

# Archie Bunker Spoof

BY ROBERT E. SEGAL

Early in the television life of Archie Bunker, this observer had a hunch that this innovative approach to airing the mischief and damage done by bigots would soon be attacked. And now the storm has broken. "All In the Family," with one of the highest ratings in history, with an audience estimated all the way from 35 million to 100 million, and with its capture of enough Emmy awards and other such to puff up any producer, is under severe fire.

A year ago, I wondered who might be afraid of the big, bad spoof, noting that Archie Bunker's weak defenses impoverish his biases. In short, this corner of opinion approved the effort to unhorse the biases. And despite the rising thunder of outrage against "All In the Family," I stubbornly cling to the view that the telecast exposure of the shallowness of an instructed hater will, in the end, do much more good than harm.

Let us take stock of the disapproval of the CBS blue-ribbon phenomenon. Starting with Laura Z. Hobson, author of "Gentlemen's Agreement," who was among the first to raise the alarm about Archie Bunker, and coming down the months since publication of her well-researched and thoughtful essay in the New York Times a year ago, one finds a strong battery in opposition. These nay-sayers to CBS raise a

number of serious points, meriting industrious study.

We would summarize their doubts thus: Mrs. Hobson holds that we just cannot put up with "your friendly neighborhood bigot," that bigotry-for-laugh in unthinkable. In her judgment, you simply cannot be both bigoted and loveable. More to the point, she has concluded that while Norman Lear, creator of the series, might continue to get away with airtime use of such epithets as spade and hebe and coon and polack, as employed by a lame-brain like Archie Bunker, the producers would never dare to use such ultimate insult bruisers as kike, nigger, sheeny. The profit-motivated moguls of televisionland would be on their way to self-destruction if they really hit where it hurts some 20 to 35 million Americans of Italian origin, 13 million Irish-Americans, 9 million Spanish speaking, 6 million Jews, and 23 million Blacks. There is a point beyond which Bunker dare not jump.

Mrs. Hobson has been joined by an impressive colony of critics in her judgment that television cannot deodorize bigotry. The Teamsters Union 2 million strong, chafes under the onus of having Brother Bunkerepitomize hard-hatism. No Archie-for-president beer mugs or sweat-shirts for them; the average worker is no dingbat. Never. "Do you now have that creepy feeling that Archie was created to be laughed at and not with and that the script backfired?" a thoughtful newsman asks. Can bigotry really ever be fun?

Perhaps most terrifying of all is the thought that our children will be conned by Archie Bunker that in creating a new freedom to be offensive (as Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyweld has warned), the series will teach our children disrespect.

Weighing all such commendable warning signals, this observer persists in the view that serious and profound efforts already made to rid mankind of bigotry are laudable but not conclusive. Shock treatment is indicated. And the still-unmeasured power of television, plus the audacity of "All In the Family's" producers plus the dynamism of buffoonery, plus the therapeutic power of catching haters by surprise may yet prove a modern miracle.

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