

Editorials & Comments

"Roots" In Perspective

By Hoyle H. Martin Sr.
Post Executive Editor

ABC-TV's 12 hour, eight-part series, "Roots," was by any standard a grand success. Based on Alex Haley's dramatic story of a black family from its African beginning through the Civil War, freedom and new forms of economic exploitation, it was without a doubt symbolic of the background of the average black American family.

Now that the epic story has been viewed nightly by an estimated 80 million Americans, what does it mean or what should it mean for us both black and white now and in the future? The answer to this question depends on how we react to the story. A story which, like none before it, portrayed how whites raped the spirits of black men and the bodies of black women in their quest to destroy black culture and dreams of freedom.

In spite of this despicable past condition of "man's inhumanity to man," for a black viewer to become enraged and engulfed in hatred of whites for what their ancestors did, would be to have missed a significant meaning of "Roots." "Roots" showed clearly that whites who enslaved blacks were themselves enslaved. Congressman John Buchanan, a white Republican from Alabama reminded us of this recently when he praised UN Ambassador Andrew Young for his attacks on white supremacy and segregation. He referred to Young as "one of the people most responsible for setting our beloved South free from the shackles of yesterday."

On the other hand, for a white viewer of "Roots" to have been overcome with feelings of guilt as a result of his ancestors acts, would be to develop an attitude of "don't blame me" and by exhibiting hostility toward blacks, a hostility that always destroys its users.

In fact, it has been the failure of some blacks and whites to respond to Haley's true-to-life story at the level of maturity noted here that has led to sporadic racial incidents in some places across the nation.

Nevertheless, when placed in perspective, "Roots" probably created strong reaction from many viewers as much for what it did not show as for what it did. The realistically portrayed "novel for television" ended on such a high note of hope and optimism that it may have caused many to wonder about the depth and justification for such optimism. No doubt the last episode of "Roots" left joy in the hearts of many viewers as the off-springs of Kunta Kinte sought freedom in a new territory. Yet, they found, as blacks are still painfully aware of today, that freedom, justice and equality was not yet theirs.

Civil War Removed

While Lincoln and the Civil War removed the chains of bondage,

freedom continued to elude Kinte's descendants, as it does blacks today, through the economic shackles of sharecropping, high unemployment (twice that of whites) and to many meaningless jobs when work is made available. The point is, in 1865 the black man's body became free, then in another 100 years, 1964, the black man's mind became free as equal educational and economic opportunity became the law of the land. Yet, institutionalized racism, including housing discrimination, limited upward mobility in employment and similar forms of social and economic injustice still exist in most areas of American society.

This means in essence that within white Americans there still exists a slave mentality. For example, and ironically, the media - television, that so vividly portrayed the cultural heritage of blacks and their struggle for freedom in the presentation of "Roots," is a media caught-up in the slave mentality.

POST columnist Gerald O. Johnson eloquently described television's slave mentality in an article elsewhere on this page where he says, "All of the black TV shows are comedies...But because there is no balance, depicting blacks in other areas it tends to make us look like clowns."

Johnson continued, "There is a definite need for us to be able to laugh at ourselves. But when laughter is not coupled with a humanistic viewpoint...the medium becomes detrimental to the depiction of a people."

