Television programs became popular in the American society since the 1950s when televisions became accessible to majority of American citizens. TV programs and movies express certain cultural themes and values and target certain audiences. By capturing a certain audience television network then get this opportunity to advertise products that would appeal to this audience during program breaks.

One popular program in Television history is the Mash 4077th. This paper will discuss what made this program popular and the cultural themes it presented. The series premiered in the US on September 17, 1972, and ended February 28, 1983, with the finale becoming the most-watched television episode in U.S. television history with 105.97 million viewers.

This series covered a three-year South Korean military conflict, showcased 251 episodes and lasted eleven seasons. Many of the stories in the early seasons are based on real-life tales told by real MASH surgeons who were interviewed by the production team. The series was much of a representation of what happened in the Vietnam War, which was still in progress when the war was running, and the Korean War. This TV program was received well by audiences who expressed sentiments concerning the involvement of the US in the Vietnam and Korean Wars.

This program came as a relief to this group of audience especially coming at a time when the movie and program scene was full of themes portraying pride and chest thumbing about the US involvement in the wars. Mash 4077th series can be categorized as a situation comedy, though some categorize it as a “dark comedy" or a "dramedy" because of the dramatic subject material often presented. The show puts together a combination of scenes that revolve around the lives and operations of the US Army Mobile Army Surgical Hospital. The main character was a lady doctor mash also a member of the Mobile Surgical hospital. The show was appealing due to its dark comedy about the Korean/Vietnam wars.

MASH took very dark topics and turned them into something you could sit in your living room with for 30 minutes once a week. In that 30 minutes we could watch what we thought life was like in a front war zone. The program addressed the poverty and lack of medical care for the locals. This issue was addressed in a number of episodes. This divergent approach to war participated in by the US appealed to the large population who did not approve the of the US involvements in this War. This demonstrates a different culture of the American people. It shows people with concern and care about what happens beyond their border.

The series also focusing on a woman main character, Margaret “hotlips”, also served to promote the appreciation of women in the society. The 70s women role in the society was not much appreciated as the situation is currently. Women were viewed as the weaker gender and
who are supposed to assume domestic duties. There was a lot of inequality in the way men and women were being treated. The women’s movement was coming into its own in the early 70’s with lobbies being launched left right and center to advocate for women right.

Margaret presented this theme very well as in several occasions she is showcased fighting for herself and her nurses to be treated with respect and dignity. She vehemently defended their right to be in the war and be treated as fellow officers and enlisted personal; not as women. This factor made this program appealing especially to the women folks and those advocating for the rights of women to be treated equally and fairly. The series also had a way of presenting serious issues in a funny way.

The series was aimed to change the viewpoint of American towards the wars and the countries affected by the wars. This series revealed the real picture that the ordinary South Korean and Vietnamese were victims of the wars and need sympathy and not despise from the American. Though these were very serious issues they have been presented in a comical way giving a nice and fresh feeling. I can remember watching this as I grew up. We used to wait all week for the new show to come on.

It did not seem to matter what the show was about, we wanted to watch it. Mash could make us laugh and cry all in the space of 15 minutes. The values shown by the show were touching. There was an episode where B.J. Hunicutt one of the Doctors on the show was called to help one of the locals with pneumonia. When B.J. got there the man was laying on the floor covered in a dirt and tattered blanket. B.J. gave him medicine yet felt bad about the living conditions. In the following days he took the family food, blankets and medicine.

He patched the roof when it leaked in a rain storm, worked on their one room shack. In the end with no notice the family moved away one night due to bombing with no notice. The extreme poverty and lack of even the most basic of necessities were a marked difference to the American family watching the show. The show’s popularity, in my opinion, has never been achieved by any other TV program. Mash hit the perfect balance of comedy and darkness and presented a theme that provided the much needed change to the American viewers after the TV and movie scene was saturated by chest thumping war movies.

Reference

Richard Hornberger (writer), Benjamin Franklin (actor). Mash 4077th (Motion pictures). Fox (Production house)