

12-2018

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Nick Campagna

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## Citation: Pilot Scholars Version (Modified MLA Style)

Campagna, Nick, "The Final Frontier: Examining Gender and Race in the 1960s Through Star Trek" (2018). *History Undergraduate Publications and Presentations*. 20.

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The Final Frontier: Examining Gender and Race in the 1960s Through *Star Trek*

By

Nick Campagna

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts in History

University of Portland

December 2018

*Star Trek: The Original Series* has always been hailed as a paragon of progressive values and showing a very ideal vision of the future. Established between the humans and vulcans, the United Federation of Planets, the “protagonist nation” of *Star Trek*, is presented as a utopia in the stars that is multicultural, both in terms of human and alien species and cultures and bases its assessments on positions of government and on Star Fleet on the merit of the individual rather than race or social class. For such reasons, the Federation is shown as a perfect interstellar society championing ideals such as peace, exploration, and diversity. In such a setting, the show tackles some major social issues that plagued American society of the time through the fictional lens of the show itself most notably would be discussions on race and racism and the Vietnam War. The show grapples with these issues within its episodes both through the context and story of the episode itself as well as through its characters. For this reason, *Star Trek* has been heralded as a masterpiece that not only wrestles with the then current social issues at the time of its creation but does so in a way that is both intelligent, deep in its conversations and analogues of such issues, and in a way that could be described as “forward thinking for its time”. The way *Star Trek* handles the topic of race and racism is consistent with conversations of the 1960s through its use of characters from diverse backgrounds and direct discussion on race itself. However, *Star Trek* does not handle the topic of gender with the same forward thinking as race with females on the show being sexualized and gender being held to a more traditional view more reminiscent of the 1950s than the 60s.

Initially released on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1966, *Star Trek* takes place in the 23<sup>rd</sup> century following the expedition and adventures of the crew of the USS Enterprise. The Enterprise itself is a ship commissioned by the Earth based United Federation of Planets, a government consisting of numerous species. Depicted as a utopia in the stars, the Federation is a republic made up of many species and governments, most notably human and Vulcan. It preaches the ideals of diversity, both in terms of humanity as well as alien elements. It also upholds ideals of meritocracy, the idea that positions and roles should be based on ability rather than other factors, and universal rights regardless of species. The Federation also champions the ideas of peaceful diplomacy, scientific progress, and exploration. The Enterprise is one such ship sent out from Federation space with the mission to explore space while also acting as a diplomatic medium between new species and the Federation. Due to the Enterprise being a large ship built with the idea of deep space exploration in mind, the ship is host to a large and interesting crew each with their own unique personalities and responsibilities aboard the ship.

One of the most notable and emphasized characters in the show is easily the captain of the Enterprise, James T. Kirk played by William Shatner. Kirk is characterized by his sound decisions in command, his charisma, cunning, and his very “manly” personality to the point of where Kirk can be said to embody the idea of masculinity of the show. Kirk, in this way, is an incarnation of the classic action hero. He’s a man that perfectly personifies masculine values of the time with his undeniable charisma, decisiveness, and his ability, often, to “get the girl” by the end of the episode in question. <sup>1</sup>

Spock can be considered Kirks more logical and often reasonable counterpart that balances logic and reason with Kirks risk taking and going on gut feeling alone. Spock is played

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<sup>1</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, Season 1 Episode 1, “The Man Trap”, Directed by Marc Daniels, Written by George Johnson, NBC, 1966.

by Leonard Nimoy and his primary responsibility aboard the Enterprise is his role as chief science officer and as 2<sup>nd</sup> in command should anything befall Kirk. As mentioned previously, Spock is defined by his use of logic and reason rather than emotion and gut feeling that characterize Kirk. Spock can be described as machine like in his interactions with both the crew and situations that occur. In this way, Spock acts as a foil to Kirk and this is one of the many themes of duality presented by the show but it is easily the most recognizable as well as the most played upon.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Leonard “Bones” McCoy, played by DeForest Kelley, is the chief medical officer aboard the ships. McCoy and Kirk are portrayed to be good friends and they also share similar character traits as well such as their knack for innovation and adaptability. In this way, McCoy acts as a counterpart to Spock. Where Spock is primarily focused on logical thinking, McCoy is a very emotional character whose choices and attitude are largely defined by this. He is very sarcastic in his interactions with Kirk and especially Spock and this often leads McCoy and Spock to argue. These arguments span over several topics ranging from what course of action to take, the most common topic, to ideology. This cements Kirk's place between the two as the best combination of logic and emotion.<sup>3</sup>

Montgomery “Scotty” Scott is played by James Doohan and is the chief engineer on the *Enterprise* and is in charge of both maintaining the technology aboard the ship as well as fixing it should any of it be broken or damaged. As his title and job would suggest, Scotty is incredibly adept with technology and it is not uncommon to find him in the show helping to solve the episode's problem by altering or creating new technology that helps them solve the problem at hand. Aside from the occasional role of savior via technology, Scotty also performs the role as

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<sup>2</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, Season 1 Episode 1, “The Man Trap”

<sup>3</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, Season 1 Episode 1, “The Man Trap”,

advisor to Kirk by often pointing out the limitations of the ship to him when he makes a grand plan in order to solve whatever situation is at hand. <sup>4</sup>

Lieutenant Uhura, played by Nichelle Nichols, certainly acts as a key part of *Star Trek's* racial and gender diversity aboard the Enterprise. <sup>5</sup> Lt. Uhura plays the role of a communications officer aboard the Enterprise in the original *Star Trek* and while her actual role aboard the ship can be considered relatively moot, especially when compared to the considerable presences of Kirk and Spock, Uhura can be argued to be the most important character, historically, in the original *Star Trek* as well as the entire franchise. <sup>6</sup> While the role of Uhura isn't quite as extravagant of other characters, her presence as a major officer aboard the Enterprise and her status as an African American woman make her a very inspiring and influential character. <sup>7</sup> In a time where the clear majority of science fiction was dominated by white men and depictions of a white American future, the character of Uhura provides a vision of a racial equal and integrated during a time where the roles of race and gender in society were being questioned and changing as a result and this is what makes the character of Uhura so powerful. <sup>8</sup>

Lieutenant Sulu, played by George Takei, also plays on the idea of envisioning a racial diverse and equal future. Sulu has the very important job of helmsmen of the Enterprise. However, Sulus most important contribution to the show is portrayal of Asians in a positive light rather than treating him as a villain. <sup>9</sup> This could be very easily contrasted to other forms of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Weitekamp, "More than 'Just Uhura,'" In *Star Trek and History*, edited by Nancy Reagin (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 24.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Weitekamp "More than 'Just Uhura'". In *Star Trek and History*, edited by Nancy Reagin, 24.

<sup>7</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, Season 1 Episode 1, "The Man Trap",

<sup>8</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, Season 1 Episode 1, "The Man Trap",

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Weitekamp "More than 'Just Uhura'". In *Star Trek and History*, edited by Nancy Reagin, 22.

media which did depict Asians as villains as a result of the events of World War II and lingering racism towards the Japanese. <sup>10</sup>

Pavel Chekov, played by Walter Koenig, and has the role of navigator aboard the *Enterprise*. More importantly, however, Chekov acts as a connection between *Star Trek* and the Cold War that was at its height during the 60s. Chekov himself is Russian and his position aboard the bridge crew alongside the other major characters as well as his portrayal as a “good guy” is unique from other TV shows at the time. Other shows at the time typically casted Russians characters into the role of an antagonist and it is for this reason that Chekov stands out when compared to other TV shows at the time. Combined with the future setting of the show, Chekov represents a commentary on the Cold War in the form of a character. <sup>11</sup>

Understanding Gene Roddenberry is fundamental to understanding *Star Trek*, its creation, as well as its philosophy. Roddenberry was born on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1921 in El Paso Texas to Eugene Roddenberry and Caroline Roddenberry. With the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese in 1941, Roddenberry enlisted with the U.S. military and became a bomber pilot and following the war he became a commercial pilot. <sup>12</sup> By 1956, Roddenberry began his career as a writer by writing a script for the show *West Point*, which detailed the real training of cadets at the military academy and would continue to write up to ten more in the next year. <sup>13</sup> However, it was not until he began writing for the western showed called *Have Gun, Will Travel* in 1957 that his writing ability received distinction and recognition when he won a Writers Guild Award for his work on the show. <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, Season 1 Episode 1, “The Man Trap”,

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Joel Engel, *Gene Roddenberry: The Myth and the Man behind Star Trek*. (New York, New York: Hyperion, 1994), 11.

