

# The Charlotte Post

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## Editorials

### More Huxtable-Like Families

By HOYLE H. MARTIN  
Editorial Writer

A study released last week dealing with the nation's television viewing habits identified so-called "sitcoms" as indisputably the most popular shows, according to the Nielsen Report on Television 1989. The laughable comedies led the field in all TV show categories as measured in November 1988. The comedies drew over 23.4 million viewers during an average broadcast minute and were first among all major demographic groups or categories of the viewing public. Feature films were an overall second and general dramas were third with 21 and 20 million viewers, respectively.

The sitcom that led all TV programs was the ever-popular "The Cosby Show." This NBC comedy was the highest ranked and most watched program by small children, teenagers and women. "The Cosby Show" was ranked fourth among men who had a preference for CBS's "60 Minutes," the premier news magazine show that had a No. 6 overall ranking. "The Cosby Show's" viewer appeal is so strong that the two shows which follow it on the tube on Thursday nights, "A Different World" and "Cheers" took second and third place in the overall Nielsen ratings. In addition, "Cosby" is ranked third even in the rerun category.

The question has often been asked, why and how has the long-running "Cosby Show" been so continuously successful and ranked very high among the nation's viewers, both white and black? In our opinion the most meaningful answer to this question is found in Shelby Steele's "America's Racial Impasse - Both blacks and whites have a hidden investment in racism," as appearing in a 1988 Harper's magazine article. Steele, an associate professor of English at San Jose State University in California, writes, "I think the real trouble between the races in America is that (they)... are ... competing power groups - a fact that is easily minimized perhaps because it is so obvious." She added, "...the human animal almost never pursues power without first convincing himself that he is entitled to it. And..." entitlement means to "believe in one's innocence, at least in the area where one wishes to be entitled."

The skillful Ms. Steele says black people have dealt with white's presumptions of innocence partly by bargaining with them. The bargainer, Steele says, believes that you, the opponent, are innocent, that is, good and fair-minded, and expects constant approval of it. This sounds all good and well, but what does it have to do with television ratings and the "Cosby Show"? It is here that Shelby Steele shows her perceptive brilliance when she writes, "clearly the

most visible black bargainer on the American scene today is Bill Cosby. The remarkable Huxtable family - with its doctor/lawyer parent combination, its drug-free, college bound children, and its wise yet youthful grandparents - is a black face version of the American dream. Cosby is a subscriber to the American identity and his subscription confirms his belief in its fair-mindedness. His vast (TV) audience knows this, knows that Cosby will never assault their (whites) innocence with racial guilt. Racial controversy is all but banished from the show."

In all the years that most of us as black people have laughed and enjoyed the "Cosby Show," almost with a subconscious feeling that yes, it depicts the American dream, but only a dream for most of us; so what the hell, let's enjoy the dream or the fairy tale, even if only for 30 minutes a week. But wait, and we make no apologies for the lengthy quotes from Steele's golden pen dripping with nuggets of wisdom and simple common sense; there's something here too for us blacks as well.

And so Steele begins again, "the bargainer Cosby offers his white viewers - I will confirm your racial innocence if you accept me - is a good deal for all concerned (meaning blacks, too). Not only does it allow whites to enjoy Cosby's humor with no loss of innocence, but it actually enhances their innocence by implying that race is not the serious problem for blacks that it once was. If anything, the success of this handsome, affluent, black family points to the fair-mindedness of whites who, out of their essential goodness, changed society so that black families like the (TV) Huxtables could succeed. Whites can watch The Cosby Show and feel complimented on a job well done."

Steele's suggestion that "The Cosby Show" is "a good deal for all concerned" and our note for blacks too is to point out that we as black people can create thousands of Huxtable families in the real world. One unknown author in less than polite verse nevertheless strings together meaningful words for making more Huxtable families when he or she says, "to accomplish great things, you must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost - put foundations under them. Yes you can (be a Huxtable). Believing is magic."

Finally, Steele reminds us that the civil rights movement was born out of the real need to stop evil men from exploiting race as a means of power. Therefore, "the best way out of America's racial impasse," Steele concludes is to realize that, "in this society, race must not be a source of advantage (power) or disadvantage to anyone."

## America's Government Must Set The Pace In Helping Poor

Guest Editorial

By Cong. AUGUSTUS HAWKINS

A number of television news shows have been hosting town hall meetings in crime-ridden neighborhoods, largely comprised of economically disadvantaged and minority individuals. The goal of these shows, so it seems, is to prove the psychology of residents who live in fear-drenched communities. I am somewhat skeptical of these types of shows, because they many times project a negative stereotype of Black Americans. On the other hand, these media discussions do provide a forum which offers the actual residents of the community an opportunity to air their frustrations. A tangible value for these shows can be realized if we view these frustrations from a sensitive and humane perspective and then take the necessary actions to address the social inequities.