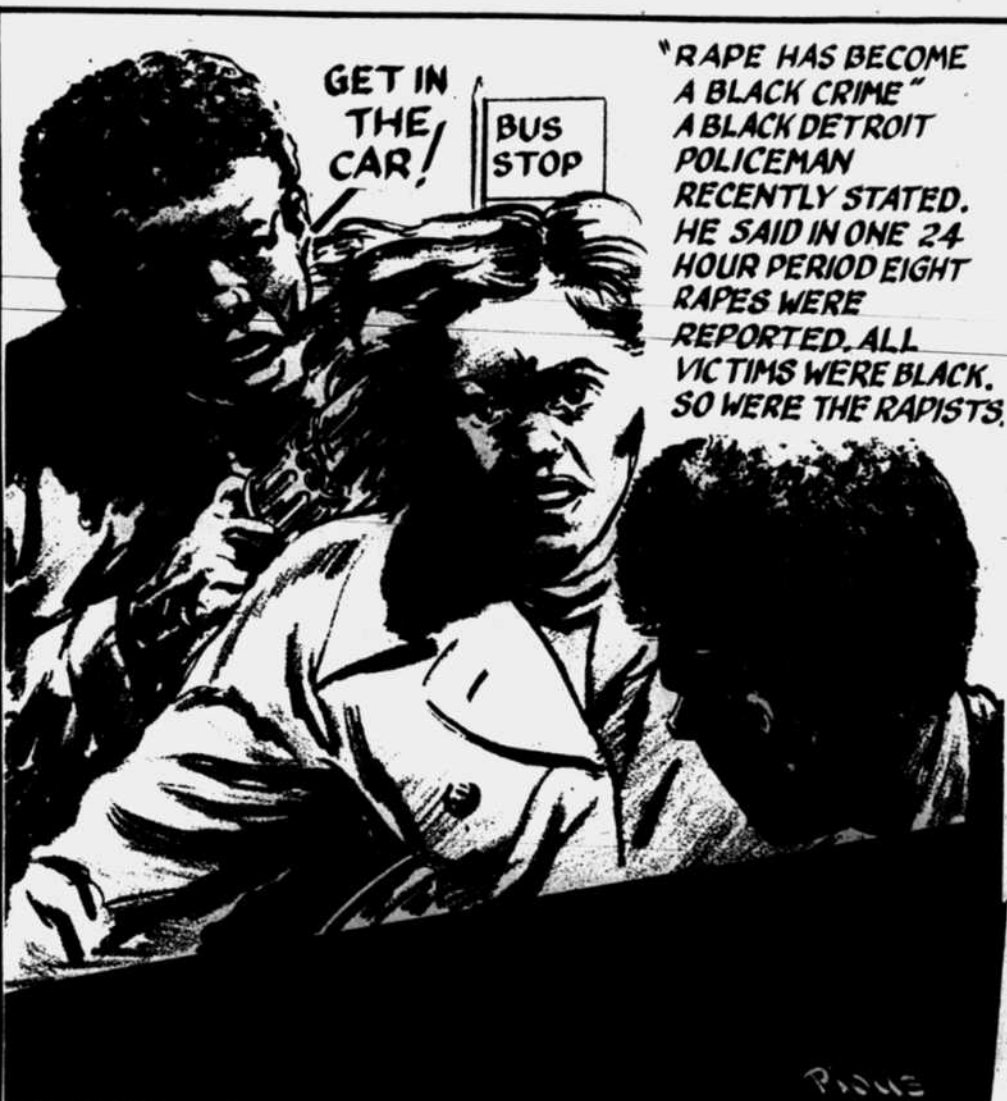
In getting even more directly to the slave mentality, Johnson states further that a lot of television shows involve mixed affairs. "Unfortunately, and even more unrealistically, all these mixed affairs are centered around a white man and a black female. Never have I witnessed the reverse." Is this not a throw-back to the historic period that "Roots" shows with the slave owners molesting black women?

Poor Black Male

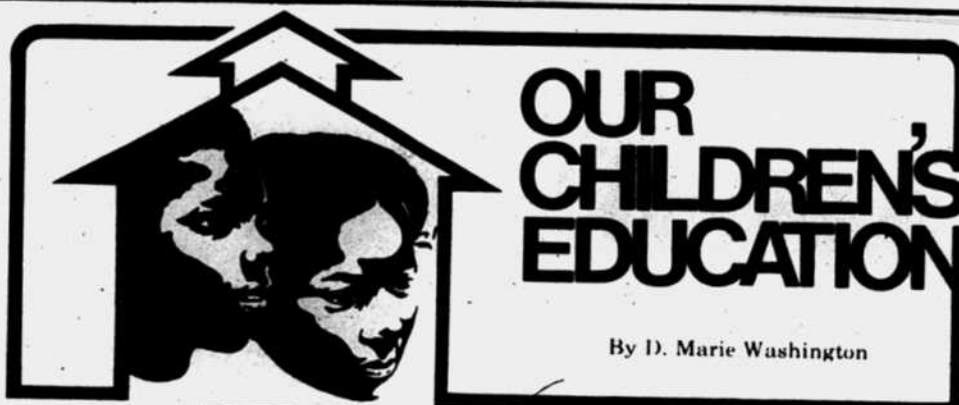
"The poor black male," Johnson continues, "is still a laughing (and being laughed at) figure while all this is going on. One night we see Brenda Sykes (on the recently cancelled show "Executive Suite") become pregnant by a white stud and the next night we see J.J. Walker ("Good Times") acting like an ass. This type of stereotyping has a definite effect on young people who (unfortunately) very seldom read and take television as the gospel."

Among the few times that a black man has won the charms and affection of a white woman was in the movie "Guess Who's Coming To Dinner." In that story Sidney Poitier was depicted as a "super nigger."

