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March 25, 2012
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Capstone Multimedia Thesis Finale
<http://www.thankfulrevolution.com/2012/03/24/2595/>



Black TV Programming: Is the Internet filling the void?

Miriam Stevens of The Thankful Revolution takes an informative journey of the past, present, and future regarding black TV programming asking the question of if in fact concerning Black TV Programming: Is the Internet filling the void? Photo Credit: Miriam Stevens

What is the current state of black TV programming?

Television is a powerful vehicle that is used to broadcast stories and information. The type of programs one sees can often influence their perception of a culture.

Since the inception of the television medium, images portrayed of black people have often been marred and aligned with controversy. Black actors portrayed certain characters that were considered demeaning. In a YouTube video, seasoned actors speak about the roles they have played in the past and what needs to happen to change the perception of black people in Hollywood. Veteran actress [Dianne Carroll](#) shared in this YouTube video interview that it is up to blacks to present an accurate picture of our culture: “We eventually have to come to terms that we have to do for ourselves and this is the reality.”

Therefore, the new challenge that blacks faced today is the lack of predominantly black stories provided through traditional mediums. There is a clear divide between an authentic black life experience and the stereotypes that often come across ones television screen. Due to this void, some black people have began to migrate to alternative arenas to view their program content. In addition to the consumer migration, black producers have developed original Web TV series to meet the needs of their niche audience.

Dr. J. Fred MacDonald, a professor at Northeastern Illinois University, has done extensive research in the area of society, stereotypes, history, and media. In one of his research studies he gives an insightful portrait of the [rise and fall of network TV](#), “Since it emerged in the late 1940s as a nationally available medium of mass entertainment and information, commercial television has been the principal window through which Americans have viewed their world. What was new or popular or influential in American life came now through TV.”

According to a [John Consoli’s article](#), predominantly black shows are extinct, “At the moment, the number of scripted, live-action shows on broadcast television with all-black (or predominantly minority, for that matter) casts is exactly zero.”

Consoli echoes what many are asking, [“Where are the black TV shows?”](#)

Today with the increase of reality TV and cable stations, some might argue that there’s nothing wrong with the state of black TV programming. According to the [Consoli article](#), he notes comments from media agency research guru Steven Sternberg about reality TV; “You might actually be able to make the case that there are more African-Americans on broadcast TV than ever before if you take into account reality series.”

[Troy DeVold](#), an executive producer for the reality TV show Basketball Wives, offered some behind the scene insight into the minds of network television executives and how they make selections for programs to broadcast. He shared how investors do not want to take a chance on a show that is not proven and financially lucrative. Troy also mentions that cable does give the television viewer varied “topical” choices that caters to preferences. He stated that the shareholders are the ones making decisions behind what is being produced and are hesitant to step outside of the “status quo” box. Troy said the Internet has its drawbacks because it’s not free for everyone at this time. He further explained how traditional network television is still the major player because it remains free and accessible to all.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFA2-hkaK_I&list=UUTimhIqL147fXDOonoe1-iA&index=11&feature=plcp

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Written by [ThankfulRevolt](#) [edit](#)



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It has been noted that blacks are cutting the cord to their cable subscription because of high costs. In addition to the high costs, some are leaving cable because of the lack of good program content. [BET \(Black Entertainment Television\)](#), which has often been linked to be the television network for the black audience, is aware of the problems with poor program television shows. [BET senior vice president](#) of original programming Charlie Jordan Brooks spoke to the challenge that lay ahead for BET in gaining back the black audience and providing content that would keep the viewers she stated, “Current management is committed to original scripted programming with predominantly black casts going forward. There’s clearly a void in this area and there is talent and voices on both sides of the camera that are not being heard. BET is in the process of building its own in-house production team that will be able to produce scripted shows on its own or in conjunction with other studios.”

A flashback of our past glory days...

In the past, [The Cosby Show drew a historical](#), multicultural, and worldwide audience. Additionally, the fact that the cast of [The Cosby Show](#) was a predominantly black one did not hinder its mass appeal or popularity.

Although The Cosby show crossed cultural barriers, network executives are still reluctant to pursue black TV shows. One TV critic Eric Deggans of the St. Petersburg Florida Times shared [his observations](#), “Black people are starved for shows which not only feature lots of black actors but that put black culture front and center in a way they enjoy.”

The conversation about how television programming was delivered in the past compared to the advent of new digital technology was explored in an interview with former radio and television Christian media personality [Prophet Jerry Brunner](#). He has witnessed the 20-year evolution of the television media broadcast and supports programming that is viewed through an Internet TV platform.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=T_-G7S_HI6c

[Don Roberts](#), a 25-year newsman, also shared in a Q and A interview his thoughts about the state of black television programming. Although he advocates for the network television medium, he notes there are potentially unlimited opportunities that people of color can find through the Internet.

