"We're the Young Generation and We've Got Something to Say": A Gramscian Analysis of Entertainment Television and the Youth Rebellion of the 1960s

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Using Gramsci's theory of hegemony to examine a growing crisis of authority erupting within American culture, this paper focuses on three popular, youth-based television programs of the 1960s—The Monkees, The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour, and The Mod Squad—and on how their themes of youthful disaffection, countercultural values, and political rebellion circulated and were made meaningful in the popular press. Although conflicts and struggles manifest themselves within other sectors of the social order, the field of popular culture is particularly valuable in showcasing breakdowns in consensus, the unmasking of coercive power, and the process of incorporating rebellious social formations back into a reconfigured hegemonic structure.

Explaining crisis of authority within a ruling hegemonic order, Gramsci (1971, p. 276) described the situation as one in which "the old is dying and the new cannot be born". This description, along with Gramsci's hegemony theory of social and political relations, seems particularly useful in making sense of the crisis that erupted through American culture in the 1960s. It has become a commonplace to describe that period as a rebellious decade, characterized by protest and confrontation, turmoil and social division. What has been lacking in the recent avalanche of commentary on the sixties is a systematic attempt to theorize the cultural politics of this tumultuous period.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony is helpful here because it considers power relations not only within such "coercive" state apparatuses as government, law, and judiciary, but also within such "consensual" civil institutions as the family, the church, cultural and political associations, and institutions of popular entertainment (Simon. 1982, pp. 68–69). These latter institutions are particularly important in

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examing the youth rebellions of the sixties, since it is within them that these rebellions manifested themselves with particular force.

To examine how the youth revolt, and the crisis of authority it helped engender, were made meaningful within the cultural sphere, I focus on two consensual institutions of American society—entertainment television and the popular press. Popular culture is one of the crucial fields upon which dominant or elite groups attempt to organize and naturalize consent to their dominance. But paradoxically, popular culture, in order to be popular, must negotiate both the interests of the dominant and the discourses of the subordinate. Consequently, in a period of crisis, popular culture can showcase the breakdown of that consent. By examining popular culture as an institution, as well as a body of texts, we also can see to what extent hegemonic forces must cede to the discourses of the subordinate during periods of turmoil.

Entertainment television programming in the United States in the 1960s has been stuck with the appellation, "the vast wasteland". FCC chairman Newton Minow's description and the oft-repeated charge that network programs constructed a comic book world with no hint of the turmoils ripping through the cultural landscape is not without foundation. While protests against the escalating war in Vietnam began growing in the mid-sixties, TV viewers were watching top-rated "war-is-fun" comedies like The Wackiest Ship in the Army (fifth in the Nielsen ratings for the 1965–1966 season), F Troop (rated eighth), and Gomer Pyle (rated tenth) (Barnouw, 1982, p. 375). However, if we look at television as a cultural institution articulating ideology as it broadcasts programs, even the so-called vast wasteland was not immune to the effects of social strife.

I looked at the reception in the popular press of three successful television programs that were targeted toward a youth audience and dealt openly with disaffection, protest, rebellion, and countercultural values. The Monkees, which aired from 1966, until 1968; The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour, which premiered in 1967 and was forcefully removed from the air in 1969; and The Mod Squad, which began in 1968 and ran till 1973, spanned the most intense period of turmoil in post-war American society. This analysis explores that turmoil as it worked through the three programs' circulated meanings in popular magazines like TV Guide (the most widely read magazine in the United States), Time, Newsweek, Saturday Review, and Look. These magazines, some vaguely liberal, others vaguely conservative, articulated dominant viewpoints and preferred opinions within the white, middle-class social formation to which they were mainly addressed. I focus on these readings rather than on the shows themselves to examine how the programs were read and made meaningful in the late sixties. The critical reception of these shows can also illustrate how dominant groups attempted to reconfigure consent around a new hegemonic order by the late sixties and early seventies.

