, "Playboy Interview: Norman Lear," *Playboy* 23:3 (March 1976), 53—71.

[39] For more, see Peter Berger, "The Class Struggle in American Religion," *Christian Century* (Feb 25 1981), 197. Lear's activism fit Berger's description perfectly, "Just as the business class sincerely believed that what is good for business is good for America, the new class believes that its own interests are identical with the 'public interest.'" In addition, Berger's identification of the religious interests of the new class was equally precise, "One of the easiest empirical procedures to determine very quickly what the agenda of the new class is at any given moment is to look up the latest pronouncements of the National Council of Churches, and to a somewhat lesser extent, of the denominational organizations of mainline Protestantism" (198).

the name of less violent television included public contributions from the National Parent Teacher Association, the American Medical Association, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Council of Churches, and the Southern Baptist Convention.[40]

This collective effort exemplified the congruence between political and religious liberalism(s) in the 1970s led largely by Lear's Hollywood—based activism. Additionally, this movement of the spiritual left mirrored another burgeoning organization of conservative yet ecumenical Protestants that would play significant roles in both the 1976 and 1980 elections. Once again, Lear's programming served as the cultural litmus test of televisual decency for both the spiritual left and Christian Right— one defending its maturity the other bewailing its controversial content. "His shows are miniature *morality plays* for the social causes to which he devotes himself offscreen as well as on," observed journalist Barbara Cady. "And he champions the right of his writers to speak their minds with an intransigent high—mindedness that has become legendary."[41] A most unlikely figure would take center stage in another public skirmish involving Lear's situation comedy over the content of primetime airspace— Beatrice Arthur, better known as *Maude*.

Maude and the Fight Over Abortion

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[40] Grefe, "The Family Viewing Hour: An Assault on the First Amendment?," 988. One document from the period that captured the spiritual front's (New Class) political agenda in the 1980s, a faction inclusive both of the Protestant mainline and liberal individuals such as Norman Lear, Martin Marty, and Bill Moyers, is titled "The 'Remaking of America': A Message to the Churches." Published in the pages of *Christianity and Crisis* during the summer of 1981, the document originated as a National Council of Churches—authored statement regarding its "fundamental disagreement" with the policies of the newly elected Reagan administration. The statement's adoption by the NCC marked the first time since its founding that it had made "so broad an evaluation of a new Administration's policies." For more, see "The 'Remaking of America': A Message to the Churches," *Christianity and Crisis* (July 20 1981), 207—210; and also Edward M. Kennedy, "Tolerance and Truth in America," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 53:1 (March 1984), 7—12.

[41] Barbara Cady, "Playboy Interview: Norman Lear," 54.

"Why did the Maude people do it? What were they trying to prove? That they are honest and brave and can joke about any subject?" asked editorial writer Joan Hoyt. "Abortion isn't funny. Vasectomy isn't funny. They are subjects of deep moral concern to many people."[42] Like her fellow letter writer, who yearned for the simplicity of *Bonanza*, Ms. Hoyt could not understand how television could address a topic of "deep moral concern," especially since the *Maude* storyline in question ended not in life, but rather in death. Instead of supporting what Hoyt and Stone contended about Lear's programming, the editor of this particular section of the *Los Angeles Times* offered his own response to the *Maude* two—part episode (titled "Maude's Dilemma" and "Walter's Dilemma" respectively) arguing that its writers handled the subject of abortion with care and maturity as an appropriate subject for television. "Whether you agree with Maude's decision (and I'm not sure I do), it is a subject which I believe television has every right to discuss even within the limitations of popular programming."[43]

This brief disagreement between editor and writer was a microcosm for the disagreements taking place over the role and place of culture (high and low) in American society. To what extent could it accurately and appropriately explore topics of "serious moral concern?" Was there something transcendent about the subject, set apart from typical discussion and debate, or was it purely a matter of immanence, fit for all mediums and methods? This was not the first time that such questions had been asked by religious Americans, especially those who identified as Christian, but it did mark a novel moment in the recent past when traditionally religious questions of translation and communication were asked of largely cultural and social agents and materials. Unlike Ms. Hoyt, Lear answered these questions in the affirmative not only

[42] Joan K. Hoyt, "Maude's Abortion Evokes Protests," *Los Angeles Times* (Nov 29 1972), D25.

[43] Cecil Smith, "Maude's Abortion Evokes Protests," *Los Angeles Times* (Nov 29 1972), D25.

because he relied on culture himself to enact his politics in public, but also because to address a different set of subjects, ones of less moral concern, would be anathema to his spiritual vocation— to reflect and *report* on the times.

From one newspaper headline to another, each author seemed to have his or her own opinion about Lear and his television programs. "The extraordinary success of all three of Lear's shows (*All in the Family*, *Maude*, and *Sanford and Son*) comes in part, I think, from the fact that all three more or less, deal with impolite subjects that haunt us, including illness, aging and the abrasiveness of private relationships, and death."[44] For Lear, there were no subjects that were beyond the creative pale— assuming they contributed to his larger project of raising awareness through entertaining, relevant programming in primetime. CBS initially said that it wouldn't fund the shooting of Lear's "abortion" episodes of *Maude* due to their content, which also included discussions of birth control and sexual embarrassment. "My fight is to get a funny script on a subject that is adult and meaningful," Lear observed, "I enjoy stirring feelings, even negative feelings, because I think that is what theater is about." Once the shooting was complete, Lear's flair for the dramatic led him to hide the two—part episodes' true subject matter from advertisements in sources such as *TV Guide*.[45]

The two episodes brought in almost half of the share of the New York—Los Angeles television audience combined. This was especially noteworthy since *Maude* had previously only captured only thirty—eight percent of the collective audience. These subjects stretched the medium's capacity to capture the social tenor and unrest of its cultural surroundings. Would a

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[44] Aljean Harmetz, "Maude Didn't Leave em' All Laughing," *New York Times* (Dec 10 1972), D3.

[45] Material for these episodes found a suitable expressive venue in a contest conducted at the time by the Population Institute, a largely liberal organization that was involved in many of the early attempts to get politics into entertainment programming on behalf of liberal causes.

flood of angry mail and calls *actually* follow the showing of such material? When it came to the pilot of *All in the Family*, the answer was an affirmative no. When it came to these episodes, the jury was slightly more mixed. For some, however, there was no question about Lear's entertainment. "Lear is, of course, correct. The honorable vulgarity of *All in the Family* has opened the door to Maude's abortion. If we're lucky, it's a door that will never shut properly again."[46] For those who continue to think that most of the cultural conflict during this period lacked any concrete, "physical warfare," Lear did in fact receive a number of letters in response to the *Maude* episodes in question. Along with letters of support, he also received death threats and a collection of glossy photographs documenting the graphic signs of a fallen country—aborted fetuses.

For Lear, the very conception of the Beatrice Arthur sitcom made little sense outside of a liberatory context.[47] "*Maude* was lauded or loathed depending on how the reviewers, and viewers as well, felt about the then relatively new feminist movement," Lear observed. "The character was a role model and hero to all who cheered on the movement, and was reviled by those who held fast to the idea that 'a woman's place is in the home.'"[48] The medium and programming of television had certainly come a long way since the days of fathers knowing best and hillbillies staking their claim in Southern California. The feminist declaration that the "personal was the political" had come full circle, and then some, in the writing of Lear and others. What had been a largely private affair, women's birth control and reproductive rights, had

[46] Harmetz, "Maude Didn't Leave em' All Laughing," D4.

[47] Historian Andrew Hartman has described this period as one defined by "epistemologies of liberation." I would add Lear's programming to this list of cultural productions that found their coherence through subversion of hierarchy and social status. For more, see Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[48] Norman Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience*, 265.

become the stuff of primetime, network television. The personal had become public in these storylines, but to the extent that it was "political," and how, was not yet clear.

The escapism of the preceding decades' primetime lineups motivated Lear to write about what he thought was meaningful, significant, and most importantly, relevant— a level of topicality never before seen on television, yet supported by the equally topical Protestant mainline. The editorial discussion concerning subjects of "deep moral concern" that took place in the pages of the *Los Angeles Times* could not have been a more appropriate result following the viewing of a single episode of *Maude*. For Lear, television was the ideal medium for his own narrative themes of deep moral concern because they found their viewers in September, and by November the episodes were the stuff of national debate and deliberation— even federal policy. Two episodes in particular, the "abortion episodes," captured Lear and his writing at the most controversial, at least to those who fought to "Stop Immorality on TV," namely those within the nascent Christian Right.

"Maude's abortion story, written by Susan Harris, took two episodes and went on the air early in the first season," Lear explained. "Two Illinois affiliates, in Champaign and Peoria, refused to air the shows—the first time that any CBS station had rejected any episode of a continuing series."[49] Not only had the network balked at paying for the production of these episodes, but two local channels had also refused to broadcast them due to their controversial nature. More likely, however, was the fact that those who made the programming decisions for the local affiliates disagreed with the content of the programs— a difference in cultural taste and decency. For the manager of the Champaign office, it was a simple question of subject matter. "We don't think abortion is a proper subject for treatment in a frivolous way in a comedy

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[49] Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience*, 265.

program."[50] In response to these actions against Lear's program, the National Organization for Women (NOW) filed a class—action suited demanding that the stations show the episodes in question.

While most scholars are familiar with conservative *counter*—mobilization movements during this period, Lear's programming and its effects on the regulation of American broadcasting illustrates as much about his liberal supporters as it does his conservative detractors— perhaps even more so. This would not be the last time that a left—leaning organization would come to Lear's aid in the name of fairness and the public interest regarding his relevance programming. Far from it. In fact, one could argue that were it not for the encouragement and support from organizations such as the Population Institute, the abortion episodes would never have come to pass.[51] "Although the Population Institute had provided the incentive for the two episodes, it had not served as a technical consultant on the script. That role was played by the Los Angeles chapter of Planned Parenthood." "As a result," argues historian Kathryn Montgomery, "Planned Parenthood leaders were in a good position to anticipate opposition from anti—abortion groups and to plan a counter—strategy."[52] Such support should come as no surprise in light of the show's explicit grounding in the women's movement in general and Maude's rights in particular.

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[50] Harmetz, "Maude Didn't Leave em' All Laughing," D3.

[51] The Population Institute originated in 1969 and sought to educate the public with information about the perils of an unchecked population. One historian argues that two individuals within this organization, Methodist ministers David Poindexter and Rodney Shaw, came up with the idea of integrating Population Institute material into primetime television. "The plan to use entertainment television for such educational purposes…seemed to be the ideal vehicle for public education." For more, see Kathryn G. Montgomery, *Target Primetime: Advocacy Groups and the Struggle Over Entertainment Television*, 30.

[52] Montgomery, *Target Primetime*, 33. Montgomery's work is the most extensive on the subject of Lear, *Maude*, and its less than hospitable reception when it comes to both secondary and primary literature. As such, I will reference the work consistently in this section of the chapter.

Relative to Archie, Maude possessed an undeniable presence as "the flip side of Archie…a Roosevelt liberal who has her feet firmly planted in the forties."[53] Of all the shows Lear composed during the 1970s and 1980s, *Maude* and its strong female lead was the closest representation of Lear himself and his politics— an individual shaped by the notions of a new deal and Jewish conspiracies. It certainly was a continuation of the relevance programming that originated with Lear's *All in the Family*, but it was also an amplified iteration of the original in the genre. In light of the popular and critical successes of *All in the Family*, the two abortion episodes of *Maude* brought a newfound attention to the medium of television as both an agent of transmission and a media for storytelling and theatre. "It tested, as never before, the boundaries of acceptability for program content; it pushed into the public arena a debate about the proper role of television in dealing with controversial political issues," or as Lear would articulate it, issues of "deep moral concern."[54] Once the tune of such mass media appeal began to change, however, with the ascendance of the Christian Right and its electronic church, the allure of the medium's scale began to morph into a portentous threat.

In the wrong hands, the television would supplant the radio in its ability to reach the most number of listeners at one time. The newfound pressure applied to the networks and their shows' sponsors by both impassioned individuals and organizations known as "advocacy groups" from both sides of the political spectrum further bifurcated the cultural landscape between those who approved of Lear's programming and those who did not. The various reactions to the *Maude* episodes and their subsequent reruns tell us much about liberal and conservative mobilization during this period as a *co—constitutive* process. For each conservative reaction, there was a

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[53] Montgomery, *Target Primetime,* 29.

[54] Montgomery, *Target Primetime*, 28.

liberal anticipation of the very same reaction. This was arguably the case because the liberal builders of single—issue advocacy as deployed during the Civil Rights Movement recognized their own handiwork in the conservative organizing of conservative ministers, businessmen, and television evangelists against immorality and indecency on television. The media reform movement may have stemmed from the largely liberative project of the New Left, the civil rights activism, and the NCC, but those who achieved its culminating application in public were conservative in political and religious philosophy.

Despite these successes, we are still able to locate liberal religious mobilization in the name of the first amendment during this period against the local stations that refused to broadcast the episodes. The Population Institute's David Poindexter described his response in a letter to Lear in light of a Detroit station's refusal to broadcast the episodes, "A small task force of us from our Center, from Planned Parenthood—World Population and from some of the Protestant churches got on the long distance phone and stirred up a considerable bit of protest in Detroit." Like his conservative counterparts, Lear also possessed an extensive network of supportive organizations and individuals who came to his defense on both the legislative and grassroots levels in the name of free speech. Lear would have to wait until the early 1980s, however, before he could begin institutionalizing this support against the Christian Right through his non—profit advocacy group People for the American Way (PFAW). His detractors would become more organized as well over the course of the 1970s as they began reacting to and organizing against the broad, national subjects of conservative criticism and scorn, including the controversy surrounding *Roe v. Wade*.

Like the larger anti—abortion movement itself, Catholics were the first ones to organize against the abortion story—lines of *Maude*. On November 21st, 1972, a group representing the

Archdiocese of Rockville Centre marched to CBS headquarters in New York "and proceeded to blockade the limousine belonging to CBS vice Chairman Dr. Frank Stanton."[55] Catholics also challenged the legitimacy and (at times) legality of Lear's programming through the application of the federally mandated Fairness Doctrine to entertainment programming, which called for a "balanced" presentation of differing points of view about a particular subject of public importance.[56] In fact, the National Council of Catholic Bishops responded to the second of two *Maude* episodes by filing an official complaint first with CBS in 1973, and later with the FCC once it realized the network was not going to cooperate with their demands.

In response to these objections, CBS categorized their primetime programming as solely "entertainment," even when particular programs explored topics seemingly of public importance. In a network—authored statement, the *Maude* episodes were "intended for entertainment and not for the discussion of viewpoints on controversial issues of public importance."[57] The network defense of Lear—style programming took advantage of the fact that shows like *All in the Family* and *Maude* walked a fine line between comedy and commentary, entertainment and social analysis. Despite the fact that Lear himself defended his programming in the names of relevance, topicality, and subjects of "deep moral concern," the networks and the federal government could not deploy the same defense because they could be seen as supporting a *partisan* perspective on a given issue instead of providing quality programming in the public interest.

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[55] Montgomery, *Target Primetime,* 35.

[56] We will hear more about this tactic later, since it was one of the most effective means Lear had of policing and monitoring televangelist broadcasts in the name of "the public interest."

[57] Montgomery, *Target Primetime*, 36.

These Catholics found a supportive voice in the organizing of the Stop Immorality in TV (SIT) group based out of Warrenton, Virginia, whose advisory board included individuals such as Phyllis Schlafly, Dr. Fred Schwartz, baseball player Phil Rizzuto, and comedian Red Skelton. Like other non—profits during this period, this group conducted mass mailings in order to alert Americans of television that was destroying "Judeo—Christian principles…through programs that defy the standards we hold sacred." Such programs included *All in the Family*, *Maude*, and *M.A.S.H.* respectively.[58] For one writer for *The Village Voice*, shame rather than praise fit the descriptive bill for Lear's abortion episodes. "Thanks to the vigilance of an organization called Stop Immorality on TV—a project of the Society for the Christian Commonwealth—we can all sleep better in front of our video sets," observed Helen Kruger. "The Virginia—based group has awarded its first 'Shield of Shame' to Norman Lear, producer of 'Maude,' for his 'tasteless intrusion into American homes…whereby he assaults the family's basic sense of decency by advancing coarseness, crudity, and a system of moral values which debase the religious principles of millions.'"[59] For Executive Director Paul A. Fisher, shows like *Maude* possessed a "low moral tone" compared to the "deep moral concern" of the editorial writers we heard from earlier and Lear, himself. Typical of disagreements within the culture wars, the personal had not only been exposed to the public, figures like Fisher and Lear had made it the stuff of *politics* and public policy. In short, one's person indecency was another's in—depth exploration of teenage sexuality, racism, or adult impotency.

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[58] Montgomery, *Target Primetime*, 37.

[59] Helen Kruger, "Shame on Maude," *The Village Voice* (May 23 1974), 56. The article concludes by noting that the Shield of Shame hangs in a place of honor in Lear's office. It also notes that the statistics used to demonstrate the national disdain for *All in the Family* also showed that 36 percent of the respondents watched the show regularly, something that Lear mentions consistently when discussing the reception of his programming despite the public opposition to it.

Expanding on the notion that Lear's programming represented a "system of moral values," Fisher argued that "Morality, decency, devotion to God, family, duty and country, are held up to mockery and laughter with the suggestion that they are 'old fashioned,' dirty and sick jokes about religion [because] decency and family life are far from humorous for American families."[60] Despite his commitment to journalistic objectivity, the author himself responded to Fisher's words, arguing that Lear's work marked the medium's maturity rather than its juvenility. In fact, Lear could not have defended his work any better, "And here TV thought it was finally coming of age, growing up to a point of accepting realities of life, and not the kind of fantasies or low intelligence baiters of the 'Green Acres' or apple—pie 'Ozzie and Harriet' era," Lewis declared. "It seems strange, too, that the shows that have become the target of the Stop Immorality on TV all are forms of comedy and variety, which now slice their humor from real life, and not the plastic world of make—believe...[Is] violence and shoot—em' ups okay, just as long as they don't get sexy?"[61]

What is clear from these exchanges between Lear, the media, and his detractors is that while editorials tended to be more critical of his work, those voices who were on staff of various magazines and newspapers were largely supportive. They also suggest that Lear possessed his own "system of moral value" in the public square as understood through his various cultural productions in primetime. While the vitriol of these debates continued to build, Lear and CBS began exploring the inherent dangers in showing the episodes in their traditional re—run

[60] Dan Lewis, "VA Group Says 'Stop Immorality on TV,'" *Lakeland Ledger* (August 12 1973), 2.

[61] Dan Lewis, "VA Group Says 'Stop Immorality on TV," 2.

schedule during the summer of 1973. "The 1972—1972 year had become a critical test year for determining just how far entertainment television could venture into controversial territory."[62]

On January 22nd, 1973, abortion officially became legal across the country, encouraging Lear and CBS to go ahead with the re—runs in traditional clandestine fashion. Relying on the deft public relations skills of newly hired executive Virginia Carter, Lear anticipated anti—abortion counterattacks with his own pre—emptive campaign, which drew on the letter—writing support of the National Organization for Women, the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws, and the American Civil Liberties Union. When the United States Catholic Conference learned of CBS and Lear's rebroadcasting plans, they charged the network with "undeniable malice and a calculated intent to offend the sensibilities and deeply held beliefs of a substantial portion of the American public." A few days before airing part two, "Walter's Dilemma," the conference distributed instructions to their 163 dioceses to campaign against *Maude* during the next Sunday sermons.[63]

Like the pilot of its primetime progenitor *All in the Family*, the summertime reruns of the *Maude* episodes were broadcast with a network—composed advisory to those watching at home. It would be a couple of years before the Family Viewing Hour would take hold of primetime lineups nationwide, but this editorial aside was indication of the developing cultural tensions between television's commercial and creative interests— those on the floor during the table reads and those making notes on the very same scripts from thirty floors up. These divisions

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[62] Montgomery, *Target Primetime*, 41.

[63] Montgomery, *Target Primetime*, 44.

reflected the larger societal restructuring that was taking place at the time between the interests of the New or Knowledge Class and the Business Class.[64]

The disclaimer that preceded the *Maude* episodes on August 14th and 21st, however, highlighted the stark differences between those who supported relevance programming and its oppositional detractors, "Tonight's episode of *Maude* was originally broadcast in November of 1972. Since it deals with Maude's dilemma as she contemplates the possibility of abortion, you may wish to refrain from watching it, if you believe the broadcast may disturb you or others in your family." In comparison to the *All in the Family* disclaimer, this one named the option of "opting out" of the episodes all together [, a foreshadowing of federal policy to come later in the century when it came to governmental assistance to parochial schools.] No longer did Lear's program shed a humorous light on human absurdity; instead, it named the disturbance of "the family" before it even took place.

The difference in tone between the two statements revealed the extent to which American citizens had learned to organize against their most beloved medium— the television. CBS anticipated this type of blowback by including an out for offended viewers in their statement, yet these pre—emptive measures echoed the support shown to CBS in its decision to air the controversial episodes. The ACLU, along with the Freedom to Read Committee of the Association of American Publishers, the National Council of Churches, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the Young Women's Christian Association, issued a public statement congratulating CBS "for their courageous decision to proceed with the re—run…despite pressure to withdraw it." For Lear's supporters as well as for Lear himself, who were as diverse as the characters in his programs, shows like *All in the Family* and *Maude* were

[64] Peter Berger, "The Class Struggle in American Religion*," Christian Century* (Feb 25 1981), 194—199.

not the narrow, partisan programming that Fisher and others described. In fact, it was just the opposite, "The public interest is not served when a station's program decision is made on the basis of fear of controversy, or when an advertiser's sponsorship is determined by fear of economic reprisal."[65]

Lear's commitment to exploring serious subjects in a mature fashion through his television programming, regardless of the content, upset many in light of the relative nature of decency and taste. These differences reflected the widening divisions at the time between conservatives and liberals across the political spectrum and often times the religious spectrum as well. In short, Lear understood his programming as contributing explicitly to the federally administered "public interest" precisely because of its subject matter as relevance programming, which included subjects such as diversity, civility, tolerance, and bigotry.

All but defeated, the Catholics who had originally protested against the *Maude* episodes had the final word when it came to Lear's usage of "the public interest" in defense of his relevance programming. For authors Robert B. Beusse and Russell Shaw, the Lear case was anything but decided. "There is something strange in the fact that protests and pressure against the *Maude* shows on abortion evoked outcries in some quarters; while the pressure that helped bring Maude's pro—abortion decision into millions of living rooms is passed over in silence." In closing, Beusse and Shaw named arguably the single most important narrative device when it comes narrating post—war conservative mobilization in the US since the 1960s, "perhaps the strongest lesson in all this for pro—life people, is to 'go and do likewise.'"[66] Like their civil religious counterparts, conservative Protestants were also realizing that they, too, could make

[65] Montgomery, *Target Primetime*, 47.

[66] Montgomery, *Target Primetime*, 48.

their collective presence felt through the very same mediated channels of dissemination and communication— the airwaves.

For many, the election of Jimmy Carter was the last indication needed to convince conservative Protestants of the importance of mobilizing politically on behalf of the unborn or unwed. In the 1960s, evangelist and future (tele)vangelist Jerry Falwell first argued against applying the Gospel to society and its politics in his sermon "Ministers and Marches." Less than two decades later, Falwell founded his own advocacy group to organize conservative interests under the banner of the Moral Majority. Despite the fact that there is little to no scholarly consensus as to why Falwell changed his mind by the late 1970s, careful study of Lear and his career in media may give us a clue as to Falwell's change of heart. At the very least, we are able to understand better how and why Falwell identified Lear as "the number one enemy of the American family" and why fellow televangelist Pat Robertson warned Lear that his arms were "too short to box with God."

