

**“You Can Pulp a Story But You Cannot Destroy an Idea”<sup>1</sup>:**  
**The History of Evolving Sociopolitical Critique in the *Star Trek* Franchise**

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<sup>1</sup> Behr, Ira Steven, and Hans Beimler. “Far Beyond the Stars.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 6, no. 13, February 11, 1998.

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## Introduction

Science fiction has long been a genre used as a space where critique and reflection on social, political, and philosophical issues could be discussed at a safe distance from the real world<sup>2</sup>. A fictional future of alien races and fantastic events, where metaphor cloaks reality while still bearing enough similarity to our world, thus allowing controversial, hot button issues can be dealt with more honestly through metaphor than they could in a television show or film set in a contemporary reality<sup>3</sup>. Science fiction as a genre, as Kodwo Eshun puts it in *Further Considerations on Afrofuturism*, is a genre that is not “concerned with the future, but rather with engineering feedback between its preferred future and its becoming present.”<sup>4</sup> As a result, the genre is intended as a sociopolitical critique of the contemporary surrounding society, which works to create a new future by commenting on the realities of the present and the critical factors, such as political and social philosophies that impact society. Cultural theorist, Stuart Hall, called this method of communication “encoding,” a process by which a message is intentionally inserted into the production of cultural works.<sup>5</sup> Thus, science fiction as a genre can serve as something of a time capsule for the sociopolitical zeitgeist of the period and society in which it was created and, therefore, critiques.

Science fiction film and television series evolved from the literary genre of science fiction. This literary genre was, and currently is, still often a source of strong sociopolitical critique. Whether it is the ecological and imperialism criticism of Frank Herbert’s *Dune*, the

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<sup>2</sup> Neil Gerlach, and Sheryl N. Hamilton. "Introduction: A History of Social Science Fiction." *Science Fiction Studies* 30, no. 2 (2003): 161-73. Accessed October 1, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4241163>.

<sup>3</sup> Faye, D. (n.d.). Science Fiction, Ungeeked. Retrieved September 27, 2020, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20150607102449/http://www.wga.org/content/default.aspx?id=3294>

<sup>4</sup> Eshun, K. (2017). Further considerations on Afrofuturism. *Science Fiction Criticism*. doi:10.5040/9781474248655.0044

<sup>5</sup> Hall, Stuart. “Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse [Originally 1973; Republished 2007].” *Essential Essays, Volume 1*, 2018, 257–76. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002413-013>.

criticism of eugenics in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, or criticism of government overreach in George Orwell's *1984*, the genre was filled with politically active authors who sought to show people the flaws in the world through fiction. However, while the on-screen version of the science fiction genre evolved from the literary form, once the genre reaches the screen, the realities of the entertainment industry create a system in which intellectual critique is often sidelined in the search for ratings or profit, which producers and networks try to maximize by giving viewers what they want, which is often more about action and sex appeal than a critique of politics or society. The question, then, is whether the medium of television created a conflict in the use of science fiction as a sociopolitical critique. Has televised science fiction, more specifically the *Star Trek* franchise, retained a coherent, intentional, political message or has it merely become an act of wish-fulfillment for viewers and a moneymaker for networks and production studios, based on reflecting what society wants to see?

In order to answer this question, this thesis will analyze the evolution of sociopolitical commentary in one of the most prolific and culturally significant science fiction television series, *Star Trek*. Spanning from 1966 to 2005, the televised franchise comprises 28 seasons and 703 episodes and shared a connected universe and many showrunners, writers, executive producers, and directors throughout its time on air. During the run from *The Next Generation* to *Voyager*, the franchise also had a unique "open submission policy," which allowed for a greater diversity of writers to participate in the series, which gave the series a better sense of the American public.<sup>6</sup> Many of the writers who got their start through Piller's open submission policy and worked on *The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, and *Voyager*, would go on to be highly successful showrunners and producers of popular science fiction in their own right, allowing the

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<sup>6</sup> Gross, Edward; Altman, Mark A.. *The Fifty-Year Mission: The Next 25 Years: From The Next Generation to J. J. Abrams*. St. Martin's Publishing Group. Kindle Edition, p. 32.

style of *Star Trek*'s approach to sociopolitical commentary to spread further in the genre of televised science fiction series. To name a few examples, Ronald D. Moore would go on to create *Battlestar Galactica*, René Echevarria was the showrunner for *Carnival Row*, Naren Shankar is the showrunner for the series *The Expanse*, and Mike Taylor was the showrunner for *Defiance*. All of which carried elements of sociopolitical critique as well. As a result, this series is ideal for assessing how the televised genre of science fiction has historically evolved in its approach to social and political critique.

### ***Historiography***

Academic research into the genre of Science Fiction, both written and filmed, is a long established field that crosses into many academic disciplines from Sociology to International Relations. As a result, while this thesis is primarily interested in understanding the evolution of the *Star Trek* series as a form of American cultural history, the diversity of the academic inquiry surrounding the general genre of Science Fiction, as well as the specifics of Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek*, required my assessment of the secondary literature related to this topic to delve into areas of academia from a wider field than that of History. To begin with, it is important to address the secondary literature related to the general study of literature that looks at Science Fiction media (as opposed to a literary genre) in an academic light, as well as literature that concerns the use of popular culture as historical sources. Much has been written on this topic in a variety of academic fields. The reasons for mining this genre vary depending on the academic field it is applied to.

### **I. Cultural Approach**

For instance, in the field of International Relations, Stephen Benedict Dyson studies how popular television series can be used as pedagogical tools that allow for greater understanding of

complex theories in his field in his book *Otherworldly Politics: The International Relations of Star Trek, Game of Thrones, and Battlestar Galactica*.<sup>7</sup> In this case, Dyson uses popular culture to give concrete examples of abstract theories of political science which can act as a way to teach these theories regardless of the cultural or historical differences<sup>8</sup>. Dyson is not the only academic to propose that science fiction can be used as a gateway to analyze modern political theory or events. George Gonzalez, in his book *The Politics of Star Trek: Justice, War, and the Future*, uses the thematic material of *Star Trek: The Original Series* to mirror and model modern political philosophy, from discussing the Cold War comparisons in the series and films to the use of allegorical comparisons that can be made between the Klingon Empire and political theories such as Traditionalism.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, Jutta Weldes in “Going Cultural: Star Trek, State Action, and Popular Culture” she points out that understanding culture and finding the best way to define and communicate political issues to the public is an important part of the job of US state officials and that “state actors’ representations are themselves made sensible in no small part precisely because they fit with, or articulate to, the constructions of the world and its workings into which diverse publics are hailed in their everyday lives. One key site for such articulations is popular culture.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, the use of popular culture in understanding and communicating complex ideas to the public is both a plausible and a necessary use of genres like science fiction.

Weldes’ and Dyson’s belief in the ability for popular culture to act as a tool to explain political policy is more closely tied to the academic field of International Relations and Political Science though their approaches could also be transferred to the field of history. Other academic

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<sup>7</sup> Dyson, Stephen Benedict. *Otherworldly Politics: the International Relations of Star Trek, Game of Thrones, and Battlestar Galactica*. Baltimore (Md.): Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. ix.

<sup>9</sup> Gonzalez, George A.. *The Politics of Star Trek: Justice, War, and the Future*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015. Accessed October 17, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>10</sup> Weldes, Jutta. "Going Cultural: Star Trek, State Action, and Popular Culture." *Millennium* 28, no. 1 (2016): 117-34, p. 133.

voices and literature have addressed that issue as well, for instance in an article from 1997 for the newsmagazine of the American Historical Association Ray Browne stated that he believed historians are becoming more cognizant of the importance of understanding popular culture as a historical resource, defining popular culture as “the everyday world around us: the mass media, entertainments, diversions; it is our heroes, icons, rituals, everyday actions, psychology, politics, and religion—our total life picture.<sup>11</sup> It is the way of life we inherit, practice, modify as we please and then pass on to our descendants. It is what we do while we are awake and how we do it; it is the dream we dream while asleep.”<sup>11</sup> In addition to this, Benjamin Leff that popular culture as a historical texts “when approached with sufficient sophistication...give students the opportunity to do real intellectual heavy lifting, performing the complex work of identifying the ideological content of mass media text and grappling with the difficult question of what popular culture tells us about the historical context in which it is produced and consumed.”<sup>12</sup>

## II. ‘Distortion of the Present’

These articles together provide a unique perspective on the global reach, cultural importance, and pedagogical uses of science fiction and popular culture in academia, which leads naturally to the work of Fredric Jameson, who explores the academic merits of science fiction as a lens through which to study history. In his 1982 essay “Progress versus Utopia, or Can We Imagine the Future” Jameson argues that the function of science fiction is not to look at the future, but to act as a lens through which we can “defamiliarize and restructure our experience of

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<sup>11</sup> Browne, Ray B. “The Voice of Popular Culture in History: Perspectives on History: AHA,” May 1, 1997. <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-1997/the-voice-of-popular-culture-in-history>.

<sup>12</sup> Leff, Benjamin J. J. "Popular Culture as Historical Text: Using Mass Media to Teach American History." *The History Teacher* 50, no. 2 (2017): 227-54. Accessed October 18, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44504480>, p. 228.

our own present.”<sup>13</sup> Jameson compares the lens of science fiction to the way that Raymond Chandler (an American novelist known for his crime fiction) immortalized the Los Angeles of his own time in his writing.<sup>14</sup> Jameson’s article points out that fiction captures an image of the society that created it and science fiction, in particular, captures the complex political, ideological, and social dramas of society that created it.<sup>15</sup> This point is echoed in Morris Emory Franklin’s dissertation from 2008, “Do Not Attempt to Adjust the Picture: The Cold War Crisis of Liberal Democracy and Science Fiction Television”<sup>16</sup>, and the 2014 book *Invasions USA: The Essential Science Fiction of the 1950s* by Michael Bliss.<sup>17</sup> Both of these texts focus primarily on Cold War era science fiction and the ways that they were examples of the social and political tensions specific to the era in which they were produced. For instance, the fact that *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, according to Bliss, indicate the American public’s fear of invasion due to the fears of the Soviet Union during the Cold War.<sup>18</sup> Franklin’s dissertation goes further by a post-September 11<sup>th</sup> world is represented in television as well, making it clear that film and television are reflections of the time period in which they were written and filmed.<sup>19</sup> This has remained the prevailing concept in academic analysis of the science fiction genre over time in a variety of field. In “Further Consideration on Afrofuturism” Kodwo Eshun addressed the use of science fiction as a source for historical research, pointing out that science fiction is a “distortion of the present” and rather than being about the future, it is

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<sup>13</sup> Jameson, Fredric. "Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future? (Progrès Contre Utopie, Ou: Pouvons-nous Imaginer L'avenir)." *Science Fiction Studies* 9, no. 2 (1982): 147-58. Accessed November 1, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239476>, p. 151-152.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 155.

<sup>16</sup> Franklin, Morris Emory, I.,II. 2008. "Do Not Attempt to Adjust the Picture: The Cold War Crisis of Liberal Democracy and Science Fiction Television." Order No. 3318512, The University of Utah. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2443/docview/304433033?accountid=12045>.

<sup>17</sup> Bliss, Michael. *Invasions USA*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Franklin. "Do Not Attempt to Adjust the Picture."

a question of analyzing the present and encouraging the shape the future will take.<sup>20</sup> In “Familiar Aliens: Science Fiction as Social Commentary” O’Quinn and Atwell make the point that science fiction as a pedagogical tool can cross disciplines and allow educators to approach topics like technology, science, and sociopolitical issues in a new, fresh way.<sup>21</sup>

The particular academic importance of the *Star Trek* series to academic discussion of the science fiction genre is another area in which extensive work in a variety of fields has been conducted. A particular academic interest in the original series, which ran from 1966 to 1969, is evident in the existing literature. In the essay collection *The Essential Science Fiction Television Reader*, the *Star Trek* series is established as one of the key series in the history of science fiction by Professor M. Keith Booker who puts special emphasis in his article on an analysis of *Star Trek: The Original Series* and the political content represented in it.<sup>22</sup> The cultural importance of the series, especially to American audiences, has been thoroughly explored in articles like “Live Long and Prosper: How Fans Made Star Trek a Cultural Phenomenon” in which Elizabeth Thomas writes that “though Star Trek was nominally international and intergalactic in its characters, the franchise ultimately celebrated America’s presence in the universe.”<sup>23</sup> Though Thomas writes that it was a celebration of America due to the way in which it portrayed American democratic and socially progressive ideologies, it is obvious in other academic works focused on the series that it was also meant to be critical of America. In “Cold War Pop Culture and the Image of U.S. Foreign Policy: The Perspective of the Original *Star Trek* Series” by

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<sup>20</sup> Eshun. “Further considerations on Afrofuturism” , p. 290-291.

<sup>21</sup> O’Quinn, Elaine J, and Atwell, Heather. “Familiar Aliens: Science Fiction as Social Commentary.” *The ALAN Review* 37, no. 3 (2010): 45.

<sup>22</sup> Telotte, J. P., and M Keith Booker. “The Politics of Star Trek” In *The Essential Science Fiction Television Reader*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce E. Drushel and Elizabeth Thomas. “Live Long and Prosper: How Fans Made Star Trek a Cultural Phenomenon” in *Fan Phenomena: Star Trek*. Fan Phenomena. Bristol: Intellect Books, 2013.  
<http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=630166&site=ehost-live>.

Nicholas Evan Sarantakes focuses on the allegories used by the creators of the original 1960s *Star Trek* series to comment on the contemporary political issues of American foreign policy during the Cold War, stating that “[t]he production documents leave no doubt that the makers of the series constantly tried to offer a thoughtful critique of U.S. involvement in international affairs that was hardly ‘reactionary nostalgia.’ Their view was that the United States should support democratic values abroad and should be restrained in using its power. In this respect, the series did far more than simply reflect the prejudices of its audience; it acted instead as a sentinel of national virtue and conscience.”<sup>24</sup> This focus on the 1960’s *Star Trek*’s use of thematic material acting as a contemporary commentary on the socio-political conflicts of the era is repeated in a great deal of the academic work associated with the series. Such as Bradley Schauer’s work connecting *The Original Series* to commentary on the Vietnam War in his book, *Escape Velocity*.<sup>25</sup>

### III. Social Commentary

Along with analysis of the political connections of the original 1960s *Star Trek* series, there are also social issues addressed by the literature. Patricia Vettel-Becker puts the issues of feminism in a historical context in her article “Space and the Single Girl: Star Trek, Aesthetics, and 1960s Femininity”. Vettel-Becker’s article puts a uniquely historical spin on her analysis, as she points out that most scholarship on the issue tends to analyze the role of women in the original series from a modern “third wave” feminist perspective, rather than putting the narrative into the proper historical context of women’s rights in the 1960s when the show was created. The second wave feminism of the 1960s was more focused on women in the workplace, reproductive

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<sup>24</sup> Sarantakes, Nicholas Evan. "Cold War Pop Culture and the Image of U.S. Foreign Policy." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 7, no. 4 (2005): 74-103, p. 77.

