

Is TV Worth Watching?

By Sylvia Bridges

Sanford and Son, The Jeffersons, Good Times, and perhaps even What's Happening? Why is that we are not allowed to produce such successful shows anymore. These shows all have something in common: they had long runs, a mostly Black casts, and high ratings which were boosted by millions of white and non-Black viewers.

"TV segregation is back," said Earl Hutchinson, writer for an on-line black publication. "As popular as these shows were, if they were pitched to TV executives today they would laugh the idea out of their office or segregate them into an all-Black time slot. They would claim that they aren't commercially viable because whites won't watch them."

As silly as this may sound, Hutchinson is correct. Dean Valentine, the president of UPN, announced that the network will dump most of its Black-themed programs into a single time block and will shift its programming to shows that appeal to more affluent whites. Sanford and Son, The Jefferson, and other black shows that were successful should prove to these executives that whites and non-whites would promote good quality black-themed shows. For all it is worth, black shows seem to be vanishing as fast as the blink of an eye.

"I think the white audience would also watch black shows especially since the people that they interact with may enjoy watching them. They may begin to like the show as well and it to the list of shows that they find entertaining," said Takeima Ricks, a junior education major.

BET, Black Entertainment Television, is the only network we can rely on to show black shows in abundance and at a time when viewers can watch them.

Although the WB, Warner Brothers network, shows a good number of black sitcoms, it has pushed most of them into a single time block. First, Jamie Foxx, Steve Harvey, and For Your Love all air on Friday night. Second, Friday night is not a night to sit down and watch television. Most people are out on Friday nights. Therefore, by missing one night of television you miss the majority of black-themed shows that are aired on TV.

Are executives looking for black shows to be forced off the air?

Jamie Foxx, Steve Harvey, and For Your Love are all great shows with excellent actors and actresses, but how many people are willing to give up their Friday nights to stay home and watch TV?

The three major networks, ABC, NBC, and CBS, all fall short when it comes to representing black shows well. Cosby, shown on CBS, and the Hughleys, shown on ABC, are the only two black-themed sitcoms aired on the three networks. There are only a few dramas that may have a black character in an important role. In contrast to the number of black sitcoms, the number of sitcoms with whites as the leading actors is overwhelming. The list includes Everybody Loves Ramon, Frazier, Spin City, King of the Hill, Dharma and Greg, Becker, the Drew Carey Show, and many more.

Cecil Outlaw, a junior African American studies major said, "There are more whites in the nation so I could see why executives would want to attract a larger audience. Yet, a show like The Jeffersons should attract a variety of viewers because it does not do a lot of stereotyping and it involve pertinent issues for all races."

It is clear that most African Americans are not happy with the lack of black shows or blacks in leading positions on television. For the new seasons of ABC, CBS, and NBC, the NAACP asked all African Americans to boycott these stations to show them they were not happy with what is going on.

The only way to have your voice heard is to take action. The NAACP has taken the first step and they must continue all the help and support they can get if they want to achieve positive results.