The Television Summit: Ojai, California

As Lear documented this religio—political ascendancy with increasing attention, he and others in Hollywood began to feel the pinch of a radically altered socio—political landscape— one that was increasingly bending under the growing power of the single—issue advocacy group as seen during the Civil Rights and Media Reform Movements of the late 1960s. Largely in response to the intensifying pressures on the networks from both liberal and conservative media groups, Lear and others organized a private summit in Ojai, California titled, "Proliferation of

Pressure Groups in Primetime Symposium" in 1981 in order to better address the changing media landscape.[67]

The meeting's attendance list reflected the diversity of opinions surrounding the issues in question— namely advertising interests, controversial subject matter, and network interests broadcast in primetime. Included in the lineup besides Lear and all three network heads were Tyrone Brown (former FCC chairman), Geoffrey Cowan (PBS), Betty Friedan, Robert Goldstein (Proctor and Gamble), Mark Goode (TV consultant to President Reagan), Rev. M. William Howard Jr. (President of NCC), F. Kent Mitchell (General Foods), William Rusher (Publisher of *National Review*), Gail Smith (General Motors), and Grant Tinker (President of Mary Tyler Moore Productions) along with Lear's Tandem Productions partner, Bud Yorkin.

Despite its largely bi—partisan composition, the meeting's lineup still leaned to the political and religious left when it came to the issues under discussion. Echoing Lear, Chairman of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences David L. Wolper stated outright that "pressure groups that push for their values and views to be reflected by the addition of programs with more *diversity* to television are desirable. What is not," Wolper argued, were "pressure groups that demand the values and points of view they disagree with be totally excluded from television are unacceptable." In addition, Wolper acknowledged the legality of organized boycotts of commercial products according to particular television programs, but they were ultimately not, as Lear would say, in the spirit of the law. "An organized boycott…is constitutionally legal but, in

[67] Lee Margulies, ed., "Proliferation of Pressure Groups in Primetime Symposium, 1981," *Emmy Magazine* (Summer 1981), A—1 – A—32. Despite Lear's advisory role, the symposium was neither in reference to nor did it make references about People for the American Way and its non—profit work. It was convened by the Academy of Television Arts and Science and The Caucus for Producers, Writers, and Directors. Lear was part of the Academy's first hall of fame class and he himself founded the Caucus in the interests of creative and expressive freedom under the first amendment in the mid—1970s.

the opinion of the symposium, morally wrong and damaging to the free flow of ideas." [68] In light of this observation, one could argue that that if conservatives claimed a more economic reading of "the market" at the time as an organizing logic of post—industrial America, then liberals appropriated their own usage of "the market," one of ideas and creativity that would not (and could not) bend to any form of censorship whatsoever.

For both Wolper and Lear, the public interest was best represented by programs that engaged themes like diversity within a free—flowing marketplace of ideas. Those groups and individuals that did not sign on to the same set of religio—political values, fell outside of the public interest due to their partisanship. Wolper mentioned specifically both the Coalition for Better Television and the Moral Majority as the primary dangers threatening an otherwise unregulated marketplace. For all intents and purposes, the summit appeared to simply echo Lear's own priorities when it came to the freedom of speech within an industry increasingly regulated by the federal government, advocacy groups, and the FCC. The opening plenary, however, said otherwise.

The symposium's first afternoon plenary was given by William Rusher, publisher of the *National Review*, one of the foremost conservative periodicals in the US at the time. Rusher's opening statement expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to speak to such an esteemed group industry leaders. Well aware of his audience's political predilections towards conservatives, he differentiated himself from any and all associations with "the rural." "Since we are going to be talking about the religious right and the Moral Majority and things like that," Rusher stated, "let

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[68] Wolper, ed., "Proliferation of Pressure Groups in Primetime Symposium," A—2.

me assure you that I am not a redneck—I am a New Yorker."[69] For someone like Norman Lear, who also dedicated serious attention to the differences between "the old religious right" of the Scopes Trial and "the new religious right" of the Moral Majority, this distinction spelled trouble for those seeking to limit the exposure of the electronic church over the highly contested airwaves through the use of "the public interest" or the Fairness Doctrine. Broadly considered, the conservatism of Rusher's arguments was closer to that of fellow conservative William Buckley than conservative evangelist Pat Robertson. In fact, Rusher's rendering of the religious right possessed an admirable level of descriptive clarity in light of the proximity to his subject and the ever—expanding contemporary literature on the Christian Right.[70]

Rusher knew that his audience tended to see the Christian or Religious Right as a cohesive entity (continuously) seeking a theocratic government in the United States. "Let's first of all clean up our terminology a little bit," Rusher suggested. "If you want to talk about it

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[69] William Rusher, "Proliferation of Pressure Groups in Primetime Symposium, 1981," *Emmy Magazine*, A—4.

[70] My understanding of "the Christian Right" emphasizes both the concrete instances of conservative institution building throughout the Bible and Sun Belts following World War II, as well as the term's descriptive character as a discursive catch—all for conservatism in the 1970s and 1980s. More often than not, it was individuals like Lear who composed the most influential pieces of film and text that informed fellow political liberals and mainline Protestants from within the knowledge industry about conservative religiosity during the culture wars. In fact, I would argue that "the Christian Right" was a politically expedient interpretive fiction constructed by Lear and others within the bi—coastal media who reported on "the electronic church" and its rise to power. The grossly over exaggerated numbers corresponding to the church's viewership regarding its programming also contributed to the formation of the Christian Right as both concrete entity and discursive agent.
While there are countless contemporary texts that examine the Christian Right admirably, much of my own categorical and descriptive analysis finds its grounding in texts produced during the rise of the conservative movement itself. The following is a selection of these sources, ones that have been largely overlooked in the literature and methods of studying the Christian Right: Michael Lienesch, "Right—Wing Religion: Christian Conservatism as a Political Movement," *Political Science Quarterly* 97:3 (Autumn 1982), 403—425; James E. Wood Jr., "Editorial: Religious Fundamentalism and the New Right," *Journal of Church and State* 23 (1981), 409—421; Leo P. Ribuffo, "Liberals and that Old—Time Religion," *The Nation* (Nov 29 1980), 570—573; James M. Wall, "The New Right Comes of Age," *The Christian Century* (Oct 22 1980), 995—996; Tina Rosenberg, "How the Media Made the Moral Majority," *The Washington Monthly* (May 1982), 26—34; William Martin, "The Birth of a Media Myth," *The Atlantic* (June 1981), 7—16. Many if not all of these sources function as both primary and secondary source, offering both insight into the Right and evidence for interpretive arguments.

[Moral Majority], talk about it. But do not confuse it with that larger entity that is called the religious right, which is all the groups that are interested in that kind of thing these days." The "New Right," including Richard Viguerie and Howard Phillips, was yet another component of the "religious right," but for Rusher they were also removed from it philosophically due to their libertarian sensibilities. "And just to make matters still clearer and worse, don't confuse any of them with neoconservatives, Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz and that crowd."[71]

Rusher's words set the descriptive bar for any and all discussions of the religious right that followed his plenary address during the symposium. They also represented some of the most—well reasoned criticisms of Lear's spiritual vision of civic life in light of the rise of the Christian Right and subsequent formation of People for the American Way by Lear and others in the interfaith and ecumenical mainline. "As a matter of principle," argued Rusher, "a person ought to be allowed to deploy…his dollars where he wants to. I didn't hear any great objections from the liberals when Caesar Chavez urged us all to boycott lettuce."[72] As Falwell and others were beginning to do in light of Lear's public visibility, Rusher identified the double standard that tended to shape how public spaces were religiously understood and consequently governed by the federal government, the FCC, and Norman Lear himself. "When we speak of fairness," argued Falwell, "let us be certain the same standards of fairness apply to *all* broadcast content…is it not fair that situation comedies and other entertainment—type programs that cover

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[71] Rusher, "Proliferation of Pressures Groups," A—4. As political scientist Jean—Francois Drolet observes, neoconservatives supported public demonstrations of religion because it made up for a morally enervated society. For neoconservative William Bennett, "'Since nothing else has been found to substitute for it,' a return to religion in public discourse is necessary to counter the 'new nihilism' and tame the 'basest appetites passions and impulses of the citizenry." In other words, recognizing and supporting the role of "religion" for neoconservatives was a very pragmatic and ultimately successful decision politically. For more, see Jean—Francois Drolet, *American Neoconservatism: The Politics and Culture of a Reactionary Idealism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013), 101.

[72] Rusher, "Proliferation of Pressure Groups," A—4.

controversial issues be measured by the same standards of fairness as are the *Old—Time Gospel Hour* and *700 Club*?"[73] Despite the fact that Lear often answered this question with an affirmative "No," Rusher identified a crucial weakness within Lear's understanding of American public life in particular and liberal democracy in general. This question was that much more important in light of the technological advances at the time in television broadcasting.

Echoing some of the observations by television critics of the 1970s in regards to Lear's programming, Rusher argued that "In terms of television, it has become a national community…Jerry Falwell wasn't trying in these last 20 years to impose his views on anybody. The aggression was all coming from the other direction."[74] The early 1980s was certainly a moment defined by conservative ascendancy on both the television and in the oval office, but it also witnessed its fair share of liberal mobilization— often in more vociferous terms than its conservative counterparts. For Rusher, television was beginning to function within and contribute to a set of cultural conditions that made its programming that much more significant or pornographic depending on your political persuasion. Due to the increasing influence of media such as television and its primetime programming on politics and the political process itself, discussion and analysis of Lear's politics and programs of the 1970s assumed a greater degree of social saliency for advocacy groups on both sides of the aisle. "It is a public morality we are talking about here," Rusher observed, identifying the most important category under dispute during the culture wars [my emphasis].[75] "I think the 1980s are going to see a great deal of

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[73] Jerry Falwell, "Let's Be Fair about Fairness," *Journal of Broadcasting* 28:3 (Summer 1984), 273—274.

[74] Rusher, "Proliferation of Pressure Groups," A—5.

hammering out of things. It may be that the whole decade will turn out to be primarily, at least in its domestic aspects, a decade in which we slug out this question."[76]

Rusher's predictive powers proved eerily accurate, as the 1980s unfolded not along the lines set out by "the Movement," but rather by its conservative antagonists, both religious and political, New and Old. Producer Richard Levinson captured the less—than—admirable place primetime programming occupied amidst countless claims to voices left unheard, "We are in the dilemma of having people wish us to be propagandists, rather than dramatists, providing we propagandize in their interest."[77] Perhaps the public interest, the very same interest that guided FCC regulation and network philosophy concerning primetime TV licenses, was not so public after all. For former FCC chairman Tyrone Brown, the issue was a straightforward one— Lear and others needed to start seeing themselves as religio—political actors and not simply as entertainers. "As far as television is concerned many of you are not accustomed to seeing yourselves as representatives of pressure groups. But that is what you are…which make you the gatekeepers of the airwaves."[78]

The most stringent defense of the airwaves, over and against organizations like the Moral Majority, came from Vice President of ABC Al Schneider. Unlike the measured accounts offered by Lear and others in the symposium, Schneider specifically targeted the Christian Right in its

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[75] For symposium attendee Alan Dershowitz, the question of the 1980s read as follows, "Is it possible to articulate general rules———rules of civility, rules of morality, rules of law, rules of constitutionality—that do not depend on whose ax is being ground or which group is being insulated" (A—14).

[76] Rusher, "Proliferation of Pressure Groups," A—5.

[77] Richard Levinson, "Proliferation of Pressure Groups," A—10. Individuals like Levinson and Lear came to a new realization about their programming and its collective significance during these years due to the pressure from various advocacy groups both left and right.

[78] Tyrone Brown, "Proliferation of Pressure Groups," A—7.

attempts to interrupt or otherwise interfere with the "marketplace of ideas" that those in Hollywood and elsewhere depended on for both livelihood and political platform.[79] "The television industry is now under assault from 'moral' crusaders who want to dictate the programming content offered to the American public," argued Schneider, "You have all heard the rhetoric from both sides. You are all aware of the potential dangers to our system, to individual creativity, to the way we conduct business and the way we direct our lives in a free society."[80] Like lawyer Alan Dershowitz, who was also in attendance, Schneider focused on the threat of possible censorship as a subject related to both the market and maintenance of the public interest.

Based on his own definition of the term and understanding of its purpose, Schneider's argument closely resembled Lear's in the emphasis on achieving an informed citizenry through a diverse array of programming. "Serving the public interest involves the public's right to know." This task, however, involved limits. "The commitment is to offer a variety of opinions and ideas to the total public. It is not a requirement to grant access to the medium to any one individual or group."[81] The terms of this debate, namely the rhetorical binaries "private/public" and "public/partisan," were as much a product of their own times as they were of American history writ large. For producer Grant Tinker of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, Lear represented one of many possible ways of addressing the religious right and its advances in the public square. Despite Lear's energy, Tinker was not completely on board despite having the same goal, "Our

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[79] For more on how "the market" has ascended in the US since the 1970s as a form of discursive contagion, see Daniel Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[80] Al Schneider, "Proliferation of Pressure Groups," A—16.

[81] Al Schneider, "Proliferation of Pressure Groups," A—16.

group spent very little time thinking about or talking about People for the American Way (PFAW), the organization put together by Norman Lear and others. There was no disapproval of this sort of activity; we just seemed to be trying to find an easier way than all—out war."[82]

Lear's motivation for gathering the funds and support necessary to start a civil liberties—oriented, non—profit during the early 1980s stemmed from the very same concerns— namely, how one view could become the only view when it came to a particular issue or subject in the news at the time. This was especially the case when it came to subjects of "public importance," those topics that both Lear and the Christian Right built their respective careers on in media, but in drastically different ways. Yet, such subjects were ultimately bound by the "taste" and "decency" of the viewers themselves amidst the culture warfare of the 1970s and 1980s. Schneider closed with an insight seemingly borrowed from Lear himself, "But no individual, no group has a right to impose its values and beliefs on others. That is the issue at stake with groups like the Moral Majority…this effort to impose their values on others through television is antithetical to the principles governing a free society…the television industry must protect the most pervasive medium of communications from any assault that reduces the choices available to viewers."[83] The entertainment industry survived the blacklisting of America's mid—century, but it left an indelible mark on how Hollywood collectively responded to instances where its creativity or freedom of expression was challenged.

The rise of the Moral Majority and the Coalition for Better TV (CBTV) was a familiar challenge, but one that possessed a danger all its own. For Lear and those at the symposium, televangelists like Falwell succeeded with the American people by limiting their political

[82] Grant Tinker, "Proliferation of Pressure Groups," A—22.

[83] Schneider, "Proliferation of Pressure Groups," A—16.

horizons of possibility instead of expanding them. In this sense, the fate of television and its programming arguably lay with those who perhaps knew least about it— the American people themselves. "I think that one of the problems we're having is that the elite people are all thinking in the same terms," argued general counsel for Planned Parenthood Harriet Pilpel, "We can come to an excellent consensus here, but the question is whether the millions and millions of Americans who are not on this level would even understand what we're talking about, much less agree with it."[84] For Lear and others in Hollywood, this varied audience was both salvific and condemnatory— it reflected the best of what America could be, but it also represented the worst as well, as evidenced by the growing number of audiences watching the programming of the emergent electronic church. Despite the fact that these numbers were more than likely overblown, they still presented a cross—section of the country to Hollywood's best and brightest that seemingly cared little for what was going on in New York or in Los Angeles. Lear's willingness to bring so many individuals together from within the creative community spoke to his position within the Hollywood community as a leader when it came to the freedom of speech of his fellow writers and the freedom of expression in the public square when it came to the American people.

Lear Vs Falwell: The Conservative Response

Another Lear—related effort to articulate Hollywood—specific concerns amidst boycotts, show cancellations, and the Moral Majority came from the journal *American Film*. In its October, 1981 special edition titled, "Special Report: Pressure Groups and the Media," three authors examined the changing media landscape in the age of the advocacy group and the subsequent first amendment challenges that followed. Despite the fact that groups like Donald

[84] Harriet Pilpel, "Proliferation of Pressure Groups," A—31.

Wildmon's Coalition for Better Television (CBTV) received much of the scorn of the Hollywood elite, including Lear himself, the broader concern for these authors was how the advocacy group itself challenged how the networks and federal government regulated programming content in its most prized timeslot— primetime. This was especially difficult in light of the developing media narrative that placed Norman Lear in direct opposition to Jerry Falwell. Because of each man's respective non—profit, their disagreements arguably became that much more public as both People for the American Way and the Moral Majority gained strength in the newspaper headlines and with the American people.

In February of 1981 and 1982, both *The Saturday Review* and *Vogue* respectively featured articles examining the antagonistic relationship between the two men and their ideas of "decency." For conservative analyst Ben Stein, Lear and Falwell were two combatants in "The War to Clean Up TV." On one side stood Lear's Hollywood infidels, while Falwell's crusaders stood on the other— the entirety of the battlefield encompassed by the color television screen and its promise of programming carried out in the public interest.[85] The following year, journalist Maureen Orth argued something similar, observing that "The true battlefield in the fight for the hearts and minds of America is the TV screen."[86] Eight months later, *Newsweek* published an article that explored similar material without mentioning Lear explicitly. The headline read, "TV's Latest Listing: Archie vs. Jerry."[87]

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[85] Ben Stein, "Norman Lear vs. The Moral Majority: The War to Clean Up TV," *Saturday Review* (February 1981), 23.

[86] Maureen Orth, "Religion on TV: Norman Lear Tackles the New Hot Issue," *Vogue* (February 1982), 177.

[87] N/A, "TV's Latest Listing: Archie vs. Jerry," *Newsweek* (October 18 1982), 42.

A third figure in what were often stories of conservative religious triangulation (Falwell, Wildmon, and Lear), Donald Wildmon also received his fair share of newspaper headlines and editorials during this period. His Mississippi—based ministry, The Coalition for Television (NCTV), eventually caught the attention of Falwell and his organization the Moral Majority in 1980. Like Lear, Wildmon had had his own encounter with less—than—hospitable programming four years prior. Unable to find anything suitable to him and his family, Wildmon took it upon himself to address the profanity that he witnessed that night in the form of a personal crusade in the name of decency— a cornerstone of his larger organization, The National Federation for Decency (NFD).[88] Lear and his programming scored quite poorly according to Wildmon's periodic network monitoring campaigns. In fact, Wildmon often named Lear by name. "The CBTV was a protest against the networks' perceived arrogance and indifference," argues Robert Mendenhall, "CLeaR—TV continues as a protest against those who, like Norman Lear, Wildmon perceives as functioning essentially as secular preachers——'evangelists' of television entertainment."[89]

The various campaigns and boycotts that Wildmon orchestrated over the course of the 1980s with the help of Falwell, Phyllis Schlafly, and others led many in the media and Hollywood industry to refer to him as "the ayatollah of the airwaves," yet more significantly

[88] In 1981, Wildmon was the target of a particularly sardonic editorial in the *Los Angeles Times*. Dated July 26th, Marcia Jacobs suggested a "New Right Moral—Off? Sort of like a bake—off, but with questions" as an approved television program based on Wildmon's own standards. The questions read as follows: "Who reads the Bible fastest? Who has the longest list of sponsor boycotts? Who has the biggest flag on July 4th? Who visits the most graves on Memorial Day? Who is the Prince of Conservatives?" In addition, as compared to a figure like Falwell, "At least Norman Lear never asked his audiences to send in money." For more, see Marcia Jacobs, "Open Letter to the Rev. Wildmon," *Los Angeles Times* (July 26 1981), M48.

[89] Robert R. Mendenhall, "Responses to Television from the New Christian Right: The Donald Wildmon Organization's Fight against Sexual Content," in *Sex, Religion, and Media* edited by Dane S. Claussen (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 102.

Wildmon was seen as instituting covert forms of censorship not unlike those of the McCarthy Era. The Holy War that appeared to be raging between these men in the media found its network representation in NBC president Fred Silverman, who described the work of Wildman as "a sneak attack on the foundation of democracy."[90] Despite the lack of consistent physical violence, these rhetorical exchanges were no less martial in their own right— a form of cultural skirmish soon to be documented by sociologists in the name of cultural warfare.[91] Various advertisers and news outlets, including Proctor and Gamble and *Newsweek*, acknowledged the divisive state of affairs. In short, hit lists and holy wars defined both the media and how it reported the conflict it was largely responsible for to the American people.[92]

The fact that Falwell, Wildmon, and others were perceived by the spiritual and political left as challenging the first amendment protections of free speech and freedom of the press through censorship was a reality not without its own effects on the journalists who were composing the stories about Falwell and Lear during this period— including those in the *American Film* special issue.[93] "Feeling defensive, journalists have responded the best way they know: by writing stories," observed Tina Rosenberg, "Most of them leave the careful reader or viewer with little doubt as to the reporters' sentiments. Sometimes the criticisms are explicit, usually they're more subtle. There's an obvious sneer behind such phrases as 'Bible—thumping,

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[90] Silverman in Cynthia Cooper, "NBC and the Moral Majority: A Holy War over Violence and Television," in *Violence on Television: Congressional Inquiry, Public Criticism, and Industry Response* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996), 100.

[91] The two most notable examples are sociologists James Davison Hunter and Robert Wuthnow.

[92] For more, see "The New Right's TV Hit List" and "P&G's Move in a 'Holy War'" in *Newsweek* (June 15th and 29th of 1981).

[93] For sociologist Todd Gitlin, many networks heads thought their rhetorical victories over Wildmon "succeed in warding off a threat to free expression as serious as book burning." For more, see Todd Gitlin, "The New Crusades: How Fundamentalists Tied up the Networks," *American Film* (October 1981), 60.

polyester—clad fundamentalists."[94] Compared to these more incendiary pieces, other journalists wrote more balanced studies that sought to take both sides, liberal and conservative, into account when it came to issues of censorship and minority representation. In fact, many even pointed out the hypocrisy that lay at the heart of liberal—authored arguments against conservative outcries over TV. "One man's 'compensation' is another's 'quality control,' but when the Religious Right adopts the tactics of the Left, leftists are among the first to accuse it of 'intimidation,'" argues film critic Carrie Rickey. "If the Left gathers to protest, it's a demonstration. When the Right does it, it's a mob."[95]

Despite the contemporary resonances of these words, they were first authored in the early 1980s, a sign of the developing partisanship that would course throughout the decade into the 1990s and 2000s. This was arguably the case because unlike previous American conflicts in the 20th century, those between Lear, Falwell, and the viewing public were dependent solely on the ammunition of culture itself to name and identify the most dangerous aspects of US society. The theatres of conflict that at one time spanned the Atlantic and the Pacific seemed to have found a home within the continent of North America itself, particularly within its continental states. Only this time, the terrain would be virtual— the airwaves themselves. "We must make it clear," argued NBC chairman Thomas Wyman, "that what is at stake is not the prosperity of the networks, but the freedom of the airwaves."[96] Lear's activism throughout the 1970s on behalf of this very principle continued rather unabated into the early 1980s, enough so that his work was

[94] Tina Rosenberg, "How the Media Made the Moral Majority," 34. For a more explicit example, former NBC chairman Thomas Wyman called the Moral Majority, "a constitutionally immoral minority." For more, see Todd Gitlin, "The New Crusades: How Fundamentalists Tied up the Networks," 60.

[95] Carrie Rickey, "Why They Fight: Subjects' Rights and the First Amendment," *American Film*, (October 1981), 57.

[96] Quoted in Gitlin, "The New Crusades," 61.

the subject of its own analysis titled, "Rallying Round the Flag: Norman Lear and the American Way" in the special issue of *American Film*.

