Talking TV

Are Black Shows Losing Their Umph? Yes!

By Mike Easterling

Remember last week I gave you a little bit of trivia on Bill Cosby? Okay, well here is some more, but not on Cosby. What do Sherman Hemsley and Robert Guillome have in common. Aside from the obvious, smarty! Well Hemsley (George Jefferson) and Guillome (Benson DuBois) both appeared in the road company version of **Purlie!** when it toured in the Seventies. Hemsley played the Uncle Tom character Gitlow and the debonair Guillome was the Rev. Purlie Victorious.

Now here's another answer to the same question. Both have found themselves 'white washed' in homogenized sitcoms. Both Benson and The Jeffersons were "spinoffs," that is, they were developed after the characters first made a strong showing in another major sitcom. For George Jefferson it was ALL IN THE FAMILY. George and Louise Jefferson were neighbors of the Bunkers. Remember. No one was blacker than George Jefferson. With him it was, 'honky' this, and 'white boy that.' He was bold, he

The Jeffersons

was relentless, he was a pain in the . . . .

As time went on we got to know him. We realized that he was a struggling business man, with a string of cleaning stores, a son in college and a mortgage. Louise was a warm and understanding woman of intelligence and depth. Then, they started movin' on up. When the Jeffersons first arrived in "that deluxe apartment in the sky" they still had their culture. George used to give Bentley 'five.' He callously referred to Jenny, the daughter of their interracial neighbors, as a 'zebra.' He brought his widowed mother to live with him, much to Louise's chagrin, but very much in keeping with what we do as a people.

After the death of his mother (played by Zora Cully), the Jeffersons got a maid. The arrival of Florence (Marla Gibbs) marked the first change in The Jeffersons. They also had another actor portray Lionel for a while, then the first Lionel returned to marry Jenny and that drew George and Tom Willis more together. All of a sudden Louise is wearing designer clothes and designer wigs and George is in tailored suits and Gucci loafers. He hasn't said honky in years (which is probably just as well). But he also seems to have lost all sense of where he came from and even more important where he is going.

Is it possible that George and Louise had to "become white" in order for the jokes with Florence to work? Florence then became the personification of the inner city black experience. If it were not for the presence of Florence the story lines for **The Jeffersons** could be interchanged with those on **The Newhart Show**, because the Jeffersons have no black friends.

Benson is an even more phenomenal story. Not only has he gotten younger in his old show, but he has gone from the wise-cracking butler on **Soap** to the budget director for the governor of that mysterious state in which he lives. Now that's Affirmative Action. He also has little hint of Benson's background, except that he is from Baltimore, somewhere. Protests by John Amos and Esther Rolle, when the network refused to keep the black experience in GOOD TIMES, caused them to first write Amos out of the series and later cancel it altogether.

Maybe the networks feel that the public wants to see black actors, but not a slice of black life. Maybe the Jeffersons really do reflect what happens to blacks who attain status. But what about WEBSTER and DIFFERENT STROKES? Those kids really have the little kids watching at home confused. Webster had a chance to go and live with his Uncle Phil (Ben Vereen), but opted to go and live with George and Ma'am. Arnold has a new little brother who is into country and western music. Now those are really different strokes. Oh, well, it's only make believe. Right? . . . . Right?

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Arena Players'

"Little Miss Dreamer": an uneven product

By R. B. Jones

"Little Miss Dreamer," the current production at the Arena Playhouse, is a dream deferred. Its potential as an evening of rousing theater is never realized despite a premise that could have illuminated the legend of Bessie Smith, the Empress of the Blues.

The play takes place on a night in 1925 when Bessie Smith is on the verge of stardom. She is undergoing a crisis in self-confidence in the dressingroom of a seedy theater in Philadelphia. She is drinking heavily to fortify herself as she prepares to perform before a northern audience for the first time. While she is ruminating, her brother Clarence appears and takes her back into the past to view pivotal moments in her life.

After viewing those moments, Bessie goes on stage and bowls over the audience. She is a star and the play ends with Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey triumphantly singing together.