<sup>25</sup> Schauer, Bradley. *Escape Velocity*. Wesleyan Film. Middletown, CT. 06459: Wesleyan University Press, 2017.

rights, and legal inequalities, while third wave feminism (beginning in the 1990s) focused far more on issues of sex positivity, intersectionality, and postmodern feminism. As a result, Vettel-Becker believed that there were “alternative readings, hopefully providing insight into how the series may have resonated with female viewers at the time who were renegotiating their own feminine positions within a rapidly changing social and technological landscape”.<sup>26</sup>

While a significant portion of the academic work available on the *Star Trek* series is related to the original series, there is still academic interest in the later television series and films. Academic articles addressing the political and social issues most commonly focus on the 1993-1999 series *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. In “‘Explorers’ – *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*” Micheal Charles Pounds deals with the way in which this episode of *Deep Space Nine* reflects on the history of exploration and colonialism on Earth:

“I think ‘Explorers’ can be read as a transformation of the latest understanding we now possess about ancient contact between the people of the two sides of the Atlantic: one group a people of wealth, daring and sophistication, the other group more tribal and agrarian. In this reading, the characters of Benjamin Sisko and Jake, his son, are the only logical vehicles for this adaptation because they are the only series characters that are Terran and can trace their ancestry back through New Orleans and across the mid-Atlantic slave trade to Africa. This fact alone makes ethnicity a potentially positive narrative element.”<sup>27</sup>

A great deal of the social issues addressed in academic articles on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* deal with addressing the issue of race in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the 24<sup>th</sup>. While *Star Trek* had

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<sup>26</sup> Vettel-Becker, Patricia. "Space and the Single Girl: Star Trek, Aesthetics, and 1960s Femininity." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 35, no. 2 (2014): 143-78. Accessed October 27, 2020. doi:10.5250/fronjwomestud.35.2.0143, p. 143-144.

<sup>27</sup> Pounds, Micheal Charles. "'Explorers' - Star Trek: Deep Space Nine." *African Identities: The Black Imagination and Science Fiction* 7, no. 2 (2009): 209-35, p. 227.

a long history of promoting multicultural casting, Gene Roddenberry treated all of his cast equally and avoided consciously addressing race in individual episodes for the most part. However, *Deep Space Nine* chose to address these issues in a more direct way, given that it was the first series in the *Star Trek* universe to cast an African-American actor in the role of a Starfleet Captain, which Lisa Doris Alexander addresses in her article “Far Beyond the Stars: The Framing of Blackness in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*.”<sup>28</sup>

General socio-political issues such as race, gender, societal structure, and geopolitical issues area all frequently addressed in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* as well. This was especially important, as the 1990s had reached a sort of plateau in dealing with issues like race, as the end of apartheid and the aftermath of the anti-racism protests of the 1980s had lulled people into viewing the world as a ‘post-racial’ society and *Star Trek* bringing those issues to the forefront of viewers minds reminded them that those issues were still present. In “Alternative Pasts, Presents, and Futures in *Star Trek*: Historical Engagement and Representation through Popular Culture” Mark Alan Rhodes speculates that *Star Trek* uses its position as a “socially and politically engaged” show, which uses “alternate perceptions of history...to provide engaging insights into historical representation.”<sup>29</sup> While in ““Most Damning of All...I Think I Can Live With It”: Captain Sisko, President Obama, and Emotional Geopolitics.” David Sietz uses the plot of the *DS9* episode “In the Pale Moonlight” to modern issues of political ethics in times of war, specifically using the episode as an allegory to deal with actions taken by the Obama administration.<sup>30</sup> Despite the fact that these comparisons are not contemporaneous with

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<sup>28</sup> Alexander, Lisa Doris. "Far Beyond the Stars: The Framing of Blackness in Star Trek: Deep Space Nine." *The Journal of Popular Film and Television* 44, no. 3 (2016): 150-58.

<sup>29</sup> Rhodes II, Mark Alan. 2017. “Alternative Pasts, Presents, and Futures in Star Trek: Historical Engagement and Representation through Popular Culture.” *Geographical Bulletin* 58 (1): 29–39. <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=123242486&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>30</sup> Seitz, David K. ""Most Damning of All... I Think I Can Live with It": Captain Sisko, President

geopolitical issues at the time of the series, the allegorical comparisons still give weight to the idea that a television series can provide serious avenues to discuss sociopolitical issues.

Overall, as Fiona Davidson points out in “Owning the Future: Manifest Destiny and the Vision of American Hegemony in *Star Trek*” pinpoints the fact that *Star Trek* as a series has had a consistent message of western liberalism, that indicates, even in its criticism of America, a view that western ideologies are the superior force in the universe and on Earth.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, in “The Limits of *Star Trek*’s Final Frontier” Allan Austin points out that while *Star Trek* was meant to be a format in which the creator, Gene Roddenberry, could address “pressing social ideals” yet the messages of the show were necessarily shaped and limited by the society it was created, “As a result, despite the good intentions of the series, *Star Trek* ultimately reflected the limits of liberalism in the late 1960s. While the show suggested that at least some progress had occurred, it also demonstrated the continuing hold of long-established stereotypes and the difficulty that most Americans had in imagining a future of peace and true equality.” While the show suggested that at least some progress had occurred, it also demonstrated the continuing hold of long-established stereotypes and the difficulty that most Americans had in imagining a future of peace and true equality.”<sup>32</sup>

The long running nature of the *Star Trek* franchise allows it to act as a unique study into the evolution of how televised science fiction has evolved as a sociopolitical critique over time. As the existing literature shows, there has already been significant academic interest in inquiry around Gene Roddenberry’s *Star Trek* series. However, the majority of this inquiry

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Obama, and Emotional Geopolitics.” *The Geographical Bulletin* (Ypsilanti, Mich.) 58, no. 1 (2017): 19.

<sup>31</sup> Davidson, Fiona M. “Owning the Future: Manifest Destiny and the Vision of American Hegemony in *Star Trek*.” *The Geographical Bulletin* (Ypsilanti, Mich.) 58, no. 1 (2017): 8.

<sup>32</sup> Austin, Allan W. “The Limits of *Star Trek*’s Final Frontier.” *Space and Time: Essays on Visions of History in ...*, 2010.

focuses exclusively on *The Original Series* and the academic literature that goes beyond the first entry in the franchise is focuses on individual series or individual episodes of the series, rather than looking at the evolution of the sociopolitical critique of the entire connected franchise. As a result, there is a gap in the academic discussion that analyzes the evolution of the series as a whole and what changes have been caused by the movement of science fiction from literary to televised formats. Answering this question will allow a greater understanding of what impact *Star Trek* (and science fiction as a genre) can play a part in understanding the history of American sociopolitical issues and whether televised science fiction has a place, alongside literary science fiction, as a pedagogical tool.

### *Primary Sources*

The primary sources for this thesis comes from various sources, the largest of which is interviews with the writers, actors, and producers involved with the creation of the *Star Trek* franchise. Additionally, the thesis looks at plot arcs and examples of individual episodes from the televised series, primarily focusing on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, *Star Trek: Voyager*, and *Star Trek: Enterprise*, but also addressing the origin of the franchise in *Star Trek: The Original Series*. Additionally information comes from interviews which were gathered through a variety of means, beginning with the compilations of interviews from Edward Gross and Mark Altman in their books *The Fifty-Year Mission* and *Captains' Logs*, both of which contain a wealth of information from cast, crew, production staff, and entertainment journalists that were interviewed for the books in 1995 and 2016. Additionally, interviews from cast members at informal events such as comic and *Star Trek* conventions, as well as formal interviews with cast and crew in entertainment magazines and documentaries are

used. Combining these interviews gives an honest look at how the franchise was built and what the mindset of those involved was when it comes to the sociopolitical messages they were encoding in the franchise. These interviews are combined with analysis of individual episodes from all four of the televised series from 1966 to 2005. Other sources, such as public polling, contemporary political philosophy from the period in which the series were produced, and commentary from fans of the *Star Trek* series, are also used. This thesis only looks at the televised, live-action series portion of the *Star Trek* franchise, excluding the films and newer series (such as *Picard* and *Star Trek: Discovery*) which were developed for streaming services rather than network television. This focus limits the discussion to television series created with traditional controls from Hollywood production companies and networks.

Abbreviations used:

*Star Trek: The Original Series*

- *The Original Series*
- *TOS*

*Star Trek: The Next Generation*

- *The Next Generation*
- *TNG*

*Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*

- *Deep Space Nine*
- *DS9*

*Star Trek: Voyager*

- *Voyager*

*Star Trek: Enterprise*

- *Enterprise*

### ***Theory & Methodology***

This thesis will use a qualitative, close reading approach to understand the intertextuality and semiotics of the primary sources, drawing in elements of cultural studies as well as cultural history. Ferdinand de Saussure, founding father of the field of Semiotics, argued that “to understand culture is to explore how meaning is produced symbolically through the signifying

practices of language”.<sup>33</sup> Literary scholars who study language and how it shapes our understanding of reality have noted that words have both a denotative and connotative function. The denotative meaning of a word is the descriptive, literal meaning of a word, for example the Dutch word ‘blank’ has the denotative meaning of ‘white’, but it also has a connotative meaning of ‘cleanness’ or ‘purity’, which means that the word gives certain cultural connotations to the cultural meaning of ‘whiteness’ and as such shapes the understanding of ‘race’ in our worldview. Roland Barthes, a French literary scholar, who elaborated on the theory of semiotics states that myth, which is in his view the connotative meaning which has become the cultural norm “has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal”.<sup>34</sup> Cultural theorists have taken up this theory of semiotics and myth, studying not only discourse but also visual signs that give meaning and shape our understanding of the world. In this thesis I will use semiotics, i.e., the study of signs and their meanings and ideologies, through analyzing the symbolic visuals and storytelling in the *Star Trek* franchise. Additionally, the French literary scholar Jacques Derrida added to the theory of semiotics with the concept of intertextuality. With this he aimed to emphasize that there is a constant buildup of meaning that informs the understanding of signs. As such we cannot ‘read’ the visual signs as only representing the societal worldview in the historical context in which the sign was produced but we must also take note of the culture and society and the (recent) historical developments from which it originated. In my analysis of the signs and ‘ideologies’ transmitted through *Star Trek* franchise, I will therefore consider the recent American social-political history, in particular the history of the Cold War and other major philosophies such as feminism and the post-9/11 opinions and fears of America, in coming to a better understanding of the intended message. This

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<sup>33</sup> Chris Baker & Emma A. Jane, *Cultural Studies, Theory and Practice*. Sage: London (2016) 86.

<sup>34</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*. London: Cape (1972) 155.

theoretical approach allows the thesis to look at each series within the historical and cultural context of the time in which they were produced, as well as the decades that preceded the 1990s, with the addition of commentary from the writing, acting, and production crew involved with the franchise. The analysis portion of this thesis is structured chronologically, with five chapters. Each chapter will address the development of a different series within the televised franchise and how it approached sociopolitical commentary. Each chapter will also include a brief background on the series being discussed.

The first chapter will address the politically socially progressive ideology that Gene Roddenberry intentionally constructed into the narrative of *Star Trek: The Original Series* by exploring some of the overarching socially progressive themes in the series as well as specific episodes written with intended political messages, as well as statements made by cast and crew regarding the series.

The second chapter will address the parallels between contemporary post-Cold War philosophy, specifically that of Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History?" on the general theme of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The way in which the series addressed contemporary sociopolitical events through specific episodes will also be analyzed.

The third chapter will address the parallels between *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* and the contrasting post-Cold War philosophy of Samuel P. Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations?", while also analyzing specific individual episodes inspired by contemporary sociopolitical events.

The fourth chapter will analyze how *Star Trek: Voyager*'s intended broad theme of 1990s Third Wave feminism was handled in the on-screen and behind the scenes treatment of women and whether the series was as true to its theme as previous entries in the franchise.

The fifth chapter will discuss the lack of a coherent, intentional sociopolitical theme in *Star Trek: Enterprise* and the reactionary post-9/11 commentary of the last two seasons of the series.

## Chapter One - *Star Trek: The Original Series*

Gene Roddenberry's so called "Wagon Train to the Stars." Roddenberry, a veteran writer and producer for television, pitched the original idea for this science fiction series in 1964, and the series ran from 1966 until it was cancelled in 1969. Originally dubbed *Star Trek*, it was later named *Star Trek: The Original Series* after the later spin-offs in the series were made. The series followed a crew aboard the USS Enterprise, comprised of both humans and aliens, exploring the galaxy on behalf of the Federation.

The series presented an optimistically progressive future of exploration, diversity, and equality. It featured an interracial and multicultural main cast for the 1960s, including Nichelle Nichols, an African-American actress, George Takei, a Japanese-American, and the Russian character Chekov (played by Walter Koenig), as part of the bridge crew of the military and exploratory vessel.

### *Social Progressivism, Civil Rights, and the Vietnam War*

If anyone in 1969 had said that Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek* would become a multibillion-dollar franchise, even Gene Roddenberry probably would not have believed them. Picked up in 1966, the series would eventually run for only three seasons and broadly go down as a failure in its own time. David Goodman, who would eventually write for the *Star Trek* franchise, once described the series in an episode of the comedy *Futurama* as "79 episodes. About 30 good ones."<sup>35</sup> The series would ultimately be canceled after three seasons, but that would only be the beginning of the story for Roddenberry's work. The series grew in popularity,

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<sup>35</sup> Goodman, David. "Where No Fan Has Gone Before." Episode. *Futurama* 4, no. 11, April 21, 2002.

with reruns in the 1970s leading to the creation of some very loyal fans globally and the Associated Press giving the series the title “the show that won’t die.”<sup>36</sup>

It is debatable whether monetary success was ever the real reason why Gene Roddenberry created the series in the first place. Placating the studio or the audience with what they wanted to see was never part of Roddenberry’s approach to the series. He had a vision of the future, and he was making a series that showcased that vision, no matter how the studio felt about it.<sup>37</sup>

The key to understanding *The Original Series* is in its socially progressive sociopolitical message and the decade it originated from. Because, as much as *Star Trek* was a series ahead of its time, it was also firmly a product of the sociopolitical conflicts of the 1960s. It was never meant to be a series about entertaining the masses; it was intentionally and inherently political from the start. The civil rights movements of the 1960s are at the core of *TOS*. As one *Star Trek* film writer put it:

“That’s part of what makes Star Trek what it is. It’s entertaining and all the things we love about it, but if you stop and look at the deeper meaning, there’s real substance there. It’s making a comment about basic human relations and politics and everything that you can ever want to think or feel. That’s what makes Trek and what makes it unique. You certainly couldn’t imagine doing Trek without taking that into account.”<sup>38</sup>

One of the significant issues that Roddenberry took on was civil rights, both in race and gender. In an interview on Good Morning America in 1986, Roddenberry talked about how the studio wanted an all-white, all-male crew on the Enterprise.<sup>39</sup> Roddenberry ignored that and gave

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<sup>36</sup> Kelly, Ray. “Star Trek’ - the Show That Wouldn't Die - Ended Its Original Run 50 Years Ago.” *masslive*, June 3, 2019. <https://www.masslive.com/entertainment/2019/06/recalling-1969-star-trek-ended-its-original-run-50-years-ago.html>.