[Leon Moore](#), who also worked at the same station with Don Roberts, offers some additional insight as it relates to the portrayal of blacks viewed from the traditional network television medium.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRdBIGKXaXs&list=UUTimhIqL147FXDOnsoe1-jA&index=3&feature=plcp>

Both newsmen, although maintaining slightly different perspectives, support the Internet as one avenue that blacks can produce content.

[The Thankful Revolution surveyed](#) several people as to whether they believed there is a lack of blacks represented in television. The extensive [research results](#) are viewable on YouTube. One of the surveys garnered 48 responses with question one asking who is doing a better job delivering better black TV programming. Television networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) fared poorly in comparison to the other mediums. The Internet received 15 votes with 24.5% of the share versus the traditional television networks receiving 5 votes at an 8.2% of the share of the responders.

1) Who is doing a better job in providing rich, diverse, quality, and non stereotypical programs for the Culturally different people of color audience - Traditional Television Networks or Internet/Web Based Channels? Please share why in the other box



Question 1 of the survey asked who is doing a better job providing television programs for people of color and out of the 48 responses the Internet tied with the other category getting 24.5 % of the share and 15 votes. Television Networks got 8.2 % and 5 votes. Information Source Credit: Miriam Stevens

The Independent survey link showing the full survey results is at the following link:

<http://freeonlinesurveys.com/v1/viewresults.asp?surveyid=995484&print=1>

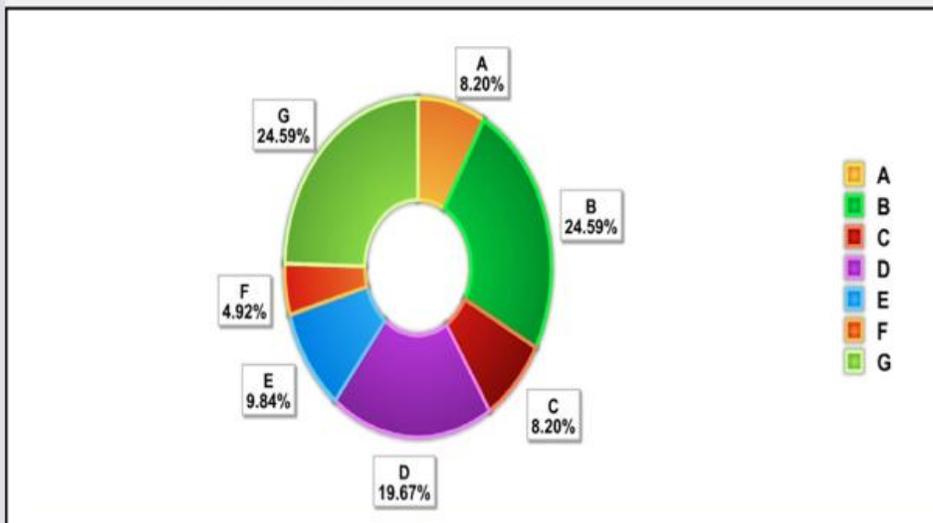
The below survey is still active with results viewable. Therefore, do take a few moments to join the conversation.

Do join in the conversation and let your voice and opinion be counted. Photo Credit: Miriam Stevens

[Take the 20-question survey here](#) (by clicking to be directed to the survey site) and view the current results as of this posting at the online link.

Question 1

Who is doing a better job in providing rich, diverse, quality, and non stereotypical programs for the Culturally different people of color audience - Traditional Television Networks or Internet/Web Based Channels? Please share why in the other box.



Key for the doughnut color coded pie results can be interpreted as follows: A = Traditional Networks, B = Internet TV, C = Both Traditional & Internet TV, D = Neither E = Undecided, F = Do not watch TV, and G = Other In this survey out of a total of 48 respondents tied for first place in percentages is Internet TV and Other with Traditional Networks at 8.20% tying with Both Traditional and Internet TV results.

In another ongoing [independent poll](#) (see figure below) the question is asked who does a better job providing quality programming for the black community. Currently with 49 votes tabulated cable television is the clear leader. Traditional television networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) were still last. Based on the results of these polls, the Internet is increasingly proving to be a formidable contender and is nipping at the heels of cable networks.

Who provides better quality television content showcasing the black community?

- Traditional Networks (i.e. NBC, ABC, FOX, CW, CBS...)
- Internet Web TV (Robert Townsend's PicTV)
- Cable
- You Tube
- NetFlix
- Other:

Who provides better quality television...