<sup>13</sup> Joel Engel, *Gene Roddenberry: The Myth and the Man behind Star Trek*, 16

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* Pg 17

It was in this period from 1957 to 1963 that Roddenberry wrote for a number television shows including *Dr. Kildare* and *The Lieutenant*, both shows revolving around military life and the common theme of the humanity of the soldiers involved.<sup>15</sup> With the Space Race beginning to make its way into the popular view of the public, Roddenberry too began to look towards the stars and envisioned a TV show similar in concept to *Wagon Train*, a western, but set in the vast expanse of space.<sup>16</sup> *Wagon Train* was an American TV show set in the days of the old west that follows a family and their journey westward via a covered wagon and Roddenberry essentially wanted to take this idea of a long and perilous journey and apply to space.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, he would abandon the project due to issues funding the show, but this idea of a *Wagon Train* style show set in space would act as a precursor for *Star Trek*.

Roddenberry first conceived of *Star Trek* in 1963 and at first attempted to pitch the series to CBS but was rejected due to CBS having a running sci-fi show, *Lost in Space*, that was similar in nature to *Star Trek*.<sup>18</sup> *Star Trek* was then sold to NBC by Roddenberry with the help of Herb Solow, vice president of the time of Desilu. Three years after its initial conception, *Star Trek* aired on NBC on September 8, 1966 and initial reviews of the show ranged from very positive to lukewarm.<sup>19</sup> A survey conducted by *Television Magazine* found that out of 24 critics, only 5 thought *Star Trek* was good while 8 did not like it and 13 found themselves neutral.<sup>20</sup> Overall, however, *Star Trek* was doing very well for a new show on the air with a Nielsen rating of 18.7/31 with only 9 new shows that were above it in the rankings.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 20

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Pg 39

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> "A Look At Star Trek," *Television Obscurities*, last modified April 26, 2018, [https://www.tvobscurities.com/articles/star\\_trek\\_look/#cite13](https://www.tvobscurities.com/articles/star_trek_look/#cite13).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



Personally, Roddenberry was a deeply progressive man and these beliefs found their way into the show when he was creating it. In an interview with the *Humanist* in 1991, Interview David Alexander commented on Roddenberry's progressive messages about race as well as different characters of different races and Roddenberry responds that he credits his parents on his progressive views as they "taught (him) that no one race was superior".<sup>22</sup> Further adding to this, Roddenberry credits his time in the air force as adding to his progressive views on race as well as claiming to have sought out children of other cultures at school when he was younger to learn about them since he found learning about other cultures to be "fascinating".<sup>23</sup> In his biography on Roddenberry, Alexander comments that it was Roddenberry's education and time aboard, as well as his knowing of people of other races and his interest in their cultures that gave him the progressive mindset that he is well known for.<sup>24</sup> It was this mindset that is asserted by many authors to be the humanist and philosophical basis for *Star Trek*<sup>25</sup> and ultimately, the reason why the show itself is so progressive and diverse in its themes and characters.<sup>26</sup>

In order to understand how *Star Trek* can be used as a lens in which to view American society in the 60s, one must first have an understanding of the 60s, particularly that the 60s were a very turbulent time where ideas of the roles of race and gender within American society were being questioned and examined with movements forming in order to protest and critique the societal norms for gender and race at the time. The norms of the time were very traditional and conservative that praised conformity to society rather than going against the established status quo. As author James Patterson points out in his book, *The Eve of Destruction: How 1965*

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<sup>22</sup> Gene Roddenberry, Interview by David Alexander, *The Humanist*, April, 1991, Accessed October 15, 2018. <https://thehumanist.com/features/interviews/humanist-interview-gene-roddenberry>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> David Alexander. *Star Trek Creator: The Authorized biography of Gene Roddenberry*. (Penguin Group, New York: New York. 1994). Pg 26

<sup>25</sup> Joel Engel. *Gene Roddenberry: The Myth and the Man behind Star Trek*. Pg 16

<sup>26</sup> David Alexander. *Star Trek Creator: The Authorized biography of Gene Roddenberry*. Pg 26

*Transformed America*, American culture was “rules based rather than rights based.”<sup>27</sup> Furthering this idea is author Dominick Cavallo in his book *A Fiction Of the Past: The 60s in American Culture* describes an idea that was prevalent in the 50s and early 60s and prior that he terms “the cult of security.”<sup>28</sup> This cult, he says, is how people conformed to the standard practices and norms of the time in a variety of different ways including how people dressed, mannerisms, haircuts, and beliefs both religious, political and otherwise.<sup>29</sup> It is this cult that is based around the idea of conformity to the values at the time, he argues, defined the 1950s regarding American culture.<sup>30</sup> The 50s were seen as a sort of “Golden Age” in the eyes of many Americans due to the booming economy as well as the victory the United States achieved in World War II.<sup>31</sup> However, it was also during this time that racial discrimination was at its peak with the then active Jim Crow laws<sup>32</sup> as well as strict social standards for gender and how people of different genders should conduct themselves.<sup>33</sup>

The 60s proved to be a departure from the very traditional and conformist 50s. The 60s saw the rise of the Civil Rights movement and ultimately its victory in 1964 with the Civil Rights Act as well as a 2<sup>nd</sup> wave feminism movement which also gained from the Civil Rights Act in the form of non-gender discrimination policies.<sup>34</sup> These movements questioned the role of race and gender in society and these questions soon found themselves being asked in popular TV such as *Star Trek* as well as others such as *Bonanza*, *I Spy*, and *Miami Vice*. All of these

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<sup>27</sup> James T. Patterson, *The Eve of Destruction: How 1965 Transformed America* (Basic Books, New York: New York, 2014), 8.

<sup>28</sup> Dominick Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past: The Sixties in American History* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 22.

<sup>29</sup> Dominick Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past: The Sixties in American History*, 22.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Frank A. Salamone, *Popular Culture in the Fifties* (Lanham, New York: University Press of America, 2001), 2.

<sup>32</sup> Edward Riley, *The 1960s* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 11.

<sup>33</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2012), 1.

<sup>34</sup> Edward Riley, *The 1960s*, 9-12.

shows, in one form or another, address the ongoing conversations of race and gender. This can be accomplished in these shows through many ways such as events and plots that coincide or comment on social movements, direct discussion of said movements, plot points or character developments that necessitate discussion on gender and race, or even through the characters themselves. In this way, TV allows writers to explore and discuss new ideas of race and gender through a fictional medium and this makes TV itself a lens through which to view the time. In particular, *Star Trek* has been noted as one of the most progressive shows at the time with it handling topics ranging from race and gender to even statements on US political affairs such as the Vietnam War and greater Cold War. While the setting of the show takes place several centuries in the future, its roots are very much based in the 1960s atmosphere and this is what makes *Star Trek* a great lens to view the 1960s with.

*Star Trek* deals with questions of gender and gender roles in a way that was very inconsistent with emerging ideas of gender and gender roles at the time. The show approaches gender with a binary mindset in mind: Men take action, commit violence, have a strong moral compass, and are meant for leadership roles while women are subordinate to men, play passive roles both in and out of dangerous situations and are objects of sexual conquest (best displayed by Kirk's antics). Captain Kirk himself is very clearly modeled to be the ideal man of the 50s as well as the cowboys of the old west who is bold and righteous while also being a man of action, morality, and a womanizer. On the other hand, the women of the show, are shown to be helpless and submissive when compared to their male counterparts.