<sup>37</sup> “*Star Trek*” Creator Gene Roddenberry on “*Good Morning America*” 1986. *YouTube*, 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ng8evd2Dt6I>.

<sup>38</sup> Gross & Altman. “The Fifty-Year Mission”, p. 763.

<sup>39</sup> “*Star Trek*” Creator Gene Roddenberry on “*Good Morning America*” 1986. *YouTube*, 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ng8evd2Dt6I>.

the viewers a diverse cast that included an African-American woman (Lieutenant Uhura, played by Nichelle Nichols). Nichelle Nichols casting brought about yet another push for civil rights, when in “Plato’s Stepchildren” Captain Kirk and Lieutenant Uhura became “the first interracial kiss on [American] network television.”<sup>40</sup>

Episodes like “Let That Be Your Last Battlefield” also blatantly addressed the issue of racism when The Enterprise comes across a planet of (literally) half black/half white aliens who are racially biased against those who are “white on the right side” instead of “black on the right side.” In the end, this hatred leads to the mass murder and genocide of their entire planet.<sup>41</sup>

**Chekov:** There was persecution on Earth once. I remember reading about it in my history class.

**Sulu:** Yes, but it happened way back in the twentieth century. There's no such primitive thinking today.<sup>42</sup>

While “The Omega Glory” offers a critique of those who hold the founding documents of America as nearly holy writ, while also refusing to realize that words like “all men are created equal” actually is supposed to apply to “all men” and not just those in power.<sup>43</sup> In the 21<sup>st</sup> century it would be easy to think of these kind of casting decisions and narratives to be inconsequential, but this kind of push for racial equality was nearly unheard of at the time. Roddenberry was very right in his assessment that America was a very different place in the 1960s than in the interview he gave in 1986.<sup>44</sup> And while it might seem overly grandiose to claim that *Star Trek*, a low rated science fiction series, was a major part of the shift in American

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<sup>40</sup> Dolinsky, Meyer. “Plato’s Stepchildren.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Original Series* 3, no. 12, November 22, 1968.; Asherman, Allan. *The Star Trek Compendium*. New York: Pocket Books, 1989, p. 120.

<sup>41</sup> Crawford, Oliver. “Let That Be Your Last Battlefield.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Original Series* 3, no. 15, January 10, 1969.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Roddenberry, Gene. “The Omega Glory.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Original Series* 2, no. 25, March 1, 1968.

<sup>44</sup> “*Star Trek*” Creator Gene Roddenberry on “Good Morning America” 1986. YouTube, 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ng8evd2Dt6I>.

culture, it is certainly easier to accept that claim knowing the high opinion that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. held for Nichelle Nichols and *Star Trek*. In an interview with NPR in 2011, Nichols recalled an encounter she had with Dr. King at an NAACP fundraiser during the first season of the series when she was considering.<sup>45</sup> After introducing himself as her “greatest fan” and when Nichols told him that she wished she could be out marching with him and he told her, “No, you don't understand. We don't need you on the [street] - to march. You are marching. You are reflecting what we are fighting for” and upon hearing that she was planning to leave at the end of the first season he told her “[y]ou cannot do that...don't you understand what this man has achieved? For the first time, we are being seen the world over as we should be seen...do you understand that this is the only show that my wife Coretta and I will allow our little children to stay up [for] and watch.”<sup>46</sup> Small, failing science fiction series it may have been but it had and continued to have far-reaching sociopolitical ramifications because of what Roddenberry was intentionally trying to achieve through the show, the spread of socially progressive ideas to the public.<sup>47</sup>

Civil rights were not the only arena which Roddenberry threw the *Star Trek* communications device into. Social and political conflict over the Vietnam War and the Cold War with the Soviet Union were also a hallmark of 1960s liberalism, and *Star Trek* did not shy away from addressing these conflicts. In his interview with Good Morning America, Roddenberry spoke about the fact that he believed *Star Trek* was the only network television show to criticize the war during this period.<sup>48</sup> With episodes like “A Private Little War”

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<sup>45</sup> “Star Trek's Uhura Reflects on MLK Encounter.” Broadcast. *Tell Me More*. NPR, January 17, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> “*Star Trek*” Creator Gene Roddenberry on “Good Morning America” 1986. *YouTube*, 2011.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ng8evd2Dt6I>.

containing lines such as “Jim, that means you're condemning this whole planet to a war that may never end! It could go on for year after year! Massacre after massacre!” and “We once were as you are – spears, arrows. There came a time when our weapons grew faster than our wisdom, and we almost destroyed ourselves. We learned from this to make a rule during all our travels – never to cause the same to happen to other worlds” addressed both of these conflicts directly.<sup>49</sup> The original first draft of this script was even more explicit in its ties to the Vietnam War, with character descriptions of a “Ho Chi Minh type.”<sup>50</sup> The timing of this episode could not have been more perfect if it had been planned, airing less than a month after the beginning of the Tet Offensive on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1968, making the message even more powerful for the American public. Episodes such as “A Taste of Armageddon” and “The Omega Glory” offered clear anti-war messages and critiques of the morality of war, as well as transparently obvious comparison to conflicts between America and Communism.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, the inclusion of a Russian, Chekov, on the bridge crew gave American viewers a glimpse of a future in which the Soviet Union would no longer be their greatest enemy.

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<sup>49</sup> Roddenberry, Gene. “A Private Little War.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Original Series* 2, no. 16, February 2, 1968.

<sup>50</sup> Asherman, Allan. *The Star Trek Compendium*. New York: Pocket Books, 1989, p. 90.

<sup>51</sup> Hammer, Robert, and Gene Coon. “A Taste of Armageddon.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Original Series* 1, no. 23, February 23, 1967.; Roddenberry, Gene. “The Omega Glory.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Original Series* 2, no. 25, March 1, 1968

## Chapter Two - *Star Trek: The Next Generation*

Paramount Pictures came to Gene Roddenberry near the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the original *Star Trek* series to ask him to make a new series. At first Roddenberry was less than enthusiastic about the idea.

When Paramount originally approached me to do a new series, I turned them down. I did not want to devote the tremendous amount of time necessary to producing another show.<sup>52</sup>

However, he eventually agreed, and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* went into planning and production, eventually debuting in September of 1987 and running for seven seasons until May of 1994. The series followed a somewhat similar format to the original series. A crew on the USS Enterprise-D, the new flagship of the Federation and Starfleet, taking on scientific exploration, military, and diplomatic roles throughout the galaxy.

### “The End of History” and Roddenberry’s Utopian Vision of the Future

Given the political nature of *The Original Series*, it should be no surprise that Roddenberry continued that theme with Paramount asked him to make a new series in the 1980s. The world in which *Star Trek: The Original Series* existed was very different from the one in which *Star Trek: The Next Generation* came to be created. As the country’s focus shifted with the Cold War drawing to a close, the sociopolitical message of the *Star Trek* series shifted as well.

Gene Roddenberry conceptualized *The Next Generation* to be, as Herman Zimmerman, the production designer for *DS9* put it, the idealized “Hyatt Regency approach” to the future

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<sup>52</sup> Gross & Altman. “The Fifty-Year Mission”, p. 44.

which is to say, a television series that viewed the future in the most optimistic (and, perhaps, bland) terms.<sup>53</sup>

Jonathan Frakes, a starring actor on *TNG*, said that “Gene believed that in the twenty-fourth century... there’ll be no hunger and there will be no greed, and all of the children will know how to read... Gene believed that in his core. It not only was expressed in his writing, it was expressed in how he described the show he wanted to make.”<sup>54</sup> *The Original Series* had been working to show a world that had reached a progressive utopia and critiqued the reality of an American society that had not yet reached those ideals, *The Next Generation* was set in a world that was even further settled into a utopia, with a captain who was even more enlightened than Kirk, more likely to engage in a rational debate than throw a punch. However, the fact that the world of *The Next Generation* was already settled into a liberal utopian society does not mean that the show was any less critical of American society. The series maintained a criticism of specific contemporary historical events. However, the general themes of post-Cold War political philosophy were the central theme that connected the entire seven seasons of the series.

The sociopolitical themes of *The Next Generation* very neatly parallel those of one of the major political philosophers of the post-Cold War period. The period at the end of the Cold War and directly following it (1989-1995) was a time of political and philosophical debate about what the future of the world would look like. Two of the most memorable political and philosophical concepts to, metaphorically, duke it out during this period were Francis Fukuyama’s “The End of History?” in 1989 and Samuel P. Huntington’s “The Clash of Civilizations?” in 1993. Fukuyama and Huntington, both political scientists, saw two different paths forward for civilization. It is in

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<sup>53</sup> Gross & Altman. “The Fifty-Year Mission”, p. 420.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p. 95.

Fukuyama's optimism that we see direct parallels to Gene Roddenberry's view of the future in *TNG*. In *The Next Generation*, there was a "humanity that was a better humanity."<sup>55</sup>

When Fukuyama posited that we were reaching the end of history in 1989, he believed that civilization was reaching the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government"<sup>56</sup> and in many ways the future that Roddenberry imagined when he created *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

Fukuyama believed that the "class issue" had been ended in the West<sup>57</sup>. Gene Roddenberry's future saw the class issue as immaterial, creating a post-scarcity world in which greed, poverty, and hunger would never be an issue in his Federation, as Captain Jean-Luc Picard tells a cryo-preserved 20<sup>th</sup>-century man in the first season: "This is the twenty-fourth century. Material needs no longer exist...The challenge, Mister Offenhouse, is to improve yourself. To enrich yourself. Enjoy it."<sup>58</sup>

While Roddenberry's view of the future still included extended conflict with other races, such as the Cardassians and the Borg, the Federation is ultimately able to construct treaties or defeat their enemies, thus "unmasking" the "pretensions" that these enemies and their ideologies are in any way more advanced than the Federation and its ideals.<sup>59</sup> Conflict with the Cardassians is successfully ended with a treaty during the fourth season of *TNG*.<sup>60</sup> Even in episodes in which conflict with the Cardassians plays a part, the solution is rarely found through military means,

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<sup>55</sup> Gross & Altman. "The Fifty-Year Mission", p. 412.

<sup>56</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. "The End of History?" *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989): 3-18. Accessed November 16, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24027184>, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> Hurley, Maurice. "The Neutral Zone." Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation*1, no. 26, May 16, 1988.

<sup>59</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. "The End of History?", p. 15.

<sup>60</sup> Charno, Stuart, Sara Charno, and Cy Chermak. "The Wounded." Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation*4, no. 12, January 28, 1991.

relying more on enlightened speeches by Captain Picard, such as this statement from the fourth season episode “The Wounded,” where he says “I think, when one has been angry for a very long time, one gets used to it. And it becomes comfortable like...like old leather. And finally... it becomes so familiar that one can’t remember feeling any other way.”<sup>61</sup> Peace with the Klingon Empire with the Khitomer Accords has been long since achieved, and the outcome of the Klingon Civil War in the season 5 episode “Redemption II” places Chancellor Gowron, who is friendly to the Federation, in charge of the Klingon High Council and establishes a more Democratic government as well, bringing the Klingon’s closer to Federation ideals.<sup>62</sup> Even the conflict with the Borg is short-lived, only comprised of two episodes of direct conflict (‘The Best of Both Worlds, Part I’ and ‘The Best of Both Worlds, Part II’<sup>63</sup>), with four other episodes exploring the villains in a more intellectual way, with less action, such as the ethical debate in the season five episode “I, Borg.”<sup>64</sup> An episode in which, when faced with one of their worst enemies, the crew overcomes their prejudice and helps him to overcome the Borg programming and regain his individuality, the ultimate success of Western liberal ideals over ideological and physical enemies. This is represented clearly in this exchange, where Captain Picard is trying to trigger the Borg’s programming by commanding him to assimilate the crew:

**Captain Jean-Luc Picard:** Resistance is futile.

**Third of Five:** Resistance – is not futile. Some have escaped.

**Captain Jean-Luc Picard:** They will be found. It is inevitable. All will be assimilated.

**Third of Five:** Must Geordi be assimilated?

**Captain Jean-Luc Picard:** Yes.

**Third of Five:** He does not wish it. He would rather die than be assimilated.

**Captain Jean-Luc Picard:** Then he will die.

**Third of Five:** No. Geordi must not die. Geordi is a friend.

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<sup>61</sup> Taylor, Jeri. “The Wounded.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 4, no. 12, January 28, 1991.

<sup>62</sup> *Star Trek VI: the Undiscovered Country*. United States: Paramount Pictures, 1991. ; Moore, Ronald D. “Redemption II.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 5, no. 01, September 23, 1991.

<sup>63</sup> Piller, Michael. “The Best of Both Worlds, Part I.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 3, no. 26, June 18, 1990.; Piller, Michael. “The Best of Both Worlds, Part II.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 4, no. 1, September 24, 1990.

<sup>64</sup> Echevarria, René. “I, Borg.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 5, no. 23, May 11, 1992.

**Captain Jean-Luc Picard:** You will assist us to assimilate this vessel. You are Borg. You will assist us.

**Third of Five:** I will not.

**Captain Jean-Luc Picard:** What did you say?

**Third of Five:** I; will not; assist you.

**Captain Jean-Luc Picard:** “I”?

**Third of Five:** Geordi must not be assimilated.

**Captain Jean-Luc Picard:** But you are Borg.

**Third of Five:** No. I am Hugh.<sup>65</sup>

This episode particularly exemplifies what Fukuyama meant when he spoke of “unmasking” the failures of ideologies that stand at odds with the Western liberalism of the future.<sup>66</sup> After all, what Fukuyama is saying in “The End of History?” is that the Western ideologies of liberalism are, regardless of what other ideologies may come along, as inevitable as the Borg motto itself: “resistance is futile.”

Because it was inevitable, Roddenberry wanted to remove the militaristic element of Starfleet as much as possible. After all, if it is inevitable, why would the Federation need to force it at the point of a phaser? A long intellectual debate could do the job just as well, with less destruction and death. Roddenberry wanted the focus of the Federation and Starfleet to return to the *Star Trek* motto of “boldly going” and the act of exploration, rather than on war<sup>67</sup>, often so much so that the writers found it challenging to create conflict for episodes in a way that Roddenberry would approve of. Herb Wright, a producer for *TNG*, complained that Roddenberry liked to take “the guts out of the villain” and replace serious conflict or battles with enemies with a “serious argument” because Roddenberry was so firm on the idea that the Federation “wouldn’t do that.”<sup>68</sup> A statement which shows that Roddenberry viewed the progressive message of *Star*

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<sup>65</sup> Echevarria, René. “I, Borg.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 5, no. 23, May 11, 1992.

<sup>66</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. “The End of History?”, p. 15.

<sup>67</sup> Gross & Altman. “The Fifty-Year Mission”, p. 62.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, p. 81.

*Trek* as more important than concerns about what fans or the production company might have enjoyed on screen. The point was the message, not the entertainment.

