Race, Class, and Rosey the Robot: Critical Study of *The Jetsons*

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The Jetsons is an animated sitcom representing a middle-class patriarchal family set in space in the year 2062. Following in the footsteps of family-friendly viewing such as *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963) and Hanna-Barbera's own *The Flintstones* (1960-1966), *The Jetsons* offered a futuristic take on a near-perfect nuclear family. *The Jetsons* centers on a family headed by a "male breadwinner" and "Happy housewife heroine" that Betty Friedan credits to creators of women's media in the 1950s and 60s (23). Packed with conservative white American perspectives and values, the show is set in the suburbs of intergalactic Orbit City and features husband George, wife Jane, teenage daughter Judy, and prodigy son Elroy (Coyle and Mesker 15). The cast is complemented by secondary characters that include George's boss Cosmo Spacely, the owner of Spacely Sprockets, and Rosey the robot maid. The only element that seemed to be missing from the earliest episodes was a family pet, which was rectified with the addition of Astro the dog early in the first season ("The coming of Astro").

The first season (S1) aired on Sunday nights September 1962 - March 1963, (Coyle and Mesker) and was one of the first shows to debut in color on ABC (Jay). Despite early cancellation the show landed deeply in the pop culture cannon through syndication and experienced renewed interest when it was brought back in the 1980s for two additional seasons (S2-3). Today, *The Jetsons* continues to reach new audiences with video and digital releases serving to revitalize the program. In this essay, S2-3 will be combined and used as a comparative analysis against the S1 given the difference of political climate and social values.

By "reading the film" (Geiger and Rutsky 3) through a contemporary lens I identify innovative creation mechanisms and a familiar use of sitcom tropes issues coupled with time-bound values of gender, class, and the labors of humans, machines and robots. This essay explores a culturally problematic show camouflaged as brightly colored sitcom escapism while also celebrating some of

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the innovations that the show creators engaged to facilitate program creation. This interpretation further reflects on how television programs can reinforce structural racism, cultural bias, and stereotypes. As Rebecca Kiddle states, “Dominant cultures are often invisible because of the mere fact of their dominance” (94). Investigating the creative choices made by Hanna-Barbera in *The Jetsons* universe empowers modern viewers to see past the nostalgia the show seems to spark.

Today’s viewers are closer to the world of 2062 with tools and technologies dreamed up for Orbit City filling daily life. From treadmills and moving sidewalks becoming commonplace tools for getting in or avoiding those miles to the faces of both friends and colleagues encroaching on life through video screens ever present in homes and workplaces. *The Jetsons* was loaded with devices that were no more real than dreams in 1962. The realization of so many devices including smart watches and digital newspapers, to space tourism and drone deliveries offer hope that while they may not be perfect, most of these tools are doing the jobs they set out to do. Coyle and Mesker call these devices “quirky and personable” and for the most part this is the common theme. The gadgets automate and add ease to the daily lives of the citizens of *The Jetsons* universe much like their modern counterparts do today.

Through automation and robotic support, *The Jetsons* live what appears to be the perfect middle-class life. Animated gadgetry presents as labor-saving and convenience to characters and offers watchers a technology-filled future with shortened work weeks, one touch task completion, and constant connectivity. For this analysis, I argue that robots are represented as advanced decision makers who are employees of characters of the show i.e. the Jetson family, while automation is displayed when a button press elicits simple task completion.

I begin with an overview of television and the extended social climate of 1960s America. Next, I review the Levittown suburban model before moving onto an assessment of the tools and tactics used by Hanna-Barbera to create *The Jetsons*. The essay continues by exploring tropes that reinforce cultural norms for viewers. I move on to investigate the mammy stereotype and detail related characterizations of Rosey and the impact of technology overlapping with human labor, race, and social class. My inquiry concludes with viewer commentary and somewhat problematic series revitalization.

