

# Entertainment

## COS & CO. BID YOU ALL ADIEU



As the final season of The Cosby Show ends, and before it gets lost in the relentless loop of syndication, the program should be given its proper as a milestone in popular entertainment.

Eight years ago, the long line that stretched from the Ricardos and Cleavers to the Bradys and Bunkers had given way to workplace oriented comedies like Taxi and Cheers as network series families were on the verge of extinction. Because television lurches forward while life evolves, there was no small-screen transition, no balance. Nobody, it seemed, could figure out a way to make the traditional setup either relevant or funny.

Bill Cosby used an outsider's perspective to fill the gap by exploiting three key elements: 1.) Because the characters were Black, the new show could afford to be old-fashioned and make the old seem new again. 2.) By spinning more toward the parents than the children, it caught the baby boom curve. 3.) And it was never terribly funny in the broad, formulaic sense of gags and one liners.

The nuclear family in blackface, along with Cosby's own appeal as a performer, was no doubt the gimmick that got the program off the ground. Ironically, it also generated most of the controversy that dogged

the show in its early, most successful years. There was the question of the professional parents, the doctor-lawyer combination became an instant and oft-scorned cliché.

It may have been Black viewers, torn between pride of recognition and suspicion of betrayal, who objected more to the apparent fantasy. Are the Huxtables "Black" enough? Interestingly, although their economic status has occasionally been a point of contention on the show, the question of racial identification has never been addressed. Cosby "don't play that," nor should he.

Are the Huxtables supposed to be not Black because they speak grammatically? Because they have white friends? Because Sondra is a feminist and Denise a flake and Theo, according to Malcom-Jamal Warner (who plays Theo), a nerd? There are many ways to be Black that does not include throwing your hands on your hips, snapping your fingers and winding your neck.

On the show, the Blackness is in details, like the art on the walls or the Black magazines that sit on the coffee table. Lets not forget the "Abolish Apartheid" bumper sticker on Theo's wall or the names of the grandchildren, Nelson and Winnie. It's in the Black music that thoroughly infuses the show, not as a trendy gimmick but as an expression of the characters lives.

Cosby has been not only the

most consistently convincing Black show on television but the most ethnically diverse as well. Asian and Latino characters appear in various episodes far more regularly than on other programs, and the frequent interaction with whites never dips to the level of easy racial humor. The show might be-and actually has been-accused of playing make-believe in this, but it's a compelling concept: *Let's make believe we're all real people here.*

Cosby combines unspoken racial pride and its color-blind premise in a conscious promotion of personal achievement. No series in the history of television has ever been more about education. Lots of white middle-class TV kids go off to college, but none with as much sense of purpose and family continuity as the Huxtables.

It's no accident that daughter Sondra and husband Elvin, decided to continue their education. Tempestt Bledsoe, who plays Vanessa, wanted to reduce her hours on the show in order to attend college, the solution was to send her to college a

### SENTINEL-VOICE TOP 10 SINGLES

- 1.) SAVE THE BEST FOR LAST - Vanessa Williams
- 2.) GOODBYE - Tevin Campbell
- 3.) ALL WOMAN - Lisa Stansfield
- 4.) I DREAM...I DREAM - Jermaine Jackson
- 5.) WHY ME BABY - Keith Sweat
- 6.) AIN'T TOO PROUD TO BEG - T.L.C.
- 7.) LET'S GET SMOOTH - Calloway
- 8.) JUMP - Kriss Kross
- 9.) MY LOVIN' - En Vogue
- 10.) WE GOT A LOVE THANG - Ce Ce Penniston

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**TWO STRAIGHT WEEKS AT #1** - Save The Best For Last

**PICK HIT OF THE WEEK** - My Lovin'

**TOP 10 CONTENDERS** - White Men Can't Jump-Riff; Come Talk To Me-Jodeci; Voulez-Vous-Freeze

**FURTHERMORE** - Vanessa and Tevin continue to dominate the Top 10; Keep dreaming Jermaine-Keith and L.L. will topple you next week; It'll be tough to get into the Top 10 for a few weeks due to the tough competition-Kriss Kross will be Jumpin' around while En Vogue is lettin' everyone aware "No you're never gonna get it..."

P2THE-E-A-C-E; WW

Top 20 listing compiled by Willie-Will, Mobile D.J., W.W. Mobile Entertainment Service 594-7594

year early. Wayward Denise redeemed herself by vowing to become a teacher. Theo had his most poignant brush with reality during a two-part stint as a student-teacher. If there was a Cosby reunion 30 years from now, Rudy would probably turn up as dean at Hillman-possibly running a scholarship fund, titled the Russell Huxtable giant, named for her Shakespeare-loving, ex-jazz musician grand-

father, also an alumnus.

In a less obvious way, being Black has allowed the Huxtables to work a different TV transformation. Worthless as models for the task we now face raising our own kids, TV parents have been displayed as boobs-loving, understanding and occasionally even wise. Although it takes one wise-cracking offspring to steal the show, nobody upstages the Cos, so the Huxtable parents remain in firm control.

This show is largely about the parents: Cliff is none-the-less an imposing Black man

who rules less by humor than by intimidation. Clair remains a get-out-of-my-face Black woman who describes her children as fools and wenches and puts down a more powerful foot than Roseanne's.

It's ironic-and instructive-that a society that takes for granted the complete dissolution of Black family life should make champions of the old-fashioned, non-sense Huxtables. From the beginning, The Cosby Show has been notoriously nondependent on punch lines. Because this show flows from it's star's anecdotal humor, its not about gags. Indeed, the plots, such as they are, exist more as a collection of low-key moments.

America will definitely feel a void on Thursday evenings after "Cos & Co. make their exit. The show could've easily ended long (See Cos, Page 20)

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