*The Next Generation* even seems to mirror Fukuyama's belief that "[i]n the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history."<sup>69</sup> *The Next Generation* has been critiqued in the past by fans for its seemingly stagnant view of popular culture in the 24<sup>th</sup> century, with crew aboard the Enterprise more likely to be seen taking in a concert of Mozart, Chopin, or Handel or acting out Shakespeare (or quoting it at omnipotent beings) than they are to be listening to the music or viewing the cinema of the future, or even the music of the 1980s and 1990s when the series was produced.<sup>70</sup> Even the choice of holodeck programs tends to old classics, with Picard and Data both prefer characters like Sherlock Holmes or noir private detectives.<sup>71</sup>

Even the omnipotent, god-like character of Q finds time to comment on the stagnation of the Federation and Starfleet (in a way commenting on the tone of *The Next Generation* series as a whole) when in the series finale "All Good Things..." he tells Picard that "mapping stars and studying nebulae" are not the exploration that he or Starfleet are meant for, and that "[y]ou have no idea how far you still have to go. But instead of using the last seven years to change and to grow, you have squandered them."<sup>72</sup> This feels remarkably like a criticism of both *The Next*

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<sup>69</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. "The End of History?", p. 16.

<sup>70</sup> Snodgrass, Melinda. "The Ensigns of Command." Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 3, no. 02, October 2, 1989.; Beagle, Peter. "Sarek." Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 3, no. 23, May 14, 1990.; Wilkerson, Ron, and Jean Louise Matthias. "Lessons." Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 6, no. 19, April 5, 1993.; Koeppel, Dan, and Rene Echevarria. "Inheritance." Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 7, no. 10, November 22, 1993.; Moore, Ronald D. "The Defector." Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 3, no. 10, January 1, 1990.; Holland, C.J., and Gene Roddenberry. "Hide and Q." Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 1, no. 10, November 23, 1987.

<sup>71</sup> Lane, Brian Alan. "Elementary, Dear Data." Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 2, no. 03, December 5, 1988.; Tormé, Tracy. "The Big Goodbye." Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 1, no. 12, January 11, 1988.

<sup>72</sup> Moore, Ronald D., and Brannon Braga. "All Good Things..." Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 7, no. 25-26, May 23, 1994.

*Generation* itself and the very political philosophy whose theme filled the series. The end of history, Q says, is dull. A sentiment that Fukuyama himself seems to share when he says, “I can feel in myself, and see in others around me, a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed.”<sup>73</sup>

Roddenberry was creating a utopian future with what Maurice Hurley called a “Pollyanna-ish view of the future where everything is going to be fine”<sup>74</sup> which closely mirrors the optimistic view of the future in Fukuyama’s “The End of History?”. A world of stability, without the need for conflict or extremism, while fulfilling it did not particularly feel realistic to the world around it.

### *Individual Episodes and Contemporary Historical References*

Near the beginning of *The Next Generation*, Rick Berman wrote a memo for the production studio that listed off story areas, which were recommended as a focus for the series. David Gerrold, a writer for *TNG*, said that it read like someone had flipped through the newspaper and picked stories from the headlines, “[w]e suggest you consider stories dealing with these issues: poverty, hunger, terrorism, child abuse.”<sup>75</sup> Despite this, there is more emphasis on broadly themed sociopolitical issues rather than plots ripped from the newspaper headlines of 1987-1994. However, there are a few strong examples of episodes based on specific issues.

The episode “The High Ground” in season three is one of the most blatant discussions of contemporary issues for the 1990s. It dealt with the issues of terrorism in a setting intentionally created to make viewers think of the conflict in Northern Ireland.<sup>76</sup> The episode raised questions

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<sup>73</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. “The End of History?”, p. 16.

<sup>74</sup> Gross & Altman. “The Fifty-Year Mission”, p. 134.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>76</sup> Snodgrass, Melinda. “The High Ground.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 3, no. 12, January 29, 1990.

on whether terrorism is, at times, a necessary part of the fight for independence and drew parallels between the American war for independence and the struggle between the Ansata rebels and the government of Rutia IV and their leader, Kyril Finn.<sup>77</sup>

**Finn:** How much innocent blood has been spilled for the cause of freedom in the history of your Federation, Doctor? How many good and noble societies have bombed civilians in war? Wiped out whole cities. And now that you enjoy the comfort that has come from their battles, their killing, you frown on my immorality? I am willing to die for my freedom. And, in the finest tradition of your own great civilization, I'm willing to kill for it, too.<sup>78</sup>

**Finn:** This is a war for independence, and I am no better or different than your own George Washington.

**Dr. Crusher:** Washington was a military general, not a terrorist.

**Finn:** The difference between generals and terrorists is only the difference between winners and losers. If you win you are called a general. If you lose...

**Dr. Crusher:** You are killing innocent people!<sup>79</sup>

In the end, the episode did not satisfy the writing staff when it was finished. Michael Piller said that he felt that their statement on terrorism was unclear and ultimately did not say anything new about the issue. The primary writer, Melinda Snodgrass, was unhappy with the choice to make the analogy one related to Northern Ireland.<sup>80</sup> Unfortunately for the franchise, Snodgrass was not the only one who took an issue with that issue and “The High Ground” was not aired unedited by the BBC in Britain until 2007.<sup>81</sup> As of 2019 the episode had still not aired unedited in Ireland due to the controversy of what was seen as a pro-IRA message.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Snodgrass, Melinda. “The High Ground.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 3, no. 12, January 29, 1990.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Snodgrass, Melinda. “The High Ground.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 3, no. 12, January 29, 1990.

<sup>80</sup> Gross, Edward, and Mark A. Altman. *Captains' Logs: The Unauthorized Complete Trek Voyages*. Little, 1995, p. 191.

<sup>81</sup> Beresford, Jack. “The Banned Star Trek: The Next Generation Episode That Predicted a United Ireland by 2024.” *The Irish Post*. The Irish Post, September 26, 2020. <https://www.irishpost.com/news/star-trek-the-next-generation-united-ireland-2024-169961>.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

The IRA refers generally to the “Irish Republican Army”, and its various splinter groups, which fought against British rule in Northern Ireland in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, often employing terrorist tactics. Several parts of the

Season four and five aired episodes that were the closest *The Next Generation* would ever get to addressing LGBT issues.

“The Host” introduced a new species to the series (which would be revisited in more depth in *Deep Space Nine*) known as the Trill.<sup>83</sup> The Trill are symbiotic species in which a host serves as a shell for a worm-like symbiont species.<sup>84</sup> Due to the nature of the bond, a symbiont can move from one host to another to stay alive. This becomes an issue in the episode when the host carrying the “Odan symbiont” is injured and dies, and the symbiont must be transferred to a new host, who is a female rather than the male who came aboard in the first place. Insofar as the LGBT issues come into play in the episode, the problem with this is that the Chief Medical Officer of the Enterprise, Dr. Beverly Crusher, had been a romantic relationship with the Odan in their previous male host body. Odan, in their new body, tells Crusher that “ I am still Odan and I still love you. I cannot imagine that ever changing.”<sup>85</sup> However, Crusher finds herself unable to accept this change and responds by ending the relationship.

Perhaps it is a Human failing, but we are not accustomed to these kinds of changes. I can't keep up. How long will you have this host? What would the next one be? I can't live with that kind of uncertainty. Perhaps, someday, our ability to love won't be so limited.<sup>86</sup>

This episode raised issues of sexual orientation as well as gender transition far earlier than any other show.<sup>87</sup> As did the fifth season episode, “The Outcast,” which also dealt with the

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organization are designated as terrorist groups by the United Kingdom, with some designated as terrorist organizations by New Zealand and the United States as well.; Beresford, Jack. “The Banned Star Trek: The Next Generation Episode That Predicted a United Ireland by 2024.” *The Irish Post*. *The Irish Post*, September 26, 2020. <https://www.irishpost.com/news/star-trek-the-next-generation-united-ireland-2024-169961>.

<sup>83</sup> Horvat, Michel. “The Host.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 4, no. 23, May 13, 1991.

<sup>84</sup> In this episode is it implied that the symbiont completely takes over the host, making it more parasitic than symbiotic, but the characterization of the race in *Deep Space Nine* has the symbiont and host sharing memories and experiences with the host being the primary personality.

<sup>85</sup> Horvat, Michel. “The Host.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 4, no. 23, May 13, 1991.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Gross & Altman. “The Fifty-Year Mission”, p. 237.

ethics of conversion therapy long before it was a topic of political debate in America.<sup>88</sup> Writer, Jeri Taylor, said that this episode was the one she was the proudest of in her career on *Star Trek* because “that message about the importance of tolerance was very important to me.”<sup>89</sup> This episode centers on a race known as the J’naii, who are completely androgynous, seeing the concept of gender as something primitive and taboo. The episode follows the character Soren as they interact with Commander Riker, the second in command of the Enterprise. A growing attraction between them reveals that Soren has secretly identified as female since childhood, a violation of the laws of her planet. Soren is eventually arrested and tried by a tribunal for the crime of having a gender identity. While, ultimately, she is found guilty and given “treatment” to “cure” Soren of the crime, the episode also gave viewers a speech on the topic of sexual orientation and gender identity that would not be out of place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A speech well ahead of its time.

I am female. I was born that way. I have had those feelings, those longings, all of my life. It is not unnatural. I am not sick because I feel this way. I do not need to be helped. I do not need to be cured. What I need, and what all of those who are like me need, is your understanding. And your compassion. We have not injured you in any way. And yet we are scorned and attacked. And all because we are different. What we do is no different from what you do. We talk and laugh. We complain about work. And we wonder about growing old. We talk about our families and we worry about the future. And we cry with each other when things seem hopeless. All of the loving things that you do with each other – that is what we do. And for that we are called misfits, and deviants and criminals. What right do you have to punish us? What right do you have to change us? What makes you think you can dictate how people love each other?<sup>90</sup>

In the season seven episode “Force of Nature,” *The Next Generation* championed issues of environmentalism through a plot in which the planet Hekaras II is being slowly rendered uninhabitable by the use of warp drives, such as the one that power the Enterprise, which are

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<sup>88</sup> Taylor, Jeri. “The Outcast.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 5, no. 17, March 16, 1992.

<sup>89</sup> Gross & Altman. “The Fifty-Year Mission”, p. 237.

<sup>90</sup> Taylor, Jeri. “The Outcast.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 5, no. 17, March 16, 1992.

slowly damaging the fabric of subspace in their region of space.<sup>91</sup> The question of whether we truly know what damage technology can do to the environment is raised. Ultimately, while it addressed a contemporary issue, writers expressed disappointment with the episode, finding it too heavy-handed and impossible to make the stakes and the characters relatable when focusing on environmental issues.<sup>92</sup>

The late 1980s and early 1990s were a time of great change for the entire world and for American society in general. Shifts in the geopolitical climate, the cracks in the foundation of the Soviet Union and its eventual fall and consequent ending of the Cold War brought questions of what the future would look like. This use of Science Fiction to convey bigger ideas are what Kodwo Eshun meant when he said that the genre was concerned with engineering “feedback between its preferred future and its becoming present.”<sup>93</sup> Roddenberry, like Fukuyama, sought to answer those questions. *The Next Generation* touched on those big sociopolitical questions, the philosophy of what the future would look like in absence of conflict which some believed would follow in the wake of ending the Cold War, while still maintaining a strong critique of the sociopolitical problems that would be necessary to solve if Earth (and America) were ever to see the bright future predicted by *Star Trek* and “The End of History?”.

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<sup>91</sup> Shankar, Naren. “Force of Nature.” Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 7, no. 09, November 15, 1993.

<sup>92</sup> Gross & Altman. “*Captains’ Logs*”.

<sup>93</sup> Eshun, K. (2017). Further considerations on Afrofuturism. *Science Fiction Criticism*. doi:10.5040/9781474248655.0044

### Chapter Three – *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*

Beginning production in 1992, this series would run for seven seasons from 1993 to 1999, concurrent with *Star Trek: The Next Generation* for the first two seasons. The series was put into production after the death of Gene Roddenberry and marked the first entry in the *Star Trek* series with no significant input from Roddenberry on its creation. Rick Berman, who had worked closely with Roddenberry, and Michael Piller, writer and Executive Producer for *Star Trek: TNG*, co-created the show.

*DS9* was a major departure from the previous two series, taking place on a space station rather than on a starship. Giving the series a more fixed location was only the start of the differences. The series also had darker themes and featured far more conflict between main and recurring cast members than *TNG* had.

The series was also one of the first experiments with serialized storytelling. Robert Hewitt Wolfe, a writer on *DS9*, commented that a major difference for *Deep Space Nine* was that that the entire premise of the show was “come to this place and take control of it and build it into something better” rather than “come to a planet, have an adventure, warp away” as it had been in *The Original Series* and *The Next Generation*, which was a premise that was inherently serialized, rather than episodic.<sup>94</sup> The serialization of the series caused conflict with the studio and fans. However, Executive Producer Ira Steven Behr maintains that he was doing what was necessary to make the best possible show.<sup>95</sup> *Deep Space Nine* is the first (and only) time an

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<sup>94</sup> Gross & Altman. “The Fifty-Year Mission”, p. 466.

<sup>95</sup> “Ira Steven Behr on Passion Project That Dominated Six Years of His Life,” June 24, 2019. <https://intl.startrek.com/news/deep-space-nine-what-we-left-behind-ira-behr-interview.;>

“The serialization was a bold move. I look back at it now and I was really a bit of an asshole, because everyone was saying people can't keep up with it. The show was syndicated and on at different times. I didn't care about any of that. I just wanted to do the best show we could do. I could understand why certain people involved and other producers and studios would feel that that was a little bit of an annoying take, because it did hurt the fan base, but at the time, I wasn't thinking about the future. I just wanted to do the best show we could do”

African-American (actor Avery Brooks as Commander/Captain Benjamin Sisko) has been cast as the lead Starfleet Captain in a syndicated *Star Trek* series.

***“The Clash of Civilizations” and Behr’s Culture Conflict***

While set in the same century as *The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*’s thematic principles portrayed a much bleaker view of the 24<sup>th</sup> century, which fit well with the contemporary political theories in being explored by Samuel P. Huntington’s counter argument to the hopeful stagnancy that Fukuyama’s “End of History?” saw and *The Next Generation* explored.

While Michael Piller and Rick Berman are the credited creators and producers for *Deep Space Nine*<sup>96</sup>, everyone from the actors and writers to Piller and Berman seem to agree that Ira Steven Behr was the real creative power behind the show.<sup>97</sup> Though Behr had worked on *The Next Generation* during the series’ third season, he and Roddenberry had little to do with each other.<sup>98</sup> Their lack of personal interaction is mirrored in their lack of agreement about what humanity will look like in the 24th century.

Behr left *The Next Generation* over artistic differences.<sup>99</sup> These differences were allowed to pursue when he was offered *Deep Space Nine* by Michael Piller several years later.<sup>100</sup> Behr felt that Roddenberry’s view of the future was lacking, describing it as the “Connecticut of *Star Trek* series” where everything was “clean, white, and proper. Nothing messy about the world of *The Next Generation*. It just wasn’t the world that I lived in.”<sup>101</sup> In contrast, Michael Pillar said that *Deep Space Nine* was made up of “conflict on every level we could find it. They are in

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<sup>96</sup> Berman, Rick, Michael Piller, Ira Steven Behr, Hans Beimler, René Echevarria, Ronald D. Moore, Michael Taylor, et al. 2003. *Star trek, Deep Space Nine. Season 1 - Season 7*.