1960s America

Visions of perfect families, technical innovations and the expansion into bigger homes abounded in 1960s America. However, fulfilment of these dreams was no more possible than many of the innovations on the show. Gender roles began shifting as the 1960s progressed (Friedan), civil unrest and battles for equality were becoming commonplace (Doar) and coupled with a nationalism fueled by the Cold War, the middle-class nuclear family was a common aspiration (Parsons). Television programming during the decade displayed rising awareness of inequality but focused primarily on the perfect home(maker) and family, core to many white American homes at the time (Humphreys). This section explores the intersection of technology of the 1960s with social values and gendered norms.

Labor saving devices displaying incredible technological progress were a common topic in American media in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Household technology fueled by the "Kitchen Debate" — a primetime dialogue on household automation between the United States and Russia — came to the forefront of media in 1962. It formed the start of two important conversations including the commodification of "women's work" while placing the man in the role of decision maker by selecting the tools most appropriate for the provision of housework performed by the woman of the house (Barnes 313).

Nicole Williams Barnes presents the concept of romantic consumerism, supported by events such as the Kitchen Debate fed an increased the demand and appearance of domestic gadgetry in American homes and television programming. Barnes highlights the concern that technology in the home acts as an extension of wealth and social class further segregating those who can afford the best tools from those who cannot. "The technology becomes a marker of lifestyle and wealth, and housework becomes a product that can be purchased, not through servant labor but through appliances" (98).

Technology scholar Andrea Krafft builds on romantic consumerism with the notion that as leaps in domestic technology were combined with depictions of family life on television it shifted viewer attentions from family-wide contribution to housework as exclusively woman's work. Household workload increased as homes grew to fill the space saved by more efficient tools. Sadly, technology also supported the ability to perform an increased volume of work, therefore causing a "never-ending cycle" filling available space and time (Krafft 70).

Television in the 1950s commonly showed women navigating domestic chores with ease and often featured the work being distributed across the family (Humphreys). In 1960s television programming, housework became the exclusive

domain of women and with that transition women providing this labor as an act of love became the norm. Further, these portrayals reinforced the satisfaction that women should garner from this labor: "the act of preserving life-performers of housework want to know others are benefiting from these preservative efforts" (Humphreys 59-60).

Household labors and the tools to complete them becomes an increasingly gendered issue as it impacts only the housewife and disregards the ability of other family members to contribute. "Defining housework through these technologies serves to commodify the role of the housewife, as well as her housework" (Barnes 98). Appliances in *The Jetsons* become "electric servants" and magic makers in 2062 not unlike 1962 where they were first dreamed up (Krafft 71).

Jane's challenges seemed to be a turning point where the foible laden housewifery transitioned into a fish out of water scenario where women were solely responsible for housework but were unable to do it effectively unlike their 1950s counterparts. Mid-60s premieres featured shows such as Bewitched, *The Addams Family,* and *I Dream of Jeannie*. Each program came armed with a housewife attempting to honor the art of "typical" household duties and being thwarted by them much like Jane is as her automated and robotic tools routinely fail her. However, despite these stumbles Jane with her gadget support systems including Rosey handle tasks on the home front while the children appear to be working towards the gender and class specific futures expected of nuclear family offspring (Johnson).

Viewers see gendered behaviors displayed most clearly by the younger Jetsons. Judy the teenage daughter is "boy crazy" and obsessed with pop culture and high potential son Elroy focusses his attention on inventions to climb the social class ladder. This could be interpreted to be so that Judy can one day marry well, and Elroy can become the creator of something just as important and influential to society as Spacely Sprockets.

In their analysis of youth of the time, Parsons presents the idea that young people are questing to surpass the generations that have come before them and also carry the weight of being masters of creation.

> He [sic] must operate in more complex situations than before. He attempts to do many things his predecessors never attempted, that indeed were beyond their capacities. To succeed in what he attempts, he has to exercise progressively higher levels of competence and responsibility. (106)

Gendering the performance of housework also reinforces the gendering of robot assistants in the work they do. As Humphreys comments, there is no need to gender a robot, yet *The Jetsons* clearly do so with Rosey as a maid being a woman and Mac as a handyman. Critical review questions why creators would do this if the robots are not considered human.