Conclusion: Re—Framing the Christian Right

Like her fellow journalists, Leslie Ward acknowledged the state of American public life in terms of its primary form of entertainment. "Lear the writer, worshipper of words…thinker, social activist, idealist. Optimism, and a master's touch for the medium, since television is the battlefield where modern—day ideological wars are waged, Lear's got the touch, even the most *ultra* of conservatives agrees, in spades."[97] Lear's analysis of the Christian or Religious Right revealed a different picture than most at the time or arguably in the contemporary literature. Rather than a bottom—up, populist grassroots movement of middle to lower—class Americans, Lear instead saw a highly sophisticated, pragmatic organizational logic that sought national headlines through the appropriation of local stories involving school boards or their curricula.

For Lear, the Christian Right was a thoroughly top—down movement funded by wealthy businessmen. It achieved many of its political successes by turning conservative Protestants like Falwell and fellow televangelist Pat Robertson into "'pawns' of ultraconservative politicos and direct—mail wizards such as Terry Dolan, Paul Weyrich, and Richard Viguerie."[98] Despite this argument's reliance on a form of manipulation, a common theme in Lear and others' analyses of conservative religiosity in general and the Christian Right in particular, it re—orients our attention productively as commentators and scholars of American religion towards the highest rungs of corporate ladders, to the deep fryers of fast food restaurants, and to the mass floors of

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[97] Leslie Ward, "Rallying Round the Flag: Norman Lear and the American Way," *American Film* (October 1981), 63. Ward's first observation upon entering Lear's office for the interview was a piece of canvas with the word "TRUTH" painted on it with bright oranges and yellows. I was lucky enough to see this painting in Lear's apartment in New York City during a second interview session. Ward's question remains the same, "But is TRUTH dawning or setting?"

[98] Ward, Rallying Round the Flag," 63.

twenty—four hour a day retail stores.[99] We have learned a great deal about the employees of these facilities to significant acclaim, but as this evidence and current historiographic trends indicate, the top has remained relatively obscured from view in favor of the popular, the grassroots of the Christian Right.[100] An analysis of Lear's writings reveals someone political at both an elite and popular level simultaneously— one who occupied a New Class position of symbolic influence in Hollywood, yet programmed to the masses each and every week throughout the 1970s.

Like the previous decade's spiritual activism, Lear named his disagreements with and criticisms of the Christian Right in the 1980s as a problem of religious intolerance. "As a Jew, it troubles me when I watch these preachers tell their large congregations that Buddhists, Confucianists, Muslims, Jews, and others, who cannot by reason of their own religion accept Jesus as their Savior, will roast for an eternity in hell," Lear explained. As he would describe later during the formation of his non—profit organization People for the American Way (PFAW), Lear could not stand by while bigotry continued to fill the airwaves and "scripture was being tormented."[101] As a "spiritual leader" to both his television crews and his mainline and ecumenical Protestants supporters during this period, Lear stood out among many liberal voices

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[99] For more, see Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Walmart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Axel R. Schafer, *Piety and Public Funding: Evangelicals and the State in Modern America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Sarah Hammond, ""God Is My Partner": An Evangelical Business Man Confronts Depression and War," *Church History* 80:3 (2011), 498—519; and Darren E. Grem, "The Marketplace Missions of S. Truett Cathy and Chick—fil—A," in *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Space, Place, and Region* edited by Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 293—315. For a more general example of a top—down approach in the study of American religion that cares very little for questions of reception and improvisation, see Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: Gospel of an Icon* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

[100] Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain—Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York, NY: WW Norton & Company, 2010).

[101] Lear in Ward, "Rally Round the Flag," 64.

as one of liberalism's most ardent and successful defenders, particularly when it came to religious pluralism and freedom of expression.[102] For one—time personal assistant Sonia Johnson, Lear's career in media could be summed up rather succinctly in light of the Moral Majority's advances into the airwaves and onto countless television screens around the country. In short, his movies "are about the same things as People for the American Way stands for. They reaffirm values of love, hope, questioning, and freedom of thought."[103]

The consistency of Lear's message from the beginning of the 1970s through the early 1980s regarding first amendment rights, civility in public life, and constitutional protections for religious minorities in the public square grounded much of the liberal activism during this period when it came to mainline and ecumenical Protestantism as well as interfaith Catholicism and Judaism. His spiritual vision of American civic life, first explored through the dramatic interactions of Archie, Edith, and Meathead on *All in the Family*, found numerous supporters including Norte Dame President Theodore Hesburgh, Church History Martin Marty, and journalist Bill Moyers.

Despite the fact that Lear arguably contributed to the very phenomenon he was fighting against in his confrontations with the nascent Christian Right, namely censorship in the name of publicly accessible arguments, he also set the spiritual agenda for not only Hollywood and its politics, but also much of mainline Protestantism itself, as understood through the activities of the National Council of Churches and its flagship periodical, *The Christian Century*. Lear's actions during the latter half of the 1970s and into the early 1980s on behalf of countless Hollywood writers and producers' intellectual freedom significantly altered the televisual

[102] Ward, "Rally Round the Flag," 81.

[103] Johnson in Ward, "Rally," 81.

landscape and the manner in which the federal government regulated the airwaves in the name of the public interest. In essence, his activism defined the parameters of a politically informed, spiritual liberalism that was aware of its antagonists, yet built exactly for such encounters. It was mobile, active, and organized— and well—funded.

The culmination of this spiritual politics would not be long in coming for Lear and his ardent supporters. In fact, for journalist Tina Rosenberg, Lear's actions were part of something larger, yet still relatively unknown and unrealized. "The press likely will discover yet another phenomenon," she explained, "For example, a resurgence of liberal Christians demanding such things as nuclear disarmament and an expansion of social programs."[104] If People for the American Way stood for anything, it was the ability to choose a given political agenda without feeling excluded from the conversation due to one's reasons. One might not agree with the content of a given argument, but one still possesses the right to articulate that argument without duress or evaluation based on an arbitrarily—defined system of taste and decency— liberal or conservative.

An extension of activism rather than an isolated incident, the establishment of People of the American Way by Lear and others reflected the belief in the effectiveness of the advocacy group to accomplish religio—political goals during this period and the contention that public discourse, as part of the marketplace of ideas, should have little to no censorship in the name of decency. Lear's leadership position within the Protestant mainline during this period should not be seen as an aberration in the history of religions liberalism, but rather its culminating public expression in the formation of People for the American Way, an interfaith organization that reflected both the Goodwill Movement of the early 20th century and the activism of Lear and

[104] Rosenberg, "Media Made Moral Majority," 34.

others in the recent American past. In short, Lear was a significant contributor to the formation of a “spiritual front” in American politics during one of the most contentious periods in American history— the culture war.

CHAPTER FIVE

Norman Lear, People for the American Way, and Spiritual Politics in Late 20th Century America

The scene opens simply enough. A white man wearing a yellow hard hat steps out from a forklift in order to tell his audience that he has a problem. "I'm religious, we're a religious family, but that don't mean we see things the same politically. Now here come certain preachers on radio, TV, and in the mail telling us on a bunch of political issues that there's just one Christian position, and implying that if we don't agree we're not good Christians." Despite the message's clarity, the man tells us that his wife and son are bad Christians on some issues and good Christians on others depending upon the particular issue. Unlike his family, however, the man (now husband) is lucky enough to be "100% Christian" because he agrees with the preachers wholeheartedly on all of the issues. His problem, nonetheless, persists.

"My problem," he says, "is I know my boy is as good a Christian as me, my wife, she's better. So maybe there's something wrong when people, even preachers, suggest that other people are good Christians or bad Christians depending on their political views." Looking intently at the camera, which by this time has zoomed in on his weathered yet kind face, the man concludes his argument with the simplicity that the television spot opened with, "That's not the American way." The clip lasted less than a minute's time, yet its impact on the formation of what would become one of the most influential interfaith non—profit organizations since America's mid—century could not have been greater. In fact, without the hard hat, forklift, and message of political toleration and difference, the "People" would never have found the "American Way."

This particular television spot was the creation of television writer and producer Norman Lear. It aired in 1980 followed shortly thereafter by four others starring Hollywood celebrities Goldie Hawn, Carol Burnett, and Muhammed Ali who spoke on behalf of the American Way in a comical, light—hearted manner. In collaboration with countless liberal Protestants and

Catholics, including Martin Marty and Theodore Hesburgh, Lear traversed the country "showing the PSA, pitching my heart out in countless homes and hotel ballrooms across America to raise money and awareness" for the soon to be realized People for the American Way (PFAW).[1] Known for his critically acclaimed situation comedies such as *All in the Family* and *Maude*, Lear made the transition from television production to non—profit activism in the late 1970s largely in response to the very same radio and television preachers mentioned in the spot, or as it came to be known later, public service announcement (PSA). Lear's writing left nothing to chance. His decision to use a hard hat—wearing, blue collar worker for his message of religious and political tolerance was meant to appeal to the audience most network executives patronized as a conservative "middle America" who inhabited the "fly over states" of the country. In addition, his emphasis on the man's working class attire and occupation echoed another one of his similarly positioned characters in the American economy in the 1970s— Archie Bunker.

Played by Carroll O'Connor, who possessed a deep ambivalence concerning Bunker's politics and frequent usage of racial slurs, Archie was meant to convey the difficulties that assembly—line workers faced in a period of unprecedented economic restructuring, one that seemed to privilege the emerging knowledge industry and its reliance on higher education for much of its economic efficacy.[2] Lear's attention to socio—economic detail in both instances

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[1] Norman Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2015), 332. By June of 1981, the New York Times reported that Lear planned to send his public service announcements to "every commercial television station."

[2] For more, see Seymour Martin Lipset, ed., *The Third Century: America as a Post—industrial Society* (Palo Alto, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1979) and James Davison Hunter, "The New Class and the Young Evangelicals," *Review of Religious Research* 22:2 (Dec 1980), 155—169. Lipset's usage of "Post—Industrial" and Hunter's usage of the term "new class" respectively points to another level of analysis that I will deploy in future work on this time period. These terms arguably possess a particular analytical traction in explaining the origins of not only the Christian Right and People for the American Way, but also the culture wars themselves. Sociologist Peter Berger has also argued that the new class emerged with religiously and politically left—leaning tendencies as

spoke to his upbringing as a child of the depression and his desire to understand the economic plight of the working man. His message was simple: political parochialism should have no bearing on one's status as a Christian, good or bad.

Despite the fact that individuals like Archie began migrating to the political right in the form of "the silent majority," Lear foregrounded the working class because he thought he *knew* them— just as he had known that the country was ready for his style of relevance programming in spite of the networks' reluctance to engage topical subject matter in primetime. Lear's non—profit organizing defended liberal religious principles of first amendment rights, civility, and the separation of church and state over and against those who provided their viewers with the Christian position on any particular political issue. Lear had worked ceaselessly throughout the 1970s to entertain his audience about something by reporting on the times through his television programs.[3]

His decision to apply this focus on relevance to American public life through non—profit organizing was anything but an aberration in his long career in entertainment, which included testifying in front of congressional boards, protesting federal attempts to censure primetime

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the culture's most influential manipulators of public symbols. Hunter explores these ideas more succinctly in both the article cited above and in his classic sociological text, *The Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1992). For more on the "new class" as a product of Neoconservative thought, see Jean—Francois Drolet, *American Neoconservatism: The Politics and Culture of a Reactionary Idealism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013). For more on 1970s workers' politics, see Jefferson R. Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2013). For Berger, see Robert S. Michaelsen and Wade Clark Roof, eds., *Liberal Protestantism: Realities and Possibilities* (New York, NY: Pilgrim Press, 1986), 19—36.

[3] This "about something" points to Lear's desire to educate while entertaining his audiences by exposing them to controversial subjects and news stories of the time. Unlike many of his conservative detractors, Lear avoided taking an explicit stand on any particular social topic preferring instead to influence and introduce complexity into singular perspectives. His approach reflected what historian Kathryn Montgomery has identified as the social group understanding of how television should operate in American society— namely, as "an electronic classroom." For more, see Kathryn C. Montgomery, *Target Primetime: Advocacy Groups and the Struggle Over Entertainment Television* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989).

programming, and establishing caucuses for greater creative control in Hollywood. The media—based programming, activism, and politics of People for the American Way captured Lear's own attention to and concern with the threats posed by a growing community of conservative Protestants. In this sense, I argue that People for the American Way served as the institutional manifestation of Lear's spiritual liberalism in public on behalf of political consensus in the name of civility and the American Way.

This chapter explores the history, composition, and cultural productions of People for the American Way (PFAW) as an "interest group" within the "third sector" of American society.[4] Lear's entrance into American politics had to be handled delicately and with thought. His biography as one of Hollywood's elite producers qualified him to speak as an entertainer, yet his vision by the early 1980s had expanded beyond the realm of primetime programming. In addition, Lear's Jewishness worked against his political credibility despite the fact that his programming had revolutionized American situation comedy through its engagement with bigotry and discrimination. Lear recounts these challenges himself when asked about the history

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[4] Wuthnow's term will be explored later in this chapter. For more, see Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988). The secondary literature on People for the American Way (PFAW) is quite underdeveloped. One of the earlier treatments of PFAW's politics was James Davison Hunter's chapter titled, "The Liberal Reaction" in the edited collection *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation*. A similarly timed monograph entitled, *Prime Time Preachers* by sociologist Jeffrey K. Hadden also explored PFAW and its reactionary politics of civility in light of the rise of televangelism. One of the more compelling analyses produced thus far of PFAW is historian Steven Miller's *Age of Evangelicalism*. His history of evangelicalism as an age versus a subculture includes a colorful cast of characters that are not exclusively evangelical themselves, but were nonetheless shaped by the age's collective concerns about the state of religion in American public life and the born—again experience. The most recent study to include PFAW as data is *Righteous Rhetoric: Sex, Speech, and the Politics of Concerned Women for America* by scholar of religion Leslie Dorrough Smith. For more, see James Davison Hunter, "The Liberal Reaction" in *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation* edited by Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow (New York, NY: Aldine Publishing, 1983), 150—161; Jeffrey K. Hadden and Charles E. Swan, eds., *Prime Time Preachers: The Rising Power of Televangelism* (Reading, MA: Addison—Wesley Publishing, 1981; Steven P. Miller, *Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born—Again Years* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Leslie Dorrough Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric: Sex, Speech, and the Politics of Concerned Women for America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

of PFAW. He thought that his wealth and association with Hollywood as a Jewish person disqualified him from speaking about religion and politics publicly. This was particularly the case when he decided to take on the Christian Right through his television spots and non—profit organizing.[5]

In light of this, I argue that the manner in which Lear positioned himself publicly was essential if he was to have any career as a political activist. This also included how journalists and television hosts reported on the emergence of PFAW as a confrontation between Lear and televangelists such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. Lear's decision to seek the counsel of numerous political and religious leaders of the Protestant mainline in regards to the formation of PFAW, which also included Catholic and Jewish leaders, buttressed his public image against possible criticisms of his political relevancy or accusations of "secular humanism." Despite the fact that People for the American Way became much bigger than the actions of a lone individual, I argue that we cannot lose sight of the fact that none of its successes would have been possible without Lear's enthusiasm and commitment to a robust yet civil public life as witnessed in his defense of the free exercise of religion, the separation of church and state, and civil deliberation.[6]

Like Lear himself, People for the American Way based most of its claims to a more civil public on an interwar formulation of religious diversity and civility championed by the likes of the National Council of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) and the National Council of Churches (NCC). When associated with "public" or "religion" as "civil religion," my usage of the word "civil" implies the realm within which politics traditionally takes place as part of a liberal

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[5] There is no question that Lear's mobilizing efforts also had to confront a form of anti—Semitic stereotype concerning rich Hollywood Jewish writers and producers who "ran Hollywood."

[6] For more, see Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 3—13.

democracy and a behavioral expectation by those (like Lear) who saw civil religion as an antidote to the nation's divisiveness and discord. In this sense, "civil" means to act, speak, and behave in a manner conducive to a harmonious polity. In particular, this chapter argues that PFAW grounded its social vision for the country on the "American Way" tradition, which found much of its own initial salience in the collective advocacy of advertisers, government officials, and private citizens at America's mid—century.[7]

People for the American Way's internal structure also spoke to what I've identified as its inter—faith concerns. Its board of directors and advisory committees reflected the values of the larger non—profit institution by including Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in its composition in addition to prominent members of the business community. Despite Lear's reasoning for organizing PFAW as a strategic response to the electronic church and its televangelist contributors, the non—profit organization itself championed broader civic values of education, equality, and fairness in politics and American public life.[8] In addition, this chapter also explores a number of the cultural productions of PFAW including television spots, printed publications, and position papers on the time's most pressing concerns including prayer in public schools, regulation of the airwaves, and the teaching of creation science alongside evolution. Lastly, I consider PFAW as an advocacy group in the third—section of American public life, and what this meant to American religion and the future of American politics.

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[7] For more on this tradition, see Wendy Wall, *Inventing the American Way: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[8] As a descriptive and categorical reminder,, the term electronic church refers to the activities of largely conservative Protestant ministers who began organizing ministries based on the resources of the airwaves in general and television in particular. Words such as "televangelism" and "televangelist" are closely related to the electronic church and its emergence into American public life in the late 1970s. Typically deployed by centrist to left—leaning political liberals, the term is also suggestively adjudicative in that those churches that were "electronic" are not the same as, and perhaps deficient relative to, physical Protestant churches and the ministries that took place within as products of community.

Considered in the broadest sense, the purpose behind much of PFAW's literature in both print and television was educational. This was part of a larger effort to raise awareness of the social and political challenges that the organization felt were most pressing and thus most threatening to American civil liberties. In light of this civic concentration, I argue that the formation of PFAW was a direct response to the Christian Right based largely on the growing political influence of televangelism as witnessed in the activities of the electronic church. Lear's encounter with televangelists such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson through his beloved medium of television transformed his distanced amusement into righteous indignation once Falwell and others emerged into the public sphere as a direct affront to the American Way.

Roots of the American Way

The formation of People for the American Way (PFAW) could not have come at a better time for liberally minded political actors in both Hollywood and in the larger Protestant mainline.[9] The transition from the 1970s to the 1980s signaled a profound shift in US society towards a religio—political culture of conservatism. Despite the fact that Jimmy Carter had been elected president as a Democrat, his ascendency to the oval office depended upon his popularity in the increasingly Republican south as well as his testimony as a born—again Christian. In this

[9] My association of mainline Protestantism with broadly liberal politics coincides nicely with what historian William Hutchinson argues in his edited collection, *Between the Times*. Despite the fact that associating liberal politics with mainline interests of the early twentieth—century is problematic at best, by the late 1970s such shorthand was largely accurate, "But the habit of designating the Protestant mainline churches simply as 'liberal,' which is at least understandable if one has in mind the alignments of the 1970s and 1980s, is problematic for earlier periods" (13). The travails that Hutchinson spoke of for the Protestant mainline were arguably not as disastrous as once thought in an age of disestablishment. In fact, I would argue that mainline interests and power remained rather solidified in the broader American culture through the country's mid—century up to the early 1980s with the arrival of the Christian Right. In this sense, mainline interests morphed into institutions and communities beyond the confines of the institutional Protestant church to include members of the Goodwill Movement in the interwar period and individuals such as Norman Lear in the 1970s. In other words, interfaith activism assumed much of the mainline's energy for mobilizing its interests in public in increasingly *secular* spaces. For more on this ecumenical period, see David Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013). Also, see William Hutchinson, *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900—1960* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

sense, Carter's successes, as well as his failures, laid the groundwork for conservative voices to take advantage of his born—again politics in support of their own concerns over America's moral state with the help of the newest arrival to the airwaves— the electronic church. Despite the ambivalence of many within the New Right over the inclusion of conservative Protestant ministers within their ranks, the social influence of individuals such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson could not be ignored.

This influence encouraged ministers such as Falwell, who had taken a stand against applying the Christian gospel to politics during the Civil Right movement, to rethink their approach to engaging politics in light of their growing successes in the media. This internal negotiation that was taking place within what was referred to as "the Christian Right," "the new Christian Right," or "the new Religious Right" worried those on the opposite end of the religious and political spectrum— namely Lear and his Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic supporters. In fact, the emergence of a seemingly united front of conservative Protestants in American public life in the late 1970s, which included Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and Fundamentalists, struck a discordant note in PFAW's otherwise harmonious rendering of the American public as tolerant, civil, and diverse.[10]

The fact that a number of ministers within the electronic church had taken firm stances against politically liberal interests such as civil rights, gender equality, and discrimination suggested to Lear and others a shift in political sensibilities at best and a hostile takeover at worst. This fear was periodically reinforced by the not so subtle usage of anti—Semitic language

[10] Neil J. Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

by conservative televangelists and ministers who targeted Lear based on his ethnicity.[11] The formation of People for the American Way was not only a direct response to such anti—Semitism, but it was also a corrective to what Lear and others saw as a fundamental violation of the separation of church and state by the electronic church based on its explicitly political appeals to its congregants. PFAW sought to address the rhetorical iniquities committed by the televangelist wing of the Christian Right by stressing educational freedom, awareness, first amendment rights, and civility in the public sphere. By "awareness" I mean PFAW's intent to expose its constituencies and others to potential challenges to first amendment and civil rights. Awareness also included PFAW's tendency to circulate what it thought to be politically damaging information in regards to politicians and preachers in a manner reminiscent of "right—watch" groups. However, despite Lear's and others' best intentions, the aspirations of PFAW regarding tolerance and religious diversity were largely unrealized since much of its civic energy depended on rendering Falwell and others as *aberrations* within a longer narrative of liberal progress.

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[11] The most disturbing instance of such remarks during this period took place during the National Affairs Briefing held in Dallas in the early 1980s. Although this event is typically remembered for the words of then candidate Ronald Reagan as he endorsed his fellow conservatives' concerns about the country's future, the words of Dr. Bailey Smith resonated strongest with individuals like Lear and Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, who would go on to serve on PFAW's advisory board. Smith, then president of the Southern Baptist Convention, observed that "God almighty does not hear the prayer of a Jew." Smith's words were recorded by a member of Tanenbaum's organization at the time on behalf of the American Jewish Committee. Taking a page out of PFAW's awareness—raising handbook, Smith's words were recorded and then sent directly to Jewish leaders the week of the briefing. Smith's full quotation reads as such, "It is interesting, at great political rallies, how you have a Protestant to pray, a Catholic to pray, and then you have a Jew to pray. With all due respects to those dear people, my friends, God Almighty does not hear the prayer of a Jew." This formulation was not only anti—Semitic, but it also attacked directly the logic of PFAW and Lear's religious liberalism as extensions of the classic sociological categorization of "Protestant—Catholic—Jew" as a viable religio—political platform for non—profits like Lear's. For more, see http://www.jta.org/1980/09/19/archive/baptist—leader—claims—god—does—not—hear—the—prayer—of—a—jew. Accessed May 10, 2014.

