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**Brother, Can You Spare Some Class:
Black Men in the Media
The Substance Of Truth
By Tolu Olorunda
BlackCommentator.com Columnist**

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On October 15th, *Comedy Central* is slated to premier a "satirical fake news show" called, *Chocolate News*. David Alan Grier, most famous for his many characters in the '90s hit sketch comedy series *In Living Color*, will be the host. The show is reported to be a cultural spin-off of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report*, but judging from the released trailers, *Comedy Central* is aiming for a much different objective. The scene is an all too familiar one. The trailers feature Grier, like past Black comics before him, dressed up in feminine outfits, yelling at the top of his voice, acting erratically, and operating in an incoherent shuffle. It is as though this long national nightmare, of which President Ford spoke, is far from over.

In early 2005, *Chappelle's Show*, Comedy Central's most popular series at the time, received a set-back from production because Dave Chappelle, star of the show, had come to a sobering conclusion that he did not wish for his soul to be purchased at the price of corporate America's offer. As the legend tells itself, Dave Chappelle turned down \$50 million – the allotted price for the third season – and escaped to South Africa for a "spiritual retreat." Comedy Central, uneasy about the kind of message being sent to Black boys and girls across the globe, initially spun Chappelle's departure into a battle with the flu, but subsequently reoriented it to suggest a meltdown of insanity and eccentricity.

Dave Chappelle, upon a return to The States, informed TV icon Oprah Winfrey, that he was motivated to halt production of his ultra successful show because it had grown increasingly "socially irresponsible." In response to the growing concern from within the Black Community, vis-à-vis his many overtly stereotypical sketches, Chappelle [remarked](#) that he didn't want "black people to be disappointed in me for putting that

[message] out there. ... It's a complete moral dilemma." What an unusual and unprecedented act of solidarity and candor.

What Dave Chappelle understood, quite explicitly, is the depth to which images matter. Dave Chappelle, unlike his counterparts, has a concerted knowledge of history and is aware of the degree to which Minstrel shows, in the past, have damaged the quality of life for Black folks worldwide. For Chappelle, stoking the flame of suffering would be unforgivable and unacceptable. If contemporary Black comedians, artists and entertainers in general, possess a similar amount of self-worth, the world would undoubtedly be a much better place for Black people. Veteran Black Panther activist and presently incarcerated political prisoner, Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin a/k/a "H. Rap Brown," once noted that in the stadium on entertainment, Blacks "dominate the field," but stop short of actually "controlling" it. In essence, commercial Hip-Hop artists foolishly parade around with diamond-encrusted slave chains on their necks, but ultimately realize who the "master" is.

Hip-Hop, a musical genre constructed from the agonizing and cruel conditions of inner-city life, has now morphed into a safe-haven for over-sexed men, over-sexed women, cutthroats, pimps, promiscuous females, testosterone-filled adolescents, capitalists, criminal international bankers, government agents, drug-dealers etc. What once represented, as Public Enemy founder Chuck D put it, the "CNN for black people," is now a disseminator of filth, uncleanness and impurity. Corporate Black male rappers – powered by big name industries – operate like cranked-up robots whose sole purpose is the further degradation of Black women. With the much publicized [studies](#) claiming 72% of Hip-Hop's consumers to be White kids, with 80% of that being suburban White females, one wonders for whom the proverbial "studio gangsters" flex their [steroid-laden](#) muscles.

The triple evils of BET, VH1 and MTV have wreaked more havoc – in the 21st century – upon the Black psyche than at any other period in entertainment history. Under the umbrella of Viacom, owned by the 85-year-old White Sumner Redstone, BET, VH1 and MTV have risen to great heights as the primary source of amusement for the 18-35 demographic. Even more foul is the reality that BET – also know also known as "Black Evil Television" or "Black Embarrassment Television" – has extended that margin to accommodate, through marketing schemes, kids as young as 9 years. old.

Like every rotten apple, BET was once a ripe beacon of illumination and intellectual stimulation. At a certain period in its formation, the now withering BET entertained a diversity of programs and a line-up embroiled in novelty. As the late Notorious B.I.G. once quipped, "Damn, sh-- done changed." With long-axed variety shows including, "Our Voices with Bev Smith," "BET Tonight with Tavis Smiley," "BET Tonight with Ed Gordon," "BET Nightly News," "Teen Summit" and "Lead Story," it seemed odd that Black Entertainment Television would, in a pathetic move, attempt to substantiate the magnitude of such loss with the addition of a weekly half-hour political talk show, hosted by noted activist, Jeff Johnson. In 2007, many activists in the Black Community grew weary of BET's stubborn reluctance to feed its viewers healthy material, and therefore employed numerous avenues to send a strong message of resistance to the corporate monsters – mostly white – whose programming decisions are wiping out the consciousness of an entire generation.