An ultimate future colors *The Jetsons* subtly across Orbit City but more widely with the credit sequence looking down upon America from space[1] ("Rosey the Robot" 00:00:50). *The Jetsons* finished S1 just before major movements such as the Birmingham Riots and March on Washington progressed the fight for civil rights for Black Americans.

> The science fiction utopias were associated with capitalism and the American dream of prosperity, unconcerned with contemporary issues around environmental sustainability, global financial and power crises, or social justice. (Coyle and Mesker 16)

Civil and gender rights protesting, and the resulting increased opportunities of each subsequent generation had become routine by 1962 when *The Jetsons* hit television screens. Early on in the series we hear Stella Spacely, Cosmo Spacely's wife, attending a protest and telling her husband to order dinner in as she will be occupied ("Rosey the Robot" 00:09:02). This act represents a position not uncommon to privileged white women who outsourced household tasks and duties to fight for rights (Frye). The appearance of protesting in such a casual way also serves to remind viewers of the idea that protests for rights and freedoms are a part of daily life for those of the future while introducing the idea that commoditization of household tasks can serve to create time for more rewarding activities (Davis).

However, in contrast to flying cars watchers must return to the ground with the undercurrent of inequality in this investigation. Visible diversity is all but erased throughout *The Jetsons*, which is ironic given the position of show as a Technicolor display of a cartoon future. At the same time income and privilege appears everywhere including the storylines, contraptions used and the introductory credits where Jane takes George's wallet and shops while he works ("Rosey the Robot"). Elimination of diversity in the 1960s was not an uncommon reality. As television programs were primarily written by educated white men, the obstacles faced by a more varied group in real life were not common discussion points. Just one episode in Season 1 is written by a woman ("Janes Driving Lesson") and interestingly it

[1] Interestingly, the show never explains the shift into space which could reflect a dystopian back story caused by global unrest or environmental damage.

sparks Jane's seeing some of the unrest of being a homemaker that appears later in the series ("Dude Planet")

Given the limited diversity in the show writers and creators *The Jetsons* presents stories from a privileged white male perspective. An example can be seen in "Jetsons Nite Out" where both George and Cosmo lie to their wives about working late to take advantage of premium seats at a championship football game. One cannot divorce race from gender or social class or their overlap in influencing societal values or lived experiences (Crenshaw), particularly in 1960s America. The elimination of racial identities is covert in *The Jetsons*. Both social class and gender references abound, but rather than face into the realities of racial oppression coming through in the future, Hanna-Barbara chose to have no people of color (POC) in the humans it colored in. Stockman argues that animated programs influence the socialization of young children and that reinforcing biased behaviors shapes the values of the audience. The exclusion of POC represents an insidious erasure of those who contributed widely to the culture and more directly those who served and raised a significant portion of American youth at the time.

Oppression takes many forms. Simple daily acts that hold another back can be seen in a number of power relations from those motivated by safety (parent-child) to those that are self-serving (structural oppression) (Blau).Structural oppressions from 1960s America flourish today in some debt to stereotypes perpetuated through media. Some forms of oppression are quieter, instead of the act of displaying a target that anyone can achieve, those who wield power show that an 'other' cannot attain the same level of success and that they are destined to hold positions of service to those in positions of power (Brown Givens and Monahan). The most common example comes in the frequent hiring, firing and promotions George receives from his boss Cosmo Spacely ("Rosey the Robot" 00:21:00).Throughout all three seasons viewers are exposed to displays of power and oppression across Orbit City and its inhabitants in a space-bound representation of Levittown.