The formation of People for the American Way in the early 1980s was a direct outgrowth of a single man's experience of economic depression, world war, and nascent culture wars.[12] Like much of his prime time programming, Lear's non—profit activism was intimately connected to his own biography as someone who benefitted from the constitutional freedoms granted to minority citizens of the United States. At the same time, Lear encountered memorable instances of virulent discrimination against his ethnic, racial, or sexual difference. This backstory cultivated a defensive stance within Lear's social vision that heightened his sense of fairness and equality in American society in addition to the manner in which such a civil state of affairs could be best established and maintained. The emergence of televangelism on a mass—mediated scale in the late 1970s immediately alerted Lear to possible moments of social exclusion, or in his case, anti—Semitism. Not only was this type of speech a violation of the nation's commitment to racial and religious tolerance, but it was also broadcast to millions of homes on a weekly basis for much of the calendar year. Lear's experience of the ubiquity of entertainment on television gave him an appreciation for how influential such a group of conservative Protestants could be in swaying the country away from its largely consensus politics of the New Deal towards a fundamentally restructured society based on the principles of the free market and deregulatory federal policies.[13]

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[12] I have examined "culture wars" in a substantive manner in another venue, namely here: http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/confessions—of—a—hollywood—liberal—american—sitcoms—and—the—culture—wars—from—norman—lear—to—parks—and—recreation—by—l—benjamin—rolsky/.
In short, I understand Lear and his actions with PFAW as a participant in what would eventually become America's culture wars. My contribution is to locate and explicate the liberal interests and activism within these very public contests over various facets of American culture and politics.

[13] For more on this transition since America's mid—century, see Daniel Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011) and Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York, NY: Macmillian Publishing, 2012).

His first reaction to witnessing televangelists in their newly minted pulpits was a familiar one— to use the means and medium he knew best to identify the disjuncture between the politics of the Christian Right and the "American Way" of doing politics— namely civilly, tolerantly, and respectfully. In foregrounding these values in his initial attempt at political mobilization, Lear drew on a longer tradition of interfaith or tri—faith cooperation that found much of its own sources of support in both the "Judeo—Christian" formulation of the early twentieth—century and the Goodwill Movement of the interwar period.[14] In addition, Lear's participation in World War II as a gunner also contributed to his appreciation for inter—faith coalitions in light of the war's significance as a transitional moment in the history of Jewish acculturation through the Judeo—Christian formula of "Protestant—Catholic—Jew."[15] "In this context," argues historian Wendy Wall, "ecumenical religion could serve simultaneously as a symbol of American pluralism and American consensus."[16] Despite the support that this particular political project

[14] For the latest on the "Judeo—Christian" tradition as a subject of academic inquiry, see K. Healan Gaston, "Interpreting Judeo—Christianity in America," *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception* 2:2 (2012), 291—304 and J. Terry Todd, "The Temple of Religion and the Politics of Religious Pluralism," in *After Pluralism: Reimagining Religious Engagement* edited by Courtney Bender and Pamela Klassen (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2010), 201—224. For more on the Goodwill movement, see historian Benny Kraut's chapter in William Hutchinson, ed., *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900—1960* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 193—230. For more on tri—faith formations, see Kevin Schultz, *Tri—Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to its Protestant Promise* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011). In fact, Lear relied on the popular interwar phrase "Brotherhood of Man" to make an argument about respect and understanding in a moment of vehement political disagreements in his television special, "I Love Liberty," which first aired in 1981. The special was titled, "I Love Liberty" and its was designed by Lear, church historian Martin Marty, and countless others to reclaim what had been appropriated and (to PFAW) exploited by the Christian Right— namely patriotism and moral discourse. The event drew very heavily on Hollywood for much of its appeal including Mary Tyler Moore, Martin Sheen, Christopher Reeve, Walter Matthau, and the Muppets. It utilized the variety show format to defend tolerance and civility in the face of the Right's divisive politics.

[15] For more on the relationship between World War II and American Jews, see Deborah Moore, *How World War II Changed a Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[16] Wendy Wall, *Inventing the American Way*, 10.

received from individuals in the entertainment industry, federal government, and private sector, its dependence on "diversity" signaled its primary strength and its principal weakness.

Diversity, both religious and political, was a value that many in interfaith circles saw as instrumental to a harmonious public sphere, Lear included. Yet, within its own expansive possibilities lay the very seeds of its undoing. If a feeling of optimism characterized much of this activism in the name of understanding and cooperation in opposition to totalitarian regimes around the globe, then an equally powerful feeling of fear of unbridled and unrestrained diversity also suffused these efforts at societal progress. Diversity suited the nation state by demonstrating its ability to forge a consensus amidst a dizzying array of religious options. This consensus, however, required an epistemological split between behavior in public versus the same behavior in private.[17] As a result, unity in public came at the expense of unbridled religious expression because its expression depended upon "a private arena of diversity and tolerance and a public arena of unity and consensus."[18] In this sense, a notion of diversity, regardless of its ecumenical origins, signified both an appreciation for what it claimed and an attempt to restrain what it most feared by reinforcing political consensus.

Lear's non—profit organizing took advantage of this particular history by emphasizing consensus through religious and political diversity in his attempts to combat the Christian Right and its seemingly absolutist method of engaging politics. Despite the fact that this community of conservative Protestants represented a particular facet of the diversity that Lear and others

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[17] For cultural theorist Raymond Williams, this underside of diversity can be understood as the negative sense of consensus itself. For Williams, consensus politics "was intended to describe deliberate evasion of basic conflicts of principle, but also a process in which certain issues were effectively excluded from political argument…because there was no room for issues not already [considered] important." For more, see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983), 76—78.

[18] Wall, *Inventing the American Way*, 84.

defended rhetorically, it ultimately functioned as a discursive "other" against which religious liberals could leverage their oppositional political identities as defenders of the American Way. "By marginalizing dissenters," argues Wall, "by casting out those who disrupted unity as somehow un—American, they shored up the social, economic, and political status quo."[19] In short, Lear's attempt to provide support for this type of consensus politics depended on disciplining his own collection of religious outliers.

Lear's efforts were met with an equal amount of passion and dedication from televangelists and politicians alike, primarily because they possessed their own formula for public deliberation and expression that did not rely on Lear's consensus for its discursive successes. Moreover, the fact that the Christian Right wielded any power whatsoever in American politics suggested a breakdown to Lear and others in what had largely determined the tenor and content of the nation's deliberative processes. For Lear and People for the American Way, the extremism of the Christian Right posed a threat to democracy itself and first amendment rights. To the Christian and political right, efforts by conservative ministers symbolized the growing power of a constituency that had been largely shut out from the media arenas of influence since the interwar period. Although People for the American Way was a product of a longer, established history of interfaith cooperation and Judeo—Christian values, it was also guilty of the same consensus—driven assumptions about how best to conduct oneself in public.

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[19] Lear's mid—century predecessor was a Hollywood studio President by the name of Barney Balaban. Both men worked with the National Council of Christian and Jews, both were involved in the entertainment industry, and both were of Jewish descent. In addition, both men purchased original copies of America's founding documents (Bill of Rights and Declaration of Independence respectively) in times of national identity formation: the Cold War and America post—September 11th. Balaban even contributed some of his own collection of Americana to the Freedom Train, which ran in the 1940s in order to remind Americans of their own sacred, national history. For more, see Wendy Wall, *Inventing the American Way*, 203 and 282.

Despite these shortcomings, PFAW proved to be the best option in an increasingly conservative and mediated political environment that had both religious and political liberals scrambling for stable ground. Lear's bid for political relevancy in an age of advocacy projected the strongest future for those mainline Protestants who had been eclipsed by their more conservative colleagues in Christ. In particular, PFAW's self—conception and media campaigns further demonstrate its dependence on an interfaith advocacy model of adjudicating pluralism in the public sphere and its method of organizing in the face of an increasingly insistent community of conservative Protestants, Catholics, and Jews.[20]

Building a People for the American Way

Lear's relevance programming in the early 1970s, along with his participation in congressional hearings over the issue of censorship during the "Family Hour" debates, demonstrated his commitment to the First Amendment and its guarantees of free speech and religious practice in both the entertainment industry and the larger American society. His decision to leave television producing by decade's end certainly signaled a professional transition to new opportunities and experiences, yet his decision unfolded according to the very same set of concerns for relevance he had brought with him into primetime programming.

By the late 1970s, Lear had grown increasingly alarmed at the power and influence of conservative politics as evidenced by the various communications of the electronic church to audiences across the country. This was largely the case because of his own encounters with a similar religio—political constituency while a network producer due to the perceived immorality of his television programs, which resulted in boycotts, public demonstrations, and mobilization led by the Reverend Donald Wildmon through his Campaign for Public Decency. Regardless of

[20] For more on interfaith activism, see Katherine E. Knutson, *Interfaith Advocacy: The Role of Religious Coalitions in the Political Process* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013).

whether such efforts to curb the freedom of expression came from the federal government through the FCC or conservative advocacy groups, Lear remained committed to the idea of the free exchange of ideas in entertainment and politics.

The emergence of the Christian Right as witnessed through its televangelist supporters troubled Lear not only due to its developing political platform, but more significantly because of its method of political engagement in public. To Lear and later for People for the American Way, the Christian Right relied on an exclusionary and incendiary method of politics that claimed its positions to be beyond rhetorical reproach regardless of the interlocutor. In addition, the Christian Right also argued that their political agenda represented *the* position on a political issue rendering those who disagreed misinformed at best and delusional at worst. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of this mobilization for Lear was the fact that conservative ministers and televangelists proclaimed their arguments to be the Christian position on a given subject regardless of the particular policy under debate including prayer in school, the women's movement, and the economy. In short, Lear was appalled by the social agenda of the Christian Right and its primary means of dissemination by absolutist claims to political and religious legitimacy.[21]

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[21] The emphasis that Lear and his mainline Protestant supporters placed on the absolutism of the Christian Right was a product of their collective reaction to an antithetical politics that did not require (or even desire) an exchange of ideas or a deliberative encounter with its opposition. Regardless of whether such claims were actually absolutist and thus beyond time and space, Lear and others interpreted televangelists' claims as such and mobilized a significant counter offensive based on their perception of the Christian Right as exclusionary. A helpful corrective to the scholar adapting such an analysis as her own can be found in scholar of religion Leslie Dorrough Smith's monograph, *Righteous Rhetoric: Sex, Speech, and the Politics of Concerned Women for America*. As Smith points out, absolutist claims such as those made by CWA or arguably PFAW may rely on an exclusionary politics, yet they also function as rhetorical strategy for mobilizing its various constituencies by convincing them of such an agenda's efficacy based largely on its flexibility rather than a rigid consistency. Smith's methodological contribution will be engaged later in this chapter. For more, see Leslie Dorrough Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric: Sex, Speech, and the Politics of Concerned Women for America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Despite Lear's extensive background in television, his preliminary response to the proliferation of conservative televangelists was to first research his subject and then compose a treatment for the silver screen. This approach set the agenda for much of what would become People for the American Way and its nonprofit purpose of educating and raising awareness of potential threats to first amendment rights. Lear spent hours in front of television screens with VCRs recording, watching, and commenting on a variety of televised ministries and their diverse array of programming. "My first experience [of watching television ministers] had been Jerry Falwell, catching a glimpse of him here and there and laughing as most of us did, not taking it seriously," Lear admitted. "But then I watched fifty, sixty hours of Pat Robertson, Jimmy Swaggart, and others, and I became deeply concerned at the way they were mixing politics and religion and suggesting that a person was a good Christian or a bad Christian depending on their political point of view."[22] Not only did this observation serve as the foundation for People for the American Way's theory of deliberative politics, but it also served as the primary source material for his soon to be completed screenplay titled, *Religion*.

Along with other films of the period that examined the phenomenon of televangelism with a critical edge, *Religion* explored the journeys of two friends (played by actors Fred Willard and Martin Mull) who became ordained through the mail as part of a larger institutional body called the Universal Life Church.[23] One friend takes advantage of the non—profit tax benefits of the institution in order to achieve wealth and fame while the other works on behalf of the

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[22] This observation can be found in an unpublished interview Lear gave as part of a seminar titled, "Television: Its Culture, Its Impact, Its Ethics, Its Future." It was copyrighted by the Museum of Broadcasting in 1987.

[23] For more on Willard and Mull, see Gary Deeb, "Mull and Willard to take a Swipe at a Racket via Lear 'Religion' Film," *Chicago Tribune* A12 (Mar 22, 1979).

impoverished.[24] In the end, the duplicitous friend falls victim to his own successes only to be saved by his friend who stayed true to his convictions as a Christian.[25] Lear's concerns were blatantly obvious— to question the veracity of conservative Protestant churches in regards to their tax exempt status and to make a point about the nature of the Christian faith in its commitment to the poor. In particular, his focus on finances grew out of his concern that the electronic church regularly violated its non—profit and tax—exempt status by making overtly political statements from the pulpit while raking in unheard of amounts of money from its distant congregations.

Lear's commitment to the film project remained steady until he witnessed the unthinkable in his research. During one particular televised service, Pastor Jimmy Swaggart asked his congregation to pray for the removal of a Supreme Court justice over the airwaves. To Lear, this was a profound violation of the separation of church and state because televangelists like Swaggart were prohibited from making explicitly political claims as part of their tax—exemption. Considering his response, Lear decided against pursuing a claim to equal time through the federally regulated Fairness Doctrine and instead explored alternative means of getting his message out to the public beyond the confines of a feature film. Swaggart's words catalyzed Lear's transition into American politics by shifting his attention from the prolonged experience of making a movie to the more efficient medium of short television spots in the form

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[24] In Lear's words, the two friends had day jobs as cops. "As clergymen they held Sunday services in their garages or playrooms, which, for tax purposes, they wrote off as sanctuaries. Their family vacations were claimed as religious retreats. All in all, church—related tax write—offs could allow them four thousand dollars more a year in take—home pay, a considerable sum given the salary of the average cop." Lear brought in comedians Richard Pryor and Robin Williams to assist with the story. For more, see Norman Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2014).

[25] This story is quite different from the other religion—oriented films that came out in the early 1980s, but they all were united in their effort to lampoon the Christian Right by ridiculing televangelists. Other films that took a similarly critical edge to current events were *Pray TV* and *In God We Tru$t*.

of the public service announcement. Drawing on his experience as a television writer and producer, Lear composed a number of spots designed to introduce a counteractive voice against those who questioned the validity of the nation's public servants based on their own idiosyncratic formulations of what was required of a Christian citizen.

Lear's first and most significant spot centered on the words of a blue collar worker in a warehouse driving a forklift. His main contention, one that Lear had been developing throughout the 1970s, was that preachers on television were not only telling Americans how to vote, but also that their very vote functioned as a resume of sorts in determining the validity of one's Christian faith. As we learned earlier, the spot ended as elegantly as it began with a reminder that such divisive politics was not "the American Way." The spot began to gain traction initially on local affiliate television channels including those connected to the three major networks as part of a grassroots effort to draw attention to the iniquities committed by the electronic church.[26] The PSAs that followed the success of Lear's first, which included A—list directors and actors from Hollywood including Goldie Hawn and boxer Muhammad Ali, would not have been as impactful without the words of the man in the forklift. The spots were lighthearted, but they were also quite serious about the importance of valuing the diversity of opinions. In this case, Lear's understanding of diversity may have focused on trivial matters such as how one liked their eggs, but the spots' larger message foregrounded the efficacy of debate, differences of opinion, and respect for that difference. His claim to a political voice through his minute—long spots would

[26] In Lear's own words from his speech commemorating the 30th anniversary of People for the American Way, "I paid to run it on a local TV station in DC and it caused so much talk that all three networks—there were only three at the time—ran it on their seven o'clock news and, like an act of spontaneous combustion—People for the American Way was born." As Lear remarks in his autobiography, "All of that [staffing PFAW] became easier after we ran the PSA on a local DC station. The national press covered the ad, the nightly news shows played it in its entirety, and I was invited to be interviewed by Tom Brokaw, then on the *Today* show" (333).

not have been possible, however, without the guidance and direction provided by what would become one of Lear's and PFAW's most passionate supporters— the liberal Protestant and Catholic mainline.

Even before Lear composed his television spots, he knew that his entrance into the nation's public life as a political actor would not be accomplished smoothly. In fact, Lear saw three strikes against his credibility as an outspoken critic of the Christian Right— he was from Hollywood, he was Jewish, and he was wealthy.[27] In order to offset these perceived limitations, Lear decided to reach out to someone who he thought could assist him in establishing his credibility as a political actor in public by way of his short public service announcements. He first contacted Father Theodore Hesburgh, who was then President of Notre Dame and former board member of the United States Civil Rights Commission. Lear consulted with Hesburgh about how best to address the impending confrontation with the Christian Right by way of its televangelist presence in the media. After playing the original television spot, Hesburgh gave Lear his full—fledged support and suggested contacting other like—minded religious figures who could assist his cause. "Let me help you," Hesburgh said, "You need to get as many mainline church leaders involved as you can."[28]

After making a number of calls and appointments, Hesburgh encouraged Lear to seek counsel from as many individuals as he could in order to forge a united front against those who

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[27] "I realized that I had lousy credentials for taking on fundamentalist religious figures," Lear admitted in an interview, "I'm Jewish and I'm a product of Hollywood and I'm not going to get a lot of attention that way. I knew I needed the help of mainline church leaders so I went to South Bend, because I had a nice acquaintance with Father Hesburgh at Notre Dame." For more, see "Television: Its Culture, Its Impact, Its Ethics, Its Future." It was copyrighted by the Museum of Broadcasting in 1987.

[28] Lear's memories of his encounter with Hesburgh can be found in "Television: Its Culture, Its Impact, Its Ethics, Its Future" during the question and answer section. This transcript, along with many others referenced in the project, can be found on Norman Lear's website under the heading, "Life in the Spirit."

"torture scripture." Hesburgh's assistance set Lear on a course that took him around the country in hopes of establishing a supportive network of religious and spiritual liberals for his nascent organizing. Not only were Hesburgh's actions instrumental in the formation of People for the American Way, but his words also gave Lear a guiding image to take with him on the road as a reminder of why he was traveling in the first place— conservative religious figures torturing scripture for political gain. The fact that the Christian Right lacked any considerable attention to poverty, the environment, or the disenfranchised in their political agenda was offensive at best and sinful at worst to Lear and his interfaith supporters.[29]

Lear's travels were nothing less than formative to his future as a political organizer. "I toured the country visiting these mainline church leaders, all of whom said, 'This is terrific, and you should do more of them' [spots]," Lear recalls. "One of them said, 'institutionalize it.' Because the guy on the commercial wound up saying, 'That's not the American Way,' somebody suggested the name, 'People for the American Way.' And an organization was formed."[30] The individuals who Lear met with were some of the most significant figures in the interfaith community in the early 1980s, which as we saw with Hesburgh included liberal Catholics and Protestants as well as secular humanists.[31] The fact that Lear was Jewish completed the interfaith composition that would define PFAW's numerous advisory boards and committees in a manner that harkened back to the Goodwill movement of the interwar period. Although he did not realize it at the time, his meetings laid the groundwork for the very institutionalizing that had

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[29] For more, see Peggy Shriver, *The Bible Vote: Religion and the New Right* (New York, NY: Pilgrim Press, 1981).

[30] "Television: Its Culture, Its Impact, Its Ethics, Its Future."

[31] Bruce Buursma, "Group Fights 'Voice of Fanaticism,'" *Chicago Tribune* (Mar 10 1981), B6.

encouraged Lear to continue his journey in the first place. In other words, the individuals Lear initially met with felt so strongly about his cause that they decided to lend their support on an organizational level as a response to the conservative Protestant ascendance that was cause for much mainline concern and trepidation.

Stopping in cities such as Chicago, New York, San Antonio, Austin, and Washington DC, Lear met with the likes of Rev. Jimmy Allen (then President of the Southern Baptist Convention), Rev. James Dunn (Southern Baptist Convention's national spokesman), Charles Bergstrom (spokesman for the Lutheran Church), William Sloane Coffin (senior minister at Riverside Church), Colin Williams (Dean of Yale Divinity School), minister and congressman John Buchanan, congresswoman Barbara Jordan, and Martin E. Marty (church historian at the University of Chicago).[32] Not only did this group lend their names and time to Lear's cause, but they also served as a soundboard for his conception of the American Way itself. In fact, Lear relied on the public status and historical knowledge of church historian Martin Marty for much of his own theorizing about the place of religion in American public life.

After a final consultation session with Los Angeles—based civil and human rights attorneys and interfaith activists, Lear made his final decision, "'That's not the American way,' our hard hat said of the mixture of politics and religion in the PSA, and so People for the American Way was established as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization."[33] With this pronouncement, television writer and producer Norman Lear arguably became the unofficial spokesperson for interfaith and mainline communities in the early 1980s as a representative of

[32] Norman Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience*, 332.

[33] Norman Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience*, 332. Before moving forward with his non—profit organizing, Lear consulted another group of influential religious liberals including Rev. George Regas and Rabbi Leonard Beerman, cofounders of Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace.

spiritual liberalism in public and a defender of the first amendment, the separation of church and state, and the freedom of religious practice in a civil society.

Despite the fact that PFAW's first offices were built in Washington DC, they eventually found homes in Los Angeles and New York as well beginning in April of 1981. At its organizational core stood three men who not only supported Lear in his political endeavors, but also epitomized Lear's reliance on and expansion of pre—war interfaith formulations such as "Protestant—Catholic—Jew" and post—war articulations like "Tri—Faith" to include secular humanists for his own interfaith organizing: Catholic Theodore Hesburgh, Rev. James M. Dunn, and Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum. Lear's initial investment of $200,000 soon grew to two million as he continued to labor and fundraise on behalf of the American Way.

Receiving and Manufacturing PFAW

Lear moved quickly in order to spread awareness about People for the American Way as an organization devoted to the protection of civil liberties in the face of an impending political force of imposed religiosity in public. From ballrooms to hotels rooms to living rooms Lear traversed the country in hopes of garnering enough support and finances to get his non—profit off the ground successfully and efficiently. The selection of lawyer Tony Podesta as PFAW's first president, a veteran of political campaigning for the likes of Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern, and Ted Kennedy, spoke to both the political orientation of the nascent organization and its future as a watchdog of threats to civic harmony and consensus. The broadcast of Lear's original public service announcement in DC assisted his project of public exposure greatly through coverage in the national press, the nightly news, and an interview with news anchor Tom Brokaw on the *Today* show. "A single impression on a network news broadcast back when there were only three of them was a very big deal," Lear observed. "In a single eight—minute

interview…People for the American Way gained recognition by the establishment and more media attention followed."[34]

The support for Lear's ads not only reminded him of his time in television production where a primetime episode broadcast in September could become the stuff of national conversation by November, but it also helped him raise money to buy more airtime for his additional PSAs, which included the likes of Hollywood actors Carol Burnett and Ned Beatty. People for the American Way not only marked the materialization of Lear's own brand of religious liberalism, but it also signaled a significant moment in the history of Hollywood—based activism in American politics. In fact, the election of President Reagan itself, based on the multifaceted support system of conservative religious and political strategists and ministers, signaled Hollywood's official arrival onto the political scene on Republican terms. It took little time for Hollywood's liberals to organize themselves in kind largely through Lear's programming, institutional organizing, and political stances in public.[35]

The beginnings of the 1980s marked a significant increase in organizations and nonprofits designed to resist the Christian Right's influence on American public life despite the fact that one of its key supporters, Ronald Reagan, had just become President of the United States. One could argue that these organizations were equally committed to combatting both political and religious manifestations of conservative politics regardless of the particular guilty party— individual or organizational. Norman Lear's PFAW was certainly a part of this liberal

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[34] Norman Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience*, 333.

