'Roseanne' Could Defuse Intolerance

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Just as Norman Lear's sitcom *All in the Family* in the 1970s provided a bitterly polarized nation a way to laugh at and cope with its cultural divide, I hope the return of *Roseanne* will produce the same effect. My recollection is that, when watching *All in the Family*, viewers could and did laugh at the characters most closely representing their own political beliefs.

As someone who studies communication, I believe that rhetoric (in this case a television show) can be more than an instrument to try to get people to change their minds. A powerful and often neglected function of rhetoric is its therapeutic effect — its capacity through laughter to adjust people to ideas and ideas to people.

That is why I hope the revival of *Roseanne* will accomplish the same thing. After all, if we can laugh and poke fun at our fundamental political differences, perhaps that will defuse some of the unhealthy tensions and intolerance resulting from these differences.

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