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# Value Driven: An Analysis of Attitudes and Values Via BET Programming Past and Present

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VALUE DRIVEN: AN ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES AND VALUES VIA BLACK  
ENTERTAINMENT TELEVISION (BET) PROGRAMMING PAST AND PRESENT

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
Communication Studies

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by  
Sasha Marc Rice  
March 2015

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Mary Fong, Committee Chair, Communication Studies

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the general attitudes of African Americans towards the programming disseminated on the Black Entertainment Television (BET) network past and present (pre-Viacom/post-Viacom). The mass media company Viacom acquired BET from African American founder Robert L. Johnson in 1980. BET under Johnson took pride in its ability to provide sophisticated, value-driven, and positive programming for African Americans. This study looks to see if the cultural values at BET have changed via its programming since Viacom's purchase. This study utilized social media to survey 100 participants who were born prior to 1984 who identify as African American or mixed African American and are familiar with BET. This paper uses social identity theory to examine the attitudes that the African American participants hold towards BET as they use their value-set to negotiate their social identity via their attitudes with the content shown on BET. This research reveals the importance of viewing cultures as heterogeneous as well as the importance of cultural groups such as African Americans controlling the dissemination of their own cultural messages and images. A paired T-test analysis revealed statistically a significant difference of participant attitudes of BET in the past (1980-1999) and the present (2000-2015). The participants therefore rated BET higher on the average in the past when BET was black owned (pre-Viacom), as opposed to the present now that BET is white owned (post-Viacom).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my ancestors--those who fought for my right to write this thesis and attain an education at any level available. To my Grandmother who told me stories about how she had to pick cotton before being able to attend school; as a grown woman she went back to school to attain a degree and encouraged me to do the same. To my mother who planted in me a healthy sense of pride in my culture and encouraged me to go to school no matter what the odds were. Thank you Mom for the years you supported me as I attained all of my degrees during some of the most stressful and trying times we experienced as a family--these degrees are as much yours as they are mine. I'd also like to dedicate this paper to myself, there were many dreams dashed that I had wished for as a little girl for myself as an adult that the tornadoes in life destroyed. I may not have gotten the Ivy League degree as I hoped or become the successful woman I'd hoped I'd be by this age (37), but I didn't give up and because of that I have achieved my dreams of traveling the world and attaining my degrees (AA, AS, two BAs, and a Master's). Therefore, I pat myself on the back for every stage in my journey when I reminded myself not to settle for less than my standards. And last but never least; I thank my Supreme Being and Higher Power, YHWH (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). There are no words to express my thank You for how Your favor has granted me this journey and all the wisdom that I have learned beyond the books. I look forward to the next chapter of my life's journey with You continuing as Captain at the helm. I love You LORD!

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

In this era of blurring the lines between reality and fantasy within entertainment, many of the behaviors and lifestyles that are depicted in music and television today are attributed to a demoralizing of the traditional values within the African American community. An example of this phenomenon can be seen in well over 30 years of existence of the media channel BET; also known as Black Entertainment Television. BET began as a channel dedicated to the African American community with programming that was focused on positive images and messages of African Americans—to an African American demographic. It was a channel that once eschewed the demoralizing and negative stereotypes of the lower social grade within the Black community.

However, once it was acquired by a prominent mass media company, BET no longer disseminates positive images and messages, received backlash from previous devotees of the channel for its demeaning programming, and has become a disappointment to many in the African American community. In this paper, I will explore the history of BET from its conception in 1980 (when it was owned by its African American creators and owners (husband and wife) Robert and Sheila Johnson to its purchase by Viacom in 2000 when it became *white* owned. I will argue that since Viacom purchased BET, the channel transitioned

into a medium which no longer communicates via its programming—images and messages that are based upon traditional African American values and has thus developed a negative association in the minds of African Americans who hold to those values.