**MONKEE BUSINESS**

Initial critical response to The Monkees, which joined the NBC lineup in the fall of 1966, focused on the fact that adults would hate the show but kids would love it. Broadcasting, an industry trade journal, offered assessments such as this from critic Laurence Laurent of the Washington Post: "Adults will scream in outrage... will
delight the young” (“Critics’ Views of Hits, Misses”, 1966, p. 64). *Television Magazine*, another trade journal, found the same response among critics. Bob Brock of the *Dallas Times-Herald* observed: “Some adults may not understand The Monkees, but I think the teenagers will get the message loud and clear” (“Consensus”, 1966, p. 68). The self-consciousness about a generational gap, about American youth breaking the familial—and by extension the social—consent associated with the post-war era was a theme emphasized by producers Bert Schneider and Bob Rafelson in press interviews. They “understood that you don’t capture the wild, sweet, for-real spirit of today’s rock ’n’ roll kids with the same net you use for Father or Mother, or U.N.C.L.E. Knows Best” (Rollins, 1966, p. 93).

These rumblings of a rift between the tastes of youth and the tastes of adults are significant in helping to chart how the crisis of authority escalated in the 1960s. The post-war years, and the fifties in particular, saw remarkably little dissent from most middle- and working-class white Americans. American foreign policy objectives meshed with an ideological consensus of anti-communism; industrial expansion meshed with a celebration of a consumerist life-style. The watchword of the era was “conformity”. And while some voices in the suburban split-level wilderness warned against the dangers of the Organization Man ethos, the era was characterized by an “end of ideology” sentiment.¹

The belief in a consensual society in which all strata of the population were united within a normalized system of shared values and goals—a system that provided the state with the cohesion it needed to operate—began to break down in the 1960s. The civil rights movement forced many Americans to acknowledge that not all members of society were equally represented within the common value system. Middle-class American youth formed a second group to crack the hegemonic armor, through civil rights work, anti-war activism, and the construction of a countercultural life-style.¹

The first major rally against the Vietnam War in April 1965, organized and attended primarily by students and young people, heralded the public birth of the anti-war movement as a youth movement. Gitlin (1980) analyzed how *The New York Times* constructed its story of the march within a hegemonic frame by focusing on a youth/adult split, discussing the long hair of some demonstrators, and adopting a trivializing and patronizing tone to the whole notion of youth protest.

A similar tone was evident in the press reception of *The Monkees* television show. Along with the youth/adult split, press accounts of the show detailed the problem of the actors’ long hair and the rock music they played. Many of the press stories also affected a patronizing tone. Long hair, weird clothing, and rock music had become, by the mid-sixties, cultural signs of youth disaffection from the consensual Establishment of their parents’ generation. A *Newsweek* article in October 1966 indicated how anxiety-producing these countercultural signs could be:

Several rural NBC affiliates refuse to carry the show. “There is a grand resistance to kids with long hair,” says Rafelson. “The TV reviewer on the Portland, Ore. paper won’t even look at the show. There’s also conservative resistance by adults to the music” (“Romp! Romp!” 1966).

A 1967 story in *TV Guide* expounded further on the conflict between the affiliates and the long-haired Monkees: “the affiliates are conservative, skeptical men known
to be opposed in principle to anything long haired” (Whitney, 1967, p. 8). The article described a gala thrown by the network for its affiliates to introduce the new stars and shows for the fall lineup. The Monkees apparently engaged in some hijinks and jokes so displeasing to affiliates that some failed to pick up the show, thus undermining its national ratings.

Clearly the “threat” the show posed was not overtly political. No press reports linked the show to anti-war protest or to any social change movements. But the show was troublesome in a way similar to the nascent anti-war movement. The reception of the show can be located within a growing adult perplexity and alarm at youth culture—a counterculture of bizarre fashions, tastes, artifacts, and practices. *The Monkees* may have been a rather scrubbed-down version of this counterculture; nevertheless, enough signs of the new youth movement remained to make some uneasy. *The New York Times* reporter who covered the 1965 March on Washington had attempted to trivialize and contain the marchers’ threat by focusing on their long hair, beards, and guitars; by 1966 and 1967 those signs themselves—even outside a clear political context or discourse—were being read as rebellion and threats to hegemonic control.