Levittown and Suburban Sprawl

Designed as the perfect "post-war American suburb," Levittown or "Island Trees Community" had an incredible cultural influence both in the United States and beyond (Hales). Representing the modern ideal of efficient mass production, William Levitt, the creator of the instant community, went on to create Levittown's in both New York and Pennsylvania from the 1940's-1960's. The first suburb of

over 11,000 homes was set half-way between New York City and Long Island. Levittown offered new suburban residents a balanced commute regardless of being employed in city or factory work (Gans). An important factor in the creation of the new community was the whites-only claims to home ownership excluding all POC from moving into the newly developed neighborhoods (Lambert). To a wide extent the community represented itself as much as a marketing success, selling the American Dream to returning white GI's, as it was a community of cookie cutter homes and curved roads that were wrapped around a village center (Hales). Expanding homes and sprawling properties motivated a stretching perspective on home maintenance. Larger homes and technological innovations spurred a higher standard of cleanliness for homemakers and created a new market for automated assistance (Barnes). Coupled with media telling the story of home fashion and decorating as women's work the enhanced standards expected of housewives and caretakers required constant focus to achieve (Friedan; Barnes).

Increased vehicle ownership of 1960s allowed people to live farther away from the office and move out of high-density housing reliant on transit to the privileged suburban bliss of backyards and child rearing. Levittown required access to capital because to purchase the home and car required to get one into their city job every day, a family needed a solid start up fund. In many cases this came from GI Bills, not easily accessed by Black soldiers of the time (Gans; Lambert). Access to finances reinforced the social and racial barricades made clearer in Levittown(s) and more widely in suburban America. Romantic notions of future and the celebration of the middle-class suburb displays the bridge between rural and urban environments. Suburban living is designed as the perfect balance of space and opportunity. Jobs are more plentiful in the city, while space is at a premium contrary to rural environments. Modern times make the suburbs a norm, but much like the commute from work to home that they require, middle-class fulfilment has a price that is more recent than many consider. Interestingly, creators at Hanna-Barbera happily drew flying cars, but placed them in traffic jams and buses seem to be mostly forgotten and rare. The lack of public transit options further segregates suburban communities between middle and working-class groups. Levittown's were the absolute opposite of easily navigated city living (Gans). Wide streets, ample parking, large spacious yards and big houses provided the dream that was being crafted for the newly created nuclear family unit featuring a male breadwinner, happy housewife, and their 2.5 children being put forth in magazines and media across the country at the time (Friedan).

The same sequence of neighborhoods centering on a hub of shopping and commerce can be seen in *The Jetsons* with Orbit City offering a visual rendering of mass produced, socially and racially segregated communities in space. Orbit City and its inhabitants represent much of what Gans as a prophet of future suburban development identifies as "the suburban way of life" lived in ever growing rings of properties revolving around community commerce centers. Residents are "beset with conflict" including those of class, race, and generational co-existence as each group seeks to have their way executed and finding no grounds of consensus (Gans).

The nuclear family portrayed in *The Jetsons* is imaginary and unrealistic, much like life in space (Johnson). Fans reinforced this with reviews claiming, "i [*sic*] really want to believe that kind of future is possible." (aleksandarsarkic). Nearly sixty years later these comments remind viewers that the perfection created by the media of the nuclear family between 1950-1965 was an impossible myth created by magazine writers (Barnes; Friedan).

Throughout *The Jetsons* elements such as the extended family including multiple generations in a household were replaced by the suburban nuclear family unit. The erasure reminds watchers that if they are not two parent household that is thriving, they aren't achieving the fulfilment of their American dreams as promised. However, modern commentary has helped to reinforce the idea that the nuclear family was a fleeting ideal.

> Today, only a minority of American households are traditional two-parent nuclear families and only one-third of American individuals live in this kind of family. That 1950-65 window was not normal. It was a freakish historical moment when all of society conspired, wittingly and not, to obscure the essential fragility of the nuclear family. (Brooks)

Despite failing to reflect real-world circumstances of some elements, *The Jetsons* offered dreams of space-bound happiness and managed to support innovation and technological progress in animated production. However complex and imagined storylines might have been in suburban Orbit City were, the efficiency of the Hanna-Barbera creative team was way ahead of their time.

Technology and Labor

Friedan introduced the issue of the impossible ideal of a happy housewife in *The Feminine Mystique* which explored the impact of the return to the home front from

the workforce that women of 1950s and 60s America faced. While shows of the 1950s such as *Leave it to Beaver* introduced the perfection of a 'typical' housewife able to keep things in perfect shape while whipping up family meals from scratch and solving challenges of childrearing around the kitchen table, the movement into 1960s America saw women portrayed on screen as being regularly foiled by the efforts to be the typical household heroine.

