

Today Is Ours--At Last Say Ossie, Ruby Dee

By Ossie Davis

Our new public television series, "With Ossie & Ruby," is the natural culmination of twenty years of our lives. My wife, Ruby Dee, and I came long at a time when being black was not yet fashionable, and there was very little in the professional theater for us to do except carry silver trays and announce that the grits wouldn't hold the heat. In our first year of marriage, Ruby and I together earned less than \$1,000. We were starving to

death, and it was obvious to us there must be some other way to earn a living.

During the early '50s, in addition to being unemployed because we were black, we also learned that we were unemployed because we were red. Some of our California friends had been kicked out of Hollywood because of the "McCarthyite" drive, and some of our New York friends like Paul Robeson, Canada Lee and John Henry Faulk were also targets of the witch

hunts. Our association with them made us targets, also.

Yet, out of this dire circumstance came an opportunity that led directly to "With Ossie & Ruby." Some of the performers who were out of work found a way to pick up an extra buck by giving readings of literary material. So we went around to churches, schools, synagogues and union halls, and we'd give dramatic interpretations of Dostoevsky and Yeats and other literary masters, for

which we would be paid \$15 or \$20. Back then, that was a lot of money — at least to us.

Through this experience, Ruby and I found there was a separate body of material we could perform that came out of our past experiences and out of our ethnic identification. It was then called Negro literature and included the work of Langston Hughes, Phyllis Wheatley, Paul Lawrence Dunbar and others. Most black folks, particularly those who came up from the South, knew this material very well. I knew it because I had come from Georgia, and each year during Negro History Week, we would study black writers in great detail. So Ruby and I began to perform dramatic interpretations of this material in black churches, at black weddings and at black funerals, and somehow, we survived.

A quantitative change in our lives occurred which was based on three events. First of all, Ruby and I became involved with "A Raisin in the Sun," one of the first plays written by a black and directed by a black that was a smash on Broadway. Because of that play, our status, prestige and price went up. This led to the second major event — writing my own play, "Purlie Victorious." It, too, became a talked-about event, and it fixed our place as people of significance in the black literary experience.

The third thing that happened, and I suppose the most important thing, was a direct result of the Supreme Court's decision in 1954 which determined that the civil rights battles of the '60s would largely be fought in the area of education. As a result of that decision, colleges and universities found themselves absolutely flatfooted when they were inclined or required by law to do something about black studies. They needed people to take the material off the page and dramatize it so black and white students alike would know what was meant by black literature. As a result, we became very popular on college campuses throughout the country.

During this time, there began to be suggestions and proposals for Ruby and me to do our thing on records, radio and television. We met executives in offices, talked to studio heads, worked with agents, and they all said, "Wouldn't it be marvelous if you could do that stuff you do on campuses on a television show? In 1973, CBS gave us a special called "Today Is Ours," and Kraft Foods sponsored a weekly radio show on which Ruby and I read poetry and did interviews. The program was quite successful.

After the radio show ended, we continued our college tours, made motion pictures and appeared on television shows. On one occasion a few years ago, I was invited to

public television station KERA in Dallas to serve as host for a six-program segment of the "Here's to Your Health" series. At KERA, I met a rather quiet young man, Bob Ray Sanders, black like myself, who asked me what had become of our radio show and if it would be possible to bring it back. I said we'd rather do a television show which would give wider exposure to the kind of material we shared on our college tours. That was the end of the conversation. I paid little attention to it because I had made that same speech a thousand times in a thousand places, and nothing had ever come of it.

Sometime later, our agent informed us that some people in Texas wanted Ruby and me to do a television show. When I finally stopped to pay attention to these Texas people, it turned out to be KERA's Bob Ray Sanders and the station's director, David Dowe. They gave us a proposal, and what they said made sense to us. To our great surprise, we found that their's was a real proposition, a real chance. In short, they made us an offer we couldn't refuse, and "With Ossie & Ruby" was, at last, on its way to becoming a reality.

Since then, things have been a bit frantic at times as we've selected material, written and rewritten scripts and then began production. But I think viewers will be satisfied — and perhaps a little surprised — at the results. "With Ossie & Ruby" is a different kind of television series. Each program presents a different aspect, a different view of the American experience. And we're combining many arts forms — poetry, drama, music, dance, comedy — to entertain our audience.