[35] For more on the Hollywood tradition of activism, see Steven J. Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011). Countless newspaper articles from the period document the gradual organizing that took place among Hollywood's liberal elite in opposition to a variety of Reagan—led operations including US actions in Central America.

activism against a seemingly hostile foe, but his connection to this moment was weighted differently in relation to groups such as theologian Daniel Maguire's Moral Alternatives in Politics, politician George McGovern's Americans for Common Sense, or Virginians Organized for Informed Community Expression. In short, Lear's non—profit organizing contributed to and served as inspiration for further civic activism in the name of the American Way.[36]

These preliminary interactions with the media laid the groundwork for how news organizations, newspapers, journals, and the spokespersons of the Christian Right framed Lear's relevancy as a political activist in the 1980s on a national scale. His short television spots may have inaugurated Lear's activism, but his reception by the media determined its significance. In this sense, Lear and PFAW were discursively manufactured in much the same way as the Christian Right was as a social movement through countless reports, articles, interviews, and television spots.[37] Beginning with his interview with Tom Brokaw, Lear's narrative of television producer turned non—profit activist hinged on his seemingly evident confrontation with the Christian Right. In fact, as Lear recounts in his autobiography *Even This I Get to Experience*, Brokaw's producers advertised the interview as, "Hollywood Coming After the Christian Right."[38] The news media, composed at the time by print sources such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The*

[36] Joining such groups in solidarity were fifteen of the largest mainline denominations in the country by way of a co—signed statement titled, "Christian Theological Observations on the Religious Right Movement." An excerpt from this statement reads as follows, "There is no place in a Christian manner of political life for arrogance, manipulation, subterfuge, or holding others in contempt…There is no justification in a pluralistic and democratic society for demands for conformity along religious or ideological lines." For more, see Jeffrey Hadden and Charles Swann, *Prime Time Preachers: The Rising Power of Televangelism* (Reading, MA: Addison—Wesley Publishing, 1981), 146—147.

[37] For more, see Tina Rosenberg, "How the Media Made the Moral Majority," *Washington Monthly* (May 1982), 26—34. Original citation found in Steven P. Miller, *Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born—Again Years* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[38] Norman Lear, *Even This I Get to Experience*, 333.

New York Times, *Vanity Fair*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, in addition to visual sources like *The Today Show*, *Firing Line*, and *The Phil Donahue Show*, circulated similar tag lines to the one formed by Brokaw's producers about the Christian Right in general and Lear's activism in particular. Once Lear began to assemble more support and attract more media attention, his activism through PFAW came to be understood as a confrontation with particular televangelists including Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson in the most martial of terms.

A brief search for Lear versus Falwell headlines from print sources of the early 1980s reveals a narrative designed to take advantage of the two public figures in order to tell a larger story about the confrontation between largely conservative and liberal political forces in public. Periodicals and newspapers such as the ones listed above dedicated numerous pages to outlining the public confrontation between Lear and Falwell despite the fact that neither of the religious combatants viewed their interactions in the same oppositional manner.[39] The two men had certainly exchanged words throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, including Falwell's labeling of Lear as "the number one enemy of the family in this generation," but neither Lear nor Falwell saw the other as his enemy outright.

This particular narrative emerged from the pages of a variety of magazines and periodicals including *Time*, *Saturday Review*, and *Vanity Fair*. Between the years of 1980 and 1982, newspapers and magazines across the country documented Lear and his engagement with televangelists and the Christian Right by way of his non—profit organization People for the American Way. In November of 1980, *Time* published a short piece titled, "Smiting the Mighty Right: PAW vs. Political Preachers," which examined the grassroots methods Lear used to get

[39] This dynamic speaks to those who argue that the culture wars were and are primarily a product of intellectual, cultural, and political elites.

PFAW off the ground through the televised PSA format. "Beyond the new TV spots," the article says, "PAW is working on educational programs with leaflets and articles on 'the nature of our pluralistic society,' for distribution in schools, churches, and libraries." Largely educational in nature, we learn how PFAW meant to disseminate its message of pluralism and understanding and what exactly it found wrong with Falwell and the electronic church.[40]

Based on the nonprofit's inaugural statement, PFAW argued that the "Religious New Right" attacks any and all who disagree with its political positions in public. Taken a step further, former Yale Divinity School Dean Colin Williams argued in a PFAW position paper that the "Protestant Right" threatens the most instrumental of civic values including pluralism, democracy, and "the American Way." Williams' words were supported by a list of notable public figures including former FCC chairman Newton Minow, President M. William Howard of the National Council of Churches, and Editor Norman Cousins. Those who supported People for the American Way's educational programming did not intend on denying the right of Falwell or others to speak in public. Instead, their grievances concerned the form or method that the Christian Right relied on for many of its political successes. "The problem, they say, lies in the *methods* used by the religious right, especially widespread lists of the supported Christian positions, and attacks on legislators who disagree [my emphasis]."[41]

In this sense, the Christian Right and its televangelist representatives were guilty of two interrelated linguistic indiscretions: first, for consistently attacking those who disagree with them over political positions, and second, for enumerating and thus determining the moral or "Godly" argument on an individual or series of individual policy questions. Not only did individuals like

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[40] N/A, "Smiting the Mighty Right: PAW vs. Political Preachers," *Time* 116 (Nov 3rd 1980), 103.

[41] N/A, "Smiting the Mighty Right," 103.

Lear disagree with the methods of the Right, but also periodicals from within the Christian Right's orbit such as the *Christianity Today* were also concerned about the lack of a social justice agenda amidst calls for a greater "pro—family" politics. The same *Time* article closed with a quote from Falwell himself, who questioned Lear's commitment to the interests of women when his programming was principally pornographic. "He's just playing games again," Falwell states, "and using some liberal theologians for his own devices." This article represented one of many that documented PFAW's rise to political prominence by naming Lear's PSAs, exploring People for the American Way's composition, delineating its educational agenda, and closing with the words of Falwell as an example of his seemingly uniform attention on Lear and PFAW. Magazines such as *Newsweek* and *Vogue* would follow suit in describing one of the most visible political confrontations over what President Reagan called the "orderly society" in America's recent history.

In "Norman Lear vs. the Moral Majority: The War to Clean Up TV," journalist Ben Stein observed that Lear and others represented the "television establishment of networks" over and against the newly ascendant "Christian militia."[42] "A battle is raging for control of network television. Storming the citadel of imperial TV power is the new Christian Right, allied with the new political right, and its spearhead political—action commando group, the Moral Majority." Stein named Lear as the establishment's leader arguing that "two warring parochialisms" went head to head over the precious advertising real estate of primetime programming. After documenting the conflicting interests between Lear and Falwell, Stein broadened the terms of the media engagement by connecting Lear's television catalogue and creation of PFAW to his

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[42] Stein's comments on Lear and TV do not end here. For more, see Ben Stein, *The View from Sunset Boulevard: America as Brought to You by the People Who Make Television* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1979).

history of supporting the American Civil Liberties Union and political candidates such as Ralph Nader and John Anderson. Not only does this information give us a sense of how Lear and Falwell conducted themselves politically, but it also contributed to Lear's own political persona through his allegiances as a non—profit organizer. Against the backdrop of "special—interest groups" and "pressure groups" of various sorts, Stein concluded by naming the two sides of the debate as "Falwell's crusaders" and "Lear's Hollywood infidels."[43]

While hyperbolic, these terms tell us much about the tenor of these interactions and their terms of conflict— namely, primetime programming, the educational outreach of PFAW, and Lear's seemingly bi—partisan involvement as the country's newest public defender of the American Way.[44] Perhaps *Vogue* writer Maureen Orth captured the conflict best in the opening line to her piece titled, "Religion on TV: Norman Lear Tackles the New Hot Issue." For Orth, "The true battlefield in the fight for the hearts and minds of America is the TV screen…their views [Lear and Falwell] are diametrically opposed and television has become their electronic dueling ground."[45] Despite his best attempts, Lear could not augment the media—based narrative of his entrance into American politics as one inseparable from and thus constitutive with Jerry Falwell and the Christian Right. This was partly his own doing since Lear and PFAW targeted

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[43] For another similarly titled article, see N/A, "TV's Latest Listing: Archie vs. Jerry," *Newsweek* (Oct 18th 1982), 41.

[44] While various newspapers and journals were publishing articles on the Lear/Falwell story, they were also giving print space to broader and arguably more threatening subject matter including the subject of the "born—again" politics itself and its potential in the US to shift the country to the right. The relationship between a Lear/Falwell article and this latter type of article should be read as an intimately connected one with the same cast of characters often times populating the different articles despite their slightly unique narrative concerns. For an example, see Allan J. Mayer, John J. Lindsay, and Howard Fineman, "A Tide of Born—Again Politics," *Newsweek* (Sept 15 1980), 28.

[45] Maureen Orth, "Religion on TV: Norman Lear Tackles the New Hot Issue," *Vogue* (February 1982), 177 and 180.

the actions of the electronic church largely through the agendas of individuals like Falwell and Robertson. Lear had also first established himself as an influential opinion maker through his television producing in the 1970s, which for many in the media defined Lear's potential impact as one heavily dependent on various forms of media. As a result, his non—profit organizing was most often interpreted in the press in these terms in spite of PFAW's educational and awareness—based agenda. In no uncertain terms, Lear had arrived.[46]

Lear's public organizing did not simply capture the attention of mainstream periodicals and newspapers. It also grabbed a number of headlines in broadly Protestant publications including the *Christian Century*, *Christianity Today*, and the *New Oxford Review*. In fact, by the time Lear and PFAW reached the mid—1980s, a defense of Lear's politics and spiritual vision had already been authored by one of mainline Protestantism's most well—known spokesmen, Martin Marty. Numerous reporters included details concerning Lear's support system of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews who eventually served prominent roles within People for the American Way as part of committees and advisory boards. In an anonymously written, two—part article in *Christianity Today*, we can discern that the National Council of Churches had lost

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[46] For more similarly titled articles, see Peter W. Kaplan, "Lear vs. Falwell in Morality Armageddon," *Chicago Tribune* (Oct 1 1981), B14; John J. Goodman, "Campaign Opens Against Religious New Right," *Los Angeles Times* (Oct 22 1980), B11; Keith Love, "Lear Tackles Moral Majority: Producer, Religious Leaders Form Group to Spur Diversity," *Los Angeles Times* (Dec 13 1981), A3; Phil Kerby, "Falwell and Lear: Maybe They're Not So Far Apart," *Los Angeles Times* (Oct 30 1981), D1; Howard Rosenberg, "Evangelists, Networks: Holy War on Airwaves," *Los Angeles Times* (Jan 25 1982), G1; N/A, "Lear Assails Religious New Right as a Threat to Spirit of Liberty," *New York Times* (Mar 27 1981), A16; Helen Parmley, "Falwell Chides Lear," *The Dallas Morning News* (Oct 23 1980), A25; Tom Shales, "Norman Lear Takes Aim at Majority," *Wilmington Morning Star* (Mar 9 1981), C3; Kenneth R. Clark, "Norman Lear, Clergy Team to Fight Morality Politics," *The Pittsburgh Press* (Oct 25 1980), C5. For examples of broader articles that address the very same tensions within US society, see Ernest Holsendolph, "Religious Broadcasts Bring Rising Revenues and Create Rivalries," *New York Times* (Dec 2 1979), 36 and Dudley Clendinen, "Christian New Right's' Rush to Power: Test of Strength Lies Ahead," New York Times (Aug 18 1980), B7.

its prophetic way and was searching eagerly for a new direction.[47] Religious figures such as Richard John Neuhaus and Edmund Robb were brought in to advise at a luncheon sponsored by the NCC at Riverside Drive.[48] Both Neuhaus and Robb accused the mainline of "leftist political leanings" that resulted in alienated congregations. James Armstrong, then president of the NCC, accused Neuhaus of offering a plan fit for the Reagan administration's foreign policy agenda. Despite the name recognition of these mainline Protestant men, it was another attendee who had the honor of featured speaker that day.

In a subsection titled, "Meanwhile: Norman Lear on Spirituality," we learn that Lear featured prominently in a meeting convened by the National Council of Churches on the heels of People for the American Way's successful formation in 1981. Not only was Lear's voice a valuable one amidst the mainline's most seminal figures, but it stood out against the maelstrom that was the NCC's political agenda with a singular quality of guidance. "He was the day's featured speaker," the article stated. "Many liberal churchmen, threatened by the rise of Religious Right, are marching under his banner."[49] Rendered in this manner, Lear's non—profit organizing in the early 1980s took on a significance that resonated far beyond his own concerns as an American citizen on behalf of the American Way. The simultaneous unfolding of mainline confusion, Lear's activism, and the electronic church's growing influence left the NCC with options few and far between for a liberal politics of civility.

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[47] N/A, "Mainline Church Leaders Hit for 'Obscene' Political Behavior," *Christianity Today* (Apr 23 1982), 42—44.

[48] Neuhaus was a well—known Lutheran minister before becoming a Catholic priest.

[49] "Mainline Church Leaders Hit for 'Obscene' Political Behavior" *Christianity Today*, 42—44.

The coherence of PFAW's agenda grounded mainline interests without relying on their own troubled internal support structure. Reflecting back on his time in television in order to present something useful to his audience in a spiritual key, Lear argued that through the "spiritual nature of laughter" experienced in his writing people were fed an idea— most notably empathy or compassion for the differing point of view. The stasis that defined the NCC's future was assuaged slightly by Lear's emphasis on his notion of the spiritual that pushed past the bottom—line thinking that to him defined his age. The intricate connections evidenced by the NCC's meeting steered the mainline away from the rocky unease of its political future towards the safer harbor of a people dedicated to vigorous deliberative politics— within limits.

PFAW's Composition

People for the American Way's formation was a product of its organizational time. Relying on the very methods that would catapult the Christian Right into political dominance including direct mailings, church—basement meetings, and informational flyer and bumper sticker campaigns, Lear and his dedicated staff organized their own advocacy group around a collective concern for the nation's democratic life and its flourishing public square. For PFAW, the best way to protect this space from an overly—imposed politics of singularity as part of a broader, interfaith coalition of religious diversity was to champion the separation of church and state and first amendment rights of free religious expression.

When asked, the American Way constituted these elements and more as the most cherished components of American civic life including "pluralism, individuality, freedom of thought and religion…tolerance and compassion for others." Overseen by the likes of Father Theodore Hesburgh, Rev. James M. Dunn, and Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, PFAW took its message of freedom of thought to the viewing public through PSAs, local informational meetings, and

fundraisers including an inaugural meeting in Lear's own home. One line in particular from a *Los Angeles Times* article revealed a great deal about PFAW's original aspirations as an educational nonprofit seeking to engage the public on a number of pressing issues, "For months the group has been holding meetings in church basements and private homes throughout the Southeast and Midwest. The people who attend are given information packets and asked to contribute money so the group can send out speakers to debate members of the Moral Majority and other conservative organizations around the country."[50]

The organization's dedication to combating the political and Christian Right called not only for a coherent set of principles disseminated widely through TV and Hollywood, but it also included a mobile collection of voices willing to travel and debate its political antitheses in public. PFAW possessed both a disciplined plan for distributing its educational material and a commitment to raising awareness about the plurality of views on a given issue. The living embodiment of the federally executed Fairness Doctrine, those who went out from People for the American Way into boardrooms and living rooms did so out of a desire to present the discussion surrounding an issue as an alternative to the singular answer provided by the Christian Right and its Bible scorecards.[51] A closer look at PFAW's founding mission statement and its literature reveals an organizational apparatus designed to uphold freedom of thought, yet there were stipulations. Assuming that the content of one's utterance was not beyond the pluralist pale, a

[50] Keith Love, "Lear Tackles Moral Majority: Producer, Religious Leaders Form Group to Spur Diversity," *Los Angeles Times* (Dec 13 1981), A3.

[51] The Fairness Doctrine stated that those who maintained broadcast licenses were obligated to give air time to issues of public importance (often couched in the terms of the "public interest") while presenting such discussion in a manner that was balanced or equitable (often referred to as "equal time"). While equal time was not a requirement of this policy, the holders were obliged to present contrasting views of the same issue.

tendency that was most evident with speakers such as Falwell, Robertson, and historically Father Charles Coughlin, then PFAW was there to help.

However, if a particular statement or declaration relied on exclusion or division for its unifying content, then PFAW had to make a decision— protect the space of free exchange, which possessed its own PFAW—authored rules, or defend the content, whatever it may be. When it came to the electronic church and its many conservative televangelists, PFAW simply decided to reinforce the parameters of public deliberation rather than the content of the church's message. This decision proved costly for all of those involved including Lear and the NCC, since it was Lear himself, and his spiritual agenda, that PFAW most closely represented in its public encounters with the Christian Right.

"Evangelists of the electronic pulpit who imply that God is a conservative Republican who hates the ERA, abortion, Panama Canal treaties and 55—mph speed limits and will condemn to eternal hell all who vote otherwise aren't the only ones who can wage a political holy war," reporter Kenneth R. Clark wrote in October of 1980 for *The Pittsburgh Press*. "A coalition of clergy and laymen, led by Norman Lear, the king of sitcoms, has formed a jihad of their own."[52] Numerous articles from this period relied on the trope of the extremist power from the Middle East for much of their persuasiveness since the events of 1979 were not too far

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[52] Kenneth R. Clark, "Norman Lear, Clergy Team to Fight Morality Politics," C5. A number of articles relied on images and tropes from the Middle East in general and the Iranian Revolution in 1979 in particular in order to make sense of the electronic church and its preachers such as Jerry Falwell. More often than not, the author leans to the middle or to the political left. In these instances, the electronic church as a descriptive category takes on an oppressive tone since most of its purveyors are described by the same author as "media manipulators." For another example of this type of analysis from a significant academic voice then and now, see Peter Berger, "The Class Struggle in American Religion, *Christian Century* (Feb 25 1981), 194—199. I will return to this particular article for a more in depth treatment either in this dissertation or later in the book project in order to make a broader, sociologically informed argument about the underlying societal tension that undergirded the development of the culture wars along lines of class, or more specifically, along the lines of the "new class" and its religious and political predilections.

behind in the nation's collective rearview mirror. Additionally, those in the media who utilized such images in sources such as the *New York Times* or the *Christian Century* often tended to lean to the political left in their politics. This meant that a newspaper article was at once a source of "news," but also an iteration of ignorance about the very individuals or groups under media scrutiny.

Much of this subtlety was lost, however, amidst outcries from both left and right *less* over particular policy arguments or concerns and *more* over the means of political deliberation themselves, or lack thereof. This media—saturated environment led to the production of PFAW's founding mission statement in addition to numerous pamphlets, leaflets, and short PSAs as part of its foundational organizing moment. Former Dean of Yale Divinity School Colin Williams composed one of PFAW's earliest position papers that articulated the non—profit's intent and aspirations for American public life in light of the Christian Right.[53] "People for the American Way has as its initial aim the encouragement of participation in the political process and reaffirmation of commitment to the American Way: a commitment marked not by polarization or demon hunting, but by a mutual search for consensus in an atmosphere of mutual respect." "The problem is not that the evangelical right takes political positions," Williams writes, "The problem lies in their refusal to respect those who differ. Branded as enemies of God, those they oppose are judged to be subversive of America's true interests."[54]

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[53] Due to the fact that the archives at People for the American Way's headquarters in Washington DC were being relocated to the Library of Congress during the writing of this dissertation, references to primary source material from the organization itself often come from second hand accounts in newspaper articles and chapters from edited scholarly work on the Christian Right.

[54] Jim Castelli, "People for the American Way Aim for Political Participation," *The Dispatch* (Feb 25 1981), 17.

Williams' source of disquiet, like those of Lear and his Christian supporters, concerned the means and method of conservative Protestant participation in American public life rather than the explicit content of such participation. For PFAW, divisive measures that excluded in order to identify coherent constituencies as targets of direct mailing campaigns reduced the political complexity of a particular policy concern down to a singular "Christian position" despite the myriad of ways one could interpret it. For Williams, Hesburgh, and Lear, this type of politics mirrored the "torturing of scripture" that took place in the electronic pulpits of Falwell and others, yet in this instance the political process itself, along with its sacred documents, served as the source material for such torturing. In other words, the scriptural concerns of Hesburgh and Lear found their mirror image in the American public sphere in the Christian Right's tendency to simplify the diversity of opinions surrounding a given issue down to a single perspective.

The "atmosphere of mutual respect" that Williams foregrounded was an essential component in PFAW's remedy for "demon hunting" and the polarization that it saw emanating from conservative Protestantism. The mutuality of behavior that Williams' claims depended on, which for PFAW was indispensable to a harmonious public, was arguably a product of what each side mutually sought— consensus. Williams' notion of an atmosphere of respect depended on his notion of consensus instead of functioning as a precedent for such a consensus' successful formulation. In other words, political actors had to buy into the very terms of public deliberation themselves, those of a consensus—supported atmosphere of respect, before stepping into the public discussion as citizens. The simplicity of this arrangement made its logic appear coherent and widely accessible to a variety of organizations and individuals.

Unfortunately, the fact that every move made by Falwell, Robertson, or the electronic church in general functioned as an affront to Williams and Lear's calls for greater understanding and pluralism in American public life made PFAW's media campaigns that much more significant. In this sense, PFAW contributed to the very polarization it sought to rectify through its own forms of rhetorical stridency on behalf of the American Way and its expression through consensus. For Lear, his organization encouraged participation, not further division, "People for the American Way allows citizens to enlist and be active. Everything's a theatre to me," Lear stated, "We had a broad canvas five nights a week when we were dealing with television. Now, with the organization, we have an even broader canvas, one that allows all Americans to be a part."[55] Despite the participatory tenor of Lear's words, they arguably could not be realized without first adhering to its broader assumptions about how best to "mix" religion and politics. In short, Falwell mixed while Lear and others campaigned for fairness in American public life. This irony, while acknowledged at times in op—ed pieces and short articles, was lost on Lear and his considerable support system of religious and business leaders.

Further evidence of PFAW's expansive yet limited vision of democratic harmony can be found in the organization's mission statement and a selection of its publications, which were considerable throughout the 1980s. As primarily an education—based, non—profit organization, People for the American Way sought to address both the political iniquities committed in public by the Christian Right and the reasons for why such a constituency could prove to be so compelling in transitional times in the first place. A number of pamphlets, leaflets, and meetings helped to disseminate the information Lear and others thought was needed in order to confront a divisive, exclusionary politics of certitude. In this way, PFAW sought to educate by raising

[55] Becky Theim, "Lear Pushing American Way," *The Bulletin* (Oct 17 1982), C3.

awareness about a number of key issues including the separation of church and state, the rights of women in the workplace, and the dangers of the Christian Right. The organization accomplished these goals by sending representatives out to correct politically and religiously conservative statements and producing primers and question/answer guides for those with unsure political footing.

Mission Statement

If left to its own devices, the American public would witness "a rise in 'demonology' and hostility, a breakdown in community and social spirit, a deterioration of free and open dialogue, and the temptation to grasp at simplistic solutions for complex problems."[56] Not only do these words take advantage of what one scholar of religion has called "chaos rhetoric" for much of its saliency and relevancy, but it also assumes a great deal about the nature of educating oneself on the pressing issues of the day.[57] For Lear, challenging times called for discerning answers that surveyed the complexity of a given political challenge. His public addresses about the Christian Right also depended upon a similar assumption about how best to address the social controversies confronting the country. In short, the conservative and Christian right provided their audiences with what to Lear appeared to be anything but complexity, which called for an

[56] For more, see http://www.pfaw.org/about—us/founding—mission. Accessed March 5, 2015.

[57] For more, see Leslie Durrough Smith, *Chaos Rhetoric: Sex, Speech, and the Politics of Concerned Women for America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014). For Smith, chaos rhetoric "is a type of speech used by a group to naturalize its own political agendas. It persuades by using fear, threat, and anxiety imagery to generate social sympathy for a position that aligns with the group's own political platforms, which the group offers as the resolution to the very threat it rhetorically created." Four characteristic of chaos rhetoric as demonstrated by Smith are "oversimplification, defensive focus, issue deflection, and urgency." Drawing on the work of theorist Julia Kristeva, Smith argues that chaos rhetoric often responds most effectively to what it doesn't quite understand. In this sense, that which PFAW didn't understand, namely Falwell and others in the electronic church, "disturbed the overarching order that the group [PFAW] presupposes, thus threatening to undo the epistemological basis on which rests the culture's defining power structures." It is also in this sense that we can describe Lear's reaction to Falwell and other televangelists as monstrous— literally beyond comprehension.*

equal and opposite response of awareness in a key of consensus. More specifically, a response based on the American Way was exactly what such political discord called for.