<sup>97</sup> Gross & Altman. “The Fifty-Year Mission”, p. 419.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 194.

<sup>99</sup> Gross & Altman. “The Fifty-Year Mission”, p. 210.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 418.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p. 210.

conflict with their environment. They are in conflict with each other...”.<sup>102</sup> As a result, Behr’s version of the 24<sup>th</sup> century was one “gritty and alien” rather than the utopian future that Roddenberry’s *The Next Generation* had dreamed of.<sup>103</sup>

Perhaps the best example of how Behr brought *DS9* into his reality can be found in the season six episode “In the Pale Moonlight.”<sup>104</sup> Despite being one of the most popular and highest-rated episodes of the series, this episode is also one of the most antithetical to the concepts that Gene Roddenberry’s views of what humanity would be like in the 24<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>105</sup> In the episode, Captain Sisko is required to weigh his principles against the lives of millions of people. In his final monologue, Sisko ultimately decides that it was worth sacrificing his principles for the greater good.

So...I lied. I cheated. I bribed men to cover the crimes of other men. I am an accessory to murder. But the most damning thing of all... I think I can live with it. And if I had to do it all over again, I would. Garak was right about one thing, a guilty conscience is a small price to pay for the safety of the Alpha Quadrant. So, I will learn to live with it. Because I can live with it.<sup>106</sup>

Andrew Robinson (Elim Garak, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*) said that the episode “[e]xpose[d] the American innocence, that we want to do these things in the world, but we’re not really willing to take the consequences of our actions. [It shows us that] sometimes we have to do very dirty things, and we have to hurt people, and we pretend that that doesn’t exist, that

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<sup>102</sup> Gross & Altman. “The Fifty-Year Mission”, p. 210.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 411.

<sup>104</sup> Taylor, Michael. “In the Pale Moonlight.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 6, no. 19, April 15, 1998.

<sup>105</sup> Erdmann, Terry J., and Paula M. Block. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine Companion*. New York: Pocket Books, 2000, p. 555.

<sup>106</sup> Taylor, Michael. “In the Pale Moonlight.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 6, no. 19, April 15, 1998.

Americans would never do that.”<sup>107</sup> Episodes like this made *Deep Space Nine* an entirely new kind of *Star Trek*, with a new message.

Just as Roddenberry’s *The Next Generation* paralleled Fukuyama, the same can be said for the parallels between Samuel P. Huntington’s theories about what a post-Cold War world would look like and the political themes of *Deep Space Nine*. In 1993, Samuel P. Huntington answered Fukuyama’s optimism about humanity’s future with his own, much more conflict-filled view of the future. While Fukuyama saw the end of the Cold War as a sign that conflict in the world was on a downward trend, Huntington saw a future that was just as divided as it had been throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only that division would be along cultural lines rather than divisions based on the dividing lines of nation or political ideologies.<sup>108</sup>

In “The Clash of Civilizations?” Huntington lays out six primary reasons that these cultural fault lines will cause friction and conflict in our world. The conflict between cultures is at the core of the plot of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* and all six of the Huntington’s reasons for a clash of civilizations can be found in the series, intentionally placed there by the writers and producers, as Michael Piller said of *DS9*: “We did politics awfully well.”<sup>109</sup>

From the very beginning of the series, the Federation is forced into close contact with non-Federation planets and races that often have values and belief systems that run counter to the humanist, nearly atheist, views of the Federation. Religious differences are viewed by Huntington as the most critical issue bound to create conflict between different civilizations.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Rossi, Marcello. “The Deceptive Complications of Elim Garak.” *Star Trek*, May 25, 2019. <https://intl.startrek.com/article/andy-robinson-interview-inside-star-trek-magazine>.

<sup>108</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22-49. Accessed November 17, 2020. doi:10.2307/20045621, p. 22.

<sup>109</sup> Gross & Altman. “The Fifty-Year Mission”, p. 460.

<sup>110</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. “The Clash of Civilizations?”, p. 25.

Religion plays a significant role in *DS9* from the very beginning, and its inclusion was fully intended to create conflict by the creators and writers, as Michael Piller stated:

What we had simply done in creating an environment that brings conflict to our people, which we desperately wanted to do, is to put a group of people with a group of aliens that are different than we are, who had a difference and a conflict with our humanist beliefs. Giving them strong spiritual mystical orbs and prophet worship forced our humanist people to deal with another alien race that is as different from us as the Klingons are.<sup>111</sup>

The second cause of conflict, according to Huntington, is the ever-shrinking world that we exist in due to globalization.<sup>112</sup> This was also an issue in the *Star Trek* franchise, which producer Michael Piller commented on as well, saying that “If you look at the years since, it’s gotten very crowded in our part of the galaxy.”<sup>113</sup> One of the key plot elements in *Deep Space Nine* revolved around the stable wormhole, which made the world even smaller as it connected the Alpha and Gamma quadrants and brought new threats.<sup>114</sup>

The third issue is the “fundamentalist” religious movements that have sprung up due to social and economic change worldwide.<sup>115</sup> A great deal of the plot of *DS9* revolves, quite literally, around the planet of Bajor and Ira Behr liked the opportunity to play up that conflict and clash between the “rational, scientific bent of the Federation versus the Bajoran spiritual outlook on life.”<sup>116</sup> The Bajoran faith is an integral part of the complete arc of the series. Commander Sisko becomes the ‘Emissary’ to Bajor from the prophets and his eventual discovery that he is genetically linked to the alien race that the Bajorans worship as the prophets. However, more important to the conflict in the series is the fundamentalist religious movement that begins in the

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<sup>111</sup> Gross & Altman, *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 418.

<sup>112</sup> Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?”, p. 25.

<sup>113</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 34.

<sup>114</sup> Piller, Michael. “Emissary.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 1, no. 1-2, January 3, 1993.

<sup>115</sup> Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?”, p. 26.

<sup>116</sup> Gross & Altman, *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 461.

series' first season. Vedek Winn, a religious leader on Bajor attempts to sow seeds of conflict with the Federation by questioning the education the Federation run school is giving to children on the space station.<sup>117</sup>

**Keiko:** No, I don't teach Bajoran spiritual beliefs. That's your job. Mine is to open the children's minds to... history, to literature, to mathematics, to science.

**Vedek Winn:** You are opening the children's minds – to blasphemy. And I cannot permit it to continue.<sup>118</sup>

When discussing this particular episode, Michael Piller was intentionally meant to make viewers think of issues such as “religion in school, school prayer, the Scopes Monkey Trial, and fundamentalism.”<sup>119</sup> Discussions of this nature were very timely, as the question of how much religion should be allowed to play a part in education was at the forefront of debate in America at the time. The conflict on allowing prayer in schools was still being litigated in American courts at the time, with *Lee v. Weisman* having been decided by the Supreme Court less than a year before this episode aired.<sup>120</sup> Additionally, the topic of evolution versus creationism was still a hotly debated topic with *Edwards v. Aguillard* having been decided only six years before the series began, which had further lead to debates on the teaching of “intelligent design” in schools well into the 1990s.<sup>121</sup> The beliefs of some fundamentalist religious groups in America on these topics quite closely mirrored those of Vedek Winn in the above quote.

The fourth issue brought up by Huntington is the “growth of civilization-consciousness,” which has caused a “return to the roots phenomenon” in non-Western countries.<sup>122</sup> Non-West or

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<sup>117</sup> Wolfe, Robert Hewitt. “In the Hands of the Prophets.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 1, no. 20, June 20, 1993.

<sup>118</sup> Wolfe, Robert Hewitt. “In the Hands of the Prophets.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 1, no. 20, June 20, 1993.

<sup>119</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 462.

<sup>120</sup> “Lee v. Weisman.” Oyez. Accessed February 3, 2021. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1991/90-1014>.

<sup>121</sup> “Edwards v. Aguillard.” Oyez, [www.oyez.org/cases/1986/85-1513](http://www.oyez.org/cases/1986/85-1513). Accessed 3 Feb. 2021.; Wexler, J.D. From the Classroom to the Courtroom: Intelligent Design and the Constitution. *Evo Edu Outreach* 3, 215–224 (2010). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12052-010-0223-3>

<sup>122</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. “The Clash of Civilizations?”, p. 26.

(in the case of *Star Trek*) non-Federation planets like Bajor are pulling back from the culture that they see as their colonizers. In describing the main character of Kira Nerys on *DS9*, one of the directors pointed out that her character had been constructed as a Bajoran nationalist who is working with a colonizing force who helped end the Cardassian occupation, but still very much telling the Federation and Starfleet “We don’t want you, either.”<sup>123</sup> Many Bajorans wished to maintain their own way of life and the involvement of the Federation made them fear yet another presence that would attempt to colonize and control them just as the Cardassians had done, only they would do it in a gentle way that expected Bajor to be grateful for the opportunity.

This nationalism and wish to maintain Bajoran cultural and religious differences is the main problem that has to be overcome to reach the ultimate goal stated in *DS9*’s pilot episode, the goal of having Bajor eventually become a member nation of the Federation.<sup>124</sup> This is part of Huntington’s fifth cause of conflict, the fact that “cultural characteristics are less mutable” and less easy to find easy resolutions and compromises to overcome.<sup>125</sup> In *DS9*, some of these nationalistic elements “believe in Bajor for the Bajorans and that all other species are inferior and should be expelled from the planet.”<sup>126</sup>

The sixth and final issue Huntington foresees as causing cultural clash is that of “economic regionalism.”<sup>127</sup> Clashes of economic differences were unique to *DS9* at this point in the *Star Trek* franchise. The economics of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* were based on a post-scarcity system, which worked on The Enterprise and Earth and removed the issue of economics from the story. However, on the station in *Deep Space Nine*, there are dozens of non-Federation

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<sup>123</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 449.

<sup>124</sup> Piller, Michael. “Emissary.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 1, no. 1-2, January 3, 1993.

<sup>125</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. “The Clash of Civilizations?”, p. 27.

<sup>126</sup> Behr, Ira Steven. “The Homecoming.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 2, no. 01, September 26, 1993.

<sup>127</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. “The Clash of Civilizations?”, p. 27.

races using the station as a hub for travel, and many of them still used money in their societies. One of the enduring conflicts in the series is between the Ferengi culture, which is an extreme parody of capitalism, and the ideals of the Federation, which is most easily summed up by this exchange between Jake Sisko (Commander Sisko's son) and Nog (a young Ferengi boy who lives on the station):

**Nog:** It's my money, Jake! If you want to bid at the auction, use your own money.

**Jake Sisko:** I'm Human, I don't have any money.

**Nog:** It's not my fault that your species decided to abandon currency-based economics in favor of some philosophy of self-enhancement.

**Jake Sisko:** Hey, watch it. There's nothing wrong with our philosophy. We work to better ourselves and the rest of Humanity.

**Nog:** What does that mean exactly?

**Jake Sisko:** It means... it means we don't need money!

**Nog:** Well, if you don't need money, then you certainly don't need mine!<sup>128</sup>

### *Individual Episodes and Contemporary Historical References*

Alexander Siddig (Dr. Julian Bashir, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*) once said that *DS9* was the “true sci-fi baby of the *Star Trek* world” because it explored “[d]ifficult things that normally people don’t want to talk about, because they find it uncomfortable. Politics, religion...”<sup>129</sup> and it did so often. Many episodes of the series were intentionally constructed to reference or address specific contemporary sociopolitical issues.

The pilot is a key example of how the writing staff on *DS9* took their cues from the world events happening around them. In “Emissary,” Commander Sisko is assigned to establish a Federation presence on a former Cardassian space station in orbit around Bajor.<sup>130</sup> When he arrives, he finds the station in complete disarray due to the Cardassian forces ransacking it before they left the station, a state which Sisko mentions is similar to the one that the Cardassian

<sup>128</sup> Moore, Ronald D. “In the Cards.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 5, no. 25, June 9, 1997.

<sup>129</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 545.

<sup>130</sup> Piller, Michael. “Emissary.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 1, no. 1-2, January 3, 1993.

occupation left the planet of Bajor in, as well.<sup>131</sup> This disarray and the necessity of rebuilding in the wake of destruction were an intentional reference on Michael Piller's part to the 1992 Los Angeles riots, which occurred during the episode's writing process.<sup>132</sup> Piller said that "it was not a dramatic situation for a man to come to the Beverly Center. It's not very dramatic for someone to go to their favorite mall and decide to stay. But for a man who goes to South Central Los Angeles and finds it in ruins and decides to stay, that's dramatic."<sup>133</sup> It was doubly poignant to use the Los Angeles Rodney King riots as an inspiration for this episode, as it was also the first episode of *Star Trek* to have an African-American as Captain.

The casting of Avery Brooks as Captain Sisko brought the issue of race and racism into *Star Trek* in a much more defined way than it had been under Gene Roddenberry's reign. For Roddenberry, the issue of race was one that he dismissed as inconsequential in the 24<sup>th</sup> century; in his opinion, "the role of the black man [was] no different from the role of anybody else."<sup>134</sup> However, Michael Piller, Ira Behr, and Avery Brooks all felt it was essential to give a platform to contemporary issues of race in America. The most prominent example of this is the season six episode "Far Beyond the Stars."<sup>135</sup> Directed by Avery Brooks, the episode is in the form of a vision that Captain Sisko has that is set in New York City in the 1950s and centers around the main cast of *Deep Space Nine* as humans working for a science fiction magazine called *Incredible Tales*. Captain Sisko is now Benny Russell, an African-American writer for the magazine, who writes a short story titled "Deep Space Nine," featuring a black captain on a space station. The episode centers around the struggle for civil rights in the era, featuring issues

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<sup>131</sup> Piller, Michael. "Emissary." Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 1, no. 1-2, January 3, 1993.

<sup>132</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 424.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 464.

<sup>135</sup> Behr, Ira Steven, and Hans Beimler. "Far Beyond the Stars." Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 6, no. 13, February 11, 1998.

of racism and police brutality (a topic that was still on the minds of many after the Rodney King incident in Los Angeles only six years previously).<sup>136</sup> Brooks said that this episode was “the most important moment for me in the entire seven years” and that the episode was, essentially, timeless because the issues it addressed have never really left society because racism is an “unconscious” part of society.<sup>137</sup>

Contemporary social and economic issues also came to the forefront in the season three two-part episode “Past Tense.”<sup>138</sup> In this episode, three crew members are accidentally sent back to San Francisco in 2024 to a key turning point in Earth’s history. At this point in Earth’s history, the homeless, mentally ill, and unemployed have all been corralled into “Sanctuary Districts” to keep them off the streets. Ira Behr said that the inspiration for the episode came from “seeing all the homeless people in Santa Monica, who I call living statues, because people used to step over them. They’re right there, overlooking the ocean, and people are lying there in the grass. And there are people taking pictures of the ocean and literally stepping over these people.”<sup>139</sup> This general ability to simply ignore the problem in society and act as if you cannot see them is summed up when Dr. Julian Bashir says “[c]ausing people to suffer because you hate them... is terrible. But causing people to suffer because you have forgotten how to care... that's really hard to understand.”<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Behr, Ira Steven, and Hans Beimler. “Far Beyond the Stars.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 6, no. 13, February 11, 1998.