49 Total Votes

Voting Results

49 Total Votes



Cable TV is leading the pack in this poll for providing quality television program with Internet TV gaining ground. Poll Credit: Miriam Stevens Link to place your vote is here

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- Other:

Vote

View Results Share This PollDaddy.com

<http://polldaddy.com/poll/5712543/>

The signs are clear that according to these polls results network television is lagging behind the rest for providing program content that people of color desire. Poll Credit: Miriam Stevens

To weigh in on the conversation cast your vote on the poll below or in the pop-up on this page:

<http://poll.fm/3eftr>

Poll Results...

Who does a better job providing television program content for people of color?

In another ongoing active independent poll the current results are below on who is doing a better job providing quality television programs for people of color:

- Cable is leader with 22 Votes and 44.9%
- Internet and Other tied for second with 7 votes and 14.29%
- Traditional TV Networks got 5 votes at 10.2%

Who is doing a better job serving the people of color niche market with programming they are wanting to view? Poll Credit: Miriam Stevens

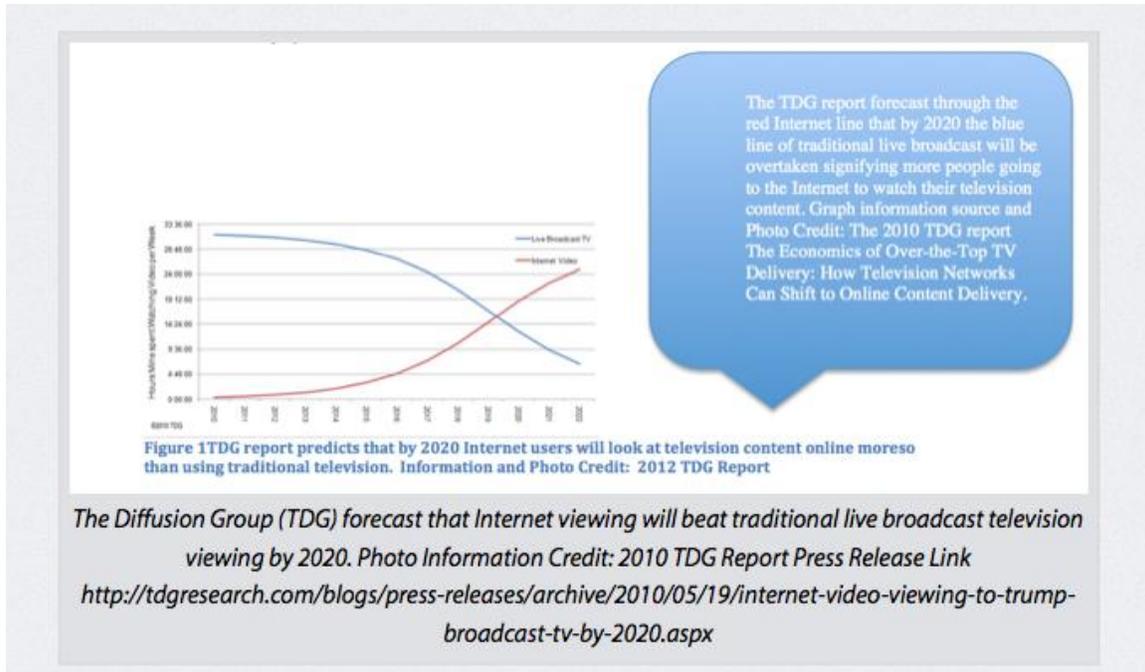
The results showed cable television is still keeping the top spot among these poll responders even beyond the cost of their subscriptions. It is also apparent that those responding are dissatisfied with the programming coming from traditional networks as it relates to black programming. Finally, the Internet market is surfacing as a challenger for providing TV programming based on the responses provided.

The Future is in the hands of black gamechangers...

The age of rapidly growing digital technology denotes the changing tide in the business of television broadcasting as it relates to consumption, advertising, content creation, and delivery .

According to the research study predictions from [The Diffusion Group \(TDG\)](#), Internet video viewing will overtake traditional broadcast TV by 2020, “The TDG data showed the amount of time consumers spent watching online video increased 84% between 2008 and 2009. When extrapolated across the entire TV-viewing population, the average time spent viewing online video in 2009 was 52% more than in 2008. TDG expects that this rate of growth will actually increase during the next 5-7 years due primarily to the increased use of the television as the platform of choice for web video viewing.”

The below graph offers a projection of how online viewership will increase to overtake traditional broadcast viewing by 2020.



