

Many Performers Are Bitter

Black Artists Who Performed In 'Roots' Found Fame Did Not Open Doors To Better Film Roles; Progress Being Made But Discrimination Exists

RADNOR, PA.—The Black performers who gained international publicity in Roots discovered that their fame did not lead to better roles in Hollywood because

"The presumption became that...the blackness was the reason for the failure," said Todd Gitlin, author of "Inside Prime Time" and

professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. The door to prime-time TV closed again for minority performers.

Ben Vereen, the singer-dancer-actor, said he is frustrated.

"I'll want to read for a role I like, but they'll say, 'You can't play that, you have to play the janitor. We want a white actor for that part.' Why does he always have to be white? Sure, they can't get away with things that they could nine years ago, but we've got to watch that we don't regress. We must not forget the struggle goes on," he said.

For more about what has happened to the stars of "Roots," read the Nov. 29-Dec. 5 issue of TV Guide.

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of continuing racial barriers.

Almost 10 years after the 1977 ABC miniseries, reports TV Guide magazine (Nov. 29), many of the actors and actresses featured in Roots still have difficulty finding good roles because, they feel, discrimination still prevails. Many of them are bitter about their experiences.

"Roots had such a profound impact on people around the world. But in terms of the work generated for black artists, it just faded away to become another media event," said actress Beverly Todd. She played the adult slave Fanta and Kunta Kinte's love interest in the miniseries.

Stan Margulies, the series' producer, said, "There's no question Roots did not have the same impact on the careers of black actors that it would have if it had starred white actors."

"The hope was the Roots would open doors for black persons in television. But it didn't happen that way," explained Lawrence-Hilton Jacobs, who played Noah in the miniseries.

John Amos, who played the adult Kunta Kinte, said that while opportunities for minority performers have improved since Roots, he has not seen any "dramatic changes."

The networks did try to capitalize on the success of Roots by presenting programs starring black actors. They flopped. They included NBC's King, ABC's The Lazarus Syndrome with Louis Gossett Jr. (who played Fiddler in Roots), and Paris on CBS.



"Except for Diahann Carroll of Dynasty, you never see a black person [on prime-time soaps], not even in terms of background."

—Leslie Uggams

JESSE JOHNSON COMES INTO HIS OWN

"I just wanted to prove I can do it on my own," says Jesse Johnson. His latest release Shockadelica shows us that Jesse Johnson has come into his own as a solo artist. There is success after life with the Time.

His first solo album, Jesse Johnson's Revue on A&M last year sold nearly a million copies. That same year he produced Ta Mara and The Seen, whose single, "Everybody Dance" rose to the #1 spot on the black/urban single charts. Jesse also lent his singing and songwriting talents to the movie soundtrack, "Breakfast Club" and "Pretty In Pink." Both albums receiving Gold certificates.

This year will be no different. Shockadelica, his second album is very innovative and exciting. The pairing of Jesse Johnson and Sly Stone on the first single, Crazy, generates the excitement necessary to become a chart topping smash.

Jesse has a lot of talk about; producing Sly Stone's next album, teaming up with the Time (yes, reunion), a future movie project with Janet Jackson.



Jesse Johnson

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