Food and kitchen appliances in particular are a focus of gadgetry in *The Jetsons*. Throughout S1 and S2-3 the devices for automated food delivery change from episode to episode. No matter the convenience attached to the newest innovations, home cooking acts as a binder for families in 1960s sitcoms. Humphreys proposes that this is love performed as service. This message is reiterated as even with his upper-class status money can't buy Cosmo the home cooked meal he craves, and dinner cooked by Rosey with the Jetson family becomes the solution ("Rosey the Robot").

While simplified, the robot role varies dramatically from automation and convenience provided by most of the technological innovations in *The Jetsons* in this analysis. Automation for *The Jetsons* is a tool or system that performs a single task. An example of each can be seen in the performance of household duties. Cooking for example requires multiple steps including ingredient selection, measuring, food assembly, and choices such as how to prepare and finish each item. Rosey performs these without intervention. However, the automated food delivery device that offers push button selections cannot complete a meal without the assistance of a human instigator.

An example of this comes when George decides to cook breakfast for the family and forgets to set the timer. The food arrives as selected but is still in a frozen state, thus displaying that the system only performs functions as directed by the user ("The Space Car"). Similarly, the effort to perform laundry requires the user to progress items between the stages of wash, fold, and iron. While a simple 'button press' is all that is required and the task is automated, these gadgets still require the user to act between stages ("Rosey the Robot").

Since all domestic labors are performed by automated gadgets or robots in *The Jetsons* the need for a maid prompts Jane to purchase the services of one. Rosey was introduced by the salesperson amongst an array of maid robot options for Jane to select from. Budget conscious, Jane is offered newer (more expensive) models including a lightly used British model and a petite frame styled French model with

an hourglass shape, before arriving at and selecting Rosey an "old demonstrator model with a lot of mileage" ("Rosey the Robot" 00:12:37).

While George and Jane can afford to have household help, budget is a consideration as to the quality of support they can acquire. Reinforcing these middle-class values, Jane cannot have the best money can buy, hence Rosey being compared to newer units displaying her status as a second-class robot. Interestingly, with the selection of Rosey there is a physical replication of the mammy archetype from the slave owning south in areas such as the design of her build, uniform, mannerisms and position as an older thus lesser model in addition to her sentient state and identification as she rather than it (Maloney). Mammy archetypes are common in media of all types including notable characters such as Hattie McDaniel in *Gone with the Wind*, Octavia Spencer in *The Help*, and Tyler Perry in drag in *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (Bogle).

Rosey reproducing the mammy archetype seems happiest when in service of her human family, a reflection of the desire to sacrifice selfish pursuits in exchange of pleasing a human owner. Versions of this appear in other renditions of robotic dedication throughout pop culture through a willingness to sacrifice their own lives for the good of humanity further establishing them as second-class citizens (Faber). This classist thinking continues as Rosey becomes a 'member of the family' only as long as there is budget to afford her services at which point she is quickly discarded without a thought for her well-being by her human owners ("Rosey the Robot").

Rosey reflects the mammy stereotype which Bogle presents as a sassy attitude resulting from hardship and the knowledge of better ways of doing things. Additionally, throughout the series Rosey's importance and influence in the household has placed her in a position of power in relation to the children and occasionally to Jane as the woman of the house. Regardless of status, gender roles remain solid with everyone serving George as the man of the house and breadwinner. A clear display of this comes in the closing credits, whereupon arriving home, each member of the family beginning with Rosey offer some form of service to George, with the exception of the dog whom he now must walk ("Rosey's Boyfriend" 00:24:50).

Black feminists such as hooks and Davis have written extensively on the role Black women and POC have had on household maintenance and labor. This becomes a critical point in the efforts performed by robots in *The Jetsons*. The position of POC in a white middle-class household often extended well beyond

tasks such as cooking and cleaning and became as much about familiar bonds and caregiving as modern definitions of motherhood and parenthood might. This combination of low status and seemingly replaceable family member is critical in analyzing Rosey's position.