<sup>137</sup> “Mission Inquiry: Far Beyond the Stars, DS9 Season 6 DVD Special Features.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 6, November 4, 2003.; Erdmann, Terry J., and Paula M. Block. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine Companion*. New York: Pocket Books, 2000.

<sup>138</sup> Wolfe, Robert Hewitt, and Ira Steven Behr. “Past Tense, Part I.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 3, no. 11, January 8, 1995.; Wolfe, Robert Hewitt, and Ira Steven Behr. “Past Tense, Part II.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 3, no. 12, January 15, 1995.

<sup>139</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 478.

<sup>140</sup> Wolfe, Robert Hewitt, and Ira Steven Behr. “Past Tense, Part I.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 3, no. 11, January 8, 1995.

The most interesting factor for this episode as far as commenting on contemporary issues is a headline from the Los Angeles Times in October of 1994 (three months before the episode aired and why the episode was still being filmed) which reads “Homeless Camp Weighed in L.A. Industrial Area” which comments on Los Angeles Mayor, Richard Riordan, had considered plans to put homeless L.A. residents in camps to clear them off the streets and give them “options.”<sup>141</sup> Ira Behr, who wrote the episode, said that “[t]hat proposal, or remark, was on the front page of the Los Angeles Times, and everyone on the show went insane when they saw that. Here we were shooting this thing, and it could have actually happened. I don’t think we showed anything in that episode that wasn’t a very possible future for this country.”<sup>142</sup>

Other episodes that dealt with contemporary political and civil liberties issues (and could very well be said to represent a very possible future for America, just as “Past Tense” had done) were the season four two part “Homefront” and “Paradise Lost” which dealt with the paranoia brought on by the threat of invasion by foreign powers (in this case by the shapeshifting ‘Founders’ from the Gamma Quadrant) and how the fear can be used to justify limiting civil liberties.<sup>143</sup> In the aftermath of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the issue of foreign terrorism became increasingly a factor of discussion in national security and the balancing of security and civil liberties for the American public.<sup>144</sup> Robert Wolfe, one of the writers for these episodes, said that the question asked, “[i]f the United States became a fascist state to fight

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<sup>141</sup> Daunt, Tina, and Tina Nguyen. “Homeless Camp Weighed in L.A. Industrial Area.” Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles Times, October 14, 1994. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-10-14-mn-50276-story.html>.

<sup>142</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 479.

<sup>143</sup> Behr, Ira Steven, and Robert Hewitt Wolfe. “Paradise Lost.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 4, no. 12, January 8, 1996.; Behr, Ira Steven, and Robert Hewitt Wolfe. “Homefront.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 4, no. 11, January 1, 1996.

<sup>144</sup> Watson, Dale. “Foreign Terrorists in America: Five Years after the World Trade Center.” *Foreign Terrorists in America: Five Years after the World Trade Center*, February 24, 1998. [https://fas.org/irp/congress/1998\\_hr/s980224w.htm](https://fas.org/irp/congress/1998_hr/s980224w.htm).

fascism, would that be worth it?”<sup>145</sup> While Roddenberry’s vision of the future had a somewhat trusting view of the Federation, Wolfe said, “I thought it was an important show that demonstrated that the best of governments had to be watched. You can’t allow our fear of outside forces or interior threats to chop away at our own democratic institutions” or, as Captain Sisko put it, you can’t be “willing to destroy paradise in order to save it”.<sup>146</sup> The paranoia brought on by invasion or terrorism was both timely when it aired and also, to some degree, prescient of the debates in American politics and society that would come in the next decade as topics like the constitutionality of The Patriot Act and other government acts in “the war on terror” would be debated.

*Deep Space Nine* chose to focus heavily on the political and social conflicts of the day throughout the series, reflecting a future that had more in common with the world that viewers lived in. A world where political, cultural, and religious conflicts were still causing genocides and violence across the world, from Bosnia to Northern Ireland, Africa to Los Angeles. However, the series tried to show these conflicts as issues that could be resolved and that humanity, while it will always find conflict, will always have the capacity to reach past those conflicts and solve them.

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<sup>145</sup> Gross & Altman. “The Fifty-Year Mission”, p. 500.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

### Chapter Four - *Star Trek: Voyager*

Returning to a more episodic style of storytelling, Paramount, Rick Berman, Michael Piller, and Jeri Taylor created *Star Trek: Voyager* in 1995. The series would run for seven years, 1995 to 2001. This series returned to being onboard a starship, but unlike *TOS* or *TNG*, the crew of the USS Voyager is forced to work with the crew of another ship, crewed by members of the Maquis rebellion, to survive and get home when they are flung 70,000 lightyears away from Federation space by alien technology.

Jeri Taylor and Michael Piller felt it was important to create something new that would be distinguished from the other entries in the *Star Trek* series. In the *Voyager* Season 1 DVD special features, Jeri Taylor said that "[w]e felt a need to create an avenue for new and fresh storytelling. We are forced into creating a new universe. We have to come up with new aliens, we have to come up with new situations."<sup>147</sup>

*Voyager* is also the first (and only) time that a *Star Trek* series cast a woman (actress Kate Mulgrew as Captain Kathryn Janeway) in the role of a Starfleet Captain in a syndicated series.

#### *Feminism, Skin-Tight Catsuits, and the Male Gaze*

*Star Trek: Voyager* represents the beginning of a significant shift from the original goal that Gene Roddenberry saw for *Star Trek*. Unlike *The Original Series*, *The Next Generation*, and *Deep Space Nine*, this new era of *Star Trek* had a much less clearly defined progressive socio-political message than the previous three series.

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<sup>147</sup> Taylor, Jeri, Michael Piller, and Rick Berman. "Braving the Unknown: Season 1 VOY Season 1 DVD Special Features." Episode. *Star Trek: Voyager*, February 24, 2004.

In many ways *Star Trek: Voyager* was a show that defined itself less by what it was but what it was *not*. It was not *Deep Space Nine*; Michael Piller and Jeri Taylor could not be more explicit about that. Instead, it was a “slam-bang adventure show” and a “romp and a true action/adventure” without all the heavy metaphysical and philosophical baggage that had been part of the third installment in the franchise.<sup>148</sup> Additionally, while returning to the format of a mostly episodic series set on a starship, it could not be *The Next Generation*. In order to differentiate the series, they followed up their first African-American captain in *DS9* with the franchise’s first female captain and then picked up the new captain and her crew (as well as the crew of an enemy Maquis vessel) and flung them 70,000 lightyears away from the familiarity of Federation space and begin a 75-year long journey home.<sup>149</sup>

The lack of clear messaging was caused by the decisions of writers, showrunners, and studio executives, which gutted massive plot points planned out since *Deep Space Nine* and written into the pilot. Glen Oliver, a film and TV critic, succinctly explained the problem:

Voyager offered a cast I very much enjoyed, but it hamstrung itself in two ways almost immediately: the notion of colliding two crews of disparate backgrounds on the bridge of a Federation starship was more or less abandoned by the end of “Caretaker,” Voyager’s opening episode. Any tension and quest for enlightenment which could’ve been hugely beneficial to the series’ dramatic structure was more or less jettisoned from the get-go. And with it went any substantive exploration of the human condition, without which the creation of drama is difficult at best.<sup>150</sup>

The problem, as described by *Voyager* creator Michael Piller, was that the studio made the executive decision to make *Voyager* brighter and happier than *Deep Space Nine*, and to do that, they had to jettison any of the serious conflicts that the Maquis versus Federation

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<sup>148</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 556.

<sup>149</sup> Piller, Michael, and Jeri Taylor. “Caretaker.” Episode. *Star Trek: Voyager* 1, no. 01-02, January 16, 1995.

<sup>150</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 558.

interactions could have given the viewers.<sup>151</sup> The studio wanted an attitude on the USS *Voyager* that was “one for all and all for one” rather than allowing for the conflict laid out in the pilot episode to play out naturally during the series.<sup>152</sup> Ronald Moore called it *Voyager*’s “biggest mistake.”<sup>153</sup>

Here are Starfleet officers who had become terrorist resistance fighters, guerrilla warriors. The Federation has got them on the run and both of these groups are thrown in a ship on another side of the galaxy and forced to live together. You’d think that’s the setup for a major show about conflict, but at the end of the pilot they all put on the Starfleet uniforms and that’s it.<sup>154</sup>

Additionally, members of the writing staff, such as Brannon Braga (who eventually became showrunner for the *Voyager* series in season four), were less invested in the sociopolitical elements that had been the primary purpose of Roddenberry’s franchise in the first place. Braga was “was more into doing weird sci-fi” than he was into political allegory or human conflict.<sup>155</sup> This had been a conflict between Braga and Michael Piller in the past; when Braga had worked on *The Next Generation*, he admitted that Piller “focused on the humanity” whereas Braga “always saw it as a crazy sci-fi show personally, and as a result, my episodes seem to be bereft of any so-called character development.”<sup>156</sup> The difference here was that Braga had far more control over the direction that *Voyager* would take than he had on *The Next Generation* and Braga wanted *Voyager* to be “high-concept” science fiction, which focused on the “weird shit” that could happen in the new quadrant of space which the series was exploring.<sup>157</sup> This story-

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<sup>151</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 588.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 589.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 588.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 626.

telling style did not lend itself to the subtleties of the more character-driven, socio-political commentaries that the previous series in the *Star Trek* franchise had taken on.

The socio-political themes of *The Next Generation* and *Deep Space Nine* had been clearly focused on the political ramifications of the end of the Cold War. By the mid-1990s, other philosophies were coming to prominence in society, namely the rise of Third Wave Feminism in the mid-1990s and the impact that would have on society. Despite the less focused political concept for the series, *Voyager* did not ignore this shift in social consciousness, electing to reflect it by deliberately choosing to cast the first female Starfleet captain<sup>158</sup>: Captain Kathryn Janeway or the USS *Voyager*, played by Irish-American Kate Mulgrew.

This was a whole new era of *Star Trek*, the women's era. Unfortunately, despite the number of female characters serving in leading roles on the series, the feminist socio-political message of the series is often muddled by the behind the scenes views of producers and writers when it came to these characters, the actresses that portrayed them, and their story arcs. As a result, unlike *The Next Generation* and *Deep Space Nine*, *Voyager* is a confusing mix of feminist philosophy on one and a near satire of feminism on the other.

The conflict between *Voyager* and the feminism of the 1990s is not immediately apparent on screen. On the surface, the series gave viewers four highly competent female characters in leading roles. Captain Kathryn Janeway, Chief Engineer B'Elanna Torres, medic and botanist Kes, and the rehabilitated Borg drone Seven of Nine. Unfortunately, both on-screen and behind the scenes, much occurred that subverted the feminist message of the series

Two of the main characters, Janeway and Torres, fared better on screen than the other two, though they still were objectified by producers behind the scenes.

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<sup>158</sup> Gross & Altman. "The Fifty-Year Mission", p. 552.

I. *Captain Kathryn Janeway and B'Elanna Torres: Strong on Screen, Objectified by Producers*

Kate Mulgrew played a strong captain and insisted on playing a character that was not sexualized, to the point where she rejected any possibility of a sexual or romantic relationship for Janeway throughout the series<sup>159</sup>. Mulgrew wanted to establish the character as a strong leader and “break the mold for women,” as a result, she saw the role as needing to “transcend” her gender and not be mistaken for anyone’s mother by men watching the show.<sup>160</sup> Winrich Kolbe, a longtime director on the *Star Trek* franchise, believed that they had difficulty writing Janeway as a woman, rather than ascribing her traditionally masculine traits, because of the lack of female writers on *Voyager*.<sup>161</sup> Despite that, Jeri Taylor and Winrich Kolbe both believed that she brought something different to the role that a male captain could not have, while she radiated that leadership.<sup>162</sup>

Behind the scenes, however, it was quite a different story. Winrich Kolbe said that it was difficult to write for her due to the lack of many female writers on the staff, which represents an issue all of its own when discussing the feminism of the series.<sup>163</sup> Additionally, Mulgrew often complained that she felt overtly scrutinized by studio executives and producers because she was a woman. Everything from her hair to her clothing to her body was obsessed over far more on set than they would have been for a male captain.<sup>164</sup> In a panel at Denver Comic Con in 2017, Mulgrew said:

That bloody thing with my hair. Endlessly stupid hijinks with my hair! Not only my hair. My hair, my breasts, my feet, my waist. There was a woman in the captain’s chair and

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<sup>159</sup> *DCC'17 Kate Mulgrew FULL Panel. Denver Comic Con 2017 Panels*, 2017. <https://youtu.be/rje9u4CRURk>.

<sup>160</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 579.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, p. 580.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, p. 583.; *Ibid*, p. 584

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, p. 580.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, p. 583.

they didn't know what to do. So, it was all physicalized. How many times did they change my hairdo in the first six months? Ten?<sup>165</sup>

That focus on Mulgrew's physicality as a woman was not her imagination. Rick Berman felt it necessary to comment on Mulgrew and her character sexually on a number of occasions, stating the importance that he had placed on finding a woman for the role who was feminine because "If you look at female officers in the military who make it to the rank of admiral or general, they tend to not be babes"<sup>166</sup> and that Mulgrew had a "sexy" voice.<sup>167</sup> Comments of this nature, as Mulgrew has speculated, were not something Berman felt were necessary with Patrick Stewart or Avery Brooks in their roles as captains on previous *Star Trek* series.

Like Janeway, B'Elanna Torres, the half-Klingon chief engineer of the USS Voyager during the seven-year run of the series, appears fairly progressively feminist in her portrayal on-screen. However, just as with Kate Mulgrew, there is an emphasis from producers (Rick Berman, specifically) on the physical attractiveness of the character, stating that casting for her was complicated because Klingon women are "kind of monstrous."<sup>168</sup> A concern that neither Berman nor Roddenberry felt the need to publicly voice when casting Michael Dorn as Worf in *The Next Generation* or casting any of the many other recurring male Klingon characters in *Deep Space Nine*.

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<sup>165</sup> DCC'17 Kate Mulgrew FULL Panel. Denver Comic Con 2017 Panels, 2017.  
<https://youtu.be/rje9u4CRURk>.

<sup>166</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 582.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*, p. 583.

<sup>168</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 564.

## II. *Kes and Seven of Nine: Lolita Complex in Space*

The most concerning pair of prominent female characters come next in my analysis. The first, Kes, was replaced in season four by the second, Seven of Nine. Each character suffers from several issues, both on-screen and behind the scenes.