According to Collin Dixon who co-authored the TDG report, since the web is easily accessible, consumer consumption is growing, “The total amount of time spent watching video from all sources, including PayTV and Internet video, will hold constant during the next 10 years at around 32 hours a week. With online video usage accelerating we expect the amount of Internet video watched to eclipse the amount of live broadcast TV around 2020.”

In addition to the TDG findings, [Sherrie L. Smith reiterates](#) on a Blackweb2.0 article that more blacks are flocking to the Internet, “Now, 35% of blacks watch TV online and 13% are considering canceling cable.” Rabsheen, another writer on Blackweb2.0 also chimes in that blacks are using [alternative methods to watch online TV](#) content. Rabsheen shared a 2011 Digital Media study produced by [Horowitz Associates, Inc.’s](#), “On a weekly basis, about a third (31%) of urban consumers watch TV content on a computer/laptop, a mobile device/tablet, or streamed directly from the Internet to the TV through devices like Apple TV, a Vudu Box, an Xbox, or a Blu-Ray DVD player.”

In the [Horowitz study press release](#), it supports that the future of television will be provided more from Web TV, “The study finds that over half (54%) of broadband Internet users watch TV content streamed or on an alternative platform weekly. Non-traditional viewing now accounts for 10.8 hours a month, or 7% of total viewing time, with 149.4 hours still dedicated to traditional TV.” Also, Adriana Waterstonm Horowitz’ Vice President of Marketing and Business Development shared, “Our study has tracked the evolution of alternative TV since its inception. While at the very margins non-traditional video platforms may erode traditional TV viewing, it is becoming increasingly clear that there will be a net gain for media brands, advertisers, and consumers. This will come hand in hand with a big shift in consumers’ viewing patterns and expectations about accessing, sharing, and otherwise controlling their TV viewing experience, not only on alternative platforms but on the traditional TV platform as well.”

[Adrienne P. Samuels](#) points out in an October 2008 article, that blacks are shifting from watching television from a home TV set to an Internet TV platform. [Samuels](#) shared this void caused an audience shift where viewers started to tune more into watching Web TV shows, “A growing number of Blacks are headed to the online frontier where Web-based episodic programming (aka Internet TV) is fast becoming popular—and even faster becoming a moneymaker. And, we’re definitely tuning in. In June, [YouTube](#) (the largest video site online) had 8.3-million African-American viewers, according to Nielsen Media Research.”

[Perry Lawrence](#), a 25-year veteran in video and television production, also advocates that Web TV development presents a successful consumer-to-business model. In an interview he shared, “Internet TV, or Direct to Web TV, is the best alternative for any demographic. Web TV allows anyone, no matter their budget, to be on equal ground as the big 4 networks.”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IVpwSmW6Ok&list=UUTimhIqL147fXDOnsoe1-jA&index=6&feature=plcp

[Tommy Lee Nichols](#), Founder and [Director](#) of the [CHARLOTTE BLACK FILM FESTIVAL](#), shared in a cellphone interview his thoughts about the current state of black television. Nichols notes blacks have been notoriously underrepresented in the industry due to lack of money and project distribution. He feels Internet television provides blacks an open door (see video below).

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mAKZkSKu5U&list=UUTimhIqL147fXDOnsoe1-jA&index=9&feature=plcp>

[Aymar Jean Christian](#), a doctoral candidate and creator of [Televisual](#), agrees that Web TV is definitely the future in television. He has researched this new online television market for several years and candidly shares in an interview some of the challenges one faces when producing black web series.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88xFcfMU4Q0&list=UUTimhIqL147fXDOn>

[Christian](#) shared about the new emergence of Internet television networks in another interview, “Among the most ambitious Web video start-ups in recent months is [GLO TV network](#), a urban LGBT network starting

online and hoping to make the move to cable TV. The newer [VisionTube](#) focuses on professional independent films and series, the one year-old [RowdyOrbit](#) has been [distributing](#) Web shows, and Percy Miller's anticipated [BetterBlackTV](#) will focus on family- friendly programming, when it [finally](#) debuts."

[Jonathan Moore](#), who created [Rowdy Orbit](#) Internet TV station, is one of the forerunners for providing people of color a place to get predominantly black cast TV shows. Moore's motto is "We are Webshows and it's our focus, passion and engrained in our business model. We strive to deliver culturally relevant,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88xFcfMU4Q0&list=UUTimhIqL147fXDOnsoe1-jA&index=1&feature=plcp>

original storytelling, through episodic webseries."

The future of television is in the hands of innovative content creators. They have a mastery of their craft and produce successful Web TV programming.