Though a number of characteristics are designed to dehumanize Rosey including a robotic voice, wheels in place of feet and the addition of mechanical and beeping type noises (Coyle and Mesker 26) an argument can be made for just how human she is. What Krafft refers to as the "Feminized embodiment" of appliances (77), Rosey is very human in her design and characteristics. S1 Rosey is clearly sentient and often talks back to the Jetson family and their guests. Illustration of this autonomy can be seen in Rosey's first dinner with *The Jetsons* where she tells Cosmo Spacely (George's boss) to "Quiet down, Shorty" while patting him on the head ("Rosey the Robot" 00:20:21).

Rosey further carries a number of features that distinguish her as the demeaning stereotype of mammy from others referencing African American women. Physical characteristics focus on the overweight and soft woman without a twinkle of sexuality or femininity in her carriage, the body of mammy is purely for service (Brown Givens and Monahan). Strong and stocky the mammy can handle physical chores and labor, but clearly is not going to be capable of running away from the household she is bound to in the way one might see a slave girl do (Bogle).

Rosey is bound to the household both through oppressive and physical limitations. When George is fired for Rosey's behavior to Cosmo at dinner, he claims that they can no longer afford a robot maid, and Rosey is sent away. After George gets rehired and provided with a raise by Cosmo, he rushes out to get Rosey back and finds her waiting at a Space Bus stop shouting "Rosey! We can afford you now!" ("Rosey the Robot" 00:23:40). This further reinforces her position not just as a servant, but also of a financially lower-class. Rosey doesn't have personal transportation either in the form of a pneumatic tube or flying car which is taken for granted throughout S1 to be the norm even for teenage friends of Judy in later episodes.

Once back in the home and Rosey's status is restored the full mammy stereotype is displayed. This behavior is best described by Bogle: "Mammy joyously goes about her chores. All is in order. Everyone knows his or her place." (8). Rosey is grateful for the chance to serve her family rather than risk never having a purpose.

However, throughout S1 attempts are made to humanize Rosey. In episode 8 when Rosey meets Mac the handyman's robot helper, viewers see both robotic

characters reproduce the distracted "love drunk clumsiness" daughter Judy shows when she has fallen for a boy and forgets how to navigate using her booster belt causing a number of near miss accidents ("Rosey's Boyfriend" 00:01:55). Both Mac and Rosey are faced with complex fates, Mac is turned off by his creator Henry for causing damage and Rosey is taken to a Robotologist for a check-up. After reminding Jane that "Factories don't install emotion chips" in these models when Jane suggests that Rosey might be sad, the Robototologist claims Rosey to be fully operational ("Rosey's Boyfriend" 00:20:03).

A particular element of these values comes in the way the show addresses household tasks in the two releases. The mammy characteristics and attitude seem to disappear in S2-3. Rosey's character is reduced to physical and social distinctions making her less human or distinctive. While removing troublesome elements of a mammy trope could be interpreted as reducing racism, I posit that it diminishes POC even further in *The Jetsons* universe.

An interesting perspective comes into play here as the 'adults' consider trading Rosey in for a new model that does a better job because of her human-like failings. The children, however, consider this something that should be solved as Elroy claims she is 'Just like one of the family' and should be saved at all costs (Rosey's Boyfriend"). Granting a five-minute daily video call for Rosey and Mac to connect to get them back to regular service resolves the behavioral challenges for both. The concession to give the servants personal time may be further acknowledgement that Rosey and Mac are more than machines. Mammy archetypes would not be considered worthy of the human joys of connecting with one another in a way that might limit their ability to serve their owners, thus reinforcing a reduced social status for robots in *The Jetsons* that echoes Bogle's interpretation.