Therefore, black people must express their outrage about these subtle forms of racism and the slave mentality.



Crime Is A Pressing Problem In The Black Community



Providing Reading Materials

Since the skill of reading is considered basic to the child's educational development, it is essential that children be provided with enough printed materials to allow them to develop this skill. Parents will find that the public library is an invaluable source for obtaining books as it offers a wide variety of reading materials for all ages, and the only requirement for borrowing books is a library card - which is free.

Library circulation figures show that people of middle and high incomes borrow books much more than people in low income communities. Part of this is due to the library's traditional image as an institution for scholars and researchers; but another and perhaps more important reason is that in the past, segregation laws have barred a large portion of Blacks from this very important source of printed materials. As a result, many parents regard the library as an alien institution and are unaware of its vital function in the development of the child's reading skills.

In the past few years, the library has made tremendous efforts to change its image and to serve all citizens. Efforts to extend service to children in low-income communities have been particularly noteworthy, ranging

from bookmobiles bringing books to children, to publicity campaigns urging children to come to the library. The children always respond to this appeal with great enthusiasm, but the response is usually short-lived as the children often forget to bring the books back on time; bring back books which have been damaged by the baby or the dog, or lose the books. Often, when they are charged overdue fines or for lost or damaged books, parents prohibit them from further use of the library and the children are once again cut off from access to printed materials. Expenses connected with the use of the library, however, need not happen and very seldom occur when children have the help of their parents in trying to learn how to use a lending system. The following suggestions should help in training children to make use of the library's services:

1. Establish a library habit. One day each week should be set aside for going to the library. Even though libraries allow books to be borrowed for two and sometimes three weeks, the child should be encouraged to take out only enough books for one week, bringing them back at the end of the week to exchange them for more. This not only firmly establishes regular library

use, but lessens the chance of incurring overdue fines.

2. Help the child to care for the books. The child should be encouraged to keep the books clean and to handle them carefully. One special place in the house, well out of the reach of toddlers and pets, should be set aside for library books. This also helps to keep the books from getting lost.

3. Regard overdue fines as an investment. Everyone, at one time or another, forgets to bring books back on time and the fines are very necessary as a means of keeping the books in circulation. When compared to the money spent for things of a less important nature, the amount of expense connected with the use of the library is extremely small and is well worth it to keep this important channel for printed materials open to the child.

4. Get to know the librarians. They perform an important function in the child's total education. They are there to serve you, and they measure their effectiveness by the extent to which the community makes use of the library.

For parents who cannot afford to purchase enough printed materials to give their child an equal opportunity to learn to read well, the public library is a gold mine - take advantage of it!

as i see it

Television Fails Black People

By Gerald O. Johnson

As more and more integration takes place on the idiot tube, I have noticed a distinct pattern developing as to the role blacks play in relation to whites.

For instance, Blacks are either depicted as buffoons or they are undermined altogether. All of the black T.V. shows are comedies. This in itself is not bad. But because there is no balance, depicting Blacks in other areas it tends to make us look like clowns. "All in the Family," "Maude," "Phyllis," and the like are balanced by "The Waltons," "The Family," "Rich Man, Poor Man," and many others.

There is a definite need for us to be able to laugh at ourselves. But when laughter is not coupled with a humanistic viewpoint as well, the medium becomes detrimental to the depiction of a people.

Thus, "The Jeffersons," "Sanford and Son," "What's Happening" and "Good

Times" have no coupling shows that depict Black people in a more serious light.

Hence, television has failed to reflect the true image of a society that it is set up to entertain.

Moreover, a lot of television shows have set out to integrate the show by having mixed affairs thrown into them. Unfortunately, and even more unrealistically, all these mixed affairs are centered around a white male and a black female. Never have I witnessed the reverse. Never has there been a case when a white female and a black male had an affair going.

I think this is a very unhealthy depiction of our society because it tends to make the white male omnipotent. It exploits us as black males and it even exploits white females indirectly.

It is obvious that the white male is attempting to prove his domineering capabilities by being able to control the female sex both white and black.



The poor black male is still a laughing figure while all this is going on. One night we see Brenda Sykes become pregnant by a white stud and the next night we see J.J. Walker acting like an ass.

This type of stereotyping has a definite effect on young people who very seldom read, but take television as the gospel. The responsibility of chang-

ing this inaccurate account of Black life in America as seen on television rests on the "Black People of America's" shoulder.

