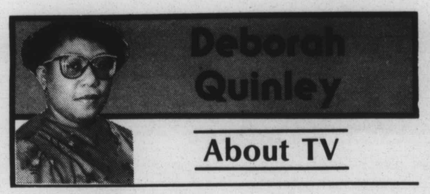


About TV

WJZ, Channel 13, recently presented two more documentaries for their "For Kids' Sake" series entitled "Teen dads—The Forgotten Half" and "Teen Sex: The case of Laurie and Ricky." Each program discussed the high rate of pregnancies among teenagers and their parents.

Though each program used a different format for presentation, in my opinion, one program left much to be desired while the other developed its topic with a variety of knowledgeable guests, lively interaction between participants, and thought-provoking discussions.

First, the bad news.

"Teen Dads — The Forgotten Half," as reported by Channel 13's Don Williams, sought to question the roles and attitudes of the teenage father in the rearing of his child, and in some cases, his children. To do this, Williams went through the streets of Baltimore and interviewed severl teenage fathers, teenage mothers, and their parents.

The general attitude of the teenage fathers seemed to be that the fathering of a child illustrated their manhood. As one young man stated, "It lets people know I'm not a homosexual!"

The teenage mothers, generally, didn't have much to say and seemed to resign themselves to their fate of being unwed mothers who end up on the welfare rolls.

The parents of these teenage parents, though offering some moral support, made it very clear that the babies were the responsibility of their parents.

Though this program featured frank responses from all of the persons interviewed, it offered no real solutions to the widespread epidemic of teenagers having babies. In essence, it told us nothing new.

We know that this is a problem and that Baltimore City has become the one city in the U.S. with the highest rate of teenage pregnancies. But what do we do about it?

A solution must be found because this persistent problem is having a devastating effect on our black communities and is bringing about a decline in the stability of the black family.

If the purpose of this program was to tell us something new, it failed. And so, we're right back where we started. How do we stop kids from having kids?

On the other hand, "Teen Sex: The Case of Laurie and Ricky" offered an enlightening program, which used a balanced panel of informed guests, consisting of such notable persons as Dr. Rosetta Stith, principal of the Laurence G. Paquin Jr.-Sr. High School for Expectant Teenage Mothers, Harriett Tootle, currently the Clinical Director of the Baltimore City Planned Parenthood Clinic, and Dr. Agnes Alston, Associate Minister and Coordinator of Religious Instruction at the Gillis Memorial Christian Community Church.

Because the panel also consisted of members who differed in their opinions on children and sex, much lively discussion was heard.

Hosted by WJZ's Jerry Turner and moderated by Dr. Charles Nesson of the Harvard Law School, this program presented each panelist with imaginary sex-related situations, involving two imaginary teenagers named Laurie and Ricky, as created by Dr. Nesson.

For instance, one question involved Laurie, at age 15, coming to her mother and asking how far she should go, sexually, with her boyfriend, Ricky. The chosen panelist was to respond as Laurie's mother. Though some panelists agreed that a conversation, such as this, should take place between children and their parents, some panelists felt that such conversations should not take place because they might "give our children ideas." It must be understood that our teenagers, today, already have the ideas — no matter how misguided and misinformed they may be.

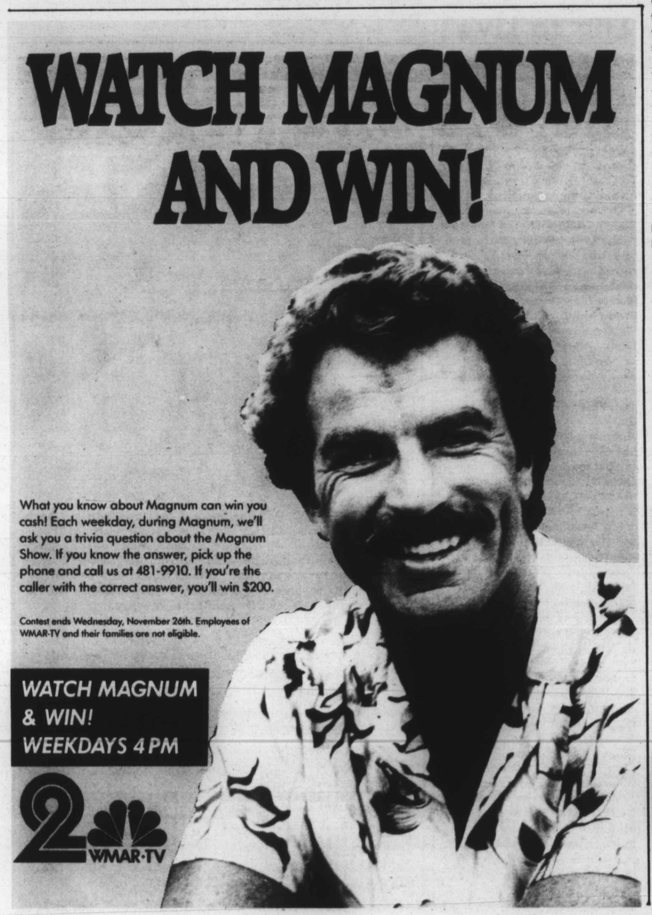
This was a program that was thought-provoking and quite helpful to parents who wish and who need to open the lines of communication between themselves and their children but don't quite know how.

Because this was a balanced panel, with some members thinking and expressing that parents should not have such open sexual conversations with their children, they felt these conversations would be telling our children too much, too soon.

But because Baltimore City has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in the country, those panel members, and others in the city who are of this same opinion, must realize that this problem cannot continue to be ignored.

Right now, this is a problem in Baltimore and is one of the major concerns in the black community. How many of you know mothers under the age of 18?

