

From 'Lassie' to 'Game of Thrones': What Has Become of America?

America was very far from perfect in the early 1960s. In much of the nation segregation was the law of the land and women certainly had far less opportunities than men, just to mention two of society's inequities. And I'm quite aware the first issue of *Playboy*, featuring Marilyn Monroe in the nude, was published in 1953. At the same time, there's no denying that America back then was a far more innocent, family friendly country than it is today.

And so, 55 years ago, when we sat together and watched *Leave It to Beaver*, we didn't say to ourselves, "How corny! There's not a family in the nation like the Cleavers." Instead, it was as normal to us as it was entertaining.

In a word, Americans in the late-1950s to early-1960s enjoyed watching *Father Knows Best* and *The Andy Griffith Show*. Today we enjoy watching *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* and *Secret Diary of a Call Girl*. (For the record, in contrast with Bruce-Caitlyn Jenner, the patriarch of the Kardashian family, Robert Young, who played the father on *Father Knows Best*, was never crowned "woman of the year.")

In the late-50s to early-60s, Annette Funicello was a popular, young female star singing songs like "Pineapple Princes." Today it's Miley Cyrus, singing songs like "Wrecking Ball" –in the nude, riding a wrecking ball, on her music video.

Take an old show like *Dennis the Menace*, which aired from 1959-1963, and think of some of the things he got in trouble for. (After all, he was called a "menace," right?) In the first episode, "Dennis successfully eludes a babysitter (whom he has never met) and sneaks out of the house and goes to a

cowboy movie that his parents also go to while [his friend] Joey is left with the babysitter, pretending to be Dennis.” In the next episode, “Dennis and [his closest friend] Tommy replace a fallen street signpost but fail to notice they’ve put it up with the street names facing in the wrong direction.” Oh, what a menace!

Today, we would be following Dennis’s journey on reality TV, waiting for him to get out of the juvenile detention center after robbing an elderly man in broad daylight. Will Dennis ever change, or will he end up dead before his eighteenth birthday? And rather than Dennis having that old scruffy hairdo with that shock of blond locks always out of place, he would be sporting a purple Mohawk, wearing earrings, an eyebrow ring, a lip ring and adorned with tattoos galore. (If you think I’m exaggerating, watch some clips from *Beyond Scared Straight*.)

Or consider that on *I Love Lucy*, Lucy and her husband slept in separate beds. Could you imagine today’s version, where the show would feature mild profanity, constant sexual innuendos and kids who do not show the slightest respect to their parents?

Or compare *Andy Griffith* to *Stalker* or *Hannibal*, or compare *Lawrence Welk* to the annual MTV Music Awards. Or watch an old Elvis movie where he shakes his hips—that was so controversial—and compare that to the latest music video (those have been around for quite some time now). And be sure to compare the lyrics too.

If you’re a young person reading this and you’re not familiar with the older shows, take a few minutes to watch some of the episodes. They’re readily available on YouTube, and you’ll be amazed by what you see.

Watch an episode of *Lassie*, then switch over to *American Horror Story*, or compare *West Side Story* to *Natural Born*

Killers. Then go back to *The Flintstones* cartoon show—remember, we would watch this together as a family—and compare it to today’s animated shows like *South Park* or *Adult Swim*. (By the way, if you say, “I’d rather pass on watching these newer shows,” you won’t get an argument from me.)

Recently, Matthew Walther, a national correspondent for *The Week*, wrote, “I used to watch *Game of Thrones*. Then I realized it was endangering my immortal soul.”

And on and his description goes, more lurid by the line. The contrast between this and *Lassie* is the contrast between America today and America when I was a boy. The question is: Can America be saved? Is there any way to recover some of the innocence we have lost? I say the answer is yes, and I believe that there is a prescription for radical change laid out in the pages of Scripture itself.

That’s the subject of my new book *Saving a Sick America: A Prescription for Moral and Cultural Transformation* (due out in September). You can download the first chapter of this book, from which much of this article has been adapted, for free, [here](#). You can also watch the book trailer there as well.

Things are indeed dire, but not all hope is lost. The question is: Do we sense the urgency of the hour? {eoa}