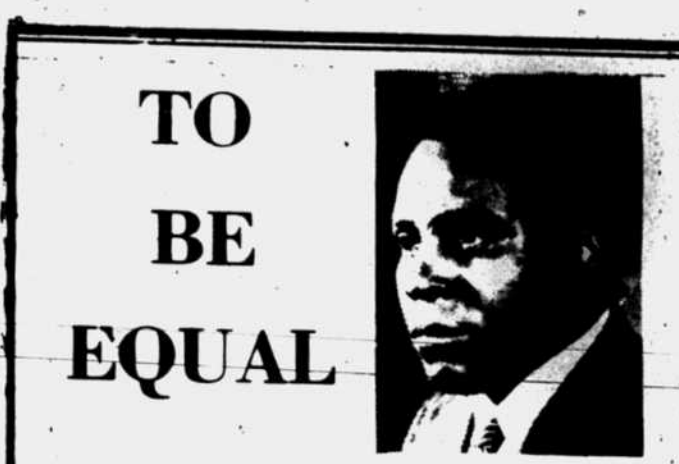
The need for Black television writers is acute. No white man can accurately describe the joys and sorrows, hurt and pain, love and hate, of a Black man.

Until, however, television can be changed to demonstrate true-to-life situations of the black lifestyles, it will fail as a responsible medium in a very complex society.

GROCERIES IN BLACK AREAS

...Have you ever been grocery shopping in the southeast section of Charlotte? Not that the food is any cheaper on that end of town, but the conditions of the food look much better. The food looks so good you want to eat it.

...The stores are so nice and clean, and very well kept over in the Southeast area. I was truly shocked. ...Compare the grocery stores in that area with the ones in Souville. That same



Vernon E. Jordan Jr.

Carter's Mandate For Activism

President Jimmy Carter enters office with the solid backing of the American people, as measured not only by the election results but also by recent polls. And that backing is largely predicated on the expectation that he will actively take steps to introduce important reforms.

A recent Newsweek poll, for example, shows that 60 percent of respondents have a more favorable opinion of President Carter than they did last November, and only ten percent thought less of him.

At the same time, 76 percent expect him to introduce a tax reform bill this year, 69 percent expect a reduction in unemployment this year, and 54 percent expect him to introduce a national health insurance bill in 1977.

Another public opinion survey, this time from Washington-based Potomac Associates suggests that much of the public's backing for then President-elect Carter was due to expectations that he would take risks and be an activist.

The study warns that "a lack of action, the pursuit of stability for its own sake...ultimately would lead to political failure."

So Jimmy Carter enters the Presidency basking in more than the usual honeymoon period all new Presidents enjoy; he enters it with the good feeling and support of the citizenry based on their expectations of his leadership and his commitment to change.

And that explains some of the disappointment in the economic package he has proposed. It's a grab-bag of tax cuts, tax rebates and some job-creation programs. Despite the expectations of reform programs within the coming months, his Administration indicates that welfare and health insurance reforms will have to wait for an improved fiscal situation. But at the same time taxes - the resources needed for the reforms - will be reduced.

I don't think a tax cut is called for at a time when the budget deficit is so large and the needs for federal programs are so great. A tax cut is not nearly as effective as job-creation programs in stimulating the economy. It's been estimated that public service employment programs create two to four times more jobs per dollar than a tax cut.

And the job-creation component is limited. Over a two year period it would create jobs for only about ten percent of the officially unemployed, and by stretching it out there's the probability that any slight improvement in the economy will be used as an excuse to cut back the unfulfilled portion of the program.

The economic package is clearly less than what President Carter's supporters expected and less than the economy needs. The most disturbing aspect of this is that President Carter seems to be trimming his sails needlessly, spending undue energy and care on reassuring his political opponents that he is not too radical, instead of meeting the needs and high expectations of his supporters.

Seeking consensus and taking the middle ground is often advisable, but a new President must be aware that the political honeymoon comes to a fairly early end anyway, and that it's necessary to act swiftly and boldly at the start of a new Administration.

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Haley Is SCSC Guest Speaker

South Carolina State College's Founder's Day program will feature Alex Haley, author of "Roots," as its guest speaker in Orangeburg on Sunday, March 13 at 4 p.m. in the Martin Luther King Jr. Auditorium.

Haley, a former chief interviewer for "Playboy" magazine and the author of "The Autobiography of Malcolm X," culminated 12 years of research in October to produce a masterpiece of history and fiction which traces his heritage from an African village. He will also be present at a reception following the program.

A spokesman from SCSC announced that the public is invited to attend the Founder's Day activities.