One of such activists, Opio Osokoni, created an international "Turn off Channel Zero" (TOCZ) movement in mid 2007. Through a self-produced documentary, Osokoni searched for answers to the over-saturation of Black male buffoonery on Viacom and the mainstream media at large. The documentary featured a panel of acclaimed activists such as *Public Enemy* member Professor Griff, Hip Hop journalist Davey D, Last Poet's Abiodun Oyewole and Morgan State University Professor Ray Winbush. In less than 80 minutes, Turn off Channel Zero was able to accomplish what most mega-budget Hollywood scripts constantly fail in fulfilling. It exposed the corporate characters that pull the strings behind big media companies.

One intriguing development was the fact that most of those forces, who now sit atop the Hip-Hop and "urban" industry, are Caucasian or non-black. These corporate criminals are, without a doubt, the chief culprits in the continual cheapening of the Black Community's integrity. With the stroke of a pen, they have outlawed positive/uplifting imagery, and promoted – with full force – the incessant caricature of Black life that has grown into a normative state on most entertainment and News channels. Rosa Clemente, V.P. nominee of the Green Party, [spoke out eloquently](#) against this reality in a 2005 protest of the Hip-Hop station, Hot 97. "Believe me, when you look at Emmis.com, and you see the 7 top executives of Emmis Communication, they are all white men over the age of 50, programming poison to our children," Clemente said. "As a new mother, with a two-month old, I refuse to let these companies, these corporations, call my daughter a bitch, a hoe, a nigger. It's over. It's not about 'free speech.' It's about your peddling drugs into the mind of our community. What you do is addicting our children to violence." Another sobering finding, that TOCZ uncovered, is the reality that White corporate executives have always found – and would always find – Black males who would readily submit themselves for the usage of the devil.

Many older Blacks are familiar with *Stepin' Fetchit* and the horror of minstrel shows. White directors, in the 1800s, formulated a plan to keep their pale-faced audiences everlastingly entertained. The way they figured it, if Black men soon resolved their internal battle with self-hatred/self esteem and decided to abruptly refuse the role of "lawn jockey" for White-owned media production companies, white actors could simply darken their faces with cosmetic products and perform in a way they believed was natural to Black people – that of drunkenness, laziness, ignorance and incompetence. Luckily for the swine, locating Black men who perceived their prime objective in life to be that of lackeys and coons for White satisfaction has proved to be no daunting task.

In the '70s, CBS found it amusing to promote a sitcom called "Good Times." The premise of the show was apparently to propagate the concept that a family with unpaid bills, horrible living conditions, insufficient food, and domestic commotion was somehow dwelling in "Good Times." As expected, the cast of gifted characters was incomplete without a silly-acting son whose self-obsession, poor taste and preoccupation with promiscuity was accommodated, and sometimes encouraged, by the loving, yet misaligned set of parents. It was also in the '70s that NBC 'made a killing' with the variety show, *The Flip Wilson Show*. A show which, amongst other factors, was most popular for the *Geraldine Jones* skit, featuring the host, Clerow Wilson Jr. reduced to the role of a sharp-tongued black woman who was devoid of any sense of personal responsibility and always retorted – when caught – "The devil made

me do it!"

This phenomenon of Black men unashamedly embracing offers that require appearances in dresses and drags have blossomed into a cash-magnet enterprise. Tyler Perry (Madea) and Martin Lawrence (Big Momma's House), two very famous comedians, are perhaps the most treasonous in reprising self-imposed roles, where the mocking and open denigration of Black women (whether consciously or subconsciously) is entertained as "humor." It is somewhat ironic that these two acts are most beloved by Black women, whose mass consumption of "mammy-like" stereotypes helped make Perry and Lawrence instant multi-millionaires.

It is no surprise that the same media which revels in the destruction of Black male identity seeks to fulfill the same with today's most important Black male: Sen. Barack Obama. More disturbing is the reality that Sen. Obama, like prominent Black public figures before him, is too uninformed to acknowledge the degree to which such acquiescence would redound toward the disadvantage of generations to come after him. One thing is for certain however: Black folks of consciousness have work cut out for them. For *Change* is not a cheap political exercise, but rather a unified hegemonic force against a system of convention.

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BlackCommentator.com Columnist, Tolu Olorunda, is an 18-year-old local activist/writer and a Nigerian immigrant. [Click here](#) to reach Mr. Olorunda.

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