It has been a special pleasure for Ruby and me, who have always dreamed of having our own television show, to see "With Ossie & Ruby" become a reality. Now that it has, we can at last share with millions of Americans the words, ideas and songs that are most dear to us. All the work and struggle and hope it took to make it happen seem well spent. I think "With Ossie & Ruby" is proof that the American Dream does work — at least, for those who work for it.

Saturday

January 10, 1981

	WFMY CH. 2 Cable 2	WPTF CH. 28 Cable 3	WTVB CH. 11 Cable 6	WUNC CH. 4 Cable 9	WTTG CH. 5 Cable 10	WRAL CH. 5 Cable 12	WTBS CH. 17 Cable 13	WGHP CH. 8
7:00	Kroff Superstars	Rocky & Bullwinkle	My Three Sons		Newsbag	Kids Are People Too	Vegetable Soup	Animals, Animals
7:15	Flintstones		Flipper		Wonderama		Romper Room	The Jetsons
7:45								
8:00	Mighty Mouse/Tom & Jerry	Godzilla/Globe-trotters Hour	Mighty Mouse/Tom & Jerry		Battle Of Planets	Super-friends	Ultraman	Super-friends
8:15							Western: "The"	
8:45								
9:00	Bugs Bunny	Fred & Barney Meet The Schmoos	Bugs Bunny		The Jetsons	It's A Comedy Block-busters	Restless Breed	It's A Comedy Block-busters
9:15	RoadRunner		RoadRunner		Bullwinkle			
9:30								
9:45								
10:00				Entertaining At Home Herb Gardening	Six Million Dollar Man		Classics: "King Of The Khyber"	
10:15	Popeye	Daffy Duck	Popeye			90 Minutes Of Action		90 Minutes Of Action
10:30								
10:45								
11:00		Batman & SuperSev-		Houseman-	Theatre I:			Comedy
11:15								
11:45	Drak Pak		Drak Pak	ship Inauguration Of James	"First Men In The Moon"			
12:00	Fat Albert	Bill Dance Outdoors Jack Van Impe	Fat Albert American			Weekend Specials TBA	Theatre: "River Of No Return"	Weekend Specials American Bandstand
12:15	TBA							
12:30								
12:45								
1:00	Duke vs. Maryland	Movie: "How The West Was Won"			Theatre II: "Darby's Ranchers"	Duke vs. Maryland		F Troop
1:15								
1:30							Theatre: "Captain Horatio Hornblower"	Soul Train
1:45								
2:00								
2:15								
2:30								
2:45								
3:00	UNC vs. Virginia	Tennessee vs.		Antiques	Once Upon A Classic	UNC vs. Virginia		Wrestling
3:15								
3:30								
3:45								
4:00		Kentucky		Antiques	Masterpiece Theatre	Dracula		Hula Bowl
4:15								
4:30			CBS Sports Spectacula				Rat Patrol	
4:45								
5:00	Wild Wild West			Soccer Made In Germany	Soul Train	Hula Bowl	Wrestling	
5:15		Sha Na Na						
5:30								
5:45								
6:00	News 2		News	Sneak Previews This Old House	Kung Fu			
6:15								
6:30	CBS News		Reflections					
6:45								
7:00	Hee Haw	Pink Panther Muppets	Hee Haw	Nova	Welcome Back Kotter M.A.S.H.	The Baxters	Football Saturday On TBS	Lawrence vs.
7:15								
7:30								
7:45								
8:00	WKRP In Cincinnati Tim Conway	NBC Movie: "Kent State"	Tim Conway	Classic Country	Georgetown vs. Boston Col	Breaking Away	Atlanta Chiefs vs. Tampa Bay	Breaking Away
8:15								
8:30								
8:45								
9:00	Freebie & The Bean		Freebie & The Bean	Mystery!		Love Boat		Love Boat
9:15								
9:30								
9:45								
10:00	Secrets Of Midland Heights	Hill St. Blues	Secrets Of Midland Heights	Matinee At The Bijou	News Black Reflections	Fantasy Island	TBS News	Fantasy Island
10:15								
10:30								
10:45								
11:00	News	America's Top Ten Saturday	News		Odd Couple	News	Dick Maurice	News ABC News
11:15								
11:30	Movie: "The"	Night Live	Movie: "A"		Metromedia	Wrestling		Rock Theatre
11:45								
12:00	Comedians		Thousand		Great Waldo Pepper		Rock Concert	
12:15								
12:30						Chiller Theatre		
12:45								

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