The concept of gender in *Star Trek* is very antiquated and did not represent the changes in society in regards to gender. *Star Trek* holds onto a very strict set of gender norms that would be much more appropriate to liken to the 1950s rather than the 1960s. Gender norms and

expectations in the 50s were well defined and set in stone for males and females with the idea of the housewife being central to American culture.<sup>35</sup> Women's roles were geared towards the male of the relationship and subservience to him and his needs.<sup>36</sup> Broadly, this included domestic household work<sup>37</sup> such as cooking, cleaning, and child rearing.<sup>38</sup> Males were to be the bread winners of the household as well as heads of the household.<sup>39</sup> Male jobs not only paid more but offered more opportunities in terms of what career paths to take and advancing their career.<sup>40</sup> Women's jobs were low paying as compared to their male counter parts and were often roles such as secretaries, nurses, flight attendants, typists, and librarians to name just a few.<sup>41</sup>

As opposed to the 1950s, the 1960s was a time that there was a growing 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of feminism. Initially, the early 60s proved to be a continuation of the 1950s in terms of understandings and acceptance of deep rooted gender roles. In 1962, a study was conducted by the Saturday Evening Post as to what Americans considered to be the ideal woman in society by interviewing over 1,800 women.<sup>42</sup> A consensus was reached; the woman would be 35, happily married, had 2 kids (but wanted 5), was a housewife, had 3 years of high school.<sup>43</sup> George Gallup, author of the article argued that house wives were content because, "Since (they) know precisely why they're here on Earth they have no real need to search for meaning in life..."

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<sup>35</sup> Annegret S Ogden, *The Great American Housewife: From Helpmate to Wage Earner, 1776-1986* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986), 171.

<sup>36</sup> Frank A Salamone, *Popular Culture in the Fifties* (Lanham, New York: University Press of America, 2001), 3.

<sup>37</sup> Linda J Waite, "US women at work." *Population Bulletin* 36, no. 2 (1981): n2, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Frank A Salamone, *Popular Culture in the Fifties*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Linda J Waite, "US women at work.", 7.

<sup>40</sup> National Research Council, *Women's work, men's work: Sex segregation on the job*, National Academies Press, 1986, 27.

<sup>41</sup> Jessamyn Neuhaus, "The way to a man's heart: Gender roles, domestic ideology, and cookbooks in the 1950s." *Journal of Social History* (1999): 529-555, 535.

<sup>42</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2012), 1.

<sup>43</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*, 2.

practically every one of the 1,813 married women in this survey said the chief purpose of her life was either to be a good mother or a good wife”.<sup>44</sup> This was the common view of women prior to and even during the 1960s: that women were made only to sire children and to act as housewives while the husband goes about his day to day business.<sup>45</sup> It was at this time that husbands often had supreme control of their wives even to the extent of law as many states had laws called “head and master” laws that legally gave the husband the power to control what their wives did or did not do.<sup>46</sup>

Additionally, most jobs in the US that were posted often were gender specific, more often than not jobs that required hard manual labor and traditionally male jobs would post asking for male applicants only while the same was true with jobs that were traditionally delegated to females with examples such as flight attendants being strictly female and jobs in construction being strictly male.<sup>47</sup> On top of this, in 1963, women only earned 60% of what men earned and this declined further when applied to African American women who only earned 42% of what a man would earn working fulltime.<sup>48</sup> The work that women did find themselves apart of, domestic work, was often a fifty hour a week job.<sup>49</sup> Women also found themselves excluded from politics with females only accounting for 2% of the US Senate and 25% of the US House of Representatives while they accounted for about 52% of the total population in the US.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Annegret S Ogden, *The Great American Housewife: From Helpmate to Wage Earner, 1776-1986* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986), 173.

<sup>46</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 10

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 5

<sup>49</sup> Francine D. Blau, and Anne E. Winkler, *The Economics of Women, Men, and Work* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 26.

<sup>50</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*, 15.

It was at this time where women were kept on the side lines that 2nd wave feminism began to emerge. That being said, the 60s proved to be the start of a turning point for women. Exceptionally influential authors such as Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique*, began to write on the injustices against women and were particularly influential with educated suburban white women.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, feminists won a victory in the Civil Rights movement which not only banned discrimination against race but also gender as well.<sup>52</sup> The EEOC, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, was created with the explicit purpose to hearing complaints to discrimination both in terms of race and gender but the Commission failed to meet with complaints with action and so a number of women, including Betty Friedan, created NOW, the National Organization of Women with Friedan serving as its first president.<sup>53</sup> The organization itself pledged that it would bring women into “full participation in the mainstream of American Society” something that was at the forefront of feminism in the 1960s.<sup>54</sup> Overall, the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave feminism movement secured more rights for women in the form of anti discriminatory laws and this opened the door for women to new careers and opportunities that were not available previously to them.<sup>55</sup>

Of the many characters of *Star Trek*, none are more recognizable than Captain James T. Kirk. Kirk can very easily be described as a “macho man” in his actions and mannerisms throughout the show. The Captain is a risk taker and several episodes revolve around Kirk making a bold choice of action that ultimately ends in victory for the crew of the *Enterprise*.

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<sup>51</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, New York: Dell, 1963)

<sup>52</sup> Estelle B Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*, 84.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 85

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 85

<sup>55</sup> Annegret S Ogden, *The Great American Housewife: From Helpmate to Wage Earner, 1776-1986* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986), 217.

Kirk is also characterized as being a man of action and violence. One of the most famous examples of this is the episode titled “Arena”. In the episode, Kirk, Spock, McCoy and a handful security soldiers beam down to a planet to meet an officer at his outpost but, when they arrive, they find the outpost destroyed by an unknown alien race.<sup>56</sup> The aliens then proceed to fire upon the landing party with the crew scrambling to find cover while Kirk finds a mortar type weapon and returns fire.<sup>57</sup> As the aliens retreat and the *Enterprise* follows them into uncharted space, they are greeted another alien race known as the Metrons who state that both parties are intruding on their territory.<sup>58</sup> The Metron then teleport both captains of both ships to the planet’s surface in a trail by combat in which the victor will be allowed to leave.<sup>59</sup> The ensuing combat ends with Kirk as the victor but he spares the alien captain and his crew from being killed by the Metrons.<sup>60</sup> This is one of many examples of Kirk being involved in violence in one form or another and Kirk is typically at the forefront of the combat that occurs within the shows many episodes such as “A Taste of Armageddon”, “The Savage Curtain” and “Day of the Dove” to name a few.

Kirk is also known for his ingenuity and innovation that allow him to adapt to different situations on the fly. Again, “Arena” proves to be an excellent example of this ability as he ultimately defeats the alien captain, who is larger and stronger than Kirk, by creating a series of traps and ultimately a makeshift shotgun using bamboo and shards of diamond.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, his attack on the alien captain does not kill him but Kirk shows him mercy and refuses to kill him and this shows Kirk’s good moral compass and exemplifies his righteousness and this adds a

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<sup>56</sup>*Star Trek: The Original Series*, “Arena.” Season 1 Episode 18, Directed by Joseph Pevney, Written by Gene Coon, NBC, January 19, 1967.

<sup>57</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*. “Arena.” Season 1 Episode 18.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

further layer to his character: his is not afraid to use violence but is merciful and honorable as well. Further examples of Kirk's ability to adapt and ultimately conquer difficult situations can be found in nearly every episode of the show and is one of the core aspects that define Kirk not only as a great captain but also as an ideal role model of a man.