With *The Monkees*, however, it wasn’t only the hair and music that indicated a breakdown in consensual politics; the very style of the show indicated anarchy. The actors playing the Monkees didn’t act or perform in any conventional manner. According to the *Newsweek* article, they “romped”. Anarchism also reigned on the set. A January 1967 cover story in *TV Guide* detailed the rather unorthodox methods used to film the series. Scenes were underlit or overlit; the camera kept running after a scene was supposedly over. Young, inexperienced directors were used because older professionals refused to work the way Schneider and Rafelson demanded. The article quoted one disgruntled director: “If you don’t care about your focus or your lighting, and if you’re going to let four idiots ad-lib your dialogue, you don’t need a director” (Raddatz, 1967, p. 19). The bewilderment and contempt evident in this remark paralleled much adult response to the burgeoning hippie movement, with its anti-authoritarian, non-hierarchical values and “let it all hang out” philosophies. *The Monkees* was also refusing to obey the rules of the (popular culture) Establishment. Like the hippie movement, the show refused to conform, refused to function within the prescribed boundaries of professional competency and deference to authority figures. *The Monkees* thus enunciated its own discourse of disaffected youth and their alternative cultural stance.

**SMOTHERING DISSENT**

Network television’s next stab at attracting a youth audience was CBS’s *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*. The show was scheduled into the coveted 9:00 p.m. Sunday slot; however, it had to do battle with NBC’s top-rated *Bonanza*. Surprisingly, the show prospered. It was always in the top twenty and frequently among the top ten highest-rated shows in the 1966–1967 and 1967–1968 seasons (Kerby, 1968).

Initially the show and the brothers were not seen as representations of the rebellious youth generation. With their short hair, suits, traditional folk music, and whimsically loving references to “mom”, the Smothers carried none of the disturbing countercultural signs that had made *The Monkees* troubling. A number of press
accounts played up the fact that the Smothers’ father had been a military officer who had valiantly given his life during the Second World War. Press accounts also played on the brothers’ consensual appeal. A June 1967 piece in *Time* magazine quoted Tommy Smothers, the duo’s highly articulate spokesperson, saying: “‘We’re so college-looking and clean-cut, . . . The American Legion likes us and so does the left wing’”. The article added, “And so does every wing of the younger generation” (“Mother’s Brothers”, 1967). Here, it seemed, were two performers who identified with the disaffected younger generation but who would offend nobody.

This noncontroversial state of affairs did not last for very long, however. By 1968, the Smothers Brothers found themselves repeatedly clashing with CBS brass. The battles were waged over the network’s censoring of skits and guest performers it considered too political for an entertainment show and the network’s demand to preview and approve all shows before airtime. All these battles received ample play in the popular press and may have escalated the atmosphere of crisis as the brothers, particularly Tommy, hurtled toward an eventual showdown with their corporate bosses.

This situation led inexorably to CBS resorting to censorship and cancellation to manage its youthful entertainers. The crisis can be analyzed as an enactment within the institution of network television of similar crises abounding in other sectors of the social order in 1968. The events of that year exposed a full-blown crisis of authority, a general crisis of the state. In *Policing the Crisis*, Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts (1978) used Gramscian theory to explain a similar crisis in Britain in the late sixties and early seventies. During a crisis of authority, they maintain the very foundation of political and cultural leadership becomes exposed and contested. The hegemonic forces of the state shift from relying primarily on consensual institutions to maintain control and begin relying more on coercive mechanisms. These coercive mechanisms are part of the state’s legitimate arsenal but are hidden from view except at times of crisis (p. 217).

In the United States in 1968, the increasing use of the police and National Guard to deal with protests on campuses, on streets, and in ghettos revealed with utter clarity the breakdown of consent and the shift to coercive methods of control. But the coercive mechanisms weren’t being used only by law enforcement agencies. The contesting of power relations was also working its way through the realm of popular culture. One such site was *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*.

The show was unusual for a prime-time variety program in that the brothers were committed to showcasing talent associated with the counterculture. The Jefferson Airplane and The Doors, for example, brought psychedelic acid rock into millions of households. However, CBS decided to step in when the Smothers invited Pete Seeger onto the show to sing “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy”. Seeger had been blacklisted from appearing on television since the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings, but CBS was primarily concerned about the lyrics to the song he wanted to sing. A narrative about a gung-ho military officer who forced his men to ford a river until they all drowned, the song was a fairly transparent comment on President Johnson’s Vietnam policy:

Now every time I read the papers That old feelin’ comes on We’re waist deep in the Big Muddy And the big fool says to push on. (Metz, 1975, p. 298)
When CBS responded by censoring the performance, press criticism of the decision was widespread, with many articles reprinting portions of the lyrics. A few months later, the network acquiesced to pressure and allowed Seeger to reappear on the show to sing the song in its entirety.