For those who composed the mission statement, which included Lear, Hesburgh, politician Barbara Jordan, and former CEO of *Time* Andrew Heiskell, the American Way consisted of value statements and empathy, "By this [the American Way], we mean pluralism, individuality, freedom of thought, expression, and religion, a sense of community, and tolerance and compassion for others." The first four characteristics addressed the Christian Right specifically in terms of its inability to appreciate certain elements of the American Way embodied in a diversity of opinions. The latter calls for tolerance and compassion highlighted the religious liberal commitment to empathy materialized in public that PFAW hoped to demonstrate to its supporters. They also gestured to another essential characteristic of a harmonious public that was deeply indebted to the consensus ideals PFAW hoped to build its mobilization on—civility.[58] The long term agenda of PFAW included "reducing social tension and polarization, fostering understanding among different segments of our society, and increasing the level and quality of public dialogue…we shall communicate with the American people through printed materials, radio, television, public lectures, and discussions."[59] By way of the printed word and the latest in communications technology, PFAW sought a more robust and informed public

[58] The notion of civility and PFAW will be addressed later in this chapter. In short, a number of concerned members of the Protestant mainline couched their criticisms of the Christian Right in terms of civility/uncivil behavior in public. Most often their calls for greater understanding required either a more respectful atmosphere (as argued by Williams) or a more civil one, which relied heaviest on sociologist Robert Bellah's popular formulation, "civil religion." The adjective "civil" implied both a religious politics equally accessible to all who would question it *and* a normative description of how one properly conducted herself in public that did not depend on parochial reasons for a particular political claim.

[59] For more, see http://www.pfaw.org/about—us/founding—mission. Accessed March 10, 2015.

through its own awareness campaigns as a relatively unencumbered space within which citizens could voice their opinions without any threat of political apostasy.

A second component to PFAW's approach to public consensus required information gathering and the subsequent exposure of its findings in line with its awareness objectives. "We will gather information, analyze it, and distribute our findings to the public in a manner that provides for full and fair exposition on the issues. "Our highest purpose," as delineated in the statement, "is to nurture a national climate that encourages and enhances the human spirit rather than one which divides people into hostile camps."[60] There is arguably no better synopsis of PFAW's approach to the Christian Right as a reflection of Lear's own spiritual agenda than these preceding sentences. Under Lear's and others' leadership, People for the American Way strove for a deliberative space where each citizen had the requisite information on hand in order to make an informed political decision. Individuals within PFAW gathered, analyzed, and distributed crucial information about what they considered to be a threat in itself or under threat by conservative Protestant politics. This process did not involve Lear directly, but he most certainly saw a given day's reports and findings through internal office memos and communications.[61] In fact, Lear's own research for his unrealized movie "Religion" established a

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[60] For more, see http://www.pfaw.org/about—us/founding—mission. For scholar of religion Jason Bivins, this claim is evidence of a Christian antiliberal characteristic of politics, namely, "political illegibility." As Bivins argues, this term "is suggestive of the ways in which the specificity and robustness of religious beliefs (particularly Christian antiliberal concerns about political order) cannot be 'read' or understood using the political logic of 'left' and 'right' or perhaps by any political ideology" (10). For more, see Jason Bivins, *The Fracture of Good Order: Christian Antiliberalism and the Challenge to American Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

[61] Evidence can be found online as part of the virtual page for PFAW's archives at the Bancroft Library at the University of California at Berkeley. The finding aid can be found here: http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/hb596nb6hz/. Accessed April 12, 2014.
Additionally, as part of the Center for Right Wing Studies at Berkeley, a number of PFAW primary sources have been made available including the transcripts of many programs that were recorded by PFAW employees, individually authored notes, and factsheets on the most troubling issues of the time designed for distribution. A

similar conclusion— Christian Right politics created more divisions than it addressed. This program helps to explain why the organization thought it was important to send rhetorical counterweights out into the fractious world of politics— namely in order to level the epistemic playing field by exposing the voting public to the same edifying information.

The program also helps to contextualize how and why PFAW came to possess thousands of hours of recorded tape and hundreds of pages of transcribed text in its archives documenting who, when, and what an individual or organization stated that qualified as a potential danger to American civil liberties or served as an example of Christian Right—authored bigotry or religious discrimination. Such examples were not only archived by PFAW itself, but if they served a particular need in real time then sound bites or the printed text of what was said would be distributed to the proper authorities in order to "distribute our findings to the public" as a "fair exposition of the issues." In light of these concerns, we are able to understand PFAW's mission statement and its stated goals as a product of what I identify as civic vigilance, a relentless monitoring of public spaces in the name of the first amendment and its constitutional protections, "By educating the American people and raising their level of understanding about the basic tenets by which our society is sustained, People for the American Way will fulfill its mission."[62]

Unfortunately for PFAW and its allies, the arguments that defined the relationship between religion and American politics in the 1980s concerned the very tenets that PFAW took for granted as uniformly accepted across the country. In fact, the contests between liberal and conservative actors like Lear and President Ronald Reagan explored the means and manner

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sample of such issues includes Censorship, School Prayer, Creationism, Secular Humanism, and Sex Education. These factsheets typically include a number of newspaper articles addressing the issue in real time along with an introductory note by PFAW meant to give the receiving party the appropriate context for understanding the controversy surrounding the topic in question.

[62] For more, see http://www.pfaw.org/about—us/founding—mission. Accessed March 13, 2014.

through which one engaged politics itself in addition to particular policy debates themselves.[63] In this way, Lear and PFAW attempted to remind the American citizenry, over and against the Christian Right, of the proper way of conducting oneself politically through civility, respect, and well—informed claims. For Lear and his fellow co—founders, articulating this message through the apparatus of an interfaith organization made their claims against an intrusive Protestant force that much stronger since they could be seen as embodying PFAW's own set of civic and spiritual values. In a war of words played out across countless television screens and newspaper headlines around the country, PFAW represented itself as consistently adhering to its values of mutual respect and understanding. Despite this consistency, an organization promoting tolerance inevitably became intolerant of an(other) form of intolerance— the Christian Right.

Cultural Productions of PFAW

In addition to numerous PSAs, factsheets, and pamphlets, PFAW also authored a number of texts for public distribution that served as both an argument for a civil public and a resource for fellow defenders of the American Way. Looking back upon an otherwise fractious decade of discord and disagreement, author Jim Castelli composed a text entitled *A Plea for Common Sense: Resolving the Clash between Religion and Politics* in 1988 that attempted to delineate the differences between proper and improper engagements with politics from religious positions in public.[64] In fact, the text's entire first chapter, appropriately titled, "How to Mix Religion and Politics," establishes five distinct rules for mixing the two that emphasizes common sense, civil

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[63] For more on this debate, see Norman Lear and Ronald Reagan, "A Debate on Religious Freedom," *Harper's* (Oct 1984), 15—20.

[64] Jim Castelli, *A Plea for Common Sense: Resolving the Clash between Religion and Politics* (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988). Castelli's plea, captured seamlessly by the title, is one thoroughly suffused with aspirations of re—establishing political consensus through calls for a return to common sense. This call is not unlike those made on the Christian and political Right for a return to simpler times in regards to gender, sexuality, and race.

religion, and the American Way.[65] For Lear, who wrote the book's forward, Castelli's words established a civic baseline for engaged citizens to make their individual claims in public without infringing upon others' right to do the same.

As part of a "focused response to the Christian Right" in defense of America's constitutional liberties, PFAW made raising awareness central to its various media campaigns by educating the public about the inconsistencies and inequities committed by the Christian Right in general and individual televangelists in particular. "The Religious Right myth holds that if its values are not codified, then all values and all religion have been driven out of the public arena," argued Lear. "While the Religious Right offers the wrong way to 'mix religion and politics,' there is a right and proper way to do so, while respecting our national heritage and the spirit of liberty."[66] If those on the Right were guilty of improperly mixing religion and politics, then where could citizens look for proper examples of how to mix religion and politics properly?[67] For Lear, a majority of Americans already shared a common framework for understanding human flourishing. "Most Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and 'secular humanists' share a

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[65] For an analysis of the recent history of civil religion, see Raymond Haberski Jr., *God and War: American Civil Religion since 1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

[66] Norman Lear, "Foreword," in *A Plea for Common Sense: Resolving the Clash between Religion and Politics* (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988), x—xi.

[67] Despite PFAW's insistence on the distinction between proper and improper usages of religion in public, a distinction mobilized primarily as a defensive measure against the influx of televangelists and conservative strategists into American public life in the late 1970s, each notion remained indebted to a particularly Protestant understanding of civic space. As scholar of religion Chad Seales argues, "In the United States, a public form of liberal Protestantism underwrote the terms of the removal and reentry of religion as a universal category from civil society, dictating the social politics and political workings of secularism." Seales defines secularism in a manner conducive to many of the arguments made in this dissertation, namely "as an epistemological conception of difference and its relationship to American pluralism and diversity." For more, see Chad Seales, *The Secular Spectacle: Performing Religion in a Southern Town* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014). Seales' insight builds on those of fellow scholar of religion Tracy Fessenden, who argues that Protestantism's expansion within the US depended on its secularization within the broader culture. For more see Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

set of beliefs on how we should live here on earth, even as we differ over questions that may never be settled in this life."[68] The form of Lear's expression perhaps said more than his content ever could— "Most Protestants, Catholics, and Jews." In this sense, civilly—minded inter—faith groups, along with the Protestant mainline, exemplified what Lear and PFAW supported as the American Way of doing politics. Despite the appeals to common sense, Lear and PFAW's educational productions were anything but common.

Castelli followed Lear's lead from the foreword by laying the groundwork for a common sense approach to religion and politics. His intentions for the text were clear, "This book is an effort to present…a framework within which to understand the relationship between religion and politics." Unlike PFAW policy primers, which listed the most contested issues of the day by discussing them in question and answer format for readers to follow along, *A Plea for Common Sense* identified potential threats to the free exchange of ideas while also prescribing an antidote to the civic and constitutional challenges still causing trouble in the eyes of Lear and others. This prescription came in the form of a normative proscription of any and all political behavior that was beyond the pale of the American Way as defined by the organization and its attentive monitors of televised public speech. Like much of the literature produced by PFAW at the time, this document also contributed to raising awareness about potentially dangerous individuals or social movements. In this text's case, Pat Robertson's campaign for President disturbed many at

[68] Lear, "Foreword" in *A Plea for Common Sense*, x—xi. Lear not only objected to the manner in which the Christian Right conducted itself politically, but he also disagreed vehemently with the Right's politics themselves. "When they tell us that putting prayer back in the public schools will solve the problems of teenage suicide and drug use—they are misleading millions of us, blurring our vision of the real problems and causing great damage" (xi). This distinction between method and content challenges Lear's own telling of the story, which usually does not venture beyond firm disagreements with the *manner* and *methods* of conservative religious actors in politics.

PFAW including Castelli, who titled his Robertson chapter, "Pat Robertson: Extremist with a Baby Face."

Castelli argued that a common sense approach was far superior to the Christian Right's because it did not depend on parochial claims or absolutist arguments. "Civil religion makes no claim that its values will get you into heaven; it only claims that they will make you a good citizen."[69] A good citizen was also a civil citizen as part of civil religion's claim to a "public religion" and to civility itself in American public life. "The Religious Right rejects civility as a sign of a lack of commitment to 'biblical values,'" argues Castelli, "but the Founders rightly saw that civility was essential to the maintenance of the republic." Not only does this citation speak to the dependence of PFAW on the notion of civil religion for much of its theorizing about American religion and politics, but it also demonstrates the religious left's own tendency to wax nostalgic about a past authority on all issues church and state. In other words, a reference to "the Founding Fathers" functioned very similarly, in a discursive sense, to the Christian Right's tendency to refer back either to the biblical text or to Jesus himself as arbiter all of things good and contemporary.

Castelli further argued for a five—rule system for mixing religion and politics that focused on *how* the two should come together instead of whether they should in the first place. Most of these rules followed the basic outlines of the first amendment, arguing that the federal government could neither single out any one religion specifically for special treatment nor subject candidates for public office to a religious test. They also reflected Lear's understanding of civic engagement to the letter. Where PFAW differed in relation to the amendments was its emphasis on how to claim a political position in public. Rule number two demonstrates this point

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[69] Jim Castelli, *A Plea for Common Sense,* 19.

succinctly, "In entering the political arena, religious leaders may not rely on doctrine, appeals to religious authority, or claims to speak for God to advance their case; they must play by the same rules as everyone else and argue their case on its merits."[70]

Students and theorists of liberal democracy will recognize this formulation of the relationship between religion and politics as an outgrowth of the writings of philosopher John Rawls, who famously coined the notion of "public reason" as a way of describing how differing claims within a pluralistic democracy are adjudicated by both the listening parties and the rules of the public itself. For Rawls, and arguably Lear and PFAW, the ideal of public reason is realized when "judges, legislators, chief executives, and other government officials, as well as candidates for public office, act from and follow the idea of public reason and explain to other citizens their reasons for supporting fundamental political positions…in this way, they fulfill what I call their duty of civility to one another and to other citizens."[71]

The confluence between Rawls and PFAW can be seen most clearly in the notion of "the rules of the game," which in this case referred to the manner and methods through which individuals defended their political positions in public. Not only did one's reasons have to be equally accessible to one's adjudicators as PFAW argued, but they also had to contribute to the overarching civility that determined how differing opinions encountered one another as products

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[70] Castelli, *A Plea to Common Sense*, 20—22. For those familiar with the study of liberal democracy, this notion of publicly accessible reasoning is a product of "public reason," a notion developed by Philosopher John Rawls. Based on the work of philosopher of religion Richard Amesbury, both Lear and Rawls can be understood as participating in the same *liberal imaginary* despite their apparent differences. For more, see Richard Amesbury, "Rethinking 'Religion and Politics': Reflections on the Reception and Import of Talal Asad's *Genealogies of Religion,*" *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 43:1 (February 2014), 2—7.

[71] John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 64:3 (Summer 1997), 766—767.

of potentially antithetical knowledge systems.[72] In light of such systems, Castelli concludes his text by stating outright how religion itself is either good or bad for the American political system. On the one hand, "Religion is good…when it supports the civil religion: when it speaks out with civility and respect; when it accepts the principles of tolerance and pluralism; when it appeals to a shared sense of morality and not to religious authority or doctrine."

On the other hand, "Religion is bad…when it undermines the civil religion; when it speaks of political matters with the certitude of faith in a pluralistic society in which faith cannot be used as apolitical standard; when it treats opponents as agents of Satan; when it violates the

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[72] Drawing on the collective work of Joan Chittister and Martin Marty, Castelli argued that two world views tended to dominate the political scene when it came to religious activism and which social and cultural challenges received the most attention. This claim emerged from within the same religio—political moment as Robert Wuthnow's arguments for "two civil religions" and James Davison Hunter's contention that the US was in a culture war. For Chittister, each side possessed its own agenda for confronting the country's ills, economic or otherwise. "Conservative activists 'are against abortion, sex education in the public schools, the teaching of evolution, the Equal Rights Amendment, and nuclear disarmament' while liberal activists 'were involved in housing, healthcare, human rights programs, education for social change, economic redevelopment, and the peace movement'" (26). Chittister's words suggest that in the wake of the social movements for human rights in the 1960s, conservatives and liberals staked out their respective territories when it came to the defining issues of the last half century. In addition, her words also add credibility to the claim that the "new class" did indeed possess a political and religious orientation towards the mainline and its interfaith sensibilities. In short, Chittister and others writing in the 1980s pointed to a fundamental restructuring of American politics along clearly differentiated lines within American society that cut less across denominational divisions and more within denominations themselves. It is in this sense that we can begin speaking of a "new denominationalism" and "new ecumenism" of the recent American religious past.
Another example of the differences between religious liberals and conservatives during this period reads as such, "Liberals abhor the smugness, the self—righteousness, the absolute certainty, the judgmentalism, the lovelessness of a narrow, dogmatic faith. Conservatives scorn the fuzziness, the marshmallow convictions, the inclusiveness that makes membership meaningless—the 'anything goes' attitude that views even Scripture as relative. Both often caricature the worst in one another and fail to perceive the best." This quotation came from a NCC official quoted in Robert Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishers, 1989), 22—23. Another way to identify the significance of Norman Lear and PFAW in American religious history is to locate references to him and his work in various works of academic scholarship. Not only did Martin Marty dedicate one of his many texts to Lear and his cause, but Wuthnow himself also relied on Lear for the opening of his prologue in *The Struggle for America's Soul*. In particular, Wuthnow opens with an anecdote about a video that was shown in a class on the Christian Right that took place in Princeton in the late 1980s. The video played a number of disturbing images and sound bites by those who the narrator identified as extremist and dangerous. The video in question was produced and overseen by Lear on behalf of People for the American Way and was narrated by none other than actor Burt Lancaster. The title, "Life and Liberty for all Who Believe," reflected PFAW's literature and activism in defense of American civil liberties. In addition, it also reflected PFAW's tendency to present the conservative and Christian Right in hyperbolic terms that were designed to rally support rather than facilitate understanding despite PFAW's educational aspirations.

precept of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom which formed the basis for the First Amendment."[73] Based on these words alone, it is not difficult to infer which tendency describes which constituency— PFAW or the Moral Majority. Those willing to adhere to the civility of religion in public, such as People for the American Way or other similarly themed advocacy groups, conducted themselves properly in public. It was this standard of political behavior that defined much of PFAW's non—profit work and media campaigns on behalf of Lear's spiritual vision and the American Way. In addition, the emphasis on "tolerance and pluralism" within "Good Religion" is a direct product of Lear's own concerns for the position of the religious minority in the United States— one that experienced a sense of precarity when confronted with the possibility of a religious majority or a strident voice that spoke to majority interests of morality and decency. In this sense, *A Plea for Common Sense* embodied PFAW's educational aspirations by distinguishing positive and negative uses of religion in addition to composing rules for the mixing of religion in politics.[74]

Along with this type of production, PFAW also authored guidebooks and primers for citizens and interested parties that presented the most important debates in an easily understood format: the question and answer. This type of text also listed organizational and institutional details about PFAW including its advisory boards, governing committees, and directors at the time of its founding. In 1982, People for the American Way published author David Bollier's

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[73] Castelli, *Plea for Common Sense*, 193.

[74] For scholar of religion Chad Seales, civility can be understood as "personal habits of democratic citizenship widely promoted throughout the nation, principally as 'civics' by liberal Protestants in voluntary organizations, such as the YMCA, and by Roman Catholics in their own ecclesiastical and educational institutions…in the South, white Protestants used it to maintain public control of black bodies." For the purposes of this dissertation, Lear and PFAW relied on the very same discursive powers of civility out of an attempt to define proper and improper usages of religion in public life. For more, see Chad Seales, *The Secular Spectacle: Performing Religion in a Southern Town* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Liberty and Justice for Some: Defending a Free Society from the Radical Right's Holy War on Democracy.[75] Decorated with an image of the statue of liberty holding the torch of liberty in one hand and a heart in the other, *Liberty and Justice for Some* explored the most pressing concerns that PFAW attempted to address through its awareness campaigns and PSAs. Issues such as book censorship, church/state separation, mandatory school prayer, creationism, and the role of religion in public policy defined the political terrain upon which PFAW would define itself as an advocacy group fighting on behalf of Americans' first amendment rights. In particular, this text functioned as primer, resource guide, and document of public record simultaneously.

As a primer, the text utilized the question and answer format to investigate the historical relationship between church and state and the manner in which the Christian Right attempted to erode the wall of separation that stood between them. As a resource guide, *Liberty and Justice for Some* provided its readers with countless citations and bibliographies for further reading and research in the areas of tolerance, civility, and conservative politics. As a document of public record, Bollier gave his readers unadulterated exposure to some of the most virulent quotations from individuals such as Jerry Falwell, Phyllis Schlafly, and Pat Robertson. As part of PFAW's commitment to raising awareness by distributing information to the public that it considered essential to the *public interest*, the text emphasized the less than charitable opinion many in the Christian Right had for Lear and others who worked for PFAW. Lastly, Bollier viewed his primer as a catalyst for political mobilization.

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[75] The title of this text possessed a history of its own. One of the television pilots that Lear wrote for ABC was titled "Justice for All." This pilot, in its third iteration, went on to become what most know today as "All in the Family" for CBS. Although the titles are not exactly the same, this connection is but one of many between the television work Lear did in the 1970s and his non—profit organizing in the early 1980s. For more, see David Bollier, *Liberty and Justice for Some: Defending a Free Society from the Radical Right's Holy War on Democracy* (New York, NY: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1982).

The book was nothing if not a reason to get involved in American politics on behalf of the American Way against those who would violate its principal values of tolerance, pluralism, and civility. Lear and others at PFAW depended on the assumption that if exposed to the horrors of the Christian Right's political aspirations as heard by its primary spokespersons, citizens would respond in kind in defense of the very rights that made such utterances possible in the first place. In other words, PFAW hoped that the right combination of shocking quotation and bibliographic data would catalyze Americans to defend the only sensible politics in American public life— one drawn from common sense itself. The composition of PFAW's leadership said as much about this goal as Lear's leadership did in establishing PFAW as an awareness—raising non—profit.

PFAW's Organizational Context: The Non—Profit Goes to Battle

As one can see, People for the American Way was the product of multiple individuals and instances of institutional support beyond yet inclusive of Lear's own spiritual idiosyncrasies. It was also, however, thoroughly a product of its socio—economic times. Recent monographs by historians Robert O. Self and Daniel Rodgers have attempted to grapple with our contemporary moment by foregrounding "the family" and fracture as central narrative motifs of the last half—century of American history.[76] The gradual displacement of political and economic causes for social and cultural concerns as an outgrowth of the move towards "identity politics" following the freedom movements of the 1960s made what happened to American families that much more important to some and dire to others.[77] As a result, "the family" emerged as one of the most (if

[76] Both works are particularly important for this study because they identify the most influential religious and social developments that have shaped political activism and mobilization since the 1960s.

[77] For more on this transition, see Jason Bivins, *The Fracture of Good Order: Christian Antiliberalism and the Challenge to American Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) and Whitney Strub,

not *the* most) powerful organizing trope for political and religious mobilization in the second half of the twentieth—century.[78] The once powerful welfare state of America's mid—century, one that initially provided for families through social programming and economic safety nets, had gradually begun to weaken under the relentless criticisms authored by the nation's racial, gender, and ethnic minorities as the nation experienced one traumatic event after another.

In addition, various religious constituencies, including those within conservative Protestantism, viewed such assistance as an over—extension of federal power that resembled other instances of government overreach such as the Supreme Court's 1962 *Engel v. Vitale* school prayer decision.[79] As a result, the notion of the family became something to defend out of a sense of protection instead of provision. This distinction contributed to the ongoing fracturing of public life as new organizational bodies arose, including think tanks, national magazines, and special interest groups, which were dedicated to a particular religio—political view of the world over and against its perceived opposition. New religious and political allegiances that seemingly ignored more traditional alliances along denominational lines aided the organizing of protection and provisions—based constituencies and organizations further dividing the country along a number of culturally—determined lines of fracture.

Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013).