Instead, the channel communicates images and messages that are the antithesis of traditional African American values and BET's original mission. In the last several years, executives at BET have been attempting to right the wrongs that demoralizing programs have caused to BET's reputation. However, the attitudes towards BET as a voice of the Black community has taken a negative turn that will be difficult to fix. This paper aims to support that African Americans who have been watching BET since the 1980s--and well into the 90s--are not pleased with BET and hold a negative attitude towards the channel due to its negative programming. In the literature review, an analysis of the traditional morals and values of the Black community from a historical perspective will be explored. Highlighting these standards will make the differing attitudes about BET's programming more evident; as well as reveal why these images create a positive or negative attitude with African Americans within the Black community; especially as it pertains to Black media that is supposed to be targeting and representing the African American community in a positive light. The methodology for this research is a questionnaire-survey created to determine the attitudes that African American participants have about the BET channel past and present.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this work is to explore the diverse attitudes African Americans have towards images and messages about Black media—this research will focus on Black Entertainment Television (aka BET). The significance of this study also serves the purpose of dispelling the myth that the Black community is heterogeneous by revealing the differing “attitudes and values” (Burke & Stets, 2000, p. 3) that exists within this unique group by exploring African American media and value sets. The paper also explores whether or not an ethnic change in ownership of Black media “changes the identity, and changes the perspective” (“BET Sold”, 2000, p. 3) of BET for African Americans. The amount of research having been done on this topic to the researcher’s knowledge is scant thus making the topic of this research a study of significance to the field of Integrated Marketing Communication.

## Theory

This research is constructed upon the theoretical concept of social identification. Burke and Stets (1998) state that “identity theory has been used to examine group phenomena in terms of the attitudes and values held by members of a racial group or age group” (Burke & Stets, 2000, p. 3). “A recent statement on the self-categorization process in social identity theory reaffirms the idea that the self is not seen as emerging from the reactions and expectations of others in the situation but from the cognitive process of social comparison” (Burke & Stets,

2000, p. 6). Thus, this research aims to convey how the images and messages (past and present) disseminated via BET influences the differing attitudes African Americans have towards BET messages are negotiated within each person's set of values to arrive to a self perception; thereby, comparing their personal social identity to the content being shown on the BET channel.

### Research Limitations

The researcher's lack of time for collecting a sufficient amount of the surveys in order to reach information saturation with a greater number of participants is a limitation of this study. The quantitative method of this research can only make assumptions concerning the relationship between the participants' attitudes toward values and their attitudes towards BET.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Ethical Strivings and Traditional African American Values

In the debate between two prominent civil rights leaders, Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, one defining principle was highlighted between the different views of these powerful men; morality. The popularity of Dr. King's peaceful march was guided by moral principles; as was Malcolm's bold statement of "any means necessary." Contrary to the belief that he was inciting vengeance motivated by rage and immoral principles, Malcolm's answer to the immorality of what he considered the enemy's (White racists) immoral ways—was self-defense (Martin Luther King & Malcolm X, 2007, p. 32). However, this did not stop those of a lower "social grade" (DuBois, 1903, p. 141) in the Black community, from attempting to use the "any means..." slogan as a means to arouse trouble and incite violence.

As far back as 100 years ago, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois voiced his concern about a change he saw brewing within the Black community that he called "social grades" (DuBois, 1903, p.141). He stated, "So great an economic and social revolution swept the South in '63 [1863] meant a weeding out among the Negroes of the incompetent and vicious, the beginning of a differentiation of social grades." (Du Bois, 1903, p. 141) He went on to say, "Thus we have two great and hardly reconcilable streams of thought and ethical strivings" (DuBois,

1903, p. 160). In the same way that Malcolm X represents an entirely different image of the civil rights movement than Dr. King, the dichotomy of *ethical strivings* between members of the African American community concerning moral codes and representation in the media of the Black community still continues on even today.