Kirk is also defined by his interactions with women. Kirk's sexual exploits in the original series are so numerous that it has become a well-established joke within the *Star Trek* series and community.<sup>62</sup> The vast majority of these romances involve Kirk captivating women rather than women captivating him and this is certainly an aspect that highlights his over the top macho nature.<sup>63</sup> One such example can be seen in the episode "Dagger of the Mind". At the start of the episode, Kirk and a newly introduced female character by the name of Dr. Helen Noel are going to beam down to a planet to inspect a penal colony.<sup>64</sup> Before beaming down, Dr. Noel mentions to Kirk about a Christmas party debacle which Kirk quickly dismisses who is shown to be visibly embarrassed by the situation.<sup>65</sup> It is revealed in a flashback later on in the episode that the previously mentioned event was a moment when Kirk bridal carried Noel back to his quarters where the two kiss passionately.<sup>66</sup> Noel voices her discomfort saying "But my reputation, I mean, just having met like this. Of course it would be different if cared for me." "You want me to manufacture a lie?" Kirk responds, "Wrap it up as a Christmas present?".<sup>67</sup> Following this line they begin kissing passionately. This is by no means an isolated incident but is rather

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<sup>62</sup> Michael Hemmingson. "Sex and Star Trek: Amorous Androids, Interstellar Promiscuity." (*Science Fiction Studies* 36, no. 3 2009): 572-77. Pg 72.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Hemmingson. "Sex and Star Trek: Amorous Androids, Interstellar Promiscuity." 572-77. Pg 72.

<sup>64</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, Season 1 Episode 9, "Dagger of the Mind", Directed by Vincent McEveety, Written by S. Bar-David, NBC, November 3, 1966.

<sup>65</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, Season 1 Episode 9, "Dagger of the Mind"

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.



common in the show with multiple females being introduced and each time Kirk preys upon them.

According to Michael Hemmingson in his article describing the sexual nature of Kirk throughout the original series, there are only two occasions in the show in which Kirk does not seek the attention of the woman in the episode but rather it is he who is forced in one way or another to fall in love with her.<sup>68</sup> Both the episodes “A Private War” and “Elaan of Toyius” both deal with a mind controlled Kirk falling in love and doing the bidding of the woman pulling the strings.<sup>69</sup> This highlights Kirk’s “manliness” However, there are two moments in particular in which Kirk uses his charming abilities in order to make women fall in love with him who he then uses for his own goals.<sup>70</sup> One such example of this occurs in the episode “The Gamemasters of Triskelion” in which Kirk and company are taken captive and forced to become gladiators for the amusement of three alien brains.<sup>71</sup> During the events of the episode, Kirk charms the female gladiator trainer named Shana, to have her rebel against her masters in a stunt that almost costs her life in the process.<sup>72</sup>

It is these traits that cement Kirk in his role of supreme macho man of *Star Trek* as well a model for the idea male at the time. Kirk takes his roots from western heroes, who themselves were already venerated for their manliness at the time, and this is evidenced in his abilities and demeanor being so similar to that of an old western hero. As Alice George mentions in her piece on Kirk, that Kirk is extraordinarily similar to the mythical cowboys of the old west and those that proliferated popular TV shows at the time, such as *Bonanza*.<sup>73</sup> Qualities such as risk taking,

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<sup>68</sup> Michael Hemmingson. "Sex and Star Trek: Amorous Androids, Interstellar Promiscuity." 572-77. Pg 72.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 73

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Alice George, “Riding Posse on the Final Frontier” In *Star Trek and History*, edited by Nancy Reagin (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 10.

combat prowess, wit, aggressiveness, and ingenuity characterized both the mythical cowboys and gunslingers of the old west as well as their fictional counterparts on TV. In his book titles *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, Richard Slotkin specifically mentions *Star Trek* as embodying the ideals of old westerns both in terms of its characters as well as how it “Projects a myth of historical progress similar to that of a progressive western”.<sup>74</sup> These legendary figures of the old west, both fictional and historical, represented the ideal for of masculinity of the 50s that was carried on to the 60s and Kirk acts as a disciple of this masculine ideal that was so prominent in old western myth and brings it into the realm of space. As Michael Kimmel points out in his work titles *Manhood in America* Kirk represents the “aggressive, erotic, and intuitive traditional version of manhood” that was 1950s masculinity.<sup>75</sup> Overall, Kirk’s character is a product of the 1950s ideal image of masculinity as well as western gunslingers who were popular on TV at the time.<sup>76</sup>

As opposed to Kirk and the other men of the *Enterprise*, women largely took a backseat in the adventures of the starship and its crew. Throughout the series, the female crew of the *Enterprise* perform jobs and fill roles that are much more in line with 1950s standards of women’s roles than the emerging 2<sup>nd</sup> wave feminist new ideals of gender roles. Women aboard the *Enterprise* are seen throughout the original series working on menial tasks such as assistants, nurses, and other such jobs that put them in a supporting role. Famous examples of this would be the numerous Yeomen (Yeoman being a naval term for somebody who does clerical work) Kirk has had over the course of the show as well as the many women who have served him and his

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<sup>74</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman: Oklahoma, 1992), 635.

<sup>75</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 191.

<sup>76</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 191.

crew meals while at meetings or diplomatic events. This placement of women in passive and stereotypical jobs is consistent with gender roles that were accepted and established in the 1950s rather than the 1960s.

Throughout the 50s and into the early 60s, the domesticity of a woman dominated her life both as a measure of worth as a woman but also as a duty assigned to her.<sup>77</sup> Childrearing and the domestic household life that came with motherhood and marriage were considered professions for women and it was treated as such with women being the primary keeper of the home and children while the father would work and focus on his own career to be the breadwinner for the family.<sup>78</sup> This is what is known as gender polarization, a concept in which gender is seen as a completely binary dichotomy in which both genders have accepted roles and norms pushed upon them.<sup>79</sup> These norms and roles are both opposites of one another and it is considered taboo to go outside of the roles assigned to each gender.<sup>80</sup> This concept can be very easily seen throughout *Star Trek* in what roles women play, how they are depicted in said roles, and how they are depicted to be violating these gendered boundaries.

One of the major roles of women in *Star Trek* is their depiction as a sexual conquest or trophy rather than as a character. As opposed to male characters, who are typically treated as characters, numerous women in the show are treated as sexual conquests or prizes to be won. One such offending episode is the fifth episode of season three titled “Is There in Truth No Beauty?”. In the episode, the *Enterprise* is tasked with transporting a human telepath named

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<sup>77</sup> Carolyn Johnson, *Sexual Power: Femenism and Family in America* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1992), 202.

<sup>78</sup> Carolyn Johnson, *Sexual Power: Femenism and Family in America*, 202.

<sup>79</sup> Sandra L. Bem, *The Lenses of Gender Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2015), 80.

<sup>80</sup> <sup>80</sup> Sandra L. Bem, *The Lenses of Gender Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality*, 80.

Miranda Jones and a Medusan ambassador by the name of Kolloos.<sup>81</sup> It is explained in the beginning of the episode that Medusans are so repulsive that it can cause madness in any individual that looks at one.<sup>82</sup> Jones, a powerful telepath, is on a mission on behalf of the Federation in order to learn more about the Medusans, who have powerful navigational abilities, and see how this can be applied to Federation technology.<sup>83</sup> Jones, played by Diana Muldaur, is an attractive woman and proves to catch the eyes of many of the male members aboard the ship including Kirk and McCoy.<sup>84</sup> During the subsequent dinner scene, she often comments on her beauty and questions why she would go with an alien that is so ugly as to induce madness. This all culminates in Kirk calling a toast for her saying “To Miranda Jones, the loveliest human to ever grace a starship” and this is followed by McCoy who says, “How can one so beautiful condemn herself to look upon ugliness for the rest of her life? Will we allow it, gentlemen?”<sup>85</sup> These comments between McCoy and Kirk clearly show their interest in her sexually and are rather unprofessional for two officers to be saying this to one of their peers. Unfortunately, it is not difficult to find other examples of this mentality of seeing a woman as a sexual object rather than a person or even a peer in the case of Miranda Jones.

Another example is in episode seven of season one called “What Are Little Girls Made Of?”. In the episode, Kirk finds himself in a situation where he meets Dr. Korby and his attractive female android named Andrea.<sup>86</sup> In order to prove his point that androids feel no emotion, he orders Andrea to kiss Kirk.<sup>87</sup> Later in the episode, to prove his point that androids

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<sup>81</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, “Is There in Truth No Beauty?” Season 3, episode 5, Directed by Ralph Senensky. Written by Jean Listte Aroeste, NBC, October 18, 1986.

<sup>82</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*. “Is There in Truth No Beauty?” Season 3, episode 5.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, “What Are Little Girls Made Of?” Season 1, episode 9, Directed by James Goldstone, Written by Robert Bloc, NBC, October 20, 1966.

