



Where Are Our Shows: An Exploration of Black Representation in Television

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Defining the “Black show”

- Simply having all black casts do not qualify shows as being “black.”
- For a show to be considered “black,” it needs to be told from a black person’s perspective. This means having black showrunners, writers, and directors, in addition to actors.

Shows Throughout the Past 30 years

The 1990’s

- Between 1990 and 1999 there were 40 black sitcoms broadcasted on the major networks: NBC, ABC, Fox, and CBS.
- Having a variety of shows allowed for different perspectives on the black experience in America to be portrayed.

The 2000’s

- Between 2000 and 2010 those same networks only broadcasted 11 sitcoms featuring black casts.
- While the major networks decreased their production of black shows, networks such as the WB, UPN, Nickelodeon, and TBS were greatly expanding their black audience by producing popular shows such as *Girlfriends*, *Moesha*, and *The Parkers*.

The 2010’s

- Similar to the previous decade, small and specialty networks became the major producers of shows aimed towards black audiences.
- In addition to these networks, streaming services also focused on producing shows for black subscribers.
- With the #OscarsSoWhite movement, black viewers, actors, writers, and producers forced networks to address and focus on improving diversity.



Impact of Television

- Television is an art form meant to be either a reflection of reality, or an escape from it.
- There is a power in television because of its universality. It connects us as a country, and plays a large part in how we learn about each other.
- For someone who is from a part of America that does not have a black population, television was their introduction and form of reference for black people

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Representation Behind the Scenes

- While there were a lot of television shows with black casts, not all of them can be considered “black shows” due to who were working on the production teams.
- This is especially true for the ABC shows that ran in the 1990s, such as ‘*Family Matters*’ and ‘*Hangin’ With Mr. Cooper*’
- In contrast to that, shows like ‘*A Different World*,’ ‘*Martin*,’ ‘*The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*,’ and ‘*Living Single*’ had black writers, directors, and producers.
- Having people of color occupy these positions is important because they are the ones who shape the show, while the actors deliver it.

Future Prevention

- As the result of people of color making it known that they want television shows to reflect their lives and experiences, major networks have been making a conscious effort to produce shows written, created by, and starring people of color.
- This change in broadcasting these shows on major networks began with ‘*Scandal* (ABC),’ and continued with ‘*Empire* (Fox),’ ‘*Black-ish* (ABC),’ and ‘*Marlon* (NBC).’
- While there is an abundance of black actors, they are often competing for the same roles because of the lack of diversity of roles.
- In order to prevent having another decade with a low production of shows made for people of color, the entertainment industry needs to restructure itself so that people of color are given the opportunity to enter writers’ rooms, direct, and become showrunners.