



*"The problem. . . is that (In Living Color) has the potential to make others believe this is the norm for--or worse yet, a common denominator that defines all of--Black America."*

By James Claude Benton  
Staff

It's hip, its funny, fresh and at the forefront of popular culture in the 1990s. It features Antoine, the homeless bum; Homey, the clown angry at being a tool of "the man"; the thieves of the Homeboy Shopping Network; and two gay patrons of film, art, travel and the like. It has lampooned Jesse Jackson, Oprah Winfrey, Louis Farrakhan, Spike Lee and MC Hammer, among others.

And it's in trouble.

One of last year's most popular television shows, the Fox network's *In Living Color* is beginning to show some signs of wear that may culminate in its timely or untimely demise, depending on how you see it.

The reason? The feelings ex-

erly are not mutually exclusive. My father was an African, and he spoke beautifully at home. Nelson Mandela speaks beautifully. Should Mandela put his hat on backward and say, "Yo homey, this is Nelson. Yo Winnie Yo, this is def'?"

Ajaye's statements were later commended by columnist Bob Greene of the *Chicago Tribune*, who felt that Ajaye's concerns were strengthened by his involvement with the show. "He addresses a circumstance that is hurtful not only to black Americans—especially black children—but to the nation as a whole. . . it makes ignorance acceptable. In a way, it makes ignorance a goal," Greene writes. "Ignorance is not fashionable when you're in your 20s or your 30s and you can't get a job because you don't even know how

pathetic line toward the homeless because Antoine's existence harms the progress made by homeless activists (who cannot stand him), the problems faced by feminists, gays and lesbians are trivialized with each shout of "Go on, girl" or each snap in a Z formation, Homey becomes a symbolic reflection of the quintessential angry Black man (a clown), and—worse yet—a generation of teens and young adults think it's cool to be criminals or use polysyllabic utterances they can't even define correctly. Why? Because suddenly, these images are glorified due to the producers' carelessness and the viewers' lack of realization.

I am not above reproach. I find *In Living Color* funny. Yes, it is hip, entertaining and on the cutting edge of humor. When I watch it, I often laugh at its skits, jokes and characters. But does the laughter ultimately do more harm than good?

Sometimes, after the laughter has subsided, I feel something painful, something that easily strips away the ever-thin veneer of dignity. In its place is the feeling that some 40 years after *Amos 'n Andy*—a show that was so stereotypical at a crucial time in our struggle for equality that it is still considered a mark of shame by many African Americans (just ask your ancestors, if you don't believe me)—we have made little progress in portraying the wide range of African American life in this country, or we have gone full circle. What difference can there be between Antoine the bum of 1990s America and Stepin Fetchit of America in the 1930s?

The problem with *In Living Color* is not that it displays the "whole street, urban rap thing." That is part of the existence of

African Americans, and it should not be denied. And it is not necessarily that it fosters the belief among many American youths that mediocrity and ignorance is fashionable (though that is a very serious threat in itself).

The problem is that for those who may not fully understand African Americans, a show that expresses part of the African American experience like this one has the potential to make them believe that African Americans are thieves, bums, clowns or hoes.

It has the potential to make others believe this is the norm for—or worse yet, a common denominator that defines all of—Black America.

But if *In Living Color* is a "Black thing" that "you wouldn't understand" (a statement that implies those who don't understand wouldn't even try in the first place)—then understanding is needed. And *that*, my friend, is the key that can bring about the solution to many of our problems. Peace.

## Top Ten Reasons Why The Struggle Must Continue

#1. After a decade of idle promises, a permanent site for the BCC has not yet materialized.

#1. Failure to establish the Curriculum of African and African-American Studies as a department.

#1. A curriculum that excludes cultural and gender minorities.

#1. An empty commitment to the recruitment and retention of black faculty.

#1. Employees are subjected to discriminatory university practices and policies.

#1. Low retention and graduation rate of African-American students.

#1. Cultural insensitivity as indicated by the erection of the statue, "The Student Body."

#1. Lack of support (i.e. increased facility and staff) for the AHANA office of academic affairs.

#1. University refusal to recognize hate crimes as a direct result of racial tension on this campus.

#1. The struggle must continue to empower the African-American community.

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The Black Student Movement presents these points of contention to inform, motivate, and unify the UNC African-American community. We strive to be a voice and catalyst for change.

Express yourself about issues that concern *Black Ink* readers. Drop your article by Suite 108-D Student Union, or mail to *Black Ink*, CB# 5210, Student Union, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27514

## Endsights

pressed by Franklyn Ajaye, a comedian and comic writer, who left the show because he believed it was beginning to display a dangerous effect: limiting and defining African Americans.

"I have no desire to be hip to the latest black slang and do the stereotypical hip thing," he said in an interview with *TV Guide*. "I was a Richard Pryor fan, and I've used profanity in my act. But when it becomes a whole thing that defines (African Americans), we're limiting ourselves—the enemy is us.

"This whole street, urban rap thing needs to be pulled back some. The ghetto is being glorified, and there's nothing good about a ghetto except getting the hell out of one. Being Black and speaking prop-

erly are not mutually exclusive.

"The assumption of the 'whole street, urban rap thing' is that impoverished black children are not likely to escape their circumstances. In many inner-city schools, children who want to study and try to excel are mocked and ridiculed and made to feel foolish. Now, ambitious children in poor neighborhoods are made fun of for even trying to do better."

The opinions of both are true. The laughter created by satirization on *In Living Color* can be somewhat therapeutic, but if it is not tempered with the viewer's realization of what is reality and what is exaggeration, it can be dangerous.

Without that realization, people take a more intransigent, unsym-