"Teen Sex: The Case of Laurie and Ricky" presented realistic and usable methods that parents could practice to let their child know that they care. And, isn't that what's important?



Ron Glass ("Barney Miller") plays a ruthless show-business manager who crosses swords with the legendary Perry Mason in "Perry Mason: The Case of the Shooting Star," airing Sunday, November 9 on NBC.

Denzel Washington stars in 'The George McKenna Story'

Denzel Washington stars as George McKenna, a courageous, charismatic school principal who took over a gang-ridden, drug-infested South Los Angeles high school and transformed it into an achievement-oriented place of learning by demanding hard work, inspiring student pride and involving their parents, in THE GEORGE McKENNA STORY. The new motion picture-for-television will be broadcast on the "CBS Tuesday Movie," Tuesday, Nov. 11 at 9 p.m.

Also starring are Lynn Whitfield as McKenna's fiancee, Bobbie Maxwell; Akosua Busia as promising student, Cynthia Byers, and Richard Masur as a dissident teacher, Ben Proctor.

The drama based on fact was directed by Denzel Washington's "St. Elsewhere" co-star, Eric Laneuville, from a script by Charles Eric Johnson. Mr. McKenna is still principal at George Washington High School in Los Angeles.

When McKenna, the newest — and youngest — high school principal in Los Angeles, takes over at Washington High, he soon learns why it has the worst reputation in the city: gangs terrorize the campus, their graffiti mars the walls, and drug use and dealing are a major problem.

And, perhaps worst of all to him, the teachers are intimidated and the best students in the district have chosen to be bussed out to other schools.

McKenna takes those deteriorated conditions as a challenge. His first steps, however — instituting mandatory homework, attendance and dress codes — are met with resistance by several members of the faculty, whom he feels have been frightened into a barricade mentality.

He also meets directly with the students and listens to what they have to say to stir in them a sense of pride, which he knows is key to the success of his program.

His struggle takes a dramatic turn when he confronts gang leaders — after a gang member is killed in a fight — and lets them know that, at least on his campus, they're finished.

Having taken that strong stand, McKenna realizes that some of the hardest work has barely begun: to rally the largely apathetic parents to get involved and to convince the brightest students, now being bussed, to stay at Washington High.

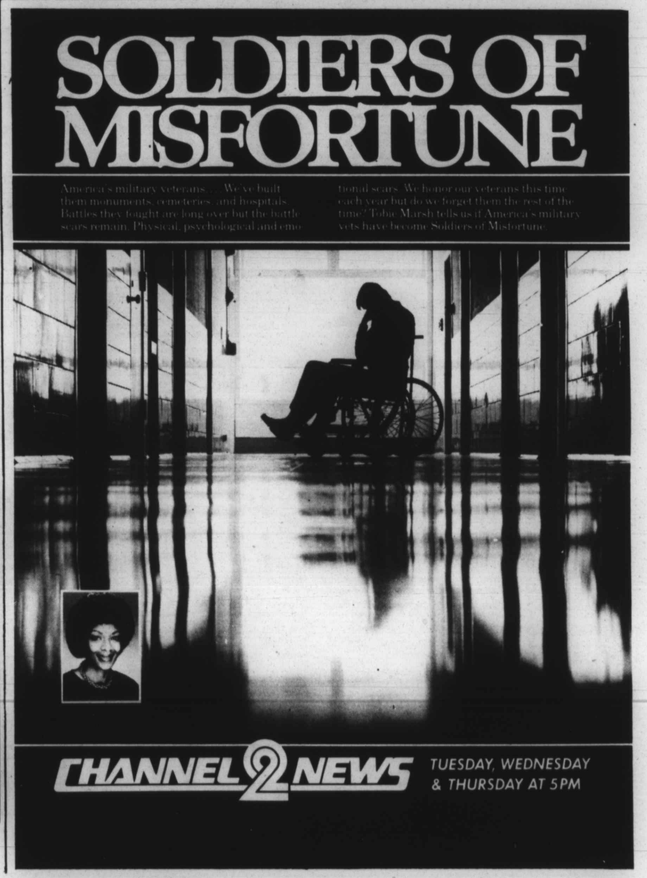
Denzel Washington, who stars as Dr. Phillip Chandler on "St. Elsewhere," was seen most recently on the big screen in "A Soldier's Story." Earlier, he had won an Obie Award for his work in the original Off Broadway production, "A Soldier's Play."

He starred as George Segal's long-lost son in the movie comedy "Carbon Copy" and his other television credits include the motion picture-for-television "Wilma" and the mini-series "Flesh and Blood."

Washington is currently working in Africa in the title role of Richard Attenborough's new film, "Biko," about the life of South African activist Stephen Biko.

Lynn Whitfield played the title role in the motion picture-for-television "Johnnie Mae Gibson: FBI." Her motion picture credits include "Silverado," "The Slugger's Wife" and "Doctor Detroit." She has guest starred on "The Fall Guy," "Hill Street Blues" and "Miami Vice." Her theater credits include "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf" and "When Hell Freezes Over."

Akosua Busia won wide acclaim for her role of Nettie in "The Color Purple" and stars in the forthcoming film of Richard Wright's "Native Son." Her television credits include the mini-series "A.D." and the Network film "Badge of the Assassin," "Babies Having Babies," broadcast as a "CBS Schoolbreak Special." and the upcoming "A Special Friendship."

Denzel Washington (left) portrays real-life high school principal George McKenna (right) in "The George McKenna Story", airing Tuesday, November 11 on CBS.

Ray Charles sings "What I Say" on "The Disney Sunday Movie" presents "Walt Disney World's 15th Birthday Celebration" airing Sunday, November 9 on ABC.