As I have shown, gender, social class and racial distinctions are made throughout *The Jetsons* when viewers meet sentient robot service providers. Representing the mammy and Uncle Tom archetypes clearly identified by Bogle in their work analyzing African Americans in film, are Rosey and her boyfriend Mac who is also a service robot ("Rosey's Boyfriend"). Those positions consistently filled by POC in 60's America. Both Rosey and Mac fulfil working-class service roles in *The Jetsons* universe, but also manage to display core elements of humanity including emotional range and real-time decision-making reminding viewers that they are no less human than other characters.

Many of the tools that were futurizing in S1 are commonplace today. From frequent video calls to treadmills for exercise at home, The Jetsons S1 shows an

animated future that has for the most part come to fruition. Nonsensical innovations from S2-3 regress back in the realms of cartoon dreams for children. Possibly fueled by the cartoon audience time slot of Saturday mornings, technology and robotic assistance moves from problem solving to silliness. Innovations including a virtual furniture moving tool and automated face washing robot for baseball show that the dreamy technological options have been replaced with whimsy. Frivolity could be considered a comment from the creators on the demographics being reached or a lack of consideration of the ways in which dreams of technological innovation can foster creativity in young minds.

Automation, Creativity, and Commercialization

The Jetsons represents more than a classist, racist and sexist future. Hanna-Barbera Studios developed the "limited animation" approach and supported numerous commercial innovations in the creation of animated properties while writers developed storylines and dreamed up new gadgets. Core to both production and storyline development was the erasure of manual or repetitive human labors wherever possible. This further serves to reinforce the importance and societal contribution of middle-class decision making work over manual skill development for young watchers (Gans).

The "limited animation" approach for the show developed by Hannah-Barbera embraced the values of capitalism (Stockman 30; Coyle and Mesker 15). In their comparison of episodes of both *The Jetsons* and *The Flintstones*, Stockman describes the acumen of Hanna-Barbera in developing the technique that uses just four frames in place of the more expensive and labor intensive 64 used in Disney-style productions as both commercially savvy and resourceful. Through efforts to reduce need for original cells by focusing on dialogue instead of movement and recycling everything from backdrops to jingles and soundscapes, the creators were able to produce content quickly and efficiently (Coyle and Mesker). Examples of these simplified cell designs can be most easily identified in the characters themselves. Each character in *The Jetsons* has distinguished boundaries between moving body parts i.e., Astro's collar or Judy's sleeve. These clear lines allowed most of the body to remain static using the same cell while a specific part such as the head or arm was animated in motion.

This placed the focus on the required original writing and acting work for every episode regardless of creative approach. It also forces viewers to fill in the blanks

in storylines and for writers to rely heavily on stereotypes and tropes to support viewer understanding (Stockman 28). The hyper simplification of both emotion and action in the each story arc carries itself into a suburban reflection of a middle-class, middle America of the 1960's (Stockman 28). Hannah-Barbera's commercial savvy goes farther as S2-3 continues to use the limited animation approach in content creation and recycles the S1 opening and closing credits helping to limit the cost of creating the later episodes.

Despite the saturated color rendering provided by Hannah-Barbera, most viewers of S1 watched the show in black and white (Jay). Reminding us of the tools of power and privilege is the realization that color television penetration only reached approximately 25% in 1968, more than five years after *The Jetsons* first aired, though the bright colors found their way into homes in syndication and in the S2-3 revivals. Themes of inequality and social class segregation go deeper when investigating the gadgets themselves.

Nostalgia and Escape

Both nostalgia and the refuge of familiar storylines are powerful factors for revisiting a favorite sitcom (Humphreys). These ideals are clearly displayed in retrospective reviews from professional critics and at-home viewers which realized an increased following re-release on DVD.

All the seasons were re-released in DVD collections in the early 2000s sparking increased viewing for another generation and renewed excitement for the series. A third generation of watchers discovered the show with viewers and critics both celebrating the nostalgia and comfort of having the series easily accessible. The later seasons spark a new level of escapism. While creators leveraged the commercial benefits of recycled credits, watchers could embrace increased familiarity with items like VHS players making appearances in the show. Even accounting for generational shifts, present-day viewers seem unaware of any problematic ideals in the program. Professional watcher reviews focus primarily on the nostalgia of the show and the formulaic sitcom plot and structure so similar to others of the time (Figueiredo). The reviews spend less time critiquing and examining the shows and instead default to episode synopsis and excitement about the collection being accessible to modern viewers (Fusion).

