



# It's A Family Affair

Evaluating Social Policy and Popular Representations of Black Families in the Media and their Effects on the Structure of Black Marriages and Families

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# Introduction

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- Ideals of the American Family
- Perceptions of Black Family Structure in Theory
- Influences of the Media on Family Structure



# Question

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Do social policies and popular representations of Black families in the media effect the structures of Black marriages and families?



# Methodology

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- Organize a list of Black sitcoms from 1970 to present
- Categorize each show by its lifespan and type
- Compare the premises of each show with the existing social policies of the given period
- Compare analyses to actual demographics in Black community for given period

# TV Show Data Table

<b>Years Span</b>	<b>TV Shows</b>	<b>Type of Show</b>	<b>Social Policies</b>	<b>President</b>	<b>Black Demographics</b>
1971-1975	-Sanford and Son -Good Times -The Jeffersons	-Living in the Ghetto -Living in the Ghetto -Rags to Riches	-Working poor utilized Food Stamps -Nixon's Family Assistance Plan shot down -Civil rights provisions no help to urban housing or education problems	Richard Nixon Gerald Ford	-Single parent households= 38% -1970 marriage rates= 57% M; 54% F -1970 divorce rates= 3% M; 4% F

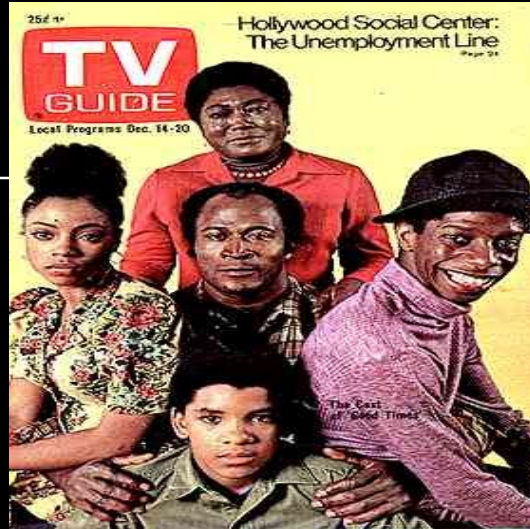


# Expected Outcomes

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- To find that sitcoms model their coexisting policies
- To find that sitcoms influence the change of family structure
- To find that family structure and social policy maintain a cause and effect relationship

Good Times



The Jeffersons



Diff'rent Strokes

The Cosby Show

Family Matters



The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air



Martin



The Bernie Mac Show





# Results

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- 1971-1975
  - Poor black families dependent on government assistance
  - Divorce rates low; marriage rates above 50% for both men and women
- 1976-1980
  - High orphanage rates among minority children, disabled children, and teens
  - Marriage rates begin to fall as a means of maintaining government aid



# Results

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- 1981-1985
  - Adoption Assistance and Welfare Act of 1980 grants money to facilities and families that provide foster care
  - Innovative sitcoms challenge the negative stereotypical perceptions of black families
- 1986-1990
  - Social welfare programs suffer as little money is allocated to urban renewal; little concern for the poverty stricken families of the inner-city
  - More sitcoms provide positive examples of black culture



# Results

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- 1991-1995
  - Marriage rates fall under 50% for black men and women; black sitcoms showcase positive aspects of single life
  - Many shows stay away from displaying the black family in disarray; those shows that did not comply did not last
- 1996-2000
  - Sitcoms designed to shed light on single parenthood as well as single life
  - Many black families portrayed as living with middle-class income; a result of economic stimulation of this period



# Results

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- 2001-2005
  - Many different types of black families and various aspects of black culture are portrayed in sitcoms
  - Shows now concerned with providing examples to their audiences that touch every facet of family life in the black community
  - Sitcoms not so heavily influenced by concurrent social policy; policies do not shape the entire premise of the show



# Summary

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- Black family structure has not resulted as a consequence of social policy or the media
- The media has allowed diverse family structures in the black community that have always existed to become more accepted by society
- Overtime policies had less and less influence on the depictions of black families in the media



# For Future Research

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- Include other forms of the media (film, literature)
- Include *all* TV shows that focus on family values (other races)
- More concentration on demographic information (poverty levels, education)

Thank You!

