

Southerners Protest 'Hillbilly' Reality Show

Five months ago, southerners in Hollywood warned CBS executives that their new reality show about "hillbillies" would not be received well in the South.

Recently, Georgia state legislator Zell Miller (D) called on CBS chief executive Leslie Moonves to cancel the program, which has sparked protests in rural areas where casting is being done.

He accused CBS of peddling "bigotry for big bucks" by planning the reality show based on "The Beverly Hillbillies," which portrayed a family of country folks suddenly relocated to Hollywood.

Groups in Appalachia and other southern communities have picketed CBS affiliates, launched letter-writing campaigns and taken out newspaper ads in an effort to pressure the network to back down.

The head of reality programming for CBS, Glen Maynard, told the trade paper Variety that the network was looking for a family that's very different but "reliable" and whose members love one another.

He confirmed that the premise of the 1960s comedy about a poor mountaineer and his kin, who strikes it rich

from oil found on their property, is the basis for the new reality series. He said CBS would transplant a real-life family from a humble home to a mansion in Beverly Hills, CA.

Also like the original comedy, which aired from 1962 to 1971, the show would try to capitalize on the fish-out-of-water dynamics between the family and their upscale environs and neighbors. Critics of the show, however, continue to brand it a "hick hunt" designed to hold poor rural people up to ridicule.

"They know the only minority left in this country that you can make fun of are hillbillies in particular, and poor people in general," Mr. Miller said.

CBS spokesman Chris Ender said the new program is not intended to be a show about stereotypes or prejudice. "It's fun. The concept is plain fun," Mr. Ender explained.

CBS executives met with rural activists in late February to discuss the controversy, but gave no indication they were ready to cancel the project, which remains without a cast five months after plans for it were unveiled.



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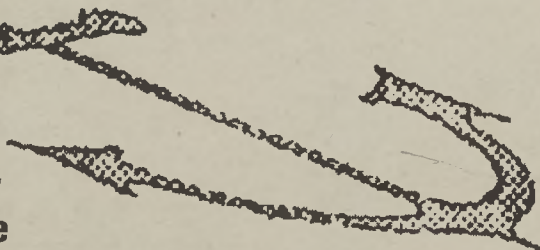
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Matthew 10:41



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