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The Prime Directive

Written By: Harry Gribnitz

just spent a fascinating afternoon at the Van Andel Museum exploring the traveling exhibit, Star Trek: Federation Science. The display features dozens of interactive displays. Even if you are not a "Trekkie", you and your children will have a wonderful time exploring the exhibit. A "must see" for this summer!!!!!!

When I got home, I started thinking about why Star Trek had such lasting appeal. I was one of those college students in the late 60's who would try to arrange my college class schedule around the Star Trek schedule. It must have had more to it than just space ships, warp drives, transporters and a collection of interesting aliens. I think the appeal was much more basic in that it actual addressed real social and political issues in the guise of Science Fiction.

The Prime Directive (Starfleet General Order Number One) was at the heart of the series. The Prime Directive prohibits interference in the normal development of any society. Not only did it allow diversity, but relished the differences between groups. The series creators cherish the desire of individuals to be unique and explore their struggle to become better people (more human). Many episodes of each series explored important themes, while masquerading as a space soap opera.

Not only did the crews consist of humans (of various races, nationalities and genetic engineering) but also Vulcans, an android, a Betazoid, a Klingon, an El-Aurian, various members of the Maquis, a Bajoran, a symbiont, a changling, a Ferengi, an Ocampa, a Talaxian and even a Hologram. The diversity was also shown in the Captains of each vessel. James Tiberius Kirk was the stereotypical swashbuckling action hero. Jean-Luc Picard was born in France and enjoyed poetry, Shakespeare and archeology. Benjamin Lafayette Sisko, the African American captain of Deep Space Nine, loved baseball, struggled to raise his son alone and served as Emissary to the Prophets of Bajor. Kathryn Janeway, while striving to return her crew to Earth and herself to her home in Indiana, enjoyed reading and gardening.

Two of my favorite episodes will serve to illustrate the power of some of the themes. In the original Star Trek series the Enterprise encountered Lokai from Cheron and his pursuer Commissioner Bele. Both characters' faces were half -black and half-white, but on opposite sides. Throughout the episode they battle over which "race" was superior. When finally returned to Cheron, it is discovered that their home civilization has been completely destroyed by racial hatred.

During the Next Generation, we watched Data struggle with his goal to be more human. Data learns to laugh, dream, have nightmares, experience romance, play the violin, help others, make

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friends and care for his pet cat, Spot. As an audience, we learn to regard Data as human as any other member of the crew. In the "Measure of a Man", a scientist wants to disassemble Data to make more and better androids. A trial is held to determine if Data is sentient with full civil rights or just a machine. The trial pits Picard and Riker as attorneys arguing the case of basic "human" rights.

While some of you just enjoy the series for its action and adventure, many of you probably also enjoy the depth of the characters and story lines. However, I am willing to bet almost all of you recognize many of the names of the characters and alien races that have been added to our vocabulary by the series. If you recognized them all, you may be a "Trekkie".

Live Long and Prosper,

Harry Gribnitz

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PS: Please continue to support my business by referring friends, relatives and coworkers.

PSS: The golfers for the Silent Observer Charity Golf Tournament have been selected and notified. Thanks to all of you who responded and supported Silent Observer. All entries received before the deadline will be acknowledge with a Thank You Gift.