The final speaker on the Ted Koppel town hall meeting, which was recently broadcast on network television, perhaps best expressed the frustrations and trappings of poverty in her comments. She is a mother who probably has experienced every bad hand that life has to deal: loss of a son; drug addiction; incarceration; poor education; etc. Despite a series of economic and social deprivations she has chosen to survive and succeed. Her simple request: "Make me know that I'm worth fighting for."

The first step in helping address this request is to explode

the myths and stereotypes regarding blacks who live in poor communities. The vast majority of persons who live in predominantly black neighborhoods are law-abiding citizens who take pride in their community. Most youngsters aren't violent, and if given a choice, don't want to engage in criminal acts. But for many young people, violence is the short-term answer. It gets them what they want -- adult attention, clothes, money and approval by their peers. It is no surprise that 80 percent of young people in jail are functionally illiterate. Dr. Alvin Poussaint, a Harvard professor and a top expert on black violence, thinks that poor, black teenagers with little education and low self-esteem resort to macho displays of violence to uphold a "twisted sense of dignity."

This is not to suggest all the crime and drug peddling is the result of wayward "wannabees." It is to suggest, however, that many of these young kids are preyed upon by hardened, repeat offenders. Therefore, the aspirations of the majority in a community are dashed by a handful of criminals whose actions disrupt peaceful continuity.

The traditional response to all criminal behavior has been to build more prisons. But this short-sighted strategy does not address the root causes of crime. A prison is a symbol of failure. Why invest in failure when we can invest in hope? This positive agenda of hope

can be realized by: providing universal pre-school education; building a community school where parents, teachers and principals work together; providing decent and affordable public housing with on-site supportive services (child care, job counseling, recreation and cultural activities); building self-esteem through community and fraternal organizations, churches, and professional and business groups; and securing both government and private sector jobs, in areas near the community.

Last, but not least, we have to invest more on the war against drugs; in terms of drug education in our schools, added drug treatment facilities and stopping the drugs from getting on the street. We can't just talk anti-drug rhetoric; we have to back it up with hard money. For example, the anti-drug bill which passed the Congress last year, promised \$2.5 billion to wage war against drugs. But when all was said and done, the appropriation was only \$500 million. Ninety percent of all drug addicts seeking treatment in America are currently turned away because there are not enough drug treatment facilities available.

Let us simply admit that the Reagan experiment of less government has failed. Let us now embark on an agenda which uses government as the engine which pulls and motivates our public and private resources. We must begin to respect the dignity and resolve of our poor. If we are going to "let our people know that they are worth fighting for," we must begin this investment now.

### Should High School Students Work?

Cut out part-time jobs for high school kids?

I always thought that work was a good thing--and not just for kids who had to work to supplement their families' budgets.

But I am in the minority around here.

Our legislature is just about ready to severely restrict employment of high school age students.

All my political friends think the restrictions are a good idea. Do my colleagues in the education profession? I am starting to feel lonely, but I have not changed my mind.

Those who want to restrict the kids' right to work tell some horrible stories. They tell us about 16 and 17 year olds who are working 40 hours a week, staying on the job until late at night, falling asleep (and behind) in class, and spending all their money on car payments and entertainment.

After-school jobs, these folks say, are one of the chief causes of poor academic performance and dropouts.

All of that brings tears to my eyes. But it does not convince me that prohibiting or severely restricting after school work would magically keep students in high school and make them productive.

But even if the restrictions would work to help a few kids stay in school and do better, I still might not support them. I would have to balance the gains against all that would be lost.

What would be lost if we kept kids from working?

Here are some of the things my daughter got from her part time work while she was in high school:

She learned to look for a job. That is something schools don't teach very well, but it is a lesson that pays off when graduation is



D.G. Martin

#### One-On-One

over. (Do you know any recent high school or college graduates who are waiting around for a job to seek them out? Kids who got jobs while they went to school know that it doesn't happen that way. Oftentimes, the hardest work is finding the right job.)

She learned what the word "boss" means. Maybe family and school should have done a better job teaching her about the importance of supporting leaders. We didn't. The job did. Kids with work experience generally learn that if you don't cooperate with your boss--you lose your job. That is a valuable lesson, especially for kids who look at most adults as some kind of enemies.

She knows more about budgeting. The value of things that she wants is now measured by how long it takes her to earn the money to pay for it--rather than by how hard it is to persuade her parents into buying it for her.

She is a better citizen. She knows about tax withholding and Social Security. Thus, she knows first-hand that the things that we do for each other through the government have a cost that we all share.