Kes is an alien who joins the USS Voyager crew briefly after they arrive in the Delta Quadrant.<sup>169</sup> She joins the crew and makes herself useful by setting up a hydroponics garden to supplement the stranded ship's food resources and begins training to become a nurse in the infirmary.<sup>170</sup> Both of these are undoubtedly important roles on the ship, but this does not negate the problematic nature of the background given to Kes as a female in the series. Kes is an Ocampa, an alien race which is canonically short-lived, born, living, and dying within eight or nine human years.<sup>171</sup> When Kes is introduced to the series in season one, she is only two human years old. Director Winrich Kolbe, when discussing the casting of the character, specifies that they were looking for young actresses that projected a certain sense of fragility.<sup>172</sup> Rick Berman specified that they “were looking for sort of an elfin female.”<sup>173</sup> The original script for the first episode describes her as “a dazzling, ethereal beauty, waifish and fragile.”<sup>174</sup> All of these descriptions emphasize a youthful, childlike quality as the focus of the character. These casting notes, when combined with the canonical extreme young age the character is described as, raise certain concerns of Lolita syndrome.<sup>175</sup> This issue is only added to by the fact that the character

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<sup>169</sup> Piller, Michael, and Jeri Taylor. “Caretaker.” Episode. *Star Trek: Voyager*1, no. 01-02, January 16, 1995.

<sup>170</sup> Braga, Brannon. “Parallax.” Episode. *Star Trek: Voyager*1, no. 03, January 23, 1995.

<sup>171</sup> Klein, Jack, Karen Klein, and Kenneth Biller. “Jetrel.” Episode. 1, no. 15, May 15, 1995.

<sup>172</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 567.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> Berman, Rick, Michael Piller, and Jeri Taylor. “Star Trek: Voyager ‘Caretaker’.” TV Writing. Accessed November 24, 2020. [http://leethomson.myzen.co.uk/Star\\_Trek/4\\_Voyager/Star\\_Trek\\_Voyager\\_1x01\\_-\\_Caretaker.pdf](http://leethomson.myzen.co.uk/Star_Trek/4_Voyager/Star_Trek_Voyager_1x01_-_Caretaker.pdf).

<sup>175</sup> *McGraw-Hill Concise Dictionary of Modern Medicine*. S.v. “Lolita syndrome.” Retrieved November 23, 2020 from <https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Lolita+syndrome>

is the object of romantic love or obsession from three much older male characters during her three seasons on the television show and, in one case, her body is possessed by another being which attempts to seduce another older male mentor figure in the character's life.<sup>176</sup>

In the episode "Elogium" in season two, an event radically speeds up Kes' natural reproductive process and causes her to go into the Ocampan "fertile" period much earlier than she should. Essentially creating a plot in which a canonically pre-pubescent character is pressed to decide if she should have a child much sooner than she is prepared for.<sup>177</sup> While there was an opportunity for a discussion of reproductive rights in the context of this plot, the episode failed to deliver any meaningful social or political commentary.

Additionally, during the episode "Before and After" in season three, Kes is shown marrying and having a child with Tom Paris, a significantly older male on the crew.<sup>178</sup> The child of that union, Linnis Paris, ages physically as quickly as her mother and ends up marrying the much older best friend of her father, Harry Kim, taking the feeling of a character being almost a child bride to an even greater extreme.

This sort of Lolita syndrome in female *Star Trek: Voyager* characters are not restricted to Kes' character. The same issue is apparent in how the character Seven of Nine (played by actress Jeri Ryan) is depicted. While this character is canonically 24 human years of age when she joins the crew of the USS Voyager, the issue of emotional maturity is still a concerning question. Within the context of the plot, she was 'assimilated' by the Borg collective at the age of six and lost her individuality at that time, essentially freezing her emotional development at the age of six and restricting any possibility of developing her personality or emotionally maturing

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<sup>176</sup> Klink, Lisa. "Warlord." Episode. 3, no. 10, November 20, 1996.

<sup>177</sup> Biller, Kenneth, and Jeri Taylor. "Elogium." Episode. 2, no. 04, September 18, 1995.

<sup>178</sup> Biller, Kenneth. "Before and After." Episode. *Star Trek: Voyager*3, no. 21, April 9, 1997.

naturally. Bryan Fuller described her as being like a woman raised by wolves that “now has to be trained to be human again.”<sup>179</sup> Ryan spoke about the character rediscovering things like her first memories of laughter and the “unruly teenage phase” her character eventually goes through, all indicative of a character who was intentionally written as emotionally underdeveloped.<sup>180</sup>

These choices by writers and producers created a character that is almost disturbingly young, both in experience and in human years, and places her as a regular focal point of sexual attraction for several much older men in the series (and seemingly most of the heterosexual male fanbase of the series). While this action is not uncommon for Hollywood, in general, it is very much at odds with the feminism of the 1990s and counter to the progressive nature of *Star Trek* that Roddenberry wanted to create. Kate Mulgrew believed that this character was created by Braga and Berman specifically because she had refused to bring overt elements of sex appeal into her role on the series.<sup>181</sup>

The problems with the Seven of Nine character are only compounded by the language of producers and show creators behind the scenes of the show. From the very beginning of the character creation, Seven of Nine was hypersexualized by showrunner Brannon Braga. In one interview, Braga discusses how he decided during a late-night creative session that the show needed a Borg character to provide conflict and Rick Berman decided it should be a “Borg babe” which Berman and Braga originally named “Perrin, short for Perineum.”<sup>182</sup> In another statement, Braga said that “the guys on Deep Space Nine thought we were sellouts, just putting tits and ass on the show. I’m, like, ‘Yeah, we’re putting tits and ass on the show.’”<sup>183</sup> The “tits and ass”

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<sup>179</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 606.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, p. 609.; *Ibid*, p. 611.

<sup>181</sup> *DCC'17 Kate Mulgrew FULL Panel. Denver Comic Con 2017 Panels*, 2017.  
<https://youtu.be/rje9u4CRURk>.

<sup>182</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 606.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, p. 607.

element of the character was confirmed by other writers on the show, such as Kenneth Biller.<sup>184</sup> Biller also stated that the character, while brought on for her sex appeal, was not “written like Jane Fonda’s sex kitten Barberella.”<sup>185</sup> However, counter to this, Seven of Nine is written as extremely forthright about sex with other crew members. In the episode “Revulsion” in season four, as soon as Seven of Nine has an indication that Ensign Kim was sexually attracted to her, she immediately offers to “copulate” with him as a way to learn more about being human.<sup>186</sup> Sex was undoubtedly first and foremost on the minds of the writing and production team when it came to this character.

That preoccupation with sex is apparent even in the costume choice for the character. The costume choice for Jeri Ryan’s Seven of Nine was a significant step backward for women in the *Star Trek* franchise. This was 1998, thirty years since the female bridge crew of *The Enterprise* had ceased wearing mini-skirts and five years since *The Next Generation* had done away with the cleavage-baring “cosmic cheerleader outfit” that Marina Sirtis had been made to wear for so long as Counsellor Troi.<sup>187</sup>

Despite all that, all it took was Berman and Braga feeling that *Voyager* needed a little extra sex appeal for them to put their newest character into a skin-tight spandex suit (complete with a specially engineered corset to make the character’s breasts as prominent as possible), with the flimsiest excuse that the costume was medically necessary as it was “skin regenerative.”<sup>188</sup> The suit was as skin tight as possible and impractical, requiring help to dress and undress, which

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<sup>184</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 616.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> Klink, Lisa. “Revulsion.” Episode. *Star Trek: Voyager* 4, no. 05, October 1, 1997.

<sup>187</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 101.

<sup>188</sup> Jancelewicz, Chris. “Jeri Ryan Talks Body Suits, Feuds & More On 'Star Trek: Voyager'.” *HuffPost*. *HuffPost*, April 12, 2012. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jeri-ryan-body-of-proof-star-trek-voyager\\_n\\_1413141?guccounter=1](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jeri-ryan-body-of-proof-star-trek-voyager_n_1413141?guccounter=1); “Jeri Ryan on David Letterman Show 2002.” Performance by Jeri Ryan, 12 Feb. 2019, [youtu.be/Pt4rJ7LQ0V0](https://youtu.be/Pt4rJ7LQ0V0). Accessed 21 Nov. 2020.

interrupted production for at least twenty minutes every time Ryan needed a bathroom break, but that did not change the insistence that Seven of Nine's costume needed to "sell her sexuality."<sup>189</sup> It is interesting to note that a similar plot, regarding the rehabilitation of a former Borg drone, existed in *The Next Generation* in the episode "I, Borg."<sup>190</sup> In this episode, a Borg drone, designation Third of Five, is freed from the Borg collective and taken aboard the Enterprise. The major difference between these two plots is that the Borg character of "Hugh" is at no time sexualized. He is, quite appropriately, treated as a sort of childlike being.<sup>191</sup>

**Lt. Commander Geordi La Forge:** He's nothing like what I expected.

**Guinan:** How so?

**Lt. Commander Geordi La Forge:** I don't know, it's -- it's like he's just -- some kid who is far away from home.

**Guinan:** Do you know that you are the second person today to refer to that Borg as though it was some sort of lost child?<sup>192</sup>

Until, at last, he learns friendship and chooses to sacrifice himself to protect his friends at the end of the episode by returning to the Borg Collective.

**Lt. Commander Geordi La Forge:** Well, I guess this is it, huh? So long, Hugh.

**Third of Five:** Goodbye, Geordi. I will try to remember you.<sup>193</sup>

This vastly different treatment of two very similar characters between the two series shows a great change in how the franchise approach to sociopolitical issues had shifted in just five years. When asked to discuss how saving a Borg from the Collective would work, *The Next*

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<sup>189</sup> Jancelewicz, Chris. "Jeri Ryan Talks Body Suits, Feuds & More On 'Star Trek: Voyager'." HuffPost. HuffPost, April 12, 2012. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jeri-ryan-body-of-proof-star-trek-voynager\\_n\\_1413141?guccounter=1](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jeri-ryan-body-of-proof-star-trek-voynager_n_1413141?guccounter=1); "Jeri Ryan on David Letterman Show 2002." Performance by Jeri Ryan, 12 Feb. 2019, youku.be/Pt4rJ7LQ0V0. Accessed 21 Nov. 2020. ; Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 620.

<sup>190</sup> Echevarria, René. "I, Borg." Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 5, no. 23, May 11, 1992.

<sup>191</sup> Echevarria, René. "I, Borg." Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* 5, no. 23, May 11, 1992.; It is worth noting that Brannon Braga also wrote the script for *Star Trek: First Contact*, which also contains an overtly sexualized "Borg Queen" character.

<sup>192</sup> Echevarria, René. "I, Borg." Episode. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* n5, no. 23, May 11, 1992.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

*Generation* treated Hugh as a traumatized child regaining their sense of self. *Voyager* treated Seven of Nine as a sex symbol to save their ratings.

In the end, the choice to bring on Jeri Ryan as Seven of Nine to give *Voyager* more sex appeal accomplished exactly what Braga, Berman, and Paramount studios had wanted. The series ratings improved, and Seven of Nine became the face of the series, making her way onto magazine covers and talk shows.<sup>194</sup> The inclusion of Seven of Nine gave the series a much needed boost in ratings, which had been slowly sliding downwards since the beginning of the series, whereas now there were fan websites springing up dedicated to Seven of Nine and a demand for everything from lunchboxes to action figures.<sup>195</sup> In the eyes of the studio, it was a vast improvement from the early days of the series when the production offices were getting bomb threats over their choice to cast a female captain.<sup>196</sup> The *Star Trek* franchise chose to respond to the wants of the general population and thus it began to reflect society rather than critique it as previous entries into the franchise had done in order to appeal to new viewers.<sup>197</sup> Ultimately this meant that this entry in the franchise made much less of an effort to use individual episodes to critique on modern day issues of war or civil rights as the previous three entries had done. Unlike these previous entries, writers and producers did not openly describe any intentional use of episodes to tackle sociopolitical issues, leaving only the conclusion that this was not their intention with *Star Trek: Voyager*.

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<sup>194</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 619.

<sup>195</sup> Winslow, Harriet. "VOYAGER' BEAMS UP RATINGS." *Los Angeles Times*. *Los Angeles Times*, February 15, 1998. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1998-feb-15-tv-19239-story.html>.

<sup>196</sup> "Straight Talk with Voyager's Garrett Wang, Part I," June 21, 2011. <https://intl.startrek.com/article/straight-talk-with-voyagerundefineds-garrett-wang-part-i>.

<sup>197</sup> Winslow, Harriet. "VOYAGER' BEAMS UP RATINGS." *Los Angeles Times*. *Los Angeles Times*, February 15, 1998. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1998-feb-15-tv-19239-story.html>.

### **Chapter Five - *Star Trek: Enterprise***

In the continuing search for new concepts, *Star Trek: Enterprise* was set as a prequel to Gene Roddenberry's original *Star Trek* series and ran from 2001 to 2005, before being canceled after its fourth season, making it the first *Star Trek* series since the original to have fewer than seven seasons.

The series was set prior to the events of *The Original Series*, in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century, before the creation of the Federation. The series revolves around the crew of Earth's first warp five capable starship and humanity's first real steps into the galaxy. The series experimented with a mix of episodic content and serialized arcs.

### ***The Impact of September 11<sup>th</sup> in Popular Culture***

*Voyager's* tendency to follow cultural events rather than a clearly defined sociopolitical framework continued into the final network televised installment of the *Star Trek* franchise. Starting in 2001, Brannon Braga and Rick Berman worked together to create a new series, *Enterprise*. While the last three entries in the franchise had taken place in the late 24<sup>th</sup> century, Braga and Berman decided that this series needed a new hook, leading them to create a prequel series set before *The Original Series*, in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>198</sup> This change necessitated extensive world-building for the series, which seemed to take precedence over creating a coherent sociopolitical theme for the series. Berman and Braga were incredibly detailed in their creation of the setting for the series, working to create a ship that was less technologically advanced than the ship's belong to the franchises that fell in the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> centuries and looked much less polished.<sup>199</sup> Berman and Braga toured a nuclear submarine, which they took their cues from in

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<sup>198</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 644.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, p. 647.

designing the new ship, making it a less comfortable throwback to 20<sup>th</sup> century submarines and space shuttle designs.<sup>200</sup> The setting was created to be dark, confining, and present the sense of fear that came from being the first warp-capable ship to leave Earth for deep space.<sup>201</sup>

Unfortunately, while the setting for the series bore the marks of Braga's detailed science fiction settings, the same detailed approach was not used for the writing on *Enterprise*. James L. Conway, who directed the *Enterprise* two-hour premiere, said that the "first season was very repetitive and it felt like it was written by people who were burned out."<sup>202</sup> Andre Jaquetton and Stephen Beck, who both wrote for the series, felt the first season was never planned out as an arc, writers felt disorganized and got little feedback from Braga on what he wanted for the show.<sup>203</sup> David Goodman felt it was a series full of "cool stuff" but one where the details were not worked out in advance to make a clear message, certainly not one that fit Gene Roddenberry's original conceptualization for *Star Trek*.<sup>204</sup>

With no planned theme to shape the series, *Enterprise* moved forward without any considerations of major sociopolitical issues to critique the way the first three *Star Trek* series had done. Instead, like *Voyager*, it fell into the role of reflecting society and there was one prominent event, and all its repercussions, that was on the mind of every person in America.

The terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

*Enterprise* premiered on the UPN network on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2001, fifteen days after the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington DC.<sup>205</sup>

These attacks left their mark on American history, but also in the entertainment culture that came

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<sup>200</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 666.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*; *Ibid*, p. 682.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*, p. 676.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, p. 686.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, p. 706.