The ethical striving of African Americans who hold to a high moral standard based on traditional African American values, continue to reject and condemn any representation in the Black community that oppose them. Lifestyles, images and messages that are contrary to the values that have been the foundation of the Black experience (which are traditional values of family, respect, passing down Black history, integrity before money, education, honesty, hard-work guided by ethics, having a sense of community, religious principles, and positive representatives) are considered negative, stereotypical, and demeaning of Black culture. Any image contrary to the “black folk traditions” (Barboza, 1998, p. 581) is considered undignified and disrespectful to the memory of those in the past who struggled and fought against the oppressive regime, derogatory images, and vicious treatment motivated by racism.

During the times of progression, when African Americans were developing their own communities and were finally able to work at keeping their families together as a unit, there was a common meeting of the minds of those who wanted to be decent people and become full-fledged members of society. Due to the status of their low totem pole position, it was always understood that to be

Black meant that one had to work twice as hard as anyone else and had to be even more morally grounded than other Americans in the country. A great emphasis was on the exterior, to look presentable and to be “clean” (Thornton, 1995, p. 50) and to add to a clean presentation “a mind to live by being honest, industrious, frugal, and self-sacrificing remains...where you shall surely reap thy character’s worth” (Barboza, 1998, p. 482). Anyone who had a mind opposite of that, “a mind to die through sloth, ignorance, and folly” (Barboza, 1998, p. 482) is to become “intolerable” (Barboza, 1998, p. 482).

A high value was placed on “dignity and discipline” (Barboza, 1998, p. 478). The understanding that “values cannot be calculated in ledger, figures and property” (Barboza, 1998, p. 460) was to remind the youth that character is more valuable than currency. Not without examples to flesh out their wisdom, revered and cherished figures such as “Fred Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Thomas Aquinas, Albert Einstein, Booker T. Washington, Mary McLeod Bethune, Shakespeare, and Socrates” (Barboza, 1998, p. 484) were reminders that great human beings were not remembered for how much they were worth economically, but were appraised for their greatness and their contributions to mankind (Barboza, 1998, p. 484). Thus, the true definition of a “quality of life” is to “know the full joy of living” (Barboza, 1998). “If it is money, material wealth, houses and land, stocks and bonds, silver and gold—as important as these are—if these are central in our lives, human values become secondary” (Barboza, 1998, p. 484).

## Family and Respect

The vicious authority of White owners toward African Americans during the time of slavery fragmented the Black family. There was “no value on black kinship” (Barboza, 1998, p. 505) and slave owners tore apart entire families, “separating husband and wife, or selling off children, parents, siblings, or grandparents” (Barboza, 1998, p. 505). Despite this historical fragmentation of families (Barboza, 1998, p. 505) and the effects that may still exist within the Black family today--the Black family “continues to thrive” (Barboza, 1998, p. 505). This is especially true in African American families. African Americans usually have what is considered an “old school” mentality about what it means to raise a family. *Respect* is a must in Black families and is a “time-honored moral value in the African American community” (Barboza, 1998, p. 793). In Black families, elders are to be revered and children are taught to show respect to them at all times. And they are also taught to “respect one another as a matter of course” (Barboza, 1998, p. 793). This comes from the thought that human decency is to be shared amongst members of the community in a world where-as African Americans—they were once “reviled by others” (Barboza, 1998, p. 793).

Thus, when African Americans speak to each other, they spoke with respectful endearments. According to Maya Angelou, “in the slave society Mariah became Aunt Mariah and Joe became Uncle Joe. Young girls were called Sister, Sis, or Tutta, Boys became, brother, Bubba, and Bro, and Buddy” (Barboza, 1998, p. 823). “When African Americans choose to speak sweetly to each other,

not only do the voices fall in register, but there is an unconscious increase in music between the speakers. In fact, a conversation between friends can sound as melodic as a scripted song” (Barboza, 1998, p. 823).

