

Critics say Nielsen discounts minorities

WASHINGTON (AP) - Fox TV, Univision and other critics of the way local television audiences are measured told Congress on Thursday that minorities are being undercounted and that could lead to the elimination of shows popular with Blacks and Hispanics.

The chief executive of Nielsen Media Research said the company has hired more people and improved training to encourage greater minority participation. Susan Whiting added that critics simply may be worried about ratings.

Nielsen, an independent company based in New York, tallies viewership for the networks. These ratings often are the basis for decisions about whether to renew or drop shows and are used to set advertising rates. A show that does well in the ratings can charge a premium price for commercials.

"The TV ratings system upon which we rely is seriously broken," said Thomas Herwitz, president of station operations for Fox Television Stations. "Accurate ratings are crucial to making programming decisions and meeting community needs."

He said there needs to be a system of checks and balances over Nielsen "to protect the public."

Whiting said the real problem is that some media companies fear the company's new counting method will produce lower ratings for their shows, and in turn, less advertising money.

"We will continue to resist all attempts to manipulate this process to mislead the public through a campaign that has nothing to do with protecting the rights of African-Americans, Latinos and Asian-Americans, or any other ethnic group," Whiting said.

Nielsen counts viewership on a national level by choosing a sample of homes and supplying "people meters" that record viewing habits.

In some local markets, the meters are replacing handwritten diaries kept by "Nielsen families." Different households are used for the national and local measurements.

Nielsen said the meters give a more accurate reading of what people are watching because they register what is on a television at any given time; the diaries require honesty and a good memory.

"The American public has a clear and compelling interest in ensuring that the television ratings system is as fair and accurate as possible," said Sen. Conrad Burns, chairman of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation subcommittee that held the hearing.

After the hearing, Burns said the parties should be able to resolve the dispute without any congressional intervention.

But during a conference call with reporters later, Burns, R-Mont., said legislation may become necessary if Nielsen does not address concerns about minority representation.

Nielsen has used the meters since 1987 to gather national ratings data. It decided in the past few years to use the electronic boxes in the top markets. Then the complaints began.

Meters in New York and Los Angeles showed big differences in viewership when compared with the diaries. Some programs popular with minorities dropped sharply in the ratings.

Critics say Nielsen has not worked hard enough to build samples that accurately reflect the diversity of big cities. They point to data showing recorded Black viewership of all programming for the 7-8 p.m. hour in New York fell by 32 percent when the meters replaced paper ballots.

Fox's parent company, News Corp. has helped underwrite a campaign against the new counting method.

Nielsen began using the meters locally in Boston two years ago, and New York and Los Angeles this summer. Plans call for the meters to be used in Chicago next month. (See Nielsen, Page 9)

New role purr-fect for Halle Berry

Off-troubled actress gets chance to show sexiness, strength

By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

After she won an Academy Award for *Monster's Ball* a couple of year's ago, Halle Maria Berry was on top of the world. At least, for ten days. But the newlywed's 2001 marriage to R&B singer/actor Eric Benet Jordan was soon in crisis, after he confirmed a revelation by *Star Magazine* that he was already cheating on her.

Of course, this news came as no surprise to those who had believed all the earlier tabloid rumors of a torrid romance between him and pop diva Mariah Carey. That illicit liaison allegedly occurred on the set of their box-office flop, *Glitter*, a movie which had been shot in the fall just before Eric and Halle blissfully exchanged their wedding vows.

In any case, earlier this year, Halle was finally forced to file for divorce due to her hubby's repeated philandering, especially after counseling for his admitted sex addiction reportedly failed to tame any beastly inclinations or to resurrect her trust in him.

She says she suffered an emotional breakdown and now vows to never marry again, though she plans to



In this file photo, Academy Award-winning actress Halle Berry presents the award for best male performance during the MTV Movie Awards in Culver City, Calif. last month.

have children by age 40.

To add insult to adultery, she's currently being sued by her ex for alimony and child support for his 12 year-old daughter, India. To be fair, Eric disagrees with her account of the facts, mounting a Bill Clinton-esque defense

in which he says the extramarital sexual escapades didn't involve conventional intercourse, you tell me what that means, and that Halle isn't all that hot in bed, anyway. This tactic strikes me as probably the worst possible approach to take since in the

next breath he's also all but begging her via the press for a hundredth chance.

Besides the sting of separation, Halle has to contend with the "Marry me or else!" death threats of her very own stalker, a 35-year old mental patient named Greg Broussard. And then there's the latest Jadakiss gangstara CD which debuted earlier this month at #1 on the charts. In a song called "Why" the group impugns Ms. Berry's integrity as an actress and tries to taint her Academy Award by asking, "Why Halle have to let a White man pop her to get a Oscar?"

Given this current state of affairs, I was not surprised that her publicist requested that this interview be respectfully limited only to questions about her new film, *Catwoman*, where she plays a shy, sensitive artist transformed by a cosmetics accident into a super-human feline.

KW: What associations popped into your mind the moment you were offered the role of *Catwoman*?

HB: "Confident... sexy... powerful... Someone I wanted to play. And someone I wanted to be."

KW: But I think everyone (See Interview, Page 9)

Program

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One of the highlights of a recent Friday gathering was a performance by MISHON, a young talent who bills himself as the new face of R&B. He recently was featured on Show Time at the Apollo and Soul Train. His debut album, titled "Still Mishon," was released in June 29.

"We had 60 kids here tonight," Bowen said of a recent Friday "That's 60 kids who were off the streets and doing something positive tonight from 6 to 9. We will continue this effort each week, hoping to help keep the kids out of trouble in the streets."

Step and skate teams have formed. Life skills management training and prevention based workshops are offered, as well.

"Another focus of our program here at the Cambridge Recreation Center is working with the youth from Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on music, writ-



"I like dealing with young kids because they are our future and they can relate to growing up on the streets and having nothing to do."

— Keith Bowen, director and founder of Big Keith's House

ing, television and radio," Bowen said. "We teach the ins and outs of business, knowing how to work in front of and behind the camera, lighting and board work, giving them an opportunity to learn a career. We have over 200 kids signed up for our weekly program."

Originally intended to be a summer program, "Off The Streets" is funded by various sponsors, including FUBU, Nike West, Hair Unlimited, B-cause, and Pastor Rock clothing.

The organization plans to continue its efforts beyond

the summer.

The need to help keep youths stay out of trouble is an understatement. The focus of the fall will be to have youth members who have participated in the summer program serve as mentors to prospective students.

Bowen is a native of New York, St. John's University. He is a single parent raising a 14 year-old son and has been doing so since three weeks after his birth, following the tragic death of Bowen's wife in a car crash.

"I was inspired to create this program because there

aren't enough things being done for the youth in Las Vegas beyond the casinos offering movies, bowling and arcades while entertaining their parents through gambling," Bowen said.

Big Keith's House also offers other programs. "Boys to Men" offers an opportunity to build self-esteem, set goals, develop reliable and trusting relationships and mentoring. "The Talented Tenth," also called Project 3T provide case managers to help with academics. Each One Reach One provides health education for youths and their families through community-based collaborations.

Anyone wishing to make a donation to this non-profit organization may call (702) 648-9850 or the Cambridge Recreation Center, 3930 Cambridge St. or call (702) 455-7169.

"Big Keith's Corner" is aired on the Internet at www.alltalkradio.net.