The play suffers from an evenness and an ambiguity of character development and motivation. It is never explained why Bessie Smith's chance at stardom hinges on performing well at this theater which is admittedly a dump? The character has already admitted to having toured with Ma Rainey and on the TOBA circuit which was a seasoning process for black entertainers.

Bessie has been a great success singing all of her life, so there is really no reason for her to doubt herself so deeply, unless someone who could help or hurt her career greatly was in the audience. This element was missing from the play. There was no reason for the brother to take her back into the past to induce her to reach for stardom.

The appearance of the brother was another ambiguous element to the play. He is clearly supernatural or an illusion created by Bessie's drinking. He can move the furniture, speak to the theater owner and take Bessie back into the past. Yet she never indicates whether her brother is dead or not.

Ma Rainey is portrayed, but there is never a clear differentiation between her style and career and Bessie's. Ma Rainey was an entertainer who bridged the gap between touring tent minstrel shows and the classic blues singer who was a female singer who bridged the gap between the rural blues singer and the nightclub torch singer.

The play seems to be more of an outline than a finished work. The second half consists entirely of Bessie and Ma Rainey singing on stage. There is no dramatic development, just a mini concert.

If the dramatic and musical performances were excellent, they could salvage the show, but the performances were generally lackluster. Bernadine Mitchell plays the grown up Bessie. Her singing is adequate, although she is not nearly charismatic enough to truly convey the star presence that was Bessie Smith. She is also not intimidating enough.

The other characters were portrayed adequately, but there was a flatness and a lack of excitement about the show. I suppose that there was too much padding to do with an underdeveloped script and a lack of understanding on the part of the director about the essence of the classic blues period and the atmosphere that permeated it.

"Little Miss Dreamer" by Ed Shockley could have been a rousing and insightful evening of theater, but it remained a dream deferred. If the Arena Players are going to charge $12.00 for musicals, they should pattern them after "Eubie" and "So Many Memories, So Little Time." They were worth it.

The Tube

TV program guide for Baltimore/Washington
Friday, October 5, 1984 to Thursday, October 11, 1984