She has developed greater confidence and maturity. Even kids who are successful at

school don't automatically have a lot of confidence themselves. Succeeding at work helps. Having value, in the form of a paycheck, placed on what a student worker does must be good for self-esteem -- for poor students and for good ones.

She found that looking out for other people is "part of the job." At a time in life when many people turn inward and limit their friendships, the contact with co-workers and customers helps keep some young people in touch with the rest of the world.

She learned that there are some jobs that she does not want to do forever. Thus, she is better equipped to choose her first "real job" when she finishes school.

And, finally, she is better prepared to go to college. Her jobs have helped her appreciate how helpful good education can be--for those who want something more than just an ordinary job.

Convinced?

If not, I hope you will think about this matter a little more. And study it. Try to find out where the kids that you want to prohibit from working will go--and what they will do--during their extra time.

Do you think that all the time will be spent working on their homework? Maybe, but I doubt it.

Or will it go for watching more T.V.? More parties and time at teenage hangouts? Experimenting with alcohol and drugs. Other trouble? Getting into other trouble?

None of us know for sure, but let's be careful and not kick the kids out of their jobs and put them on the streets.

Still disagree? Let me know why. Write me in care of this newspaper or at Box 2688, Chapel Hill, NC 27515.



## America's Airline Industry Will Do Better To Help Passengers Enjoy Flying

Because I travel worldwide, I am often asked which airlines are the best. Since major air carriers use similar aircraft, my experience in regards to service and personnel becomes the dominant features on which I rate airlines. Until recently, Singapore Airlines, Lufthansa, Delta, and Piedmont were the only airlines on which I looked forward to riding.

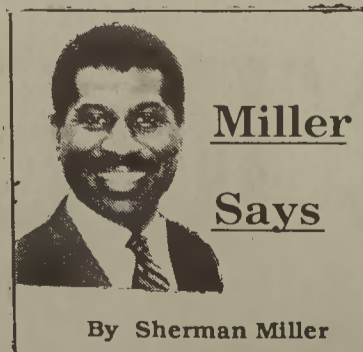
I must have a strong incentive to fly other airlines such as their being the only flight going in my destination for me to pass over my top four carriers. Yet on a recent trip from St. Louis to Philadelphia, I was forced to reassess my closed mind policy.

I was riding first class on a TWA flight when the flight atten-

dant asked me to give her my first name. I was disquieted by this request because no flight attendant had cared in the past. Flight Service Manager Rachael L. Jenkins' face was etched with a soothing smile that demanded I respond to her question.

She wrote down each person's name with his seat location. Throughout the flight she addressed each person by his first name. When we disembarked, she said good-bye to each first class person using his first name.

Jenkins also provided a level of high quality service that was a throw-back to pre-airline deregulation days. She was also an attractive member of the Yuppie generation rather than the late



Miller Says

By Sherman Miller

baby-boomers who pervade the airline industry today.

An Indian-American, Taracad K. Venkatachalam, sat next to me on this TWA flight; so we chatted about Jenkins' excellent

performance. He had been lecturing me on how to travel first class. His words brought to mind my wife's complaints, "You have no class!" She sees me as a college-trained, inner-city housing project fellow who does not appreciate a lot of pomp and circumstance.

At the flight's end, I asked Jenkins for her business card. She responded, "Have I done something wrong?" Venkatachalam and I responded, "On the contrary, you have done things right."

Jenkins' actions caught my attention because I had always rated "first class" on domestic airlines below "business class" on Singapore Airlines or Lufthansa. I formed this harsh

opinion traveling first class on PanAm to the Orient, New Zealand, and Australia in the early 80s. I experienced other airlines in travel across Vietnam or internal flights in many countries.

I must admit that PanAm had the best frequent flyer plan of all. I have not seen another airline frequent flyer program which remotely compares to PanAm's frequent flyer program of the early 80s. I took the family to Hawaii, got a free rental car, and was offered 35 percent off a hotel on PanAm with only 70,000 points.

I think the U.S. airline industry could save themselves megabucks on incentive plans, which are merely surrogates for good service, if Jenkins' style pervad-

ed the industry. They also need to project an image of newness both in flight attendants and equipment. It would also greatly help the airline industry to recognize that business travelers.

The airline industry must incarnate the enjoyable experience of flying. Simple things as a table cloth and restaurant class meals, complete with a glass of wine, are God-sends to tired business travelers. I am sure tourists would also appreciate this shift away from mediocre service to world class service.

Jenkins' high quality service forced me to open my mind to TWA. I will see if Jenkins is merely an outlier before I start to tell people that I have a top five airlines list.