<sup>205</sup> Berman, Rick, and Brannon Braga. "Broken Bow." Episode. *Star Trek: Enterprise* 1, no. 01-02, September 26, 2001.

in their wake. These events influenced series set in the modern world, such as 24, NCIS, JAG, and *The West Wing* all, but even Science Fiction could not avoid the issue. Though it would take two years, the third season of *Enterprise* in 2003, for the full weight of the events to begin impacting the *Enterprise* series.

[T]here's a big part of me that feels that 9/11 influenced our show, influenced the writers and their state of mind. When they said, "We want to go in this darker direction," I said, "That feels appropriate to the times." You look at shows like JAG, which was still on then, and NCIS and shows that came out of the war ... it's funny how all the war movies pretty much died, but the TV stuff that touched on it lived on. I felt like it was appropriate. I wish it had been that way from the top.

- Scott Bakula (Captain Archer, *Star Trek: Enterprise*)<sup>206</sup>

There are conflicting accounts of how specific the references to 9/11 are meant to be in the series. Chris Black, a writer on *Enterprise*, does not recall that 9/11 was ever a specific issue addressed in the writer's room but speculated that it might have been something Braga and Berman discussed and planned behind closed doors rather than collaboratively with the *Enterprise* writing staff.<sup>207</sup> While Mike Sussman and Manny Coto were both confident that the season three plot arc was a clear, if delayed, allegory for the attacks on 9/11.<sup>208</sup> Sussman contended that it was an attempt for the series to regain relevancy and ratings. Connor Trinneer and Scott Bakula, both main actors on the series, both saw the clear parallels between the 'Xindi arc' of season three and the attack on America.<sup>209</sup> However, Brannon Braga firmly denies a 9/11 parallel, saying, "[w]e weren't trying to do 9/11. The show premiered a week or two after 9/11. We didn't do the Xindi arc as a 9/11 metaphor. We did it because an attack on Earth hadn't been done in a while. Let's put Earth at stake so there's a larger purpose."<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 699.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.* p. 702.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 703.; *Ibid.*, p. 701.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 702.; *Ibid.*, p. 704.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.* p. 701.

Regardless of Braga's intent, the season three plot arc has many distinct parallels with 9/11 and the conflict that it caused, both on American morality and on international soil.

Season two of *Enterprise* ended with an unprecedented alien attack on Earth when a probe appears and fires an energy weapon at Earth surface, ultimately killing 7 million people in a single attack.<sup>211</sup> The attack, they eventually discover, came from a group of sentient species from the Delphic Expanse who called themselves "The Xindi."<sup>212</sup> However, the simple parallel between an attack on Earth by aliens and an attack on America by foreign terrorists is not the end of the parallels between these events.

There are several parallels between the Xindi and the Triannon (another extremist religious sect inhabiting the same area of space as the Xindi) and the post-9/11 view of Islamic cultures.

First and foremost is the issue of religion. The Xindi worshipped "the Guardians," alien beings from the future that they practiced daily prayers to and would not question.<sup>213</sup> The Guardians, it is later found, are the ones who lead the Xindi to preemptively strike at Earth when the Guardians told the Xindi that humanity would eventually destroy the Xindi if they were not stopped.<sup>214</sup>

Violent extremism against their own and non-believers also plays a significant role. For instance, the Triannon worship the Guardians as well and are possibly stricter in their adherence to their religion than the Xindi are, believing that non-believers are the enemy and even those

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<sup>211</sup> Berman, Rick, and Brannon Braga. "The Expanse." Episode. *Star Trek: Enterprise* 2, no. 26, May 21, 2003.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Coto, Manny. "The Council." Episode. *Star Trek: Enterprise* 3, no. 22, May 12, 2004.

<sup>214</sup> Berman, Rick, and Brannon Braga. "The Expanse." Episode. *Star Trek: Enterprise* 2, no. 26, May 21, 2003.

that only differ slightly in their beliefs about the Guardians are “heretics.”<sup>215</sup> Additionally, the plotline for the Triannon involves the hijacking of the Enterprise and the use of suicide bombs.

These traits of extreme devotion to religious views and willingness to commit violent acts of self-sacrifice in the name of religion are both traits that were commonly associated with the religious extremist factions of Islam in post-9/11 America.<sup>216</sup>

Dominic Keating (Lieutenant Malcolm Reed, *Star Trek: Enterprise*) referred to these comparisons and parallels as verging on “jingoistic” and “heavy handed.”<sup>217</sup> This goes hand in hand with the fact that this era of *Star Trek* had taken a sharp turn towards populist narratives with the creation of *Enterprise*, with Braga describing the world of *Enterprise*’s 22<sup>nd</sup> century as a place where “People had ball caps and walked dogs and wore tennis shoes and are more identifiable as people than, say, a Captain Picard, who is more of an idyllic man of the future that you probably wouldn’t recognize as a person that you could ever meet today.”<sup>218</sup> This statement makes it clear that *Enterprise* was tonally shifting turn towards American populist sentiments, indicated by its return to the “rural roots” of the “ordinary people” and rejecting the elitism of the philosophical intellectualism of Captain Picard in *The Next Generation*.<sup>219</sup> This turn toward populist narratives in the *Star Trek* franchise mirrored the growing nativist populist sentiments that were growing in American culture in the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, which Eirikur Bergmann characterized as a spike in the populist ideologies of the “second wave” of the post-

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<sup>215</sup> Coto, Manny. “Chosen Realm.” Episode. *Star Trek: Enterprise* 3, no. 12, January 14, 2004.

<sup>216</sup> Pew Research Center. “Poll: Two Years After 9/11, Growing Number of Americans Link Islam to Violence.” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, December 31, 2019. <https://www.pewforum.org/2003/09/10/poll-two-years-after-911-growing-number-of-americans-link-islam-to-violence/>.

<sup>217</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 705.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 646.

<sup>219</sup> Brewer, Mark D.. “Populism in American Politics” *The Forum* 14, no. 3 (2016): 249-264. <https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2016-0021>

war era.<sup>220</sup> This phase of populism not only focused on the “ordinary man” concept of populism, but also on the more xenophobic and anti-immigrant beliefs found in populism.<sup>221</sup>

There was a strongly militaristic, pro-war attitude in the third season, which touched on issues that were on American minds at the time, such as the acceptability of torture in wartime. In the season three episode “Anomaly,” Captain Archer tortures and threatens to kill a prisoner on board the Enterprise unless he gives up critical information needed in the conflict against the Xindi.<sup>222</sup> This use of torture, in this case the deprivation of air, is similar to the use of waterboarding for information which was used by the CIA in post-9/11 intelligence gathering. This was a topic that was hotly debated in the post-9/11 era, with public opinion both for and against the practice.<sup>223</sup> In the context of *Enterprise*, the action of Captain Archer is neither censured by his commanding officers nor is it played as truly negative action by the episode itself, as his actions prove beneficial to the war effort and he gets the information that he was seeking.<sup>224</sup> Neither are his actions seen as a negative by Scott Bakula, the actor who portrayed Captain Archer, or the show’s writers.<sup>225</sup> Manny Coto defends the act, saying, “[h]e’s protecting the lives of four billion people and, by the way, this wasn’t even a nice guy, this was a thug, who he’s just depriving of oxygen enough to knock him out.”<sup>226</sup>

*Star Trek: Enterprise* chose to focus solely on reflecting the fears and anger of American society in the post-9/11 period and the rising populist political sentiments that came with this period. Rather than critiquing xenophobia or jingoistic policies or attitudes, the writers and

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<sup>220</sup> Bergmann E. (2020) The Second Wave: The Collapse of Communism and 9/11. In: Neo-Nationalism. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41773-4\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41773-4_4)

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Sussman, Mike. “Anomaly.” Episode. *Star Trek: Enterprise* 3, no. 02, September 17, 2003.

<sup>223</sup> Gronke, Paul, Darius Rejali, Dustin Drenguis, James Hicks, Peter Miller, and Bryan Nakayama. “U.S. Public Opinion on Torture, 2001–2009.” *PS Symposium*, July 2010, 437–44.

<sup>224</sup> Sussman, Mike. “Anomaly.” Episode. *Star Trek: Enterprise* 3, no. 02, September 17, 2003.

<sup>225</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 704.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

producers adopted those attitudes and behaviors for their own characters and plots. As a result, this entry in the franchise became far less critical of social ills and changed from describing a better future or even critiquing the failures of modern society and became more wish-fulfillment for the American viewers. As a result, as with *Star Trek: Voyager*, *Enterprise* writers and producers did not focus on tackling specific sociopolitical issues in individual episodes as previous franchise entries had done. Instead of using science fiction as a tool to “defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own present” as literary critic Fredric Jameson described it, these later iterations of the *Star Trek* franchise and, in fact, many other examples of early 21<sup>st</sup> century science fiction that followed *Star Trek*, such as *Firefly*, *Fringe*, *Andromeda*, and the *Stargate* franchise were less concerned about the sociopolitical message their content provided the public and more on providing entertainment.<sup>227</sup> There are examples of contemporary science fiction, such as *Battlestar Galactica*, which put a heavy emphasis on sociopolitical commentary in the series.<sup>228</sup> Ronald Moore, who was in charge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century reboot of the *Battlestar Galactica* series, had worked on *Star Trek* earlier in his career and he notes how his decision on *Battlestar Galactica* were shaped by the work he did on *Star Trek*.<sup>229</sup>

While *Star Trek: Enterprise* does not act as a sociopolitical critique in the way that the majority of previous entries in the franchise did, it certainly has merits as a time capsule of sorts for the mentality of the American populace at the time it was created. The change in tone for this series reflects a society at its lowest point, regrouping in the face of an attack on their country and not always responding with the grace or intellectualism that we would perhaps hope a society on the cusp of creating an interstellar government like The United Federation of Planets

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<sup>227</sup> Jameson, Fredric. "Progress versus Utopia" p. 151-152.

<sup>228</sup> Rogers, Adam. "Read an Extended Version of Wired's Interview With Ron Moore." *Wired*. Conde Nast, May 19, 2008. <https://www.wired.com/2008/05/ff-moore-transcript/>.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

would respond with. Given the previous tone of sociopolitical critique in the *Star Trek* franchise, *Enterprise* could have chosen to show the flaws in this kind of response, but instead of critique it chose to mirror societies flaws and call them positive character traits.

## Conclusion

There are few television franchises with the cultural reach and societal impact of *Star Trek*. Every year millions of fans re-watch their favorite episodes, make costumes, attend conventions, tattoo their bodies with artwork from the series, argue the ethics of the Prime Directive, or hotly debate which is the best Starfleet captain and why it is definitely Benjamin Sisko.<sup>230</sup> There are as many opinions about which is the best *Star Trek* series or best episode as there are fans of the show, but while that debate is purely subjective and personal, there are objective ways to analyze a series as well.

What this thesis set out to answer was the question of whether the *Star Trek* has remained a relevant form of sociopolitical critique throughout its time on the air. Unfortunately, for all its episodes that asked viewers hard questions and for all that the original purpose Roddenberry had for the series was to show people a better future and inspire them to get there, I have found that answer to be that it has not. Glen Oliver, an entertainment critic who covered *Star Trek* for many years, probably summed it best when he said, “[o]ver the course of the years, Star Trek ceased to be about anything tangible. And, at the end of the day, who wants to watch shows which don’t seem entirely sure of their own identity?”<sup>231</sup>

Roddenberry approach *The Original Series* with the intention of a specific socially progressive message. ‘This is the future, this is the world as it should be, with no greed, no hunger, where equality for all races and genders has been reached. Now go build it.’ He approached the series like a lesson plan. Here we will deliver a lesson on racial equality. Today we will criticize the Vietnam War. Next week we deliver a sermon on the universality of the

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<sup>230</sup> I said what I said.

<sup>231</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 763.

democratic ideas in the Declaration of Independence. He certainly wanted it to be entertaining, but the point is that he used that entertainment to deliver a philosophy in easy, bite-size, weekly episodes.

The same holds true for *The Next Generation*. Roddenberry approached it with a philosophy, and those who took up the torch after him, Rick Berman, Michael Piller, and the rest of the writing staff, carried that with them after Roddenberry died. The philosophy was a little updated for the new world it existed in and the entertainment wrapping was a tiny bit flashier with a slightly better special effects budget. However, at its core, it was the same message. 'This is the future we want, now go build it.'

*Deep Space Nine* took a new approach. Instead of 'here's what the future should look like,' it said, 'this is humanity, it's far from perfect, we are going to put those flaws on display so you can recognize them and do something about it.' It was a more realistic philosophy than Roddenberry had envisioned for the series and perhaps not one he would have approved of himself, but it cannot be denied that there was a coherent lesson plan of sorts for the world.

The point at which the franchise began to lose its identity is with the creation of *Voyager*. This series wanted to have its own message and philosophy. They tried with feminism but fumbled it badly. When the ratings dropped, instead of holding on to the Roddenberry philosophy that entertainment was just a clever wrapping for the message, they embraced entertainment as their entire purpose for existence. The feminism of the show was shoved in a closet to make room for whatever would boost their ratings and when what they needed to boost their ratings was a sexy alien in a skintight bodysuit, feminism got locked in the closet and only allowed out when it suited them.

With *Enterprise*, they decided not to even bother with making it fit Gene Roddenberry's vision for the franchise. It was a show for the masses; it was all about the ratings. The socially progressive ideology of Roddenberry was lost entirely as the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century crept in, along with the paranoia and xenophobia that become so common in the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, which the series praises rather than critiques. The series takes on a tone more similar to that of the series *24*, which deals with the men and women tasked with terrorist attacks on American soil and has often been remarked on for having aspects of Islamophobia and xenophobia in their plotlines.

That is not to say that *Voyager* and *Enterprise* do not have a place of their own in the study of history. The very fact that they became these shallow reflections of society makes them a useful tool to study American society; they simply are not the nuanced sociopolitical critiques of society that the genre of science fiction has typically been known for. Of course, *Star Trek* is only one franchise. However, it is a long-standing part of American cultural heritage, and the impact of the series stretches out to the rest of the genre, from the writers who worked on the series to those who grew up watching the series and have been impacted by it. The genre of televised science fiction has forever been impacted by the *Star Trek* franchise over the course of its time on air. The franchise was the most impactful in its early days because of the message that came with the entertainment, the message that "our shortcomings are forgivable and surmountable as long as we struggle to reach for something better."<sup>232</sup> However, the impact of the decision to move from sociopolitical critique to a focus on entertainment has had long-term impacts on the genre as well. If the sociopolitical significance of *Star Trek* (or, in fact, the rest of the science fiction genre) continues to stagnate in this manner, it may be quite right to ask the

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<sup>232</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 839.

same question Gene Roddenberry's son has on whether the future of *Star Trek* is one as a “a historical footnote [rather] than something that's really affecting people.”<sup>233</sup> Just as Benny Russell said in “Far Beyond the Stars,” it is the ideas that are important and survive, not necessarily the stories.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Gross & Altman. *The Fifty-Year Mission*, p. 835.

<sup>234</sup> Behr, Ira Steven, and Hans Beimler. “Far Beyond the Stars.” Episode. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* 6, no. 13, February 11, 1998.

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