However, public reviews seem to place focus on the simplicity of the show and while aware of the gendered differences, ignore any influence these may have on

watchers. Content creators carry a responsibility in the views and ideas they share. In the modern context this could be interpreted as viewer warnings and content notifications, but with retrospective viewing the responsibility for understanding the media and messages they are consuming falls to viewers. Wolf introduces the joy they experience and while acknowledging gendered differences, seems to celebrate them rather than finding any issues. “This says to me that the show is hilarious for any age. Younger children can feel with Elroy’s trials of school, and teenage girls can laugh and cry with Judy’s boy troubles” (Wolf).

A general spirit of hope seems to come through in their thoughts that romantic ideals are possible rather than the imaginary concoctions that they are. Simple joy is best described by reviewer Little-Mikey “The Jetsons are a normal modern-day family not like any other modern-day family of today, except, of course that they live in the future.” Such statements return viewers to the quest for middle-class nuclear families that have been established to be an imperfect and imagined rendering of true family life in America and around the globe.

Humphreys revisits the feeling of escapism and how it becomes the norm when discussing how modern viewers revisiting shows such as *The Jetsons* may feel. When combined with the magic of nostalgia, a fantasy world may place blinders on viewers to disregard any missteps by the creators. Despite the opportunity to leverage nostalgia, reboots fail to display the progress society had made in the 25 years between S1 and S2-3. Much like the recycled opening and closing credits, later seasons of *The Jetsons* bring only the slightest reduction in racist tropes and continue to maintain social and gender norms at the 1962 level. Creators may have reduced these elements thoughtfully, or because the change in viewing time from Sunday evenings to Saturday mornings motivated a reduction. This is not to say that S2-3 are not a joyful escape but instead to warn watchers of being blinded to wrongdoing by the magic of nostalgia.

Conclusion: Beloved Content Causes Blindered Watching?

Fiction in any form offers a chance for the consumer to escape but can just as easily be used as a tool for social good. Revisiting *The Jetsons* through a contemporary lens offers viewers the chance to find insight in the production. New levels of escapism are arrived at as multiple generations romanticize the re-release seen in viewer commentary.

As I stated in the introduction, the “family friendly” viewing of shows such as *The Jetsons* pervaded specific values and stereotypes to those watching. In what Geiger and Rutsky (5) refer to as “the emotional charge,” viewers see and hear many messages in the content they consume. Young watchers spanning multiple generations were cultured to believe that women and POC deserved fewer opportunities and had fewer interests, while adults were supplied content that reinforced the oppressive norms of the 1960s (Brown Givens and Monahan). While retrospective analysis of content cannot change the influence something has had, it can shift it moving forward.

When a POC, disabled, woman, or gender-diverse person is unable to see themselves reflected by those who control society either in real life or in media the result are quiet oppressions removing the hope and opportunity that can be presented by entertainment. Shows such as *The Jetsons* may portray a future holding only options for those who are not white and male to be in service roles and not those of leaders, but it also provides a place for viewers and critics to question how to make these ideals remain fiction. Fortunately, with critique unwinding historical oppressions through modern retelling is possible and can offer the reminder that few stories can deliver on all things.

The Jetsons provides the escape and formulaic plots that many viewers want in a sitcom but fails to stand up to modern values. For good or bad a time capsule that erases POC and places gender and social class above ability may not deserve a place in viewer watchlists in 2022 or 2062 unless the lessons from both the beloved and biased can be learned in tandem. The Jetsons offers an opportunity to see innovation and creativity in play while offering creators, critics, and watchers lessons in evolving their own definition of what the perfect world of the future might look like to them. The animation industry benefitted greatly from technical developments provided by shows such as *The Jetsons* and can continue to improve upon this foundation by encouraging greater diversity both behind the screen and in front of it.

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