Folk singer Joan Baez wasn’t as fortunate. Baez appeared on the show dedicating a song to her husband, a prominent anti-war activist who had recently resisted the draft and been sentenced to prison. In her dedication she mentioned first that her husband was going to prison, and then, in a politically forthright manner, she explained why. CBS deleted the explanation from the aired version of the program. *Saturday Review* quoted the network’s rationale: “her remarks on the Smothers Brothers show were ‘editorial’ and not suitable for entertainment programs” (Shayon, 1969).

There were other run-ins with the network, not all concerning overtly political issues. In October 1968, comic David Steinberg delivered a vaguely sacrilegious sermonette that resulted in a flurry of protest. CBS banned Steinberg from ever delivering a sermonette on the program again and at that point instated a policy unique to *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*: All episodes would have to be made available to affiliates to preview before airing (Metz, 1975, p. 301).

**A DIFFERENT KIND OF REBELLION**

Over and over again in the press accounts of the controversy, Tommy Smothers was quoted aligning himself and his show with the youth movement. In a *Time* magazine piece titled “Snippers v. Snipers” (1968), Tommy affirmed to the CBS Program Practices department, “Dick and I are the only ones who really know what young people want”. The article went on to say:

> The overriding problem, as far as the brothers are concerned, is that CBS with its large commitment to the blandest sort of family shows is out of touch with the times and with its audiences. “The whole country’s in trouble,” exclaims Tommy, “and we’ve started getting a kind of renaissance in the arts, in living. Painters can reflect their society. And writers can. Why can’t TV comedians?”

The show and its battle with CBS was likened to a rebellious youth going against the Establishment power structure. Like *The Monkees*, *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* was not playing by the rules; the difference was in how they articulated the rebellion. In the case of *The Monkees*, the discourse of rebellion worked primarily on a stylistic level—the look of the show, its method of production, the look of the Monkees themselves. The rebellious discourses associated with the Smothers Brothers show were more troubling and went far deeper, belittling a growing crisis of authority. The latter show, by pushing the bounds of acceptable political speech within the entertainment TV format, forced the network to reveal what those bounds were and to unmask its own coercive manner of operation. By characterizing network executives as totally ignorant about youth culture and CBS shows as blandly family-oriented, Tommy Smothers helped set up an antagonistic power struggle between the old that was dying and the new that couldn’t be born, to paraphrase Gramsci. *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* functioned as the rebellious politicized youth in CBS’s conformist, middle-class neighborhood. And to keep this
youth in line, the network was acting more and more like an over-zealous cop, metaphorically billyclubbing the show whenever it asserted its rebellious stance.

In April 1969, CBS suddenly cancelled the show, charging that the brothers had not delivered a tape of the upcoming episode on time for preview. The cancellation garnered headlines and a *Look* magazine cover story. Many story titles punned with the word “smothering” to foreground the censorship issue surrounding the show's cancellation.

If we can liken the CBS cancellation to a process of unmaking of coercive power, then what occurred within the institution of entertainment television was also a crisis of authority. While this crisis played itself out in the popular press, there were attempts by some accounts to defuse or deny the coerciveness of CBS’s action. *Newsweek* in its “Brothers Smothered” account said: “The brothers claim that they are being punished for antagonizing the power structure with their irreverent political and social comment.” In an attempt to contain the politically loaded situation, the article ended by claiming that a slip in the show’s ratings (to an apparent low of 47) may have been a more valid interpretation of the network’s action (1969). Here and elsewhere, claims that the network cancelled the show because of ratings, recast the conflict into a familiar free-market mold having nothing to do with political coercion; cancellation on the basis of ratings was, thus, constructed as a form of popular democracy the network was acceding to the will of its viewers by ridding it from the airways.

