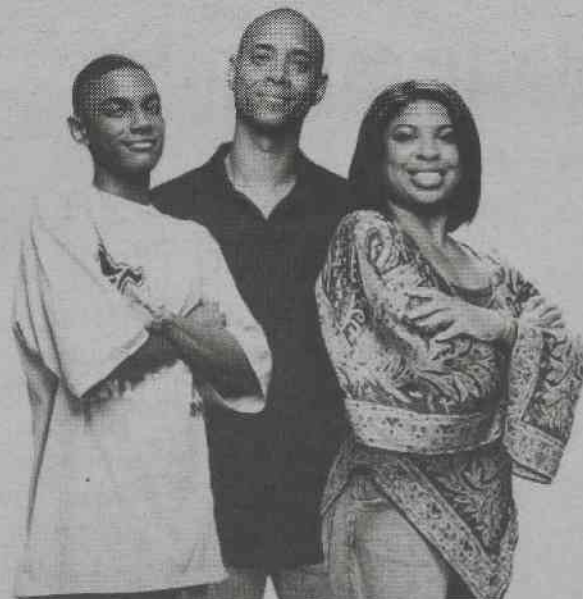


Black or White

FX Reality Show Attempts to Answer Question

By Tashonda Harney
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Surely you have heard phrases like these: "You couldn't walk a mile in my shoes," or "I wish you could feel what it is like



to be me." The question is do you want to know (better yet would you want to know) what its like to walk not just in another man's shoes, but in another man's skin? That's the question FX's (Fox Extended Network) series asks as it transforms, through extensive makeup work, an African-American family into a white family and vice versa.

The two families live together for the duration of the six week experiment discussing their experiences sometimes heated—after the make-up comes off. Filmmaker R.J. Cutler and actor/hip-hop eminence Ice Cube teamed

up to produce "Black. White," a six-episode series in which an African-American family becomes white and a Caucasian family become black. They then go out into the world and see what life is like in the others skin. The show observes the dads as they find work and buy shoes.

It also follows the kids as they go to parties and school; and it hones in on the dinner-time conversations of the two families, who share the same house in a Los Angeles suburb during the experiment.

The show whose premise is reminiscent of John Howard Griffin's 1959 book "Black Like Me," examines the often contentious

and emotionally charged issues that come up as the families try to see life through new eyes. They discover that while racism may be more subtle, it is still very much what many have dubbed "the third rail of American public life" - the issue nobody wants to touch. In one episode the Black father dressed as a white man goes to buy shoes, plays golf, and gets a job at a sports bar. As an avid viewer of the show it can make you become pretty angry at people's comments and feelings about another race, even here in the 21st century. The black dad in white face buys shoes and has them slipped on his feet "for the first time in my life," and

later has a conversation with the white dad in black face about whether he imagines or actually experiences racism. The moments that seem to have stuck in everyone's mind revolve around differences in perception about racism. Throughout the show, Bruno Marcotulli, the white man in black face, seems committed to the notion that racism is something you create. At one point, he even tells Brian Sparks, the African-American in the show: "You're looking for it."

One of the most interesting twists in the show is that it shows how much both sides realize how much they don't know about the other. In an interview, the show's African-American dad says, "I knew racism was there, but I was shocked." He has just finished a stint bartending as a white person in an all-white neighborhood. Patrons, who assume he was nothing more than the average white man, discuss at length the virtues of keeping their white neighborhood "pure." There is also evidence that the whites of the show think of black culture as an act or a perception that blacks put on performances instead of learning about the culture the whites only assume. In one humorous but racist moment, the white family dressed as blacks are to attend a black church, assuming that all blacks were into afro centric attire, instead of having on a suit the white father comes

dressed like an extra from the movie "Coming to America", with full African clothing on dashiki and all. Brian Sparks, the black father on the show had this to say, "Nobody wants to talk about race because it makes them uncomfortable." Sparks concludes that the difference for blacks and whites is that blacks think about it all the time because they are constantly making adjustments to a culture that is dominated by the white experience, meaning blacks constantly feel they have to change who they are to fit a white dominated society.

Black. White is one of the most watched and top rated shows on FX. Black, White offers many eye-opening lessons about cultural differences and the way America feels about people of other races, and religions. I hope that as the future leaders of America we continue to press forward together, all races, creeds, genders, religions, shapes, and sizes. Let's not carry our country through what our ancestors had to go through.



The Sparks Family, in both pictures is the African-American Family involved in the FX reality show experiment, "Black. White."