

# Bergen's 'Murphy Brown' creates biting comedy

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Staff Writer

With all the political humor that's around nowadays, from the "Doonesbury" comic strip to Dennis Miller's "Weekend Update" installment on "Saturday Night Live," television can't bear to be left behind — a political sitcom had to appear sooner or later. CBS' "Murphy Brown," set in a Washington, D.C. television newsroom, centers around a somewhat snide lady reporter and her dizzy compatriots. But when the producers of the new comedy were casting for the part to play Murphy Brown, they didn't pick your typical comedic actress like Mary Tyler Moore or Jane Curtin; they instead approached Candice Bergen. It was a wise choice; Bergen's beauty and sarcasm give "Murphy Brown" a style that doesn't fit the typical TV comedy mold.

But who is Candice Bergen? The blonde, blue-eyed, 42-year-old actress is the daughter of ventriloquist Edgar Bergen and was raised around some of Hollywood's biggest and best. She's modeled, acted on the big and small screens, and even written for various magazines, but had never done comedy until a "Saturday Night Live" guest appearance last year. Maybe that's what caught CBS' eye, along with her portrayal of Sydney Biddle Barrows in the "Mayflower Madam" TV movie (more realism than comedy there). "Murphy Brown" gives Bergen a chance to exercise her comedic talent, to gain some attention for herself and to spend time with her family in the process. Bergen's charm makes an otherwise bitchy character seem much more likable and real.

The actress had been hoping for a chance to use her wit and has confessed a hope that viewers will enjoy seeing her satirize life. "Murphy Brown" may be fun even without Bergen in the lead role but, somehow, she makes it more worthwhile.

The show itself may be compared to "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," because both programs feature a female television reporter heading up a cast of rather bizarre fellow journalists. But that's not to say that "Murphy Brown" is a complete take-off on the popular 1970s series. Moore played an innocent astounded by her potpourri of zany co-workers. Bergen, on the other hand, represents a lady with a chip on her shoulder, an attitude that seems understandable in view of the dim-witted shallowness of her colleagues. "Murphy Brown" shows viewers the 80's version of Mary Tyler Moore's innocent reporter: an independent, clear-minded career woman who is unafraid of stepping on a few toes to tackle a story. And she does it with such

wit, too. Bergen has said that she feels Murphy Brown is sort of a caricature of former NBC anchorwoman Linda Ellerbee, someone who has rocked the boat of TV journalism in the past. Indeed, Murphy has some of that flair for being in control, just like so many of the Diane Sawyerish reporters today.

When watching "Murphy Brown," the viewer feels Washington springing to life in a newsroom. The careers of the journalists are racked with a tension and satire relevant to the present. One episode, airing right around the presidential inauguration, featured Murphy flying off the handle for not receiving her traditional invitation to the inaugural ball, while everyone else in the office did. Through several twists

and turns of plot that are blessed all the way with Bergen's snappy humor, the show ends by revealing that Murphy's ticket had been given by mistake to the janitor, Murray Brown. In a rarely-seen caring moment, the cynical reporter lets the man go in her place without telling him he was not really invited. Murphy then goes out and parties with her strange butler. The more significant result was that Candice Bergen was invited to the actual inaugural gala after a Bush advisor saw the show.

Even if a viewer can't relate to the hectic life of Murphy, though, there are plenty of other ways to laugh at ourselves. There's the wimpy but moral Miles, Frank, the lady's man, the stuffy and well-mannered Jim and the sweet but airheaded Corky (maybe she's

Mary Tyler Moore's caricature). The show pokes fun at political figures and at Washington in general, leaving a viewer laughing but thinking, "I wonder if it's really like that..." Apparently someone in the Bush Administration felt some sort of link with the show; it's my bet that anyone can.

In the show's first season, the Nielsen ratings have treated it well. It also has the advantage of preceding "Designing Women," a powerhouse of TV comedy in its own right, thus benefiting from that program's popularity. With any luck, Bergen's show will be renewed by CBS and push other networks to come up with equally bright, relevant programs. After a half-hour of "Murphy Brown," you'll see Diane Sawyer (and Candice Bergen) in a whole new light.



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### RESTAURANT GUIDE



#### AMERICAN

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310 W. Franklin 933-3767.  
Famous for our home-made chips and fries, deli style subs and sandwiches, burgers and homemade soups. Wide selection of imported beers along with yard and half yards of beer. Ten foot wide TV screen. Open 11A.M.-1A.M. Monday through Saturday, 11A.M.-midnight Sunday. ABC permits. Mastercharge, Visa and American Express.

#### LUNCH

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107 N. Columbia St (next to Copytron) 967-9150. Homemade soups, salads, sandwiches, spinach turnovers, and more. ("Best chili in town." -Anon.) Plus fresh muffins, pastries, brownies, cookies, breads. Beautiful birthday cakes. With fresh-roasted coffee, cappuccino, teas, juices.... Informal atmosphere, reasonable prices. Open all day through late evening, everyday.

#### GREEK

##### Mariakakis Restaurant and Bakery

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made barbecue, chicken, seafood and 60 brands of domestic and imported beers and 25 wines.

#### INTERNATIONAL

##### Marco Polo International Restaurant.

Chefs from Italy and China prepare fabulous dishes from the finest provinni veal, stuffed clams, to szechuan shrimp. Thailand chicken and spicy Indian curried dishes, pleasing the most critical palate. Come for a casual lunch or delightful dinner. The average price of our 100-item dinner menu is about \$8.00.

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#### CAFÉ

##### Colonel Chutney's

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##### Brass Rail

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#### PIZZA

##### Sal's Pizza

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##### University Pizza

Original Hand Made Pizza (thinner crust) and Pan Pizza (thicker crust) are both available for delivery. A 33 minute delivery guarantee makes UP the best delivery deal in town. Nightly from 10P.M. until 2A.M. there are late night specials on both 12" and 16" pizzas. Call for more details. 968-9999.

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