CBS itself employed another strategy of containment. *Look*’s cover story, written by First Amendment champion Nat Hentoff, provided a very sympathetic platform for Tommy Smothers. However, appended at the very end was CBS’s counter in the form of a letter by network president Robert Wood. The Wood letter set up a dichotomy between what was appropriate in news television and what was appropriate in entertainment television. Dissident and anti-establishment views, such as that expressed in coverage of the Chicago Democratic Convention, were fine in news. “On the other hand, the Smothers Brothers took the position that we must abrogate the standards that we apply to all entertainment programs and make a special exception of them” (Hentoff, 1969, p. 29, italics in original). Wood claimed that all views could be expressed on the network (thus appealing to pluralist ideals), however, CBS could legitimately control their dissemination. Anti-establishment perspectives on the news could presumably be contained by strategies of news management. Such views were more problematic on a variety show where containment might be more difficult. The Wood letter attempted to render natural the network’s control over televised discourses. It attempted to depoliticize the definition of entertainment standards as though there was consensus on what those standards were.

*TV Guide*, in an angry and self-righteous special editorial, proudly took up the network banner:

To many good, sensible citizens of this Nation, the Smothers Brothers have been crossing these lines [of sacrilege and affront] too often. . . .

The issue is taste. And responsibility. And honesty. And perspective. And a proper respect for the views of others. . . .
The issue is: Shall a network be required to provide time for a Joan Baez to pay tribute to her draft-evading husband while hundreds of thousands of viewers in the households of men fighting and dying in Vietnam look on in shocked resentment?

We can only agree unreservedly with a network policy that is determined not to insult the general mores of the country. ("Smothered Out: A Wise Decision", 1969)

Although TV Guide's position was somewhat more extreme than other press responses, it crystallized a more typical rhetorical strategy that the popular press used to represent a denaturalized ruling position under attack. The editorial appealed overtly to consensual positions: "good, sensible citizens" who were outraged by the deviant opinions of the Smothers Brothers show. There was an appeal to "general mores" that were somehow understood by all—except the Smothers and their disrespectful guests. However, by its very appeal to that consensual system of "general mores", the TV Guide editorial tended to expose it as a hegemonic construct.

The editorial also attempted to defuse the political nature of the issue. The question was not political speech, but "taste". It was bad taste for Joan Baez to pay tribute to her draft-evading husband, not because she was expressing a political position but because she offended the general mores of a nation that supported its boys in Vietnam. By so thoroughly repressing the actual crisis of legitimacy shuddering through American society, the TV Guide piece itself became a marker of that crisis.

Despite these and other attempts to contain the crisis, most press accounts circulated Tommy Smothers' discourse of youth rebellion. He intensified his alignment with the youth movement in the aftermath of the show's cancellation. He also intensified the sense of polarization between CBS as unjust authority and the show as champion of anti-establishment youth culture.

Look magazine's cover story on the show's cancellation was constructed primarily around Tommy's discourse of polarization. At one point in the article he said:

Now, if we're thrown off this easily, what will happen to someone who has something really important to say? And also, what shows on television are in any way representing the viewpoint of young people? They are used to controversy. They haven't turned their heads off yet. But they're turning television off. (Hentoff, 1969, p. 28)

At another point the article described Tommy brooding in a chair in his hotel, asking: "'And CBS, where is that fear they have coming from? How are we so dangerous?' He paused. 'Nobody bothers hawks like Bob Hope.'" (Hentoff, 1969, p. 29). Unlike Bob Hope, The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour provided discourse deeply at odds with that of ruling elites. It was the circulation of such dissenting speech that CBS rightly feared and that made the show, finally, so dangerous.