[78] Seth Dowland, *Family Values and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

[79] The importance of this event in the history of the Christian Right cannot be overstated. Although some argue that abortion itself was the galvanizing issue for the Right and its various political causes, alternative readings of the period suggest that government intervention, either in this case or the case concerning non—profit status and the practice of racial discrimination at Bob Jones University, was the primary antagonistic force. More subtle interpretations foreground selective appropriation instead of strict rejection or "backlash" by the Christian Right of countercultural currents in American society during the 1960s and 1970s. For more on this literature, see the various works of Axel R. Schäfer including *Countercultural Conservatives: American Evangelicalism from the Postwar Revival to the New Christian Right* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013) and ed., *American Evangelicals and the 1960s* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013).

The establishment of People for the American Way as an educationally—minded, non—profit organization by Lear and his supporters exemplified these socio—economic shifts in American public life in the lead up to the 1980s. The public association of candidate Ronald Reagan with the electronic church forecast an uncertain political future for Lear and those he gathered behind him as one of America's most beloved television producers *and* as the country's most vocal proponent of civility and tolerance in American politics. If interfaith coalition building described PFAW's claim to religious leverage in opposition to the perceived absolutist and exclusionary politics of the Christian Right, then the advocacy group operated as the elemental form of social cohesion for both the political right and left/center as a form of demographic mobilization, public—building, and resistance.[80] In other words, the currency of politics in this period depended upon utilizing the most recent means of communication and organization in order to compete for media exposure and narrative traction over and against the manifest opposition— both political and religious.

Sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow identifies this space of activism as the "third sector" of American politics.[81] This term does not describe the actions of the state or individuals

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[80] For more on the creation of publics, see Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14:1 (Winter 2002), 49—90. For Warner, a public is "the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse" addressed to both personal and impersonal audiences as a form of poetic world—making. Additionally, "Writing to a public helps to make a world, insofar as the object of address is brought into being partly by postulating and characterizing it." In this sense, Lear and PFAW assisted in bolstering two separate but interrelated publics— one that corresponded to the Christian Right and the other representing the interests of religious liberals in the early 1980s. Publics fulfill specific needs as well, namely "to concretize the world in which discourse circulates, to offer its members direct and active membership through language, to place strangers on a shared footing." And lastly, publics do not come and go without leaving a mark, "The projection of a public is a new, creative, and distinctively modern mode of power." In order to manifest as a public, discourses or performances "must characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate, projecting for that world a concrete and livable shape, and attempting to realize that world through address."

[81] Wuthnow's work is required reading not only for this period in recent US history, but also on the emergence of the "third sector" in American politics, which refers to the spaces between individuals and the federal government where politics themselves happen on a national scale. Generally speaking, national organizations and

themselves, but rather the collective action of non—profit organizations like PFAW or the Moral Majority that unfolds in the space between the federal and the individual. "It functions as a *public sphere*," Wuthnow argues, "That is, the third sector is of interest primarily as a locus of public discourse about the collective values of the society. It provides an arena in which fundamental values…can be discussed, experimented with, symbolized, and ritually enacted."[82] In this sense, debates and concerns that had once tended to remain local or regional came into view in national terms through disagreement with other similarly designed organizations within their respective media environments. As such, visibility itself became a significant source of religious capital in the exceedingly public confrontations between left and right over foreign policy in Central America and social policy on the domestic front. In fact, the names of many of these organizations themselves, including People for the American Way, the Christian Voice, and the Moral Majority, said as much about their intentions and aspirations as their media campaigns did in regards to the country they wanted to reclaim for their respective constituencies.

This style of politics depended on the single—issue organizing that had been commonplace throughout the 1960s as civil rights movement participants attempted to draw the nation's attention to the various socio—economic injustices experienced on a daily basis. By the 1980s coalitions had broadened to include a more diverse collection of individuals and vested

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non—profits typically reside in this space including the NCC and PFAW. As scholar of religion Jason Bivins argues, "It is in the political spaces that belong neither to the 'private sphere' nor to the state that Christian antiliberals have attempted to reinvigorate the political process itself, in the struggle for identity through organizing publics, coalescing political identities, and moral suasion" (Bivins, *The Fracture of Good Order*, 172). For Bivins, most of the verbal protest authored by the Christian Right against the state, not to mention the evangelical left as evidenced by figures such as Jim Wallis, can be understood as antiliberal speech in the public square.

[82] Robert Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 10—11.

interests, yet they came together around an equally partisan claim to the best "America" possible in contentious times. In this sense, individuals like Lear and Falwell played instrumental roles in the formation of various publics as an outgrowth of the organizing that took place on behalf of an internally—besieged nation.[83] Unlike previous periods of activism, however, the one that confronted Lear and Reagan possessed its own unique communicative possibilities, "Movements, political actions committees, direct—mail campaigns, and lobbying provided the framework in which participation in the public sphere was described."[84] Not only did this visibility hold more promise for the respective interested parties, but it also was a potent source of division and discord as one organizational absolute went against another in an age of fracture; political certainty clashed with civic toleration as the separation of church and state itself came into question through the claims of Lear, Falwell, and others on behalf of their concerned constituencies.

"Special interest groups give explicit identity to religious and religio—moral issues," argues Wuthnow. "They provide a way in which individuals can reinforce one another…as persons with common religious convictions. In so doing, they also make religious convictions more visible in the public arena."[85] The activities of PFAW and the Moral Majority demonstrate

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[83] Drawing on the work of philosopher Jürgen Habermas, Wuthnow argues that the public sphere "is diverse, divided into various subspheres or groupings constituted by interests and expertise…above all, it is oriented toward open discussion of basic societal goals" (12). Lear and Falwell not only took part in contributing to such a public, but they also engaged its rules and guidelines by either following or rejecting them. Lear tended to defend the basic principles of the public sphere by insisting that there was a proper way to mixing religion and politics. Falwell tended to reject these claims since they often resulted in excluding his claims from the wider national discussion of what type of nation would emerge from one of the more contentious decades in recent American political history. "Indeed, the two [liberals and conservatives] often gave lip service to the higher principles held by the other," Wuthnow argues, "but expressed disagreement over the tactics being used" (34). In other words, it wasn't that Falwell's politics were faulty to Lear and PFAW, but rather that the means by which he enacted them were an affront to the rules of public deliberation themselves.

[84] Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America's Soul*, 41.

this description aptly through their activities and organizing tactics both in print and over the airwaves. Lear's organization acted on behalf of an imagined polity otherwise free from internal discord since it functioned on largely shared concerns for mutual respect and toleration of political difference. This public functioned smoothly according to the guidelines of a pluralist consensus model within which diversity served as both unifying concept and evidence of unity forged out of multiplicity.[86] The Moral Majority not only contested the politics of PFAW, but it also questioned the very *terms* upon which their notion of public deliberation took place. Its political statements were neither careful nor civil according to the descriptive measure of PFAW since they did not respect the rules governing religion's appearance or usage in public life.[87]

This disjuncture between the two groups was largely a product of People for the American Way's notion of "the public," which served as "a safe space for pluralism, a zone wherein citizenship trumps sectarian desires to legislate morality."[88] Although Lear and others may not have realized it at the time, the formation of PFAW was one attempt among many to establish a reasoned, religiously—informed voice in the face of global movements of intolerance

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[85] Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America's Soul*, 52.

[86] For scholars of religion Courtney Bender and Pamela Klassen, pluralism can be understood as "casting prescriptive norms of identity and engagement, creating new possibilities and curtailing others." In addition, it defines "religion" as that which "is shared between diverse groups, whether as articulated in the language of harmonious interfaith coalitions or in the terminology of secular detractors." Lastly, as deployed by PFAW, notions of pluralism allow organizations to "powerfully articulate the very terms on which religious actors, interests, and understandings are recognized as such." For more, see Courtney Bender and Pamela Klassen, eds., *After Pluralism: Reimagining Religious Engagement* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2010), 1—30.

[87] For sociologist James Davison Hunter, the claims of PFAW can be understood as part of "the liberal reaction" during this period. The authors of such reactions could be found in organizations such as the ACLU, NOW, and the NCC. There are four themes that characterize this reaction according to Hunter: values/ideals, methods, negativism, and substance. Based on these four traits alone, we are able to locate PFAW's accusations concerning the Christian Right's intolerance and antidemocratic tendencies. For more, see James Davison Hunter, "The Liberal Reaction" in *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation* edited by Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow (New York, NY: Aldine Publishing, 1983), 150—161.

[88] Steven P. Miller, *Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born—Again Years* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 75—76.

that threatened to establish themselves on US shores through the means of the electronic church and the voices of those who populated its virtual pulpits.[89] It operated as a form of special interest activism as understood through the advocacy group in defense of interfaith values of religious pluralism and separation of church and state. Ironically enough, religious leaders during this period, including Falwell and Lear, arguably encouraged their constituencies with the same mantra despite their vehement differences, "awareness is the watchword, freedom the slogan, and action the mandate."[90]

If we can understand the third sector mobilization of this period as a collective reaction to the state and its growth in post—war America, in both supportive (PFAW) and critical (Moral Majority) modes, then Lear and Falwell have much more in common than initially realized.[91] Instead of particular policies or politics serving as the focal point of religious activism, the state itself became the oppositional force against which various communities of protest mobilized. As a result, the terms of debate for this particular period took place on a discursive level that certainly encompassed individual claims about federal policy made public, yet they centered on the apparatus of deliberation itself and its preservation in American public life— a task supported ardently by Lear and those at PFAW. Considered separately, each organization

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[89] By global I mean liberal awareness of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and its subsequent deployment by Lear, Peter Berger, and others in their attempts to understand conservative Protestantism by way of its fundamentalist, Pentecostal, and evangelical representatives in the American public.

[90] Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America's Soul*, 58.

[91] This is one of many arguments put forth by Wuthnow in *The Restructuring of American Religion*. For Wuthnow, "Special interest groups have arisen for the express purpose of combating, restraining, or promising certain types of government action" (114). This citation not only illuminates America's recent political history, but it also shifts analytic emphasis for scholars of religion and historians of American religion by querying the role of the liberal state in cultivating and/or suppressing religious life and practices within the US instead of beginning with America's religious multiplicity and its subsequent improvisational splendor. For more on the role of the state in American history, see Gary Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion: The Paradox of American Government from the Founding to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

furthered its cause through similar means including the use of print and television, charismatic leadership, and the deployment of chaos rhetoric.[92] Each group was also reactive in its own way— one responding to the other in kind. When considered together, however, a different picture emerges.

The formation of PFAW in the early 1980s pointed to the fracturing of American public life that had been ongoing since the 1960s over the role of the federal government in the lives of American citizens as it attempted to "legislate morality" through its various governing bodies. For Lear, the religious integrity of these structures, namely their ability to withstand appropriation by the Christian Right, was dubious at best in light Reagan's election to the oval office and Jimmy Swaggart's requests to pray the removal of Supreme Court justices. These examples proved to Lear that the nation's founding documents, including the First Amendment, would not be enough to stave off the civic nightmare that grew more ominous on the distant horizon of the country's political future.

What made these debates unique in the recent religious history of the US was that the content of morality itself, as well as its public and private applications, seemed to encompass many of the debates between liberals and conservatives including those between Lear and Reagan themselves.[93] "What had once been a sharp symbolic boundary between private morality and collective life," argues Wuthnow, "had become so ambiguous that writers and public figures began openly challenging the earlier privatistic notions."[94]Although initially supported and

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[92] For more, see Leslie Durrough Smith, *Chaos Rhetoric: Sex, Speech, and the Politics of Concerned Women for America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[93] For more on this debate, see Norman Lear and Ronald Reagan, "A Debate on Religious Freedom," *Harper's* (Oct 1984), 15—20.

understood in a completely different social register, one goal of “the movement” seemed to have been realized in the public sparring between People for the American Way and the Christian Right— the private had indeed become the political.

PFAW and Civility

The programming and policy concerns of PFAW remained educationally—focused throughout the course of the 1980s. Debates ranging from what should be taught and read in school classrooms to the selection of Supreme Court justices drew much of PFAW’s attention as it continued to find its footing in politically uneven times. For all of their concern for individual instances of discrimination, legislative injustices, or religious suppression, those who occupied the advisory board of PFAW, including Lear himself, typically relied on a broader set of values that reinforced the non—profit’s platform of first amendment rights and the separation of church and state. Capacious yet no less instructive of PFAW’s politics, these values included the free exchange of ideas, tolerance, diversity, liberty, dialogue, and perhaps most importantly, civility. If the spirit of liberty was under siege from the rhetorical onslaughts of the electronic church, then civility was not far behind in experiencing its own forms of civic abuse.

The liberal response or reaction to such challenges assumed a level of finality rarely before seen in public. “To be sure, there are few if any issues in the past century which have evoked such unilateral and resolute reaction on the part of such a broad coalition of liberal groups.”[95] This coalition was certainly indebted to its liberal forebearers who had taken up similar causes during the various freedom movements of the 1960s, but it also came together in hopes of addressing a disturbing force in American public life that grabbed newspaper headlines

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[94] Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, 201.

[95] James Davison Hunter, “The Liberal Reaction” in *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation* edited by Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow (New York, NY: Aldine Publishing, 1983), 156.

the globe over— conservative religiosity. Despite the fact that both PFAW and the Moral Majority committed the anti—democratic act of "deliberately attempting to monopolize the symbols of legitimacy (patriotism, Americanism, family, First Amendment, etc.)," one not completely unrelated to how scholars describe American wars of culture, it is PFAW that blended prescription with description in the face of consistent evangelical accomplishments in politics.[96] This epistemic blending found its bearings in the application of civility by PFAW to the country's many sources of political discord.[97]

Tolerance of difference, a diversity of opinions, a robust exchange of ideas— these broadly construed themes captured much of Lear and PFAW's activism and awareness campaigns in the early part of the 1980s. These particular values also mapped seamlessly onto previous interwar and mid—century efforts by activists who defended the US tradition of interfaith cooperation in the face of totalitarian inroads or the Lear—authored "moral McCarthyism" of the Christian Right epitomized in the bible scorecard.[98] In one historical moment, this pluralist configuration manifested as "Protestant, Catholic, and Jew." In another, a

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[96] James Davison Hunter, "The Liberal Reaction," 162.

[97] One such call could be found in the pages of *Christianity and Crisis*. Authored in March of 1979 by former senator Thomas J. McIntyre, an article titled, "Resisting the New Right: The Politics of Civility" hoped to explain why divisive politics were so "dangerously successful" to "liberals and moderates" and why they must not respond to the "New Right" in kind. "The truth," McIntyre wrote, "is that both sets of absolutes are worthy of respect, and that neither *absolutely* precludes the other." Senator McIntyre's quote comes from a selection of his larger book titled, *The Fear Brokers* and published by Pilgrim Press. He was particularly qualified to speak on these issues because he was one of many senators who was unseated during this period by the little understood Christian Right and its grassroots politics. For more, see Thomas J. McIntyre, "Resisting the New Right: The Politics of Civility," *Christianity and Crisis* (Mar 5 1979), 43—48.

[98] Among the many characteristics of the Christian Right that offended Lear and PFAW the certainty of the bible scorecard was arguably at the top of the list. Not only did this type of print media evaluate the quality of one's Christianity based on voting records, but it also established *the* Christian vote on a particular issue or set of issues regardless of the diversity of opinion. The conversation that in theory was supposed to follow a political claim made in public was unable to get off the ground because the form of the scorecard itself undermined any chance of a dialogue between differing opinions. In short, the scorecard violated many of PFAW's guidelines for properly mixing religion and politics by shutting down conversation in addition to identifying political opinions with the certainty of God.

"Tri—Faith America" rang clearest on behalf of America's rich history of religious diversity.[99] By the time Lear established PFAW, this notion had transformed yet again into simply, "The American Way."[100] People for the American Way's confidence in these ideals stemmed from its commitment to education and awareness since it contributed to a healthy democratic exchange of deliberation and debate— one ideally suited to the discord and division it confronted in the wake of Reagan's election to the presidency.

The attention PFAW paid to sites of learning, instruction, and idea formation functioned as a transitional moment in the recent history of the United States as the martial legacy of the Cold War, a conflict between competing ideas within the mind itself, resurfaced with a vengeance in the publications of PFAW and numerous leaders of the Christian Right including Jerry Falwell, Timothy LeHaye, and Francis Schaeffer.[101] This concentration on ideational production was expertly deployed by PFAW in its consistent surveillance of the Christian Right's media usages, its substantial archive of right—wing movements in the US, and its creation of various informational factsheets for concerned constituencies. PFAW echoed the

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[99] For the definitive work on this topic, see Kevin Shultz, *Tri—Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Post—War America to its Protestant Promise* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[100] My tracking of pluralist projects over the course of the twentieth century does not mean to imply that one simply replaced the other. In fact, one could argue that Lear's reliance on the "American Way" took advantage of the interwar formulation more so than the Tri—Faith formation since his frame of biographical reference was the 1930s. He was also known to work with the National Council of Christians and Jews and even received an award from them during the 1970s.

[101] Texts that defined the 1980s in such mental terms are as follows: Jerry Falwell, *Listen America!* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1981); Tim LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1980); Francis Schaeffer, *The Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1981). This emphasis on the mind and ideas was echoed by conservative strategists as well during the early 1980s. "It's a war of ideas," argued Paul Weyrich, "It may not be with rockets and missiles, but it is a war nevertheless. It's a war of ideology, it's a war of ideas, and it is a war about our way of life. And it has to be fought with the same intensity, I think, and dedication as you would fight a shooting war." Think tanks echoed this call to engage one's opponents upon the battlefield of the mind. In 1986, the vice president of the Heritage Foundation described his role as such, "We are the intellectual shock troops of the conservative revolution." For more, see Daniel Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1—14.

emphasis on ideology as witnessed during the Cold War, yet it also prefigured the terms of public debate in the age of fracture as defined by the wars of culture that would engulf the US in the early 1990s. Recalling the history of interfaith exchange across denominations and cultures assisted PFAW in staking its claim for tolerance in the American public over and against the Christian Right, but it needed additional ideological support in order to establish its political efficacy as an alternative to an abrasive and divisive politics of absolute certainty.

The calls for civility and tolerance authored by People for the American Way in both their printed material and formative PSAs assumed a great deal about the American nation state and its civic organization. Drawing on postulations usually associated with consensus models of American governance, PFAW argued that the US operated as a civil society replete with publics and counterpublics along with their requisite claims to political maneuverability. Politics served as the backdrop for much of this public exchange as one individual after another jockeyed for position in public. Over time, spaces linked to *the* public came to be associated with particular sexes, races, and for my purposes religiosities, that were conducive to its various operations. As a result, the public/private binary came to define much of what could be understood as the "architecture of consensus" regarding who tended to be privileged or discriminated against within the rules of civil politics.

Civic ideals such as toleration and civility aided the purpose of consensus itself, which was to cultivate harmony out of a dizzying array of cultures, practices, and traditions. This social formation, however, also required a particular understanding of religion that did not venture beyond the home or local community organization due to its potential divisiveness.[102] It is in this

[102] For sociologist James Davison Hunter, civil society in the US context depended on two overriding presuppositions: that there was a proper place *for* religion and that behavior in public would be tolerant of others'

sense that diversity functions as both consensus's primary accomplishment and its most susceptible ideal. Assuming such diversity could be kept in check, regardless of its cultural or religious valence, the larger civil society would continue functioning. If, on the other hand, this particular rendering of pluralism was left to its own devices, especially that of the Christian Right, then there was no telling what the repercussions could be. As a result, different communities interpreted civility differently depending on their position within American civil society.

Civility sounded, and perhaps felt, very different for the religious actors explored thus far. For PFAW, it was an indispensable component of their overall approach to maintaining (and thus monitoring) a robust public life through the unencumbered exchange of ideas. In this sense, the "civil" in civil society was more than simply an adjective modifier; it was a prescriptive antidote for political strife. For Falwell and the Christian Right, the promises of civility rang hollow in an environment bent against their political claims due to the framing of conservative religiosity as the "repugnant cultural other" by the media writ large.[103] As a result, notions such as civility and the separation of church and state, which possessed institutional backing from PFAW and others, functioned less as a maintenance mechanism and more as a curtailment of religious possibility.[104]

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rights and freedoms. As Hunter puts it, "In spite of any ideological diversity and any attendant hostilities, the civil society remains intact as long as all parties agree to abide by the procedural norms of tolerance of opposing views, respect for civil liberties, and nonviolent, legally proscribed political action and dissent." For more, see James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 150.

[103] For more, see Susan Harding, "Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other," *Social Research* 58:2 (Summer 1991), 373—393.

[104] Put in a slightly different way, such curtailment functioned as part of the "restraining techniques of public consensus" (Seales, *The Secular Spectacle*, 19).

"Persistent calls for civility in the present mythological contest by representatives of the center will not resonate with those who feel that the center is itself a liberal construct which is being used normatively," argues scholar of religion Donald Heinz. "If that is so, civility is a centrist virtue espoused by those who regularly find that the system, or currently dominant cultural definitions, works for them."[105] Rendered in this manner, the cultural productions of People for the American Way on behalf of the public's awareness for right—wing movements consistently reminded their readers that the delicate balance within civil society between universality and particularity was precarious at best. This was especially the case when it came to religion and its proper role in public as understood by Lear and PFAW.

Conclusion

Due to Lear's own investments in religious liberal ways of thought that tended to see the universal in religious particulars, he and PFAW saw little at issue when speaking of a common vision for the country when articulated by the members of his interfaith advisory board. Once circulated within the media, however, such suggestions took on a defensive quality in an attempt to name their most visceral enemy— the Christian Right. For Falwell and others in the electronic church, PFAW represented anything but the liberty—centered non—profit it claimed to be. In fact, for many on the Christian and political right, "the separation of church and state came to be, by and large, the *isolation* of religion from politics." Lear and PFAW expected citizens of the US to behave civilly when conducting themselves politically, yet with the arrival of Falwell, Swaggart, and the electronic church, each of the tenets espoused and defended by the non—profit came into view in the less than flattering light of intolerance. As a result, the tolerant

[105] Donald Heinz, "The Struggle to Define America," in *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation* edited by Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow (New York, NY: Aldine Publishing, 1983), 146—148.

gradually became intolerant of intolerance itself as witnessed in the speeches and writings of the Christian Right.[106]

For Lear and PFAW, the diagnosis was a simple one— the right did not follow the "ethic of civility" in its political activities.[107] As perceived "peddlers" of divisiveness and belligerency, Falwell and others left little to moderation or gentility. Theirs was a politics of offense rather than "no—fense." Their voices were to be heard no matter what in a manner fitting to an increasingly mediated age. As sociologist James Davison Hunter fittingly describes, "The 'New Christian Right' has violated the moral strictures of civility by crossing over the barriers separating public and private spheres and attempting to retain, through political means, traditional moral standards. With the relatively forceful reintroduction of conservative Protestant symbols into the public realm, political decorum was besmirched."[108] In light of this particular description, the accusations of PFAW were designed to not only draw attention to the dangers of conservative religiosity, but they were also part of a larger strategy of maintenance and protection of public space itself from the likes of Falwell and his generous congregations.

Lear and PFAW's desire to raise the nation's collective awareness concerning these threats stemmed from its commitment to defending free speech as a first amendment right, yet the non—profit's cultural productions accomplished a great deal more once uttered to eager audiences and journalists the country over. The numerous publications and addresses of PFAW,

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[106] For commentary on this topic by scholar of religion Robert Orsi, see his presentation on Walter Capps at UCSB here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6zuPa7qA9w. Accessed December 15, 2015.

[107] Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*, 151.