WEEKDAY DAYTIME REGULARS

DAYTIME

MORNING

—6:00—
(5) SURGSAT (FRI)
—6:20—
(8) THE MUPPETS (FRI)
(HBO) PAT BENATAR IN CONCERT (THU)
—6:25—
(8) THE MUPPETS (THU)
(HBO) BEST LEGS IN THE 8TH GRADE (FRI)
—5:30—
(5) EYESAT (FRI)
—5:45—
(11) DEVOTIONS
—5:50—
(13) NEWS
—5:55—
(29) JIM BAKKER
—6:00—
(2) 20 MINUTE WORKOUT
(4) (38) MORNING STRETCH
(5) PANORAMA
(7) ABC NEWS THIS MORNING
(9) CBS EARLY MORNING NEWS
(11) LEARNING TO READ (MON, WED, FRI)
(11) LEARNING TO DO (TUE, THU)
(13) JIMMY SWAGGART
—6:30—
(2) (4) NBC NEWS AT SUNRISE
(7) (38) NEWS
(9) CBS EARLY MORNING NEWS
(23) GREAT SPACE COASTER
(33) FARM DAY
(HBO) NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC (FRI)
(HBO) ROBBERS, ROOFTOPS AND WITCHES (MON)
(HBO) MOVIE (WED, THU)
—6:45—
(33) A.M. WEATHER
—7:00—
(2) (8) TODAY
(4) (38) GOOD MORNING AMERICA
(9) (13) CBS MORNING NEWS
(23) BUGS BUNNY AND FRIENDS
(29) INSPECTOR GADGET
(33) FOCUS ON SOCIETY (FRI)
(33) AMERICAN STORY (MON, WED)
(33) GROWING YEARS (TUE, THU)
(HBO) THE ELECTRIC GRANDMOTHER (TUE)
—7:30—
(5) HE-MAN AND MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE
(29) WOODY WOODPECKER
(29) LILIAS, YOGA AND YOU
(33) VOLTRON, DEFENDER OF THE UNIVERSE
(33) SESAME STREET (R) ☐
(HBO) THE HALLOWEEN THAT ALMOST WASN'T (FRI)
(HBO) MOVIE (MON)
—8:00—
(5) THE FLINTSTONES
(29) SUPERFRIENDS
(29) MACNEIL / LEHRER NEWSHOUR
(33) FAT ALBERT
(HBO) MOVIE (TUE, THU, FRI)
(HBO) FRAGGLE ROCK (WED)
—8:30—
(5) TOM AND JERRY
(29) MIGHTY MOUSE (FRI)
(29) HEATHCLIFF (MON-THU)
(29) FLINTSTONES (TUE-FRI)
(33) THE FLINTSTONES (MON)
(33) MISTER ROGERS (R)
(HBO) MOVIE (WED)
—9:00—
(2) (8) DONAHUE
(4) FANTASY ISLAND
(5) I LOVE LUCY
(7) TIC TAC DOUGH
(33) LOVE CONNECTION
(33) PEOPLE ARE TALKING
(38) W.G.M.!
(38) SESAME STREET (R) ☐
(38) TODAY'S SPECIAL
(38) FAMILY
(38) EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING
(HBO) THE NIGHTMARE OF COCAINE (MON)
—9:30—
(4) SUPER PASSWORD
(5) LEAVE IT TO BEAVER
(7) JOKERS WILD
(9) BODY LANGUAGE
(23) ROMPER ROOM
(38) POLKA DOT DOOR
(HBO) HBO COMING ATTRACTIONS (FRI)
(HBO) NOT NECESSARILY THE NEWS (TUE)
—10:00—
(5) ALICE
(4) FACTS OF LIFE (R)
(7) ANDY GRIFFITH
(7) LET'S MAKE A DEAL
(9) MORNING BREAK
(9) $25,000 PYRAMID
(9) HOUR MAGAZINE
(9) (38) 700 CLUB
(33) SESAME STREET (R) ☐
(38) ELECTRIC COMPANY (R)
(HBO) STANDING ROOM ONLY (TUE, FRI)
(HBO) MOVIE (MON, WED, THU)
—10:30—
(5) LAVERNE & SHIRLEY
(4) SALE OF THE CENTURY
(5) BEWITCHED
(7) FAMILY FEUD
(7) LET'S MAKE A DEAL
(9) VOYAGE OF THE MIMI
(9) SPACES (TUE, FRI)
—11:00—
(2) (4) WHEEL OF FORTUNE
(5) MEDICAL CENTER
(7) (38) CELEBRITY FAMILY FEUD (FRI)
(7) (38) TRIVIA TRAP (MON-THU)
(9) (13) PRICE IS RIGHT
(33) (38) MISTER ROGERS (R)
(38) EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING (TUE, FRI)
—11:30—
(2) (4) SCRABBLE
(7) (38) LOVING (FRI)
(7) TAKING ADVANTAGE (MON)
(7) RYAN'S HOPE (TUE-THU)
(9) FAMILY FEUD (MON-THU)
(9) LOVE, AMERICAN STYLE
(9) VOYAGE OF THE MIMI
(9) VEGETABLE SOUP
(9) INDEPENDENT NEWS
(13) SPECIAL PROGRAMMING HOUR (WED-FRI)
(HBO) MOVIE (THU, FRI)
(HBO) AND IF I'M ELECTED... PART II (TUE)

