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Culture

**Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and the Postwar Suburbs**
Lynn Spigel
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In Welcome to the Dreamhouse, University of Southern California professor Spigel changes the terms of television criticism in a collection of essays that range from the surprising to the sublime.

Rather than restaging the dusty argument that television destroys private and public life, she asks how television establishes rules and conventions for the ways that people create what is public and private. Spigel explores the relationship of the growing television industry to home and suburban planning. She probes television's role in the debate over such ideological centerpieces as family values and children, arguing that critics who complain about the loss of family structures and children's innocence are actually expressing their own disenfranchisement from dominant forms of public communication.

She tweaks received wisdom about toy collectors as geeks by arguing that Barbie—a doll whose popularity would not be possible without television—has found a considerable place in the feminist, queer, and artistic imaginations. She explores how television's penchant for nostalgia and dreams of progress are linked to people's concerns about the present.

In the most interesting essay, Spigel delves into how critics condemned television's "Gee-Whiz!" rhetoric on the space race as "overly colloquial," as not appropriate for the public's values of science and progress. At the same time, African-Americans were responding to images of space travel in profound and surprising ways. Some argued that space travel shifted public attention away from racial tension, while others, like music performers George Clinton and Sun Ra, used the iconography of the space program to create the subversive funkadelics of a new African galactic Diaspora—to be sure, a fascinating public consequence of television's love affair with NASA.

Television, then, becomes a "dreamhouse" for imagining public and private life as well as the past and the future. By asking how the medium establishes the terms for these dreams,

Spigel entertains the possibility of television as a vehicle for empowerment and freedom in a world dominated by media conglomerates.

*James Highfill*