INCORPORATING THE MOD

While the Smothers Brothers were locked in their generational battle with CBS, at ABC plans were afoot to introduce a disaffected youth show into the fall 1968 lineup. The Mod Squad generated its own brand of controversy, illustrating a new turn in the crisis of authority.
The Mod Squad embraced both the countercultural hippie look and life-style evident (in scrubbed-down version) on The Monkees and the more politically dissident youth speech associated with The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour. However, the meanings attributed to The Mod Squad were very different. The Mod Squad may be seen as an attempt to incorporate aspects of dissident youths and blacks back within a new alliance of ruling interests, thus changing the hegemonic order itself.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, American society was increasingly responding to the threat of dissident youth as a "moral panic" and was constructing this panic as a clash between undisciplined, nihilistically rebellious young and the institutions of law and order. At the core of the panic was the question of how to make the young obey these institutions, whose strictures they appeared to be rejecting wholesale. We can see a playing out of this panic in events such as the Chicago Convention riots and the subsequent trial of the Chicago Eight; the law and order campaign waged by the Nixon/Agnew Republican ticket; and the shooting of anti-war protesters at Kent State University in 1970. The insistent theme of these events was the need to bring down harsh judicial or police force to rein in a youth generation gone out of control. So while the crisis of authority, on the one hand, forced the state to reveal its need to mobilize coercive forces to maintain power, on the other hand, it also gave the state its excuse to use those forces. The moral panic, therefore, justified coercion.

The very premise of The Mod Squad was an attempt to work out this crisis. Three disaffected young people—an angry ghetto black, a blonde "hippie chick", and a rebellious young rich kid—were recruited by the police department to work as undercover cops. On the surface the show's plot seemed a simple (if rather obvious) solution to the youth problem—encourage the young to join the system they felt had been oppressing them. But discussions of the show in the popular press reveal a much more ambivalent response to this plot and to the moral panic it represented.

A fairly long and in-depth article on The Mod Squad in the July 3, 1971, issue of TV Guide documented the initial response to the proposed show. In May 1968, according to the article, the forthcoming series was advertised in The New York Times with copy reading, "The police don't understand the now generation and the now generation doesn't dig the fuzz. The solution: find some swinging young people who live the beat scene. Get them to work for the cops" (Hobson, 1971, p. 24). The response was immediate and negative. According to series producer Aaron Spelling, the show was saddled with the "stigma... of kids being undercover dragnets, kids finkin' on kids". Eventual series star Michael Cole refused to read for the part, and the network received an avalanche of mail condemning the show.

The controversy surrounding The Mod Squad suggested that entertainment television's attempt to reconfigure a consensus around issues of law and order was not entirely successful. The attempt at incorporation was being read as yet another unmasking of coercive power—and it was being rejected.

The article went on to discuss the repercussions of the controversy:

The initial brouhaha about kids finkin' on kids made the producers hypersensitive on the subject. Subsequent scripts have been routinely furbished with lines like, "I do not fink on a soul brother". Youth crime, in fact, has been avoided. Most of the heavies have been adults with power. (Hobson, 1971, p.)
Apparently the show was retooled in the face of protest. To make the premise at all palatable (and popular) the series had to encompass a range of different and contradictory meanings.

The theme of powerful-adults-as-villains appeared in numerous accounts. In his October 5, 1968, *TV Guide* review, Cleveland Amory (1968) discussed how neither the show nor the main characters were sell-outs. In one episode, for instance, “the seemingly bad-guy young try were just pawns in the hands of the evil adults”. In its March 21, 1969, review, *Time* magazine compared the treatment of young people in such popular cop shows as *Adam-12*, *Hawaii Five-O*, and *The Name of the Game*, where the young were frequently portrayed as psychotic hippies or crazed radicals wreaking havoc on their elders, and the treatment of young people in *The Mod Squad*, which “consistently take[s] the attitude that contemporary kids can be heroes” (“Telling It Like It Isn’t”, 1969). Press accounts also repeatedly noted that the Mod Squad carried no weapons and made no arrests.

In the *Time* article, producer Aaron Spelling—echoing *Monkees* producer Bob Rafelson and Tommy Smothers—emphasized how *The Mod Squad* gave voice to the legitimate views of disaffected youth:

“We’re telling it like it is,” he says. “Somebody has to help adults understand young people. They’ve got so many hangups and nobody seems to care. Love is the answer. Those hippies are right. Those kids are so totally involved with life they’ve involved me” (“Telling It Like It Isn’t”, 1969).

Unfortunately Spelling had neither Tommy Smothers’ eloquence nor his air of sincerity. The middle-aged Spelling’s affectation of youth lingo appeared forced and slightly ridiculous. The article reinforced Spelling’s dubious sincerity by juxtaposing his quote with a counter from one of the show’s youthful stars, Clarence Williams III, who claimed that there was nothing realistic about kids working for cops.