AFTERNOON

—12:00—
(2) (4) (7) (9) (13) (38) NEWS
(5) PANORAMA
(5) FAMILY
(5) WHITE COURSE (WED, FRI)
(5) YAN CAN COOK (MON)
(29) AMERICAN GOVERNMENT SURVEY (TUE, THU)
(29) MACNEIL / LEHRER NEWSHOUR
(33) BIG VALLEY
(38) EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING (MON, TUE)
(HBO) MOVIE (MON, TUE)
(HBO) THE INVESTIGATORS: CRUSADING REPORTERS OF THE AIR (WED)
—12:30—
(2) (4) SEARCH FOR TOMORROW
(7) (38) RYAN'S HOPE (FRI)
(7) (38) LOVING (MON-THU)
(9) (13) YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS
(33) FOCUS ON SOCIETY (WED, FRI)
(33) JUSTIN WILSON'S LOUISIANA COOKIN' (MON)
(38) CONGRESS: WE THE PEOPLE (TUE, THU)
(38) EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING (WED-FRI)
(38) SPACES (MON)
(HBO) PAT BENATAR IN CONCERT (WED)
—1:00—
(2) (4) DAYS OF OUR LIVES
(5) (38) MOVIE
(7) (38) ALL MY CHILDREN
(29) HOGAN'S HEROES
(29) WORLD CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP (FRI)
(29) SURVIVAL (MON)
(29) MYSTERY! (TUE)
(29) FIRING LINE (WED)
(29) CONSTITUTION: THAT DELICATE BALANCE (THU)
(33) EVENING EXCHANGE
(38) EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING (MON)
(HBO) MOVIE (THU, FRI)
—1:30—
(7) (38) AS THE WORLD TURNS
(29) INDEPENDENT NEWS
(HBO) MOVIE (WED)
—2:00—
(2) (4) ANOTHER WORLD
(7) (38) ONE LIFE TO LIVE
(9) EYE ON WASHINGTON
(9) DO IT YOURSELF SHOW (MON)
(9) MASTERPIECE THEATRE (TUE)
(9) STONECARYERS (WED)
(9) OPEN MIND (THU)
(9) BLACK FORUM (FRI)
(9) JUST FOR YOU (MON)
(9) HOWARD PERSPECTIVES (TUE)
(9) COMMON CENTS (WED)
(9) TONY BROWN'S JOURNAL (THU)
(HBO) MOVIE (MON)
(HBO) REMEMBER WHEN: PAGE ONE (TUE)
—2:30—
(5) INSIGHT (FRI)
(7) (38) CAPITOL
(29) KIDS INCORPORATED (FRI)
(29) KID'S BREAK (MON-THU)
(29) NEW TECH TIMES (MON)
(29) THE MARY ROSE (WED)
(29) PRESENTE (THU)
(29) THIS OLD HOUSE (FRI)
(29) WOODWRIGHT'S SHOP (MON)
(29) LAST CHANCE GARAGE (TUE)
(29) MOTORWEEK (WED)
(29) DO IT YOURSELF SHOW (THU)
(HBO) MOVIE (THU, FRI)
—3:00—
(2) (4) SANTA BARBARA
(5) TOM AND JERRY (TUE-FRI)
(5) THE CHARMKINS (MON)
(7) (38) GENERAL HOSPITAL
(9) (13) GUIDING LIGHT
(29) SCOOBY DOO
(29) MISTER ROGERS (R)
(29) I SPY
(29) CAPTAIN CHESAPEAKE / SUPERFRIENDS
(33) TEACHING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS (FRI)
(33) TEACHING WRITING (MON, WED)
(33) GED (TUE, THU)
(HBO) MOVIE (THU)
—3:30—
(5) INSPECTOR GADGET (TUE-FRI)
(5) MY LITTLE PONY (MON)
(29) SUPERFRIENDS
(33) ELECTRIC COMPANY (R)
(33) VOLTRON, DEFENDER OF THE UNIVERSE
(38) MISTER ROGERS (R)
(HBO) THE NIGHTMARE OF COCAINE (MON)
(HBO) BEST LEGS IN THE 8TH GRADE (WED)
—4:00—
(2) (4) JEOPARDY
(5) FAT ALBERT
(7) LOVE CONNECTION
(9) HOUR MAGAZINE
(9) SANFORD AND SON
(9) LOVE BOAT (MON, TUE, THU, FRI)
(9) ABC AFTERSCHOOL (WED)
(33) VOLTRON, DEFENDER OF THE UNIVERSE
(38) (38) SESAME STREET (R) ☐
(38) ANOTHER LIFE
(38) HE-MAN AND MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE
(HBO) FRAGGLE ROCK (FRI)
—4:30—
(5) JOKER'S WILD
(5) PEOPLE'S COURT
(5) HE-MAN AND MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE
(7) ANYTHING FOR THE MONEY (FRI)
(7) ANYTHING FOR MONEY (MON-THU)
(9) THE JEFFERSONS
(29) BUGS BUNNY AND FRIENDS
(29) PAINTING CERAMICS (T-H)
(29) MAGIC OF OIL PAINTING (MON)
(29) MAGIC OF ANIMAL PAINTING (TUE)
(29) MAGIC OF WATERCOLORS (WED)
(29) MAGIC OF FLORAL PAINTING (THU)
(29) SCOOBY DOO
(HBO) NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC (FRI)
(HBO) MOVIE (MON, THU)
(HBO) THE ELECTRIC GRANDMOTHER (TUE)
(HBO) FRAGGLE ROCK (WED)
—5:00—
(2) NEWSCOPE
(4) (9) NEWS
(5) LOVE BOAT
(7) EVERY SECOND COUNTS
(11) BARNEY MILLER
(13) THREE'S COMPANY
(29) THE DUKES OF HAZZARD (FRI)
(29) DUKES OF HAZZARD (MON-THU)
(29) SESAME STREET (R) ☐
(33) THE BRAIN (FRI)
(38) CONGRESS: WE THE PEOPLE (MON)
(38) FIRING LINE (TUE)
(38) WORKING WOMEN (WED)
(38) NOVA (THU)
(38) FAT ALBERT
(38) ELECTRIC COMPANY (R)
(HBO) MOVIE (WED)
—5:30—
(2) (7) (38) NEWS
(5) TAXI
(38) CONGRESS: WE THE PEOPLE (MON)
(38) AMERICA WORKS (WED)
(38) MUSIC VIDEO
(38) COLORSOUND
(HBO) MOVIE (TUE, FRI)