The parents in morally value driven households (whether there is one or both parents in the household) are determined to see their children succeed and will make self-sacrifices in order for them to reach their goals. In the book (and film), *The Ditchdigger’s Daughter: A Black Family’s Astonishing Success Story* set in the 1950s written by Yvonne S. Thornton, M.D., she retells the amazing true story of her parents sacrificial love and determination to see her and her 5 sisters become physicians. She shares her father’s many anecdotes and words of wisdom that helped propel her and her sisters to becoming successful independent women; two physicians, an attorney, a dentist, a stenographer, and Nurse.

She made it plain that her parents’ strict-traditional moral code and determination molded her and her sisters into “becoming successes by a father who labored at two jobs and a mother who cleaned houses” (Thornton, 1995, p. ix). “There are millions of black families, as well as families of all races, colors and creeds with working class parents who just want a better life for their children and are willing to make the sacrifices needed for their children to succeed” (Thornton, 1995, p. x). However, in the “black subculture” (Thornton, 1995, p. 50) where the “small minded” (Thornton, 1998, p. 50) dwell, the youth find “little or no courtesy at home, make exodus into the streets filled with violent self-revulsion

and exploding vulgarity” (Barboza, 1998, p. 823). Families like the Thornton’s and the myriad of others who worked their way out of poverty into prominence were built on the main principle—respect and love. The children who turn to the street mentality do so because they lack affection and direction from a firm loving hand. “Any man or woman who has a family knows that man lives by affection. There may be material gain galore, but if there is no affection, no love in the home, the family falls apart” (Barboza, 1998, p. 484).

### Money

The importance of family and respect were never to be replaced by the most important substance that made up the quality of one’s life. In traditional Black culture, money ought never to substitute for character. No matter how much money someone reaped, if it was earned dishonestly or if it was earned through “selling out” the culture--it wasn’t worth any value in a traditional African American home. Anyone who placed money over values and community would be an embarrassment and disappointment to family and the community for having forsaken the core values of their culture in order to earn bread. An example of this can be seen in the film, *Sparkle* (Akil, Chase, & Akil, 2012), when the character “Satin” played by comedian Mike Epps is heckled off of the stage in an African American night club. Satin gained wealth and made a name for himself as a comedian for White audiences. His comedic routines were full of derogatory jokes aimed at the Black community. Having broken the traditional

code to not sell out the culture and to put money before values—he became a pariah within the community.

Bell Hooks, an author and activist, was well aware of a shift that was taking place in the Black community as priorities began to change from the importance of cultural values to money; "...we need to examine the impact of materialistic thinking in black lives. Nowadays many black folks believe it is fine to do anything that will make money. Many of us have lost a needed sense of ethics" (Barboza, 1998, p. 583). In her writing, *The Chitlin Circuit* Hooks recalls a character in the historical play *A Raisin in the Sun*, asked the question, "Since when did money become life" (Barboza, 1998, p. 583)? Hooks goes on to say,

Black people must critically examine our obsession with material gain and consumer goods. We need to talk about the way living simply may be a necessary aspect of our collective self-discovery. We need to look at the way addiction to drugs, food, alcohol and a host of other substances undermines our capacity to relate to one another. (Barboza, 1998, p. 583)

Hooks believed that the perpetual poverty experienced by ninety percent of African Americans who came from in the deep South (Barboza, 1998, p. 581) has had a negative effect on certain members of the Black community--in that it is motivating them to see *money* as a mark of success instead of *integrity*.

### Education

Amongst the many values that have been the backbone of the African American community and have been the structural character of culture (West,

1993, p. 13), the “Chief among these are a reverence for education and the call to serve and elevate the black community” (Crouch and Benjamin, 2003, p. 21); like Dr. Dubois, who embraced other core cultural values treasured by African Americans (Crouch and Benjamin, 2003, p. 21), elders in the community believed that the means to succeeding in society as fully-functional well-adjusted members of society was to get an education. African American children, especially in the 1960’s and after could not escape the mantra of “education is the key” and the need for a college degree as a safety-net; because in life they will always need “something to fall back on” if their other endeavors (usually artistic and entrepreneurial) that did not involve an education were unsuccessful. The foundation of this education imperative as the key to success began in the days of successful educators such as W.E.B. DuBois.

