

Imagining the Future into Reality: An Interdisciplinary Exploration of *The Jetsons*

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Background:

- 1957: William Hanna and Joseph Barbera found Hanna-Barbera Productions, Inc., a cartoon studio in Hollywood, California
- 1962-1963: the original 24-episode season of *The Jetsons* first aired on television, made for color TVs
- Premise: average American family living 100 years in the future (2062)
- Loosely based on *The Flintstones*, another Hanna-Barbera cartoon about a stone age family, and the 1950s show *The Honeymooners*

Introduction:

- The Jetsons* is an enduring icon of classic Americana
- Created during an era of excitement and potential—space race, education reform, scientific innovation, and social movements
- The Jetsons* is regularly referenced in discussions of new innovations and the possibilities of the future
- Two reasons generally cited as evidence that the show is no longer relevant: the technology & cultural traits seen in the show
- Technology is viewed as too fantastical or not possible
- Culture is viewed as old-fashioned
- To what extent is *The Jetsons*' view of the future relevant to today, both technologically and culturally?

Methods:

- Retrofuturism – the study of how people in the past envisioned the future
- Interdisciplinary, research-based approach (history, anthropology, science, etc.)
- Examine arch of technological and cultural development postulated in *The Jetsons*
- Compare and contrast the reality of the modern era (50 years after the show's creation; halfway to the era in which the show is set) with the imagined future depicted in the show



Technology:

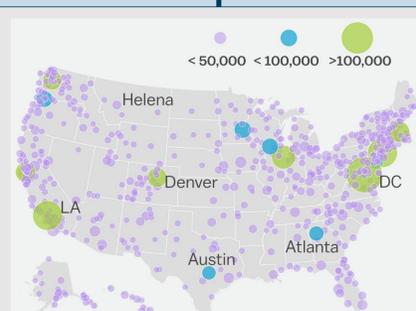
- Much of the technology seen in the show already exists today or is in the process of being developed
- Videotelephony – Skype, FaceTime, etc.
- Flying cars – 2017 passenger drones in Dubai
- Space tourism – SpaceX and Virgin Air are developing plans for future luxury space hotels and commercial shuttles
- Service robots – becoming normalized; Rudy the home care robot, real estate robots, Artificial Intelligences like Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa, etc. are more and more common
- Fashion – 2017 space-themed fashion shows featuring Bill Nye and Buzz Aldrin; sneaker designs akin to those worn by George in the series and inspired by retro-futurist films such as the *Back to the Future* franchise
- Technology is largely keeping pace with show's vision

Culture:

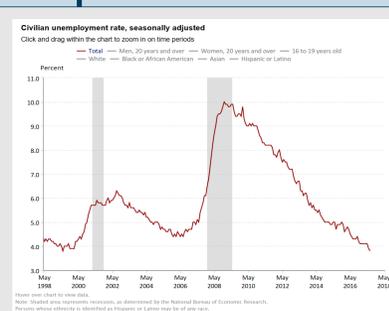
- Certainly reflects the era when *The Jetsons* was created
- Education reform – launch of Sputnik in 1957 triggered increased focus on academic rigor and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) programs to allow the US to be more competitive with Russia and China
- Second-wave feminism – intersection of traditional beliefs and new ways of thinking about gender roles and women
- Civil Rights Movement – race in society being closely examined, end of segregation, diversity in media increasing
- Environmental movement – beginnings of concerns about the future of the environment; official founding of the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) in 1970
- Job stability – post-World War II population boom (Baby Boomer generation); concerns about the strength of the job market and job availability, especially with the rise of technology designed to increase efficiency
- Similar themes in cultural conversations today: competitive education and college entrance, #MeToo movement and Women's March, #OscarsSoWhite and Hollywood diversity, students walking out for climate change reform, union workers' concerns for jobs being taken by robots, etc.
- Recognizably relatable to modern America, but definite positive progress has been made at a societal level

Conclusion:

- The Jetsons* has remained relevant and influential across the decades through both its iconic technology as well as its fundamental human relatability
- The dazzling technology in the show feels familiar, and most of it is either already available or is in development
- Despite the show's somewhat dated outlook on society, we can still empathize and see our own modern experiences reflected back at us through an animated futuristic lens
- The Jetsons* serves as a touchstone for our hopes for the future as well as the experiences of the past and the values and goals of the present



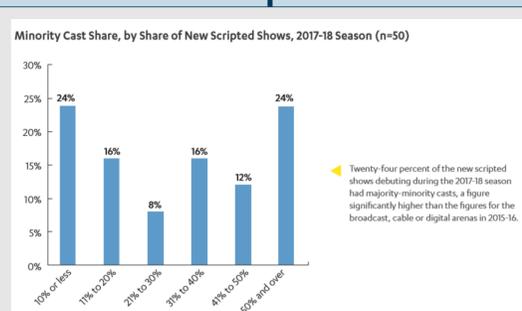
This map shows the estimated 4.2 million people who participated in Women's Marches in over 600 cities in the US. It was one of the largest single-day protests in American history. Source: Business Insider.



As the graph shows, unemployment has been on the decline since the 2008 recession, and it is lower than the 6.0% unemployment rate of 1962, the year *The Jetsons* aired. Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics.



Over 1.6 million students have banned together to urge their governments to take action against climate change as part of the Fridays for Future movement, which began in 2019. Source: Fridays for Future.



Minority representation on television is at an all-time high, with 24% of new shows for the 2017-2018 season featuring majority-minority casts. While representation could certainly be more extensive, it is a vast improvement from the 1960s. Source: UCLA College of Social Sciences.

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