[Emelyn Stuart](#) of [Stuart Films](#) is another innovative business thinker who produces an award winning Web TV Show, "[12 Steps to Recovery](#)." Stuart's business model has yielded lucrative partnerships from small business investors who have funded 80% of this web shows production.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DoX6deZMgrM&list=UUTimhIqL147fXDOnsoe1-jA&index=11&feature=plcp>

How else is the void being filled online?

Let's meet a few of the gamechangers in the arena of Web TV programming below:

Award winners such as Al Thompson and Tony Clomax have established themselves as the future for original content creation in the form of Web TV shows. [Tony Clomax](#) is the creative force behind the award winning "[12 Steps to Recovery](#)" Web TV Show. This Web series has over 1.5 million online viewers. One can easily get drawn into the story line that is well-written incorporating top-notch television production quality and exceptional acting. Likewise, seasoned actor turned Web TV show creator, [Al Thompson](#) is poised to launch his next original Web TV Show, [Lenox Avenue](#), in the summer of 2012. He has lit up the Internet with his comedy, "[Johnny B. Homeless](#)". His Web TV show garnered the [People's Choice Award](#). Other phenomenal Web Show content creators are [Ebony J. Lewis](#) of "[Truth Unspoken](#)" and [Danielle Earle](#) of "[Brooklyn is in love](#)".

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zftTBa31b3o&list=UUTimhIqL147fXDOnsoe1-jA&index=7&feature=plcp>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMmruA0RIMQ&list=UUTimhIqL147fXDOnsoe1-jA&index=5&feature=plcp>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uNS013NVyI&list=UUTimhIqL147fXDOnsoe1-jA&index=4&feature=plcp>

Many have accepted the challenge and are successful with this new media frontier. These individuals possess a drive and do it yourself ([DIY](#)) entrepreneurial attitude. They have carved out a niche online and become successful Internet and Web TV content providers.

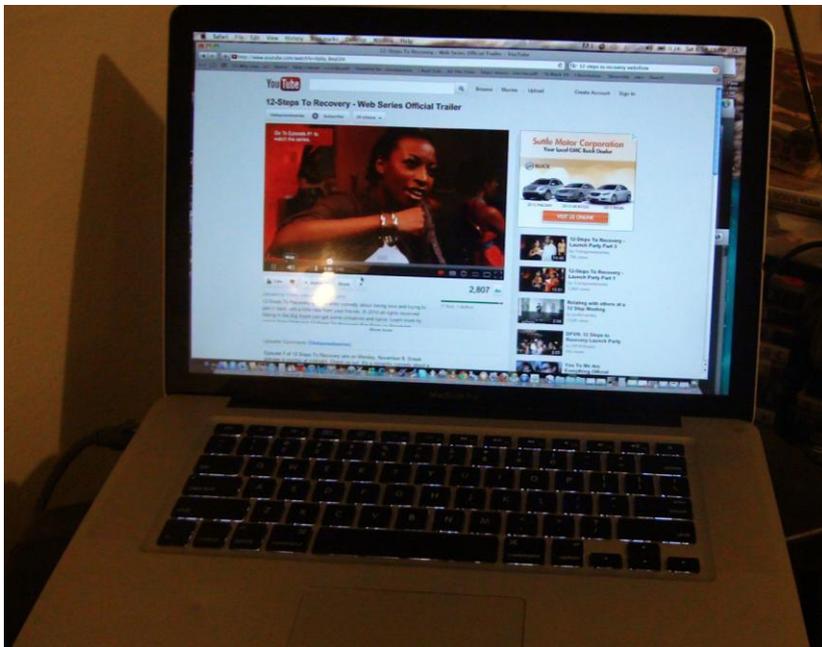
When asked about this new media DIY age and its impact regarding being a Web TV content provider for black TV programming, Hampton University Assistant [Professor William Leonard](#) of the Scripps Howard School of Journalism and Communications shared, “At first glance it may appear that it is out of your reach but once you start pursuing that which you desire it is no longer the case but the bottom line is that there is nothing beyond your capabilities if you can imagine it, you can do it.”

The future is being made from people found on a Facebook list featuring over 100+ [black Web TV series](#) programs and a panelists of black Web TV producers showcased on [YouTube](#).

Therefore, when asking the question about black television programming and if the Internet is filling the void, the answer is yes.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKkOcs6UcnQ&list=UUTimhIqL147fXDOnsoe1-jA&index=10&feature=plcp>

Here's a sneak preview.



Now Showing in many homes television content viewed from a laptop. The future of Black TV Programming is found through clicking onto a Web series to enjoy the latest "webisode". Photo Credit: Miriam Stevens