Dr. DuBois, believed that individuals he called, the “Talented Tenth” (DuBois, 1903, xxiii), a group of college educated African Americans like himself (a PhD graduate from Harvard) including Carter G. Woodson (the “Father of Black History” week that eventually became Black History month; he is also the second African American to attain a PhD from Harvard; Brown, n.d., para. 2), Edward A. Bouchet (the first African American to earn a PhD in America—earned at Yale University; “His degree was the sixth doctorate in physics ever awarded in that field”; Yale.edu, 2014, para. 1), and other educated African Americans could “lead the untutored masses to the promised land of freedom and equality in their American house of bondage” (Crouch & Benjamin, 2003 p. 123).



This educational imperative became even more of a mandate upon Black youth as it became obvious that the most powerful and effective leaders in the community were individuals who were properly educated. Hence, the push and at times burden upon the shoulders of the youth was to gain an education not just for the child's ticket to success in society but also as a means of helping the Black community progress as a whole. Older generations constantly reminded the younger generations of the impossibility of an African American to get an education in the past. And heralded self-educated men (and women) such as Frederick Douglass, who despite the odds became great due to a desire to learn; thus, the collective thought of "eradicating inferiority" (Barboza, 1998, p. 243) and closing the door to menial work and opening the door to better opportunities was all riding on an education.

However, not just any education would do. Being trained by educators such as those who were considered part of "the talented tenth" (DuBois, 1903, xxiii) (degree awarded individuals) or being educated in *good schools* (a euphemism for white schools) was the goal. Parents in the Black community like that of Donald Thornton who was dedicated to seeing his daughters become Doctors, believed his children "should go to school with children who had goals, or whose parents had goals for them" (Thornton, 1998, p. 19). Although the debate in the Black community about whether or not the Plessy vs. Ferguson stance of "separate but equal" (Zirkel and Cantor, 2004, p. 4) was a better position education-wise for African American children (segregated schools

enabled Black educators to teach curriculum which included positive perspectives on African American history and culture) or if the Brown vs. Board of Education stance of desegregating schools was the answer--one thing was not up for debate, that Black kids needed the same fair chance and opportunities that white kids had.

Many parents like Thornton held to this same mentality, “the white people see to it that they get the best, so if we want our kids to do well, they’ve got to go to where the white kids are [...] Our kids’ll watch the white kids...and they’ll hitch a ride on their wagon” (Thornton, 1995, p. 19). In entertainment, one can see in movies such as *School Daze* by Spike Lee and *Higher Learning* by John Singleton and television shows such as *A Different World* and *The Cosby Show* (both produced by Bill Cosby--where all of the Huxtable children are college bound; i.e. Sandra Huxtable to Princeton and Denise Huxtable to a predominantly Black fictitious college called, Hillman) the dichotomy of *theirs* or *our* educational system, the carrying of the mandate of a higher-education upon the shoulders of the youth to make their parents proud, and the vocal presence of elders in the ears of the younger generations to pursue a higher-education because once upon a time it was not an option.

### Religious Principles

As important as education was to the Black community, one necessity in life trumped them all and that was spirituality. A statement given by the great educator Mary McCleod Bethune adequately describes the spiritual foundation

that governed the Black community, “I had faith in a living God, faith in myself, and a desire to serve” (Barboza, 1998, p. 456). She goes on to say, “In other words, many must live by faith in God—faith to believe that God sustains good and not evil, peace and not war, truth and not lies, justice and not injustice, integrity, and not dishonesty” (Barboza, 1998, p. 487). It is no secret that faith or what is now called *spirituality* has always been the guiding force of the African American community. This is evident in the famous and awe-inspiring negro-spirituals, the soul-stirring voices of gifted African American singers in Black Southern churches, and in the plantation fields which prompted the memorable line, “Well, White people may have the pianos, but the colored folks got the voices” in the movie *The Little Foxes*. (“The Little Foxes,” 2014, para. 6).