<sup>87</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, “What Are Little Girls Made Of?” Season 1, episode 9.

can feel emotion, Kirk kisses Andrea passionately and this somehow overrides her programming to be emotionless.<sup>88</sup> What is particularly interesting about this episode is the choice to use a kiss to prove emotion rather than any other action that would inspire emotion. This coupled with the fact that Andrea herself is a beautiful female point to the idea that the use of the kiss as an experiment for feeling emotion sexualizes Andrea.

Another aspect of gender polarization in *Star Trek* is the depiction of women is creatures governed by their emotions rather than logic or in the case of the women aboard the *Enterprise*, training. A common notion of the 1950s was that women's choices were made as a result of their emotions at the time and were typically depicted in this way in TV. *Star Trek* was no exception to this and the dichotomy between male reason as opposed to female irrational logic as a result of being influenced by their emotions is very present in the series. Harkening back to "What Are Little Girls Made Of?", Kirk decides to prove to the doctor that androids have the capacity to feel and act on emotion by kissing Andrea.<sup>89</sup> When Kirk kisses the android, the emotions that are created by the kiss are so overwhelming that Andrea not only begins to experience emotion but also malfunctions as a result.<sup>90</sup>

However, the most damning episode comes in the form of "Turnabout Intruder" that very directly deals with women and their emotional responses. In the episode, Kirk and a woman named Dr. Janice Lester switch bodies with Lester's goal being able to finally command a ship, something she has always dreamed of doing but has not been able to because she is a woman.<sup>91</sup> Throughout the episode, Lester, in Kirk's body, makes questionable decisions such as changing

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, Season 3 episode 24. Directed by Herb Wallerstein, Written by Gene Roddenberry, NBC, June 3, 1969.

course to drop off Kirk, in Lester's body, to a colony for medical examination that has poor medical equipment.<sup>92</sup> When Lester discovers that the major crew, Spock, Sulu, McCoy, Scotty, and Chekov, start becoming uneasy and even resistant to her irrational commands, she is enraged and claims that all of them are staging a mutiny aboard the ship and will be condemned to death.<sup>93</sup> Eventually they switch back bodies and Kirk prevails in typical *Star Trek*. As Lester is escorted to the brig, Kirk, Spock, and McCoy discuss the fate of Lester.<sup>94</sup> Kirk stating outright that if she had embraced her life as a woman, she would have lived a happy life.<sup>95</sup>

This episode very clearly illustrates the ideas of women being governed by their emotions in addition to women not being able to handle commanding positions like captain of a star ship. Furthermore, this episode's theme of not being able to handle positions of authority is a concept that came into the show as the second wave feminism movement began to take root in the U.S. It was in the mid-60s that Second Wave Feminism began to take shape and gain steam as its own movement with the founding of NOW, the National Organization for Women, headed by Betty Friedman, author of *The Feminine Mystique*.<sup>96</sup> This episode has been a point of contention among scholars in its representations of women and feminism. Brenton Malin commented in his book titled *American Masculinity Under Clinton: Popular Media and the Nineties "Crisis of Masculinity"*, that Dr. Lester is a, "Caricature and condemnation of feminism of the late 60s."<sup>97</sup>

This episode displays an attempt to draw viewers back into more traditional views by creating this representation of a women gone mad with a man's power, a critique of the growing

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<sup>92</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Serie*,. Season 3 episode 24.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*. (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2012), 12.

<sup>97</sup> Brenton Malin, *American masculinity under Clinton : Popular media and the nineties "crisis of masculinity"* (Popular culture & everyday life ; vol. 7, 2005). New York: P. Lang.

feminism movement. This also provides an insight into the strict gender polarization with *Star Trek* lashing out at women who dared to defy the gendered social order by portraying women as going mad with power and unable to deal with the burdens that come with an authoritative position. An example in regards to this is the pilot episode of *Star Trek* titled “The Cage”. The episode is quite different when compared to the other episodes of *Star Trek* and presents an unfamiliar scene and cast of characters. Kirk, Spock, McCoy, Scotty, Chekov, and Uhura are not present in the episode but are replaced with unnamed characters. One character, simply known as “number one” stands out among this crowd of unfamiliar characters. Number one is a female commanding officer aboard the ship played by Majel Barrett, the actress who plays nurse Chapel through the original series. What is particularly striking about this character is her position aboard the ship as second in command, a similar role to Spock.<sup>98</sup> This character stands out from other women of the show as she is given a commanding position and authority power over the crew in a very similar position as Spock in second in command. However, this character’s disappearance and replacement with nurse Chapel is due to NBC network executives not wanting to have a female in a commanding position citing that it was doubtful that audiences would “enjoy a strong commanding female”.<sup>99</sup> What these episodes overall demonstrate is a traditional ideal of gender that harkens back to the ideals of the 1950s rather than commenting and showing the new emerging ideals of gender of the 1960s. Furthermore, this shows how network executives at NBC were supportive of older ideals and took steps to mitigate more progressive ideals of gender roles from *Star Trek*.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, “The Cage”. Episode 1. Directed by Robert Butler, Written by Gene Roddenberry, NBC, February, 1965.

<sup>99</sup> Joel Engel. *Gene Roddenberry: The Myth and the Man behind Star Trek*. Pg 65

<sup>100</sup> Roberta E Pearson., and Maire Davies, *Star Trek and American Television History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 25.

Outside of the *Enterprise*, women sometimes find themselves as the villains of the episode. These villains often fall into two categories that define them: the woman as a temptress and the woman as misguided. The woman as a temptress is the most common villain narrative in *Star Trek* and involves the villain in question using her beauty in order to tempt the men of the *Enterprise* to waver in their duty or outright betray the rest of the crew. One of the first examples of this is in fact the first episode of the series “The Man Trap”. During the episode, an alien monster that feeds on salt to survive and can shapeshift meaning that it can change its physical appearance into anything it wants.<sup>101</sup> It takes the form of an old love of McCoy’s by the name of Nancy Crater who appears to McCoy as she did 10 year prior when they first met.<sup>102</sup> Both Kirk and Darnell, who were with McCoy, view a different woman each appealing to the viewers desires.<sup>103</sup> Eventually the alien infiltrates the *Enterprise* and is cornered and takes the appearance of Nancy again to McCoy whom it pleads with not to let Kirk kill it.<sup>104</sup> For a moment, while Kirk is being attacked, McCoy hesitates even though he knows the truth but eventually does shoot and kill it.<sup>105</sup>

Another such example takes place in the episode called “Mudd’s Women”. It starts with the *Enterprise* rescuing three beautiful women and a man by the name of Harry Mudd from a damaged starship.<sup>106</sup> Mudd is identified by the ship’s computer as having a very extensive criminal record and Kirk detains him.<sup>107</sup> It is also revealed that Mudd intends to sell the women to men on the frontier colonies who desperately need wives.<sup>108</sup> Every man on the ship is

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<sup>101</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, Season 1 Episode 1, “The Man Trap”.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, “Mudd’s Women” Season 1 Episode 6, Directed by Harvey Hart, Written by Gene Roddenberry, NBC, October 13, 1966.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.



entranced by the beautiful women and soon Kirk learns that the ship is losing power and needs to stop at a nearby mining outpost to get lithium crystals for power.<sup>109</sup> Mudd is then able to communicate to the miners and tempts them through the beauty of the women to refuse to give Kirk the crystals unless Kirk allows Mudd to sell the women to the miners.<sup>110</sup> Kirk, out of options, acquiesces to the demands and allows the women and Mudd to beam down to meet the miners.<sup>111</sup> McCoy, who was conducting medical examinations on the women after the destruction of their ship, informs Kirk that the women are on a drug called Venus that makes them more beautiful to those that see them.<sup>112</sup> Kirk then exposes Mudd and the women to the miners and finally gets his crystals.<sup>113</sup> These two examples depict the woman as a temptress, a clever and less overt villain when compared to other villains of the show. They seduce the men of the *Enterprise* and are portrayed as irresistible to males and thus a strange sexualized threat to the male crew.

