

Editor's Note

By Jonathan Friday

Anyone who knows me well, knows that I love to watch television. Multiple episodes of "The Cosby Show," a late-night hour of "The Golden Girls," and a little of "Moesha," "Will & Grace" and "ER" are vital parts of my week. Even though these programs, in my opinion, are some of the best, television has gotten a bad rep' over the last decade or two, and justifiably so. But TV offers a lot more than lascivious sex and unmitigated violence; it can be enlightening and inspiring as well. And that's just one reason why I look forward to February.

This month, the Grammy's will air and the nominations for the Academy Awards will be handed out. (Good luck, Denzel!) But despite these events, February is also important because it is Black History Month. It's during this month that television offers a great deal of both entertaining and enlightening programs depicting the Black experience in this country. It's still sad to say, however, that we are inundated with these "types" of programs only once during the year. But hopefully, the recent actions of the NAACP will help remedy this.

It's great that the NAACP realizes the importance of images in popular culture. Images are powerful representations of an idea, person or subject; and consequently, those representations can alter how anything or anyone

is perceived. It's a reality in this country with its deplorable legacy of white supremacy and degradation of black life, mind and body that African Americans have and are perceived in many ways: as brutish heathens, floundering idiots, passive Uncle Toms, jezebels, criminals and religious

“ If Americans are really serious about eradicating its problem with race, then they could start by watching TV that doesn't propagate racial messages. ”

radicals, just to name a few.

So, what the NAACP is trying to do, through its TV boycott, is to force the major networks to depict African Americans in a real way. That is to, in fact, show African Americans in day-to-day life, as they already do whites in programs like "Friends," "Frasier" and "Spin City." The NAACP is also working to motivate the networks to eliminate the highly stereotypical images that go along with some of the African-American characters already on TV, which would force new and

non-static interpretations of Black life into the homes of black and mostly white TV viewers. The programming during Black History Month might aid in doing this, but truthfully, one month of "Black TV" will not change centuries of harmful ideas and images of Black life. Only massive re-configuration of the hearts and souls of the mainstream will do that. Our government can't do it, contrary to popular belief, and countless, discussions about race, where no one is really candid, won't do it. Which is not to say that TV programming is the panacea for racism. But TV at its best, like other artistic entities, can work a lot of magic by grasping our attention for 30 minutes or an hour and in that time frame that convey ideas through easy to understand pictures and sounds, give us knowledge about certain things, and hopefully, challenge our viewpoints and ideas.

If Americans are really serious about eradicating its problem with race, then they could start by watching TV that doesn't propagate racial messages. Or they could do what the NAACP is doing, and that is to stop watching. If they don't, then maybe we will know that the majority of Americans really aren't that serious about ending racism at all.

Jonathan Friday is a history major who can be reached at jfriday1@email.unc..