Spirituals (based on Biblical principles) and hymns have been a soundtrack for the values that seeded the soil of African American hopes of freedom and equality. Whether they were used to hide strategic messages concerning the Underground Railroad such as *Follow the Drinking Gourd* or to encourage freedom-fighters during the Civil Rights movement with songs such as *We Shall Overcome*, the religious foundation remained the basis for communicating the collective faith and moral values of the Black community. It is no wonder, that the majority of artists that have had the most prominent success world-wide in both Black and White communities like Mahalia Jackson and Aretha Franklin were those whose artistic background had its genesis in the Black church—singing gospel music. No matter how popular an African American

artist becomes, there remains an expectation within the community to hear a personal appreciation and gratitude toward God in some way, shape, or form.

Historically, in the African American community the deity of the African American faith was Jesus Christ. Prior to the transporting of Africans to America, “African religious concepts and rituals, such as ancestor worship, initiation rites, spirit possession, healing and funeral rituals, magic rituals, etc.” (Swatos, 2014, para. 2) were the dominant spiritual practices before many began to convert to Christianity. Although slave owners were “reluctant to foster the conversion of their slaves to Christianity because they feared it might provide them with notions of equality and freedom, [...] they became convinced that a selective interpretation of the Gospel would foster docility in their subjects” (Swatos, 2014, para. 3).

Unfortunately, for the slave masters, the former thought was true; the “slaves internalized portions of their master’s ideology” (Swatos, 2014, para. 3) by manifesting the belief “that Jesus Christ was a meek, humble, and compassionate figure with whom they could converse about their earthly tribulations” (Swatos, 2014, para. 3). As can be heard in spirituals, Jesus Christ by His Spirit would become a formidable spiritual guide who would lead them to “battle against their oppressors” (Swatos, 2014, para. 3) contrary to being a being a meek and lowly servant that taught them to remain docile and accepting of their oppressive position. “Conversely, it is important to note that Christianity served as an inspiration in the three best known slave rebellions in U.S. history,

namely, those led by Gabriel Proesser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner” (Swatos, 2014, para. 3).

It was the coming of Malcolm X and his defiant-intelligence that adequately packaged the indignation of how many African Americans felt about “the Black condition” (West, 1993, p. 58); more-so for those in the Black community who were tired of the silent suffering that biblical principles encouraged. Malcolm opened the door of opportunity for those tired of “getting over” (West, 1993, p. 10) in a Christ-like manner, to a more personal and honest reaction of anger and if necessary physical force. On the platform of a Black interpretation of Islam, inspired by his mentor, the “Honorable Elijah Muhammad” (Nation of Islam, n.d., para. 1)--as he is known in the Nation of Islam--Malcolm was the spearhead that helped the Nation of Islam grow “rapidly, in part due to the militant preaching of Malcolm X during the early 1960s” (Swatos, 2014, para. 12).

Unfortunately, in this “post-modern culture” (West, 1993, p. 10), nihilism has been the new mentality of generations today. Where in times past, the grand concern of elders concerning the youths sway from religious principles was secular music; the popularization of “the seductive blues songs of the devil” (West, 1993, p. 20) which would lead to soul and R&B music, was turning singers raised in churches from singing songs “intended to praise the Lord” (Cataliotti, 1995, p. 49) to singing “the devil’s music” (Cataliotti, 1995, p. 49). The popularity of artists like Sam Cooke and other acts from the popular Motown and Stax

record labels sparked a concern within African American homes that caused many African American parents to ban “the devil’s music” (Cataliotti, 1995, p. 49) music from their households. Gospel artists such as *The Winans* family (which birthed sibling groups *The Winans*, *Bebe and CeCe Winans*, *Angie and Debbie Winans*) as well as popular 90s secular urban artists such as *Jodeci* (a 4 member group of two-sets of brothers—the Haley and the DeGrate brothers—with gospel roots) were forbidden to listen to secular music. It was rumored at the beginning of Jodeci’s success, that the father of the founding member of Jodeci (Donald DeGrate aka *DeVante Swing*) had no desire to listen to any of the secular music created by their sons (DeVante’s brother Dalvin DeGrate also known as *Mr. Dalvin* is also a member of *Jodeci*).