### A PROCESS OF NEGOTIATION

How can we make sense of the recurring questions about the show’s premise of kids as cops as well as the hypersensitivity to depicting adults as bad guys and young people as innocent pawns or outright heroes? One way to theorize the situation is to see it as a process of negotiation. To reassert hegemonic control, elites may attempt to incorporate aspects of the very forces arrayed against them. *The Mod Squad* showcased that complex and contradictory process of incorporation at work. To begin incorporating disaffected youth back into “the system”, major concessions needed to be made to this particular group. *The Mod Squad* indicated this concession by, for instance, portraying adults as villains.

In 1966, the *Monkees’* long hair and their rock music had created major problems for the series. By the time *The Mod Squad* aired, these signs of countercultural life-style and values no longer carried such negative connotations. In fact, crucial to the show’s premise was the assumption that kids could look like hippies, talk like hippies, and express countercultural values, yet still be good kids; they could even be cops. Unlike *The Monkees*, which expressed an anarchic, anti-authoritarian vision, *The Mod Squad* situated these countercultural values and tastes within the institu-
tion of law and order. The series tried to show that even this institution could be changed, remolded along new lines. The crucial point was that the police department needed to change to accommodate Pete Cochran, Julie Barnes, and Linc Hayes, not that these three needed to change themselves to become good cops. The very fact that they were described as "three young social outcasts" ("New Series", 1968) was what made them valuable.

The clearest shift toward accepting and incorporating positions associated with rebellious youth involved not primarily their styles and tastes but rather their values and political positions. Incorporating an alternative position should not be read as a sign of hegemony triumphant. It reveals, instead, hegemonic change.

When Joan Baez had sought to dedicate a song to her draft-resisting husband, she had been censored by CBS; TV Guide had castigated her and the Smothers Brothers for offending the mores of the nation. The situation had changed markedly by the 1970-1971 season of The Mod Squad, as revealed by TV Guide's July 3, 1971, article on the series and the movement toward "relevance" in popular television. Harve Bennett, the second of the series' two producers, said: "I thought we were in trouble, but if you can do a show where a draft resister is the sympathetic character, you have done something worth doing" (Hobson, 1971, p. 23). From censorship and editorial outrage we have moved to the sympathetic portrayal of a draft evader.

The article went on to document other socially relevant topics the program tackled (although it carefully alternated each relevant episode with a straight cops-and-robbers episode). Shows produced by Harve Bennett dealt with such topics as militant black priests, campus unrest, slum lords, Indian life, and the My Lai massacre. None of these topics would have been considered appropriate for entertainment television when CBS's Bob Wood fired the Smothers Brothers in 1969. Ironically Wood became the main proponent of the turn toward relevance in the early 1970s as CBS began to woo the very audience the Smothers had appealed to in their embattled show. The turn toward relevance—with The Mod Squad being one of the movement's most successful products—revealed the process of incorporation at work. Programs like The Mod Squad began to treat seriously issues of concern to disaffected young people, using a discourse associated with their movements for social change.

One way to explain the change is to suggest that the reliance on coercive force to reassert hegemonic control was less than entirely successful. The unmasking of authoritarian force, whether on network television or in the streets, seemed to have only given the rebellious movements of blacks and young people more ammunition for their struggle. A new tactic—the formation of a new consensus—finally succeeded in effectively incorporating dissident social forces back into a reconfigured hegemonic structure. We can see how this new consensus worked by comparing the themes of confrontation that circulated around CBS and the Smothers Brothers over issues of program practices with the manner in which Harve Bennett dealt with program practices at ABC.

Bennett, quoted in the July 3, 1971, TV Guide, explained his initial worries about how to get an episode dealing with the My Lai massacre past the network's Program
Standards and Practices department. He said he expected to be told to jump out a window:

I said, "Dorothy [the head of the department], I would like to do this show for one reason only and this will be the theme of the show—that a country which is capable of admitting there's a possibility that we kill innocent civilians and is capable of putting it in print and talking about it cannot be a bad place to live" (Hobson, 1971, p. 23).

Bennett got the go-ahead with the proviso that he soft-pedal the killing of children.