FRIDAY

OCTOBER 5, 1984
DAYTIME SPECIALS

—6:25—
(HBO) BEST LEGS IN THE 8TH GRADE A comedy about a successful lawyer who has the chance to realize his adolescent fantasies about a beautiful former schoolmate. Stars: Tim Matheson, Annette O'Toole, Kathryn Harrold and Jim Belushi.

—6:30—
(HBO) NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC "The Living Sands Of Namib" Unusual plants and strange creatures have adapted to the intense heat of the Namib Desert, where temperatures sometimes reach 170 degrees.

—7:30—
(HBO) THE HALLOWEEN THAT ALMOST WASN'T The Wicked Witch threatens to ruin Halloween by not flying over the moon on her broomstick. Stars: Judd Hirsch and Meriette Hartley.

—10:00—
(HBO) STANDING ROOM ONLY "Willie Nelson & Family" The country singer performs "Always On My Mind," "Whiskey River" and "On The Road Again."

—4:30—
(HBO) NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC "The Living Sands Of Namib" Unusual plants and strange creatures have adapted to the intense heat of the Namib Desert, where temperatures sometimes reach 170 degrees.

DAYTIME CHILDREN'S SHOWS

—10:30—
(29) VOYAGE OF THE MIMI Back at sea, the crew tags a whale and tracks it; a visit to Gallaudet College, the world's only liberal arts college for the deaf. (R) ☐

—11:30—
(29) VOYAGE OF THE MIMI Back at sea, the crew tags a whale and tracks it; a visit to Gallaudet College, the world's only liberal arts college for the deaf. (R) ☐

—2:30—
(29) KIDS INCORPORATED

—4:00—
(HBO) FRAGGLE ROCK Feeling self-important, Red Fraggle starts a club; but Gobo is elected president.

