

Bring back the Bunkers

In the annals of situation comedies, none could top "All in the family" for art that confronted the realities facing the U.S. of the 1970s. No topic was off-limits at a time when America was split into two political/ideological camps and torn asunder by war, distrust in our institutions, social unrest and inflation. The family of Archie, Edith and Gloria Bunker along with son-in-law Mike exemplified it.

Then, as now, many of us were tiptoeing around each other, measuring our power bases before speaking and before becoming activists for social, political and economic change. Our President then misled us as does the current occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Our Congress caved to a call to arms in Southeast Asia while our domestic economy was suffering a severe energy crisis, punctuated by rising gas prices, shortages and interminably long lines at gas stations and high unemployment.

Archie Bunker played the part of everyman - the silent majority spokesman - who loved and fought for his country and told those who didn't to "get the Hell out." His work ethic was born of growing up during the depression, sacrificing during the big war that robbed us of hundreds of thousands of our sons and finally by postwar prosperity. "An honest day's labor for an honest day's wage" was Archie's credo. None of his friends asked for government largess, only a decent job and a pathway to a secure and peaceful future for themselves and their families. That was the American way.

Archie was also a product of segregated times when the races kept their distance and tolerated each other, mostly. They didn't mix nor did they intermarry so they didn't get to know each other except for their decades-long prejudices and practices. Archie was a man in conflict - God-fearing and God loving - but tainted by the conventional wisdom and beliefs of men of his class. His wife Edith, was the opposite as was their daughter Gloria and her liberal husband Mike (the *Polack* or the *meathead* as Archie called him). They were the counterweight to Archie and his often outlandish, over-the-top pronouncements. To his credit, he could be moved ever so slightly, and he gave us, the audience, a little hope that with the right arguments even the most inflexible person could be motivated to move off their prejudices.

This was 50 years ago, but it could just as well have been set in today's America except that All in the family could never air today because of our destructive political correctness attitudes and because of our inability to laugh at ourselves. The laugh track now would sound more like the collective gasp of onlookers at a car wreck. Jokes would be preceded by disclaimers and be rated like violent or sexually-explicit movies. A *new* Archie would have to be vilified and pilloried by his family every episode. No quarter and no charity would be given. Archie would have to be humiliated and destroyed every week by his Hollywood writers lest they themselves be ostracized or canceled by today's increasingly 'woke' community.

The America of today is incapable of forgiveness and acceptance of lifestyles that are rooted in honesty and directness. We have become a country of intolerance that justifies bigotry through the arrogant belief that the bigotry of the Left supersedes the beliefs of Conservatives who do not share one sanctioned by an ideology that limits free expression. Moralizing now passes for entertainment. We are rapidly becoming that which we feared the most... a people in perpetual conflict with ourselves that see no escape from the quicksand of intolerance and that's no laughing matter. R.I.P. Archie Bunker.

Stephan Helgesen is a retired career U.S. diplomat who lived and worked in 30 countries for 25 years during the Reagan, G.H.W. Bush, Clinton, and G.W. Bush Administrations. He is the author of twelve books, six of which are on American politics and has written over 1,200 articles on politics, economics and social trends. He operates a political news story aggregator website, www.projectpushback.com. He can be reached at: stephan@stephanhelgesen.com