Network authority was no longer a coercive force that refused to entertain alternative viewpoints. Alternative views were permitted (and were ultimately not that threatening) because the appeal was made to a consensual notion of liberal pluralism. While there may not have been consensus on the content of the various alternative views, there was consensus on the desirability to let them circulate. The construction of the network as a liberal pluralist consensual institution, instead of the authoritarian institution associated with the Smothers Brothers crisis, eased us away from the crisis of authority that so threatened hegemonic control. The fact that such institutions did finally exert the authority of ruling elites was blurred by this new appeal to consensus. The face of hegemonic power and authority was rendered invisible by the reconstruction of American society as a plurality of different perspectives and points of view.

The face of hegemonic authority was further rendered invisible by the shifting and retooling of institutions associated with coercive state apparatuses to incorporate dissident social formations. The networks reconfigured their notions of appropriate entertainment to include the discourses of youth in their move toward relevant programs. In The Mod Squad, the police department reconfigured itself to include hippie cops. In the arena of "legitimate" electoral politics, the Democratic party reconfigured itself in 1972 to embrace anti-war positions with the candidacy of George McGovern.

CONCLUSION

To avoid wholesale social breakdown and disintegration and to avoid authority resorting to coercive state powers, dominant groups needed to embrace change. This is what happened in American society in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Hegemonic authority reasserted itself and the economic basis of the social order remained unchanged, but certain cultural concessions needed to be made to those groups who had instigated the crisis in the first place.

By looking at entertainment television and the social circulation of a number of shows targeted to dissident young people, we can chart the process of cultural clash, negotiation, concession, and incorporation. At the end we find a new landscape of discourses saying that to oppose the war in Vietnam and resist the draft were noble and honorable things to do. The acceptance of such a discourse came only through struggle, it was not granted from above, it was won from below. The various rebellions of the 1960s may not have changed American society as much as the rebels wanted, but they did change it.
NOTES

1Gitlin (1980) has shown the usefulness of Gramsci’s theories in his ground-breaking book, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*. While my application of hegemony theory differs somewhat from his, this paper is clearly indebted to his work.

2Another useful way to examine popular meanings attributed to television programs at particular historical moments is to look at audience response letters. My work on the late sixties TV show *Julia* indicates that viewers, while frequently aware of opinions circulating within the mainstream press, often challenged those interpretations and came up with their own readings. These readings helped viewers negotiate changes reverberating through the social order, such as changes in definitions of what it meant to be black and what it meant to be white (Bodroghkozy, in press). By focusing only on discourses in the popular press in this article, I am necessarily examining elite opinion. However, such opinion frequently set the agenda or defined the boundaries of debate for viewers.

1I am not suggesting that there were no contradictions or instances of social strife in this period. However, as indicated by contemporary best-sellers such as Daniel Bell’s *The End of Ideology*, David Reisman’s *The Lonely Crowd*, and William Whyte’s *The Organization Man*, along with popular films like *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, and *Rebel Without a Cause*, the white, middle-class *jidget* of the era was more a preoccupation with conformity, normality, and the fears as well as benefits of consensus than it was a preoccupation with the rending of that consensus.

1Women, many coming out of the youth-based New Left and civil rights movements, formed yet a third social formation to shatter the hegemonic armor in the late 1960s and early to mid-1970s (see Evans, 1979).

3See Specter (1983) for an overview of the Seeger censorship controversy.

4Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts (1978) have described a moral panic as “one of the principal surface manifestations of the crisis”. It is a site where the crisis of authority is experienced and played out (p. 221).

5Gitlin (1982) argues that incorporation is a routine function of hegemony. Hegemonic orders remain hegemonic precisely because they can absorb and domesticate alternative views of social reality.

6It has been argued that aspects of countercultural life-style were easily divested of any threat, rendered politically meaningless, and offered up as fashion by a consumer capitalist system that can absorb almost anything. But even within the process of absorption and incorporation, dissident signs and discourses retain some politically charged meanings. Long hair, whether worn by the Monkees or by Mod Squadder Pete Cochran, was not primarily a fashion statement in the 1960s; it connected its wearer, however tenuously, to a rebellious and dissident social movement. The strategy of the hegemonic system is not to evacuate a movement’s meanings, but rather to incorporate elements of that movement into a new hegemony that is not too radically at odds with the old.

REFERENCES


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