The other major theme to women as villains in *Star Trek* is the woman as misguided. Throughout the show, Kirk and his crew encounter women who become villains because they subscribe to an ideal that is flawed and do not realize it. It is in these situations that Kirk has to fight against her and attempt to convince her that her path is the wrong path with Kirk eventually “setting her straight”. One of the most infamous examples of this is from the previously mentioned episode “Turnabout Intruder” but this episode is not alone in terms of presenting women this way. The episode “Where No Man Has Gone Before” follows the *Enterprise* attempting to leave the galaxy but being rocked by radiation from a barrier on the edge of the

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

galaxy.<sup>114</sup> The radiation is found to have enhanced the psychic ability of one of the crew members, Gary Mitchel who happens to be a good friend of Kirk from the academy back on Earth.<sup>115</sup> Mitchel then becomes a power psychic with near god like abilities and grows a god complex as a result.<sup>116</sup> It is then revealed that Dr. Dehner a female science officer aboard the ship and latent psychic, has also been corrupted by the radiation and betrays Kirk and the crew.<sup>117</sup> In order to save the universe from recreation by the pair, Kirk goes to fight the them by himself.<sup>118</sup> Throughout the fight, Kirk tries to appeal to the Dehner to get her to side with him against Mitchel.<sup>119</sup> He appeals to her humanity begging her to see that the way that her and Mitchel are acting is wrong and this eventually gets through to her.<sup>120</sup> With her help, he eventually kills Mitchel but Dehner also dies in the process.<sup>121</sup>

“The Conscience of the King” is another such episode that exemplifies this theme of the misguided woman. The episode begins with the crew of the *Enterprise* encountering a Shakespearian troupe.<sup>122</sup> Kirk and his friend Dr. Leighton suspects the leader of the troupe is actually a former governor of a colony who killed over 4,000 people.<sup>123</sup> Kirk is at first very hesitant to point the finger at the leader of the troupe, a man by the name of Kardidian, as being the head of the massacre but Leighton is insistent that it is him.<sup>124</sup> following a party at Leightons house with the troupe, Leighton himself is found dead by Kirk and Kardidian’s daughter, Lenore.

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<sup>114</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, “Where No Man Has Gone Before” Season 1 Episode 3, Directed by James Goldstone, Written by Samuel Peeples, NBC, September 22, 1966.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series* “The Conscience of the King” Season 1 Episode 13, Directed by Gerd Oswald, Written by Barry Travis, NBC, December 8, 1966.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> It is then found that witnesses from the massacre are being murdered with the troupe being somewhere in close proximity to the murders each time. <sup>126</sup> Kirk, during a play by the troupe of Hamlet, goes to confront Kardidian but both are shocked to find that it was Lenore who was silencing the witnesses to protect her father and plans to kill Kirk next. <sup>127</sup> Kardidian sacrifices himself to save Kirk and the episode ends with Lenore crying over the body of her father. <sup>128</sup>

In both of these circumstances, the women are villains not because of any real malice or ambition that they personally have but because they believe they are fighting for a right cause but ultimately this is not the case. The woman as misguided is a troupe within *Star Trek's* female villains that ultimately deny them the malice and ambition that give villains their agency.

While *Star Trek* certainly held a dated view regarding gender, the show certainly follows a more progressive viewpoint on race that characterized the 60s. One of the great triumphs of the show that is claimed by both fans and critics alike is how the show handles race and discussions of racism in a way that is both forward-thinking as well as progressive. While *Star Trek* does have discussions of race very directly in some episodes, such as "Let That Be Your Last Battlefield", where race is the core subject of the episode, the show also has a discussion of race through its characters.

Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, race was a heavily contested term and the 1960s can be well defined as a struggle for a more egalitarian view on race and the struggle to secure equal rights for people of color, most notably African Americans. <sup>129</sup> Very famed and esteemed African American leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X both lead

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Bernardi, Daniel, "'Star Trek' in the 1960s: Liberal-Humanism and the Production of Race." (*Science Fiction Studies* 24, no. 2, 1997): 209-25, 212.

movements in order to create a more racially equal society although both leaders had different views on what this was and how to accomplish this.<sup>130</sup> Martin Luther King Jr advocated for nonviolent protest of racial inequality in American and valued the idea of integration.<sup>131</sup> On the other hand, Malcolm X also advocated for the protest of racial inequality but also supported the ideas of self defense as well as African American economic and political independence from white America.<sup>132</sup> As of 1964, two years before the first episode of *Star Trek* aired, the Civil Rights act had been signed into law but racism was still prevalent in the US and African Americans still found themselves fighting for an equal place. Even following the enactment of the Civils Rights act of 1964, views on African Americans were still particularly poor as Lyndon B. Johnson would put it in his call to John McClellan of Arkansas,

“I’ve got 38% of these young negro boys on the streets. They’ve got no school to go to, and no job. And by God, I’m just scared to death what’s going to happen... You take an old hard pressed boy that sits around and got no school and got no job and got no work and got no discipline. His daddy’s probably on relief and his mama’s probably taking morphine. Why, he ain’t got nothing hurt if he gets shot. I mean he’s better off dead than where he is”<sup>133</sup>

Unfortunately, even after the passing of the Civil Rights act, this was still the very commonly held view at the time. In regards to his statistic, in 1964, it was found that 48% of all African Americans lived in poverty as compared to only 14% for whites.<sup>134</sup> Furthermore, voting taxes and tests, such as those that were in Alabama at the time, effectively barred African Americans from gaining true voting rights on par with whites. This led to further demonstrations and protests, such as the famous Selma marches, and this discussion of race and society is taken up by *Star Trek*.

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<sup>130</sup> James T. Patterson, *The Eve of Destruction: How 1965 Transformed America*, 51.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> James T. Patterson, *The Eve of Destruction: How 1965 Transformed America*, 49.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

Lt. Uhura is easily the most recognizable and influential character in *Star Trek* in regards to *Star Trek's* conversation on race and racism. Uhura, played by Nichelle Nichols, is a staple member of the original crew of the *Enterprise* acting in the role as communications officer who is responsible for both incoming and outgoing communications to and from the *Enterprise*. What makes Uhura so unique when compared to other shows is how Uhura herself compares to other depictions of African-Americans on TV at the time.

One such comparison can be drawn from *Bonanza*, a classic western show set in the 1860s following Cartwright family and their adventures in the old west. *Bonanza*, much like *Star Trek*, features contemporary discussions of race in the context of the Reconstruction-era United States and a fair amount of episodes deal with the fallout of the Civil War and the end of slavery. Two episodes in particular deal with African-Americans and racism: “Enter Thomas Bowers” and “The Wish”. “Enter Thomas Bowers” is an episode based on the real historical figure Thomas Bowers and deals with the people of the town believing that Thomas is the runaway slave they were recently warned about and they seek to arrest him and return him to his owner.<sup>135</sup> “The Wish” has a similar theme with the family going out of their way to defend an ex-slave from post Civil War racism.<sup>136</sup>

These episodes share the common theme that while race is being discussed in a positive and progressive manner, the African-American who is on the episode at the time is only there just for the episode and main cast, being the family, was all white. In addition, across TV, the roles and situations that African-Americans found themselves in was typically menial roles such as the contented servant or close friend, like in *Father of the Bride*, or comic relief through

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<sup>135</sup> *Bonanza*. “Enter Thomas Bowers”, Season 5 episode 30. Directed by Murray Golden. Written by Jessica Benson and Murray Golden. NBC, April 26, 1964.