DAYTIME MOVIES

—8:00—
(HBO) "Eddie Macon's Run" (1983) John Schneider, Kirk Douglas. An escaped criminal becomes the quarry of a ruthless law officer. 'PG'

—11:30—
(HBO) "The Golden Seal" (1983) Steve Railsback, Penelope Milford. A legendary golden seal appears off the Aleutian Islands, becoming the quarry of hunters until a brave boy finds and protects the rare mammal. 'PG'

—1:00—
(5) "The San Pedro Bums" (1977) Jeffry Druce, John Mark Robinson. Five young men with more freedom than funds share a battered boat in California.
(38) "Where It's At" (1969) David Janssen, Rosemary Forsyth. After resisting, an Ivy Leaguer learns his father's nightclub business and becomes a ruthless manager.
(HBO) "Still Of The Night" (1982) Roy Scheider, Meryl Streep. A psychiatrist becomes increasingly involved with a mysterious woman who was the mistress of a murdered patient. 'PG'

—2:30—
(HBO) "Jimmy The Kid" (1982) Gary Coleman, Paul LeMat. Bumbling criminals kidnap the son of two country-soul singers. 'PG'

—6:30—
(HBO) "Eddie Macon's Run" (1983) John Schneider, Kirk Douglas. An escaped criminal becomes the quarry of a ruthless law officer. 'PG'

EVENING

—6:00—
(2) (4) (7) (9) (38) NEWS
(5) WKRP IN CINCINNATI
(29) DIFF'RENT STROKES
(29) VOYAGE OF THE MIMI Back at sea, the crew tags a whale and tracks it; a visit to Gallaudet College, the world's only liberal arts college for the deaf. (R) ☐
(29) (33) MACNEIL / LEHRER NEWSHOUR
(33) STAR TREK

—6:30—
(2) NBC NEWS
(5) TAXI
(7) CBS NEWS
(29) WHAT'S HAPPENING!!
(29) BUSINESS REPORT

—7:00—
(2) WHEEL OF FORTUNE
(4) NBC NEWS
(5) THREE'S COMPANY
(7) (38) ABC NEWS ☐
(9) CBS NEWS
(13) NEW $100,000 NAME THAT TUNE
(29) THE JEFFERSONS
(29) MACNEIL / LEHRER NEWSHOUR
(33) EVENING EXCHANGE
(38) ANYTHING FOR MONEY
(38) BUSINESS REPORT
(HBO) INSIDE THE NFL Hosts: Len Dawson, Nick Buoniconti.

—7:30—
(2) TIC TAC DOUGH
(4) $100,000 NAME THAT TUNE
(5) M*A*S*H
(7) ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT
(7) WHEEL OF FORTUNE
(9) PEOPLE'S COURT
(9) EVENING MAGAZINE
(13) SANFORD AND SON
(29) CAROL BURNETT AND FRIENDS
(29) WILD, WILD WORLD OF ANIMALS

—8:00—
(2) (4) HOLLYWOOD STARS' SCREEN TESTS Screen tests from sources as diverse as Hollywood's "Gone With The Wind" and television's "The A-Team" feature soon-to-be stars in early roles and established performers auditioning for major parts.
(5) P.M. MAGAZINE
(7) (38) BASEBALL AL Championship Game Three. AL West Champions at Detroit Tigers
(9) (13) DUKES OF HAZZARD
(29) RETURN TO EDEN Stephanie (Rebecca Gilling), assuming the identity of fashion model Tara Wolfes, attracts the unknowing Greg (James Reynes) and lures him and Jilly (Wendy Hughes) back to Eden to exact her revenge. (Part 2 of 2) ☐
(29) (38) WASHINGTON WEEK IN REVIEW
(33) AMERICAN PLAYHOUSE
(33) TRAPPER JOHN, M.D.
(HBO) MOVIE "The Golden Seal" (1983) Steve Railsback, Penelope Milford. A legendary golden seal appears off the Aleutian Islands, becoming the quarry of hunters until a brave boy finds and protects the rare mammal. 'PG'

—8:30—
(2) HEALTHBEAT
(38) (38) WALL STREET WEEK

—9:00—
(2) (4) JUSTICE
(5) MERV GRIFFIN