[108] Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*, 152. For anthropologist Susan Harding, "The religious right broke a web of mostly informal restrictions on religious speech in the public arena, in some ways lowered the 'wall of separation' between church and state, and broke the spell of America as a strictly 'secular nation.'" For more, see Susan Harding, "Religious Right," in *Encyclopedia of Religion in America* edited by Charles Lippy and Peter Williams (New York, NY: Sage Publications, 2010), 1867—1880.

in addition to the writings and productions of Lear himself, "set the discursive terms of civil society by naming and locating the sacred *and* the profane, while simultaneously prescribing the rules of engagement for the ritual interaction of both in public space...under the name of civic protection."[109] It is in this sense that we can name such acts of discursive fashioning as part of the *religious mechanics of civility*. These processes were intimately related to the interfaith politics of consensus that Lear and PFAW grounded many of their arguments on for a more civil space of American politics. Scholar of religion Chad Seales' analyses of Southern white usages of civility on their own behalf illuminates PFAW's own practices of civility deployment only in a different register— namely the religious rather than the racial. His narrative depiction of the on—the—ground effects of such civility captures the manner in which PFAW employed civility in an attempt to cleanse the American polity of all exclamations and behaviors that reflected badly on the American Way tradition of mixing religion and politics properly according to the dictates of a broadly defined civil religion. It is in this analytical spirit that I quote Seales at length:

> White officials in New South towns and cities drained secular spaces of an exuberant emotion that they associated with those primitive outbursts. They filled that emptied space with refined etiquette, which they associated with a modern disposition…citizens could still bring pious feelings into the secular chambers of government and law, but they had to remake them as modern. Public prayers had to be offered in accordance with the rules of civility. They must be conciliatory, given in the name of transcendent virtues, of love and peace, common to all Christians regardless of race [or religion]…ultimately, they leveraged civility to enforce a religious justification of [religious] hierarchy.[110]

The varied results of PFAW's social programming as a response to the threat of an "evangelical America" had much in common with this description of how civility could be utilized to buttress

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[109] Chad Seales, *The Secular Spectacle*, 10.

[110] Seales, *The Secular Spectacle*, 86.

local, state, and federal authority in circumscribing public space according to certain epistemological assumptions about the relationship between American religion and politics.[111] Distinctions such as these, including those that separated the sacred from the profane and the civil from the uncivil, did nothing if not establish the discursive power of consensus to monitor and regulate religious expression in the public sphere through civility, tolerance, and diversity. People for the American Way reacted to the Christian Right in kind through an equally divisive rhetoric of chaos that helped mobilize its supporters against the constitutional threats of Christian Right politics. This is not to say that PFAW did not accomplish its own self—defined goals because on this account it most certainly did.

Despite their best intentions, however, Lear and his advisory board launched a counteroffensive against the electronic church and its representatives that ultimately resulted in an equally divided citizenry in an effort to remind this polity of the country's consensus ideals enshrined in both print and television special. To say, as Falwell did, that PFAW literature was largely the product of "Norman Lear's Way" would be an overstatement, yet it nevertheless pointed to the receptivity of American public spaces to a specific formation of spiritual liberalism that found its catalytic mechanism in the appearance of its discursive opposite— the Christian Right. In this sense, Lear provided religious and political liberals in this period with a new set of rhetorical tools with which to defend their interfaith interests as understood through a civilly—organized society by rendering their pluralist project apart of a "new modern

[111] For historian Steven Miller, the "evangelical age" defined the actions of both the Christian Right and those beyond its boundaries who sought their own usages for born—again faith in American politics. In this sense, evangelicals are only one of many protagonists in religious histories of America's recent past. Evangelicalism "was pervasive enough that no one expression of evangelicalism could lay sole claim to it, and it involved more than just avowed born—again Christians." For more, see Steven P. Miller, *Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born—Again Years* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1—8.

mainstream." Thus, the social and political polarization of our contemporary moment is indebted not simply to a Falwell or a Robertson, but also to Lear and PFAW's politics of consensus as a remedy for the spiritual ills that confronted them.

CHAPTER SIX
Conclusion

On October 8th, 2015, former CEO of Columbia Pictures and chairman of Coca—Cola Fay Vincent authored a piece for the Treasure Coast Palm entitled, "Examining the Role of Religion in 'the American Way.'" Vincent's tale was one of a common, yet complicated, genealogical ancestry. Not only did Lear and Vincent share a common upbringing on the east coast in New Haven, CT, but Lear also consulted Vincent during the seminal organizational moment of People for the American Way. Vincent reminded Lear of his many objections to PFAW's original religio—political agenda, including the argument that defended the application of religion to politics in the name of the Jews during the Second World War. To Vincent, Lear's PFAW represented a hostile critic of explicitly religious claims in the political process. "Is it not the American way," Vincent asked, "to find in religion the light to illuminate moral teachings?" On some level, Lear could agree with Vincent— to the extent that the conversation never made it to the "*which* moral teachings" part. Rehearsing a familiar argument in favor of de facto religious tests when running for the American Presidency, Vincent argued Americans have a "right and duty" to "judge a person on any aspect of that person's total personal, and religious beliefs."[1] Less than three weeks later, Lear authored his own response to Vincent's claims in a public forum— the Huffington Post Politics webpage.

"People for the American Way has never argued that people should not bring their religious and moral perspectives into public life," responded Lear in his October 21st piece entitled, "Ben Carson and the American Way." "What troubled me about the political televangelists of the day was not that they were encouraging fellow conservative Christians to

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[1] Fay Vincent, "Examining the Role of Religion in 'the American Way,'" *Treasure Coast Palm* (Oct 8th 2015). Available here: http://www.tcpalm.com/opinion/guest—columns/fay—vincent—examining—the—role—of—religion—in—the—american—way—ep—1309239018—340370181.html. Accessed February 1, 2016.

get involved in politics, but that they disparaged the faith and patriotism of people who didn't share their religious beliefs and right—wing political views."[2] Vincent had come to Carson's defense when Carson admitted that he would not support a Muslim Presidential candidate who practiced Sharia law. These arguments caught Lear's attention because they were exclusionary, and thus counter to the American Way tradition he had so vigorously defended for the past half century. Unlike Vincent, however, Lear argued that civic life did not necessarily depend on the shared illumination of seemingly universal moral teachings. "As Kennedy made clear," Lear argued, "what unites us as Americans is not a set of religious beliefs, but the US constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion for all peoples and prohibits any religious test for public office."

Not only do these particular arguments continue to characterize contemporary political debate, but they also closely resemble the exchange that Lear had with President Ronald Reagan in the pages of *Harper's* magazine. Despite the time that separated the two debates, nearly three decades in fact, parallel issues were at stake for the respective verbal combatants. Over and against Reagan's association with the "Christian Nation movement," Lear argued in negative terms against Vincent's defense of America's *positive* freedoms of religion since it supported exclusionary evaluations of presidential candidates. In short, Lear argued that the nation's constitutional protections of freedom *from* religion were more significant than those that encouraged freedom *for* religion. The fact that both men were discussing the appropriateness of right belief and religious tests in American public life only fortified Lear's defense of the separation of church and state and its subsequent negative freedoms and liberal principles of

[2] Norman Lear, "Ben Carson and the American Way," *Huffington Post – Politics* (Oct 21 2015). Available here: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/norman—lear/ben—carson—and—the—americ_b_8353156.html. Accessed February 1, 2016.

public reason and civil religion. What Lear did not necessarily realize at the time of PFAW's formation, however, was that his own thinking tended to take on a similarly exclusionary tone when confronted with conservative religiosity in the public square— both at home and abroad. This connection in the liberal imagination between "homegrown Ayatollahs" in the US and Iranian "Fundamentalists," one on full display in the Vincent/Lear conversation over Sharia law, helped make possible the invention of both "the Christian Right" and "Fundamentalism" as uniquely liberal conceptions of public religion within a liberal democracy during the early 1980s.

This dissertation has argued that since the beginning of the 1960s, the US has been at war with itself over the most fundamental assumptions about the relationship between religion, the state, and the public good. Such debates over the nature and role of secular governance in religiously diverse populations have a much longer history arguably dating back to the Protestant Reformation and the Treaty of Westphalia that would soon follow, but their singularity also rings true to their time— one defined by conservative upheaval in the face of the liberal defense of the national welfare state and its New Deal underpinnings. On the one hand, Lear's upbringing in the 1930s introduced him to a commitment to the public interest in the form of the New Deal and its social welfare programming. On the other, the same moment introduced Lear to the theoretical need to curtail a given citizen's freedom of speech if not articulated within the public interest. In this sense, both FDR and Father Charles Coughlin influenced Lear's theory of religion and liberal democracy as a spiritual liberal, which called for tolerance, empathy, and diversity in public life in equally accessible terms.[3] In this sense, Lear's politics of spiritual liberalism were

[3] In this sense, I argued that Lear's theory of religion and liberal democracy most resembled that of a spiritual liberal and his/her dependence on ideals such as public reason, empathy, separation of church and state, and civil religion in the public square.

most evident as a theory of religion and liberal democracy in two contradictory, yet inextricable ways: abhorrence of the Christian Right's exclusionary politics *and* the commitment to the separation of church and state. As such, Lear made his own contributions to the history of liberal framing of conservative religiosity dating back at least to the writings of HL Mencken in the 1920s and later, mid—century studies of conservative anxiety and anti—intellectualism. In short, one could argue that this contradiction between antipathy and empathy lies at the very heart of liberal, secular governance— the assumption that religious exuberance is best practiced in the privacy of our homes, especially if it is conservative in nature.

Lear's spiritual liberalism found a supportive yet divided audience in his situation comedies *All in the Family* and *Maude*. In fact, I have argued that one of the most understudied ways in which religious and spiritual liberals enact their politics in public is through various artistic and cultural productions— especially in primetime television. Lear's programming, however, did not emerge in a vacuum. Instead, Lear and others relied on a sophisticated form of comedic satire to establish "relevance programming" as part of the 1970s television network landscape. While shows such as *M.A.S.H.* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* contributed significantly to this new type of topical programming, it was Lear's catalogue in particular that established this didactic form of comedy as understood through the virtual classroom of the situation comedy. I have argued that Lear's shows presented an idealized form of American civic life based on the fundamental principles of deliberation, civility, and public reason. Additionally, Lear's characters, including Archie and Meathead, said much about the often antagonistic relationship between the country's working class and its emergent student worker population. Meathead's interests in sociology identified him with the emerging New Class while Archie's resentment of his son—in—law's socio—economic interests identified him with the not—so

“silent majority.” Little did Lear know that it would be this constituency that would go on to redefine the GOP according to more Western and Southern regional interests— including those of conservative Protestants in the Sunbelt that stretched from Southern California to Arizona to North Carolina. In short, these realignments arguably laid the groundwork for the cultural conflict that continues to define American public life today— the culture wars.

In light of this developing attention to and utilization of culture and the media that transmitted it, primetime space itself fell quickly into the crosshairs of both liberal and conservative activists in the public square. The backdrop of these conflicts was a national concern for violence on television as a product of “the New Morality” and its more fluid moral predilections. Chapter two examined three case studies in order to demonstrate the politicization of primetime achieved largely through Lear’s own programming and its subsequent protests by conservative Protestants and Catholics. Examples of such case studies included abortion—centered episodes of *Maude* and an Ojai, California symposium organized by Lear and others in the name of Hollywood’s first amendment rights.

Lear’s defense of the airwaves unfolded according to the public interest, a debated concept dating back to the origins of the FCC and its exclusionary stipulations concerning Father Coughlin’s radio addresses— the very same ones that had shaped Lear’s own sense of personhood as an ethnic outsider. These debates are significant because they identified primetime television as the next battleground of the culture wars of the late twentieth century. In this sense, Lear can be understood as one of America’s earliest culture warriors, who went on to oppose more well—known warriors from the right such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. This type of reception did more to reify the differences between individuals like Lear and Falwell, but it was also how the public at large understood the conflict between television producer and

televangelist. Either way, the point of contention during these debates was arguably over the power of the prefix and its disseminatory powers: (tele)—vision.

In the final chapter, I argued that lear's decision to leave television for non—profit activism helped institutionalize his politics of spiritual liberalism in a public setting— the third sector of American public life. Reflecting his spiritual politics and religious liberal commitment to civility and the separation of church and state, Lear toured the country in order to address the inroads that conservative politicians and evangelists had made into the political process. For many at the time, such inroads were understood as the "emergence" of the Christian Right, an observation that spoke to liberal understandings of conservative religion as always ever maturing. Lear was instrumental in this process, one that relied on journalists, politicians, entertainers, and writers in the formation of the christian right as both rhetorical tool and metonym for conservative Protestantism in late twentieth—century America.

Lear's People for the American Way went on to play a significant leadership role within a larger mobilizing front that included liberal progressive Protestants, Catholics, and Jews from New York to Hollywood, California. Such organizational fervor reflected the liberal antagonism directed towards the conservative policies and constituencies of President Ronald Reagan and the Christian Right. Lear assumed a predominant leadership position within multiple progressive religious communities throughout the 1970s including the ecumenical mainline, the Protestant mainline, and interfaith groups as well as more secular organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union. Rather than an aberration in the long history of religious liberal organizing, this moment was in fact a culminating one as liberal religious sentiment continued its migration beyond institutional church walls and onto the front pages of the *New York* and *Los Angeles Times*— only this time, it was in the key of Lear's spiritual politics.

Lear's visionary position within ecumenical, interfaith, and mainline Protestant circles speaks to one of the many myths addressed and challenged by this dissertation in the study of American religions. Rather than contributing to a story of American secularization during the twentieth century, Lear and his diverse supporters in particular created their own forms of religious liberal mobilization in response to their conservative counterparts.[4] In fact, one could argue that both Lear and his detractors possessed their own understandings of secularism and the duties of the secular state regarding charismatic spiritual or religious outbursts in public. However, Lear and PFAW were not acting as a vanguard force within religious liberalism during the 1980s, but rather a rearguard of concerned citizens who feared the shifting grounds of religious claims in American public life spurred on by the electronic church and its conservative supporters.

Another myth perpetuated by both the religious and academic left is that the Christian Right was the first to mix religion and politics in a substantive (and thus threatening) manner. Lear and his supporters made much political hay over the apparent violation that the Christian Right committed by applying their conservative agendas to public life and subsequent legislative interests. This story, however, is ideologically fraught with liberal histrionics. If anything, it was liberals like Lear who were among the first to apply their progressive value systems to issues such as racial discrimination and segregation following the Second World War as a matter of principle. In fact, Lear was guilty of this type of mixing himself when he introduced topicality and relevance into primetime television and its production through the character of Archie

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[4] This argument may not need to be made from the side of studies of the Christian Right, but many still argue that liberal progressive organization made its own contribution to American secularization in the 20th century. For more, see Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri—Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Bunker. In this sense, liberal progressives like Lear possessed an inordinate amount of power over the various disseminatory processes that helped produce religio—cultural entities such as "the Christian Right," including television and its primetime programming, as part of the "new class" of knowledge workers, entertainers, writers, and "verbalists."[5] By following Lear's career in media, we are better able to understand *how* the Christian Right came to be as a product of liberal religious framing of conservative religiosity in public spaces.

Lear's role as the founder of the non—profit People for the American Way also speaks to the need for more study of the religious, spiritual, and economic interests of corporate entities and their employees in the study of American religion. Studies such as Kathryn Lofton's *Oprah: Gospel of an Icon*, Darren Grem's forthcoming *The Blessings of Business: How Corporations Shaped Conservative Christianity*, and Kevin Kruse's *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* demonstrate the efficacy of research and analysis based on the top floors of corporations as supplementary studies to those still attuned to the grassroots. Such a change in academic vantage would be especially productive for those studying the history of the Christian Right since much of its study has assumed the importance of the grassroots, and for good reason. At this moment, however, there is arguably a need for more top—down studies of the same subjects due simply to the influence that marketers and businessmen have had and continue to have on the formation of conservative religious constituencies in the US.

For my purposes, a Hollywood community of largely liberal Jewish writers and directors during the early 1970s served my descriptive and categorical agenda of naming a politics of spiritual liberalism in late twentieth century America. This attention to corporate power, particularly in the form of liberal political and cultural influence, would be enhanced if focused

[5] William A. Rusher, *The Making of the New Majority Party* (Ottawa, IL: Green Hill, 1975).

on liberal religious actors like Lear, Martin Marty, and journalist Bill Moyers. Due to the power that various historians, sociologists, and scholars of religion have given conservative religiosity in American religious history since the country's mid—century, liberal culture warriors like Lear have been largely ignored as either part of the mainstream or due to their cultural ubiquity. These types of studies have arguably defined the field since the 1980s, but if we foreground Lear and his interests in the public square we are better able to understand how terms like "the Christian Right" are part of longer active histories of liberal interpellation. My attempt in this dissertation has been to open up some of these wider connections in the study of American religious liberalism through Lear, his programming, and his supporters as well as his conservative detractors.

This dissertation has also attempted to blend histories of the Christian Right with the spiritual left in order to demonstrate their intimate and co—constitutive relationship in the recent past. Figures such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Donald Wildmon make appearances in this work because they contributed to the formation of both the electronic church and the Christian Right. They were also the primary foils of Lear and his liberal supporters. In this sense, Lear helped these figures achieve the religio—political influence that they did during this period by drawing attention to their televised actions and messages through his own organizing and activism. Lear shadowed Falwell's actions as the head of a tax exempt non—profit organization while Falwell's presence shadowed Lear by echoing the religious intolerance of his youth. As such, these debates between Lear and various representatives of the electronic church fundamentally altered the landscape of American religion and politics by reimagining a new public life beyond yet inclusive of pluralism and its adjudication by the largely liberal state. This

is why Lear defended his programming in the name of the public interest to begin with, thereby reflecting the custodial impulse of religious liberalism itself as empathy incarnate in public.

This dissertation has attempted a critical and historical study of television producer Norman Lear and his contributions to the history of American religious liberalism and the discursive formation of the Christian Right. In this sense, I have conducted my analysis of Lear with the assumptions that he is both a freely choosing agent and a source of hegemonic power in the public square. In other words, when confronted by the likes of Falwell, Robertson, and Wildmon, Lear both created and eliminated spaces for religious expression in the public square and across the airwaves. In fact, I would argue that Lear did everything in his power to define the nature of public deliberation itself as *form* rather than specific *content.* In between the early 1970s and mid—1980s, Lear authored didactic storylines in primetime and monitored the broadcasts of conservative televangelists through PFAW media campaigns. He spoke of spiritual illumination through the world's myriad religions at the American Academy of Religion and to the dangers of those who would not listen to reason and civility.

The analytical complexity of Lear's articulations, one that both curtailed and protected freedom of religious expression, speaks to both lived religion approaches to the study of religion and contemporary studies that examine the socio—economic and epistemic conditions that make certain conceptions of the human possible.[6] Scholars of American religion have recently begun asking questions about many of the field's practices and common sense tendencies including the archival impulse to catalogue as the primary form of knowledge production about the past. "In the study of American religions," argues Finbarr Curtis, "suspicion of technical scholarly discourse mirrors a popular preference for common—sense realism and a belief in individual

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[6] John Modern, "My Evangelical Conviction," *Religion* 42:3 (2012), 439—457.

freedom." For Curtis, "The common—sense tradition holds that conceptual complexity detracts from good storytelling...One prominent example of the coupling of individual freedom and religious diversity in the study of American religion can be found in the accumulation of mircohistories of previously excluded groups in the hope of recovering their subjects' agency."[7]

In other words, the scholarly assumption that has guided much of this spirit of accumulation since the 1970s is not only the image of the freely choosing religious subject, but also the analytical maxim, "What we study, what we want, is *more*."[8] This dissertation has attempted a blended approach to my subject as a product of both critical and historical study—one interested in both synchronic and diachronic analysis of religion and its formation in the recent American past. It has also been an analysis and evaluation of "pluralism" as both civic ideal and discursive formation across the twentieth century. In fact, the analytical impulse to catalogue and archive through microhistory and thick description reflects the very same pluralist values that help produce the subject material for and serve as a demonstration of a thriving "American religious landscape."

Put in another way, these assumptions are the product of what sociologist Courtney Bender has called "the power of pluralist thinking" in the sociological study of American religion.[9] "Much as the 'positive thinking' espoused by Norman Vincent Peale hid the mechanics of social institutions that shape human lives and their many contingencies," argues Bender, "contemporary pluralist thinking hides the mechanisms through which we recognize religions as

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[7] Finbarr Curtis, "The Study of American Religions: Critical Reflections on a Specialization," *Religion* 42:3 (2012), 11.

[8] Tracy Fessenden, "The Objects of Religious Studies," *Religion* 42:3 (2012), 375.

[9] Courtney Bender, "The Power of Pluralist Thinking," in *Politics of Religious Freedom*, ed. Winnifred Sullivan, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, Saba Mahmood, and Peter G. Danchin (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 66—77.

free and many, or why we even find these tallies and their evaluations useful or necessary."[10] In light of this analysis, we are able to better understand and describe pluralism as both an engine of analytical insight and a disciplining mechanism of scholarly description. In Lear's case, pluralism functioned multivalently as both the content of his own spiritual liberalism and as a rhetorical weapon in the defense of the public square over and against the Christian Right.

In light of these analytical and methodological choices, I sense that the study of American religion currently sits at an analytical crossroads. Those trained in history and religion departments dating back to the 1970s and 1980s have grounded the study of American religion in the systematic exploration of the archive and its myriad sources of epistemic illumination. This intellectual expectation continues to define the quality of historical work in the study of American religion based on the scholar's ability to narrate a story of human improvisation and contingency. Such observations have been made possible largely through the work of scholars who have begun identifying some of the field's fundamental analytical assumptions, including its own depiction of the human agent and her ability to choose her religious future within the marketplace of rational choice. If previous generations of historian and scholar of religion established the parameters of the study of US American religions, then contemporary analysts continue to investigate these stories in a self—reflexive manner, one that asks not only narrative—driven questions, but also questions about how such narratives became naturalized to begin with. In this sense, what I call the conditions of religious possibility, not simply the possibility itself, has become the latest multiform subject of our collective labors in the critical study of American religious history.

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[10] Bender, "Power of Pluralist Thinking," 73.

It is in this spirit that I have conducted my own study of Lear's spiritual politics during the American culture wars of the 1970s and 1980s. Focusing our collective attention on the careers of individuals such as Norman Lear speaks to both the narrative and analytical concerns of both historians and scholars of religion. This story is at once uniform and historically contingent because it speaks to change over time *and* its contemporary resonance as a genealogical investigation of our collective political present. My study of Lear is significant because it contributes a new, compelling subject to the field while also questioning the means by which we evaluate proper subjects of American religious study as scholars. Despite the analytical differences that exist between these disciplinary registers, historical subjects like Lear demonstrate how the interdisciplinary study of media can reconcile individual and systemic— analyses of American public life by turning our attention to the conditions of religious possibility that our subjects navigate on a continuous basis. As one scholar of religion recently remarked, perhaps it is safe to say that we no longer are simply sycophants to our religious subjects. If this is indeed the case, then we will be better able to address the question of the archive— not necessarily *the* archive, but the archives of our choosing. In this sense, understanding Lear and his work as a collective archive for scholars of American religion allows us to chart the last half century of American religion and politics according to the predilections of a spiritual liberal, one who contributed to the cause of religious freedom at the expense of religious expression.

In short, Lear's story speaks to the struggle of liberalism itself as it confronts its greatest challenge to date: neo—liberal economic policy as the new form of American commonsense. What was once a collective task of determining the public good has now evolved into a largely private enterprise driven by deregulatory agendas and "bottom—line thinking," as Lear himself observed. As a result, American public life itself has fractured beyond recognition into its

constitutive cultural and social parts. Within these tumultuous socio—economic conditions, liberals may remain content in their cultural victories, but at what cost to our shared conceptions of the public good? That remains to be seen.

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