<sup>136</sup> *Bonanza*, “The Wish”, Season 10 episode 23. Directed by Michael Landon. Written by David Dortort. NBC, March 9, 1969

slapstick style antics.<sup>137</sup> What makes Uhura so unique and ultimately more progressive and powerful than these is how she is portrayed.<sup>138</sup> In the universe of *Star Trek*, Uhura hails from the United States of Africa, a futuristic united African continent that was only ever mentioned in the original series.<sup>139</sup> Her job aboard the *Enterprise* was as a communications officer who was in charge of sending and receiving any incoming messages to the ship. This role, while not as flashy or immediately interesting as the roles of other characters such as Kirk, Spock, or McCoy, it was certainly a revolutionary step up from the roles in film and TV that African-Americans traditionally played.<sup>140</sup> Her rank of Lieutenant makes her a commissioned officer and a high ranking one at that. This is important to note as her rank gives her high status within the *Enterprise's* command structure. This alone is already a far cry from other depictions of African Americans within TV as she is not only a permanent and notable crew member but also one of high rank. Furthermore, her character was not created with the purpose of comic relief or slapstick humor in mind. Uhura, for lack of a better phrase, acts like a normal person aboard the ship. She isn't depicted as a goofy or vulnerable and in need of sheltering. She takes her role aboard the ship very seriously and has been shown on multiple occasions such as "I, Mudd" and "Mirror, Mirror" to beam down to planets along with Kirk and company as well as take part in important meetings. Her role represented Roddenberry's vision of an integrated and equal future<sup>141</sup> and was jointly created by both Roddenberry and Nichols, the actress who played her.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Donald Bogle, *Primetime blues: African Americans on network television*, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), Pg 94

<sup>138</sup> Margaret Weitekamp "More than 'Just Uhura'". In *Star Trek and History*, edited by Nancy Reagan. Pg 26

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Nichelle Nichols, *Beyond Uhura: Star Trek and Other Memories*, (Putnam's Sons, New York: New York, 1994), Pg 145

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 24

Uhura was a landmark for African-Americans in TV as she was not only a part of the main cast, but her role was not bogged down by the stereotypes that were prevalent on TV at the time.

However, one of the most famous moments in *Star Trek* is the first interracial kiss on TV in the episode “Plato’s Step children”. The episode deals with the *Enterprise* crew being kidnapped by a powerful race of telekinetic aliens who force them to act out for their own amusement.<sup>143</sup> At one point in the episode, the aliens pair off the crew and Kirk and Uhura are paired together and the aliens force them through their abilities to kiss.<sup>144</sup> This moment marks the first interracial kiss on network TV but it is important to note the details of the scene itself. It is both interesting and important to note that Kirks and Uhuras lips do not actually connect, the shot changes to the aliens and their reaction just before their lips connect.<sup>145</sup> This can be blamed on NBC as the network was very on edge about having the first interracial kiss on TV performed on their network.<sup>146</sup> The network made it clear to the *Star Trek* team that “it must be clear there are no racial over-tones to Kirk and Uhuras dilemma” and further requested that Spock, the half human half Vulcan, take the place of Kirk in the kissing scene.<sup>147</sup> This moment was defining of the original *Star Trek* series and further allowed Uhuras character to break ground in regards to pushing the boundaries of race on TV.

Uhura was also a character that was firmly rooted in the Civil Rights movement that was sweeping the nation at the time.<sup>148</sup> Following the events of “Plato’s Stepchildren”, Nichols

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<sup>143</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, “Plato’s Stepchildren” Season 3 episode 10, Directed by David Alexander, Written by Meyer Dolinsky, NBC, November 22, 1968.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Daniel Bernardi, “Star Trek in the 1960s: Liberal-Humanism and the Production of Race”, *Science Fiction Studies* (1997): 209-225, 217.

<sup>147</sup> Daniel Bernardi. “Star Trek in the 1960s: Liberal-Humanism and the Production of Race”, 217.

<sup>148</sup> Margaret Weitekamp “More than ‘Just Uhura’”. In *Star Trek and History*, edited by Nancy Reagin, 24.

nearly quit the show following outcry from the interracial kiss featured in the episode. <sup>149</sup>

However, she was encouraged by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to stay on the show because, “This show is changing the way people see us and see themselves. And the manner in which they’re seeing the world”.<sup>150</sup> Overall, Uhura’s character was one that not only challenged the typical racial stereotypes in both TV as well as in real life, but she began to help redefine race in the eyes of Americans.

Overall, the character of Uhura is one that is firmly rooted in the racial conversation that defined the 60s. Uhura was a great departure from the depictions of African-Americans at the time by having her as one of the main cast of characters as well as treating her as an equal member of the crew. This can be compared to other shows at the time, such as *Bonanza*, which largely treated African-Americans as background characters and did not have any major reoccurring characters that were African-American. This portrayal of an African-American in a lead role was unique for the time and certainly did have an impact as Dr. King in the interview with Nichelle Nichols urged her to remain in the role as Uhura as it proved to be an inspiration to young African-Americans.

However, while Uhura is the most famous example, racial discussion through characters is not limited only to Uhura. Sulu, the helmsmen of the *Enterprise*, also proves to be a character that redefines popular perceptions of race at the time. Sulu, a Japanese-American, is tasked with piloting the *Enterprise* and proves to be a departure from the stereotypes and attitudes that were directed towards Asians at the time.

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<sup>149</sup> Sharon Bramlett-Solomon, "Interracial Love on Television: What’s Taboo Still." *Critical thinking about sex, love, and romance in the mass media: Media literacy applications* (2007): 85.

<sup>150</sup> Sharon Bramlett-Solomon. "Interracial Love on Television: What’s Taboo Still." Pg 87



At the time, racism towards Asians was prevalent in the United States and it is easy to see this in the roles they portrayed in both movies and TV.<sup>151</sup> In Movies and TV, Asian portrayals in both film and TV tended to seat them in a number of stereotypical roles ranging from the wise mystic to conniving communist villain.<sup>152</sup> During World War II, many films depicting the pacific theater and the fight against the Japanese portrayed them as evil, cunning, brutish, savage and sadistic.<sup>153</sup> Films such as *Wake Island* and *Dragon Seed* both propagated these stereotypes of the Japanese and these stereotypes would soon be applies to more Asian cultures following the war.<sup>154</sup> The Korean War as well as the Vietnam War films would both take on this tradition of stereotyping Asians in this way as well and served for to further fuel the problem of racism against Asians in American media.<sup>155</sup> This problem also found its way into popular TV in shows such as *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* and *I Spy*.<sup>156</sup> In the former, features Asians, specifically Chinese, as being the common enemy of the American and Soviet pair of Solo and Kuryakin.<sup>157</sup> *I Spy* similarly features Asians as villains, primarily in the episode titled “An American Empress” that follows the story of a supposed Chinese Empress living in San Francisco being extorted by the communist Chinese government.<sup>158</sup> Both of these shows depict Asians, specifically the Chinese, as villains with a particular emphasis on their intelligence as well as inhuman sadism. Much like Uhura, how Sulu breaks this mold is both his position on the

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<sup>151</sup> Chong Han "Sexy Like a Girl and Horny Like a Boy." In *Gender, Race, and Class in Media*, edited by Gail Dines and Jean Humez, 163-69. 3rd ed. Los Angeles, California: Sage, 2011. Pg 163

<sup>152</sup> Brian D Behnken., and Gregory D. Smithers, *Racism in American Popular Media: From Aunt Jemima to the Frito Bandito*. (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2015), 66.

<sup>153</sup> Brian D Behnken., and Gregory D. Smithers, *Racism in American Popular Media: From Aunt Jemima to the Frito Bandito*, 66.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Darrell Y Hamamoto, *Monitored peril: Asian Americans and the politics of TV representation* (University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 118.

<sup>157</sup> Darrell Y Hamamoto, *Monitored peril: Asian Americans and the politics of TV representation*, 118.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

*Enterprise* as well as how he is portrayed. Sulu's character is in no way connected to the previous and then current stereotypes of Asians. Sulu's job aboard the *Enterprise* is helmsmen, helmsmen being the pilot of the ship and holds the rank of Lieutenant. Sulu is not portrayed as mystical, foreign, savage, or conniving but is portrayed as a positive role of Asian Americans.<sup>159</sup> Like Uhura, Sulu is depicted as simply a normal person. Characteristics that are typically accentuated in Asian portrayals such as high intelligence and mysticism are not present in Sulu's character. This factor combined with his high rank as well as his depiction as a "good guy" defy the then common tropes and stereotypes surrounding Asians in TV.<sup>160</sup>

Going even further, *Star Trek* does not stop its racial commentary at its human characters but also proves to comment on racism and race through the use of nonhuman and alien analogues. One of the most famous examples in this regard is "Let That Be Your Last Battlefield". The episode begins with the *Enterprise* is on a mission to help with pollution on the planet Ariannus.<sup>161</sup> The ship then brings aboard two natives from the planet Cheron; one named Lokai, a political refugee, and Bele, a sort of bounty hunter that has been tracking down Lokai.<sup>162</sup> What is important to note is that Lokai has a face that is colored half black on the left and half white on the right while Bele is the exact opposite.<sup>163</sup> The two then proceed to argue about the history of their planet and the crew attempt to separate them by taking them to the brig, however, Bele takes over the ship using one of his abilities and charts a course to Cheron.<sup>164</sup> Kirk is unable to regain control of the ship so he sets off the self destruct as a threat to Bele who then reluctantly

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<sup>159</sup> Guiyou Huang. *Asian American Autobiographers: A Bio-bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2010), 354.

<sup>160</sup> Brian D Behnken., and Gregory D. Smithers, *Racism in American Popular Media: From Aunt Jemima to the Frito Bandito*, 66.

<sup>161</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series* "Let That Be Your Last Battlefield" Season 3 episode 15. Directed by Jud Taylor. Written by Lee Cronin. NBC, January 10, 1969.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

resends control of the ship. <sup>165</sup> Bele tries to pull this again but shuts off the self destruct function from being accessed and the ship arrives at Cheron. <sup>166</sup>It is then revealed that the ships sensors can no longer detect the presence of intelligent life on the planet and it is revealed that Lokai and Bele are the last of their species. <sup>167</sup> The two begin to fight and eventually both are beamed down to the planet and left there while Kirk and the crew talk about, even when they were the last ones left, Lokai and Bele would not stop hating each other for the color of their skin. <sup>168</sup> This episode has been noted by scholars to be a direct reference to the racial tensions of the 1960s. <sup>169</sup> This episode is a very brutal discussion on the implication of a racist society and even goes as far to imply that, should humanity remain in its racist ways, humanity is doomed. <sup>170</sup>

Furthermore, race is also discussed through Spock. Spock is noted many times throughout the series as being a “half-breed”: half human and half Vulcan. In this way, Spock is a very unique character as he has to grapple with both his human and Vulcan sides and cultures. <sup>171</sup> While he primarily identifies with his Vulcan heritage, as evidenced by his practice of shutting out all emotion and embracing logic which is a Vulcan tradition, he does at times struggle with his own cultural identity and race. One such example of this is the episode “Journey to Babel”. This episode involves Spock and the *Enterprise* crew escorting his father, the famed Ambassador Sarek, and his human wife Amanda. <sup>172</sup> During the course of the episode,

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Allen Kwan. "Seeking new civilizations: Race normativity in the Star Trek Franchise." (*Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 27, no. 1 2007): 59-70, 67.

<sup>170</sup> Daniel Bernardi. "Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations: Diegetic Logics and Racial Articulations in the Original *Star Trek*." *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 24, no. 1 (1994): 60-74, 65.

<sup>171</sup> Dariotis, Wei Ming, "Crossing the Racial Frontier." *The influence of Star Trek on television, film and culture* 4 (2007): 63.

<sup>172</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, “Journey to Babel” Season 2 Episode 10, Directed by Joseph Pevney, Written by D. C Fontana, NBC, November 17, 1967.

it is revealed to the audience that Sarek is estranged from Spock due to Spock's decision to join Starfleet rather than follow his father's wishes of him joining the Vulcan Science Academy.<sup>173</sup> As the episode goes on, Spock's father is gravely injured and needs a blood transfusion to survive and the crew try to appeal to Spock to save him by reminding him that he is also human and can feel emotions.<sup>174</sup> The episode essentially creates a triangle with Spock and his father on opposite sides and his mother in the middle. The episode is about exploring not only the relationship between Spock and his parents but also his own racial identity through his discussions with his parents as well as the crew.<sup>175</sup> Another episode that capsules this line of logic is the first episode of season two called "Amok Time". In the episode, it is revealed that Spock is undergoing a part of Vulcan life where they become every emotionally and physically burdened to the point of death unless he mates.<sup>176</sup> To solve this, he has to go to his home world of Vulcan and perform a ritual called the Pon Farr to essentially marry his betrothed wife, T'Pol, who was betrothed to him when they were children.<sup>177</sup> When they arrive at the ritual, T'Pol refuses him and demands trial by combat between him and Kirk and the winner gets to be her mate.<sup>178</sup> Prior to the fight, the matriarch overseeing the fight questions Spock's race by saying, "It is said thy Vulcan blood is thin. Are thee Vulcan or are thee human?"<sup>179</sup> Both of these episodes deal directly with Spock's racial heritage and his own identity between his human and vulcan cultures and his journey to understand himself and his own identity throughout the show proves to be a commentary about race and racial identity.

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> *Star Trek: The Original Series*, "Amok Time" Season 2 Episode 1, Directed by Joseph Pevney, Written by Theodore Sturgeon, NBC, September 15, 1967.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

Over the years, *Star Trek* has been hailed as an exceptional TV show and one that took bold steps towards a more progressive and equal future via its intelligent conversations on race and racism as well as its including characters of different races, such as Uhura and Sulu, in lead and recurring roles. In this way, *Star Trek* could be said to have been ahead of its time but it would be more accurate to say that *Star Trek* was a product of the tumultuous nature of the 60s. The 60s proved to be a decade that changed America and would greatly effect both domestic and foreign affairs for decades. It was during this time that the questions of race and gender began to take shape in the American public eye and it was also during this time that these questions became the subject of much change and debate in the United States. The Civil Rights movement undoubtedly had a profound effect on American society during the 60s and the effects of the movement are still being felt today and the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave Feminism movement also effected American life and began to raise questions of gender and gender roles that are still being explored. *Star Trek* was born in the middle of this hectic and ground breaking decade and its deep discussions on race and criticisms of racism are a product of such intense discussions that were occurring in the 60s. However, *Star Trek* does not portray women in a progressive manner as it enthusiastically deliberates on racism. The women of *Star Trek* are portrayed using gender norms and attitudes that are much more characteristic of the 1950s than the 1960s. While *Star Trek* can certainly be claimed to be a lens to view the emerging discussion of race that was characterizing of the 60s, *Star Trek* proves to linger behind in a 1950s mentality in regards to depictions of women and gender roles.

Overall, *Star Trek* proves to be an accurate lens to view the 1960s in terms of race as it dives into the discussions and discourse centered around race and racism. Its use of a diverse cast to play the crew of the Enterprise as well as the characters of Uhura and Sulu defying racial

stereotypes is consistent with emergent ideas of race in the 1960s. However, *Star Trek's* forays into discourse on race do not end with just human characters. The show also dives into its own alien races and their histories in order to discuss race and racism more directly in a fictional medium. While *Star Trek* certainly is an accurate lens through which to view the idea of race in the 1960s, it fails to do the same for gender. The interpretation of gender and gender roles in *Star Trek* is much more closely aligned to a 1950s ideal rather than the 1960s. Kirk is a prime example of masculinity within the show being a man who is authoritative, strong, skilled, and suave in all things that he does. His sexual conquests are so frequent and, at times, so baffling that it has become a joke within the community and a prime symbol of ideals of gender within the show. Women, on the other hand, are often shown in more passive positions than their male counterparts. Women appear on the Enterprise as servers, secretaries, Yeomen, and nurses. Women both aboard the ship and off it are often sexualized. One example of such sexualization is the uniform of female Starfleet personnel being a dress with a very short and revealing skirt. In addition to this, female characters introduced in some episode such as “Dagger of the Mind”, “Is There No Truth in Beauty?”, and, most famously, “Mudd’s Women” are often portrayed as being temptresses or are preyed upon by Kirk for sexual quarry. To conclude, *Star Trek* is a great lens through which to view the discussions on race and racism but also a poor lens in regards to gender and gender roles.

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