In an 1992 interview with the Baltimore Sun, Reverend Donald Degrate Sr., shared his dislike for his sons’ R&B music despite the success of “Their debut album, ‘*Forever My Lady*’” (Knight-Ridder, 1992, para. 1), selling “1.2 million copies” (Knight-Ridder, 1992, para. 1) and their single *Stay*, being “No. 1 on the Billboard R&B chart” (Knight-Ridder, 1992, para. 1). In the article, the author stated:

Their parents, Donald, 50, and Mary, 45, believe God would rather have their sons inspiring new believers with gospel music, instead of inspiring new lovers with spend-the-night ballads like ‘*Stay*.’[...] The DeGrates have never listened to Jodeci’s platinum-selling album. ‘They would rather us be in church no matter how much success we have,’ said Dalvin. ‘I respect

them for that. They never liked R&B music before, and they won't bend just because we're their kids.' (Knight-Ridder, 1992, para. 4)

Parents of the earlier generations had justified concerns that the influence of the arts—preferably music-- and the messages that they disseminated were a threat to the moral foundation of black folk tradition. As the new-millennium set in, *the devil's music* via R&B would seem like lullabies compared to the “self-destructive wantonness” (West, 1993, p. 10) and violent themes brought on by certain sects of hip-hop. The days of Black artists singing secular music and hypocritically thanking God at music ceremonies for their success for singing *the devils music*, would be a far cry from the blasphemous messages created by the nihilistic artists of today.

### Hard Work

While instilling the importance of God, African American parents were instilling the value of hard work; “...if you fool around or get lazy, then you'll do the housework because that's what you'll be doing the rest of your life” (Thornton, 1995, p. 37). Laziness and slothfulness have always been intolerable to Black elders. African American children were raised to believe that only hard work could get them where they wanted to go. This hard work was usually used in the context of an education:

A lot of Black people don't want to work,' [...] they'd rather party and say studyin' ain't gonna help, that it don't do no good to work hard. When someone says that to me, I say, 'Have you ever worked hard?' It's like

gravity. It's a basic law. You work hard, you'll make it. (Thornton, 1995, p. 100)

Due to the heavy toil of working in the fields, of scraping to get by during the reconstruction era after slavery, and during the days of fighting during the Civil Rights movement for a fair shake, African American parents made a religious ritual to remind their children of how hard they had it in order to survive and provide their families with a decent living. Years of hard toiling rarely gave way to slothfulness for older generations. And they wanted to make for sure that their children did not become complacent as their generation was reaping the benefits of their struggles for equality.

As frustrating as the racist system was in America that made it a point to sabotage black autonomy, the Black community was determined to raise children who earned their own keep:

You got to not go around with a chip on your shoulder, like, you owe me 'cause I'm black and I come over on a slave ship. Nobody don't owe you a thing. You owe yourself the best you can do for yourself. (Thornton, 1995, p. 100)

African American parents did not want their children choosing to waste their lives on hedonism as a way to appreciate their freedom. The "subculture" (Thornton, 1995, p. 50) of "barrelhouse niggers" (Thornton, 1995, p. 156) was not welcomed into traditional African American homes. There existed a distinct divide



between those who wanted to continue on toward upward mobility for the community and those who wanted to simply “get by.”

There were those in the Black community who did not see the eradication of the laws of segregation as a means to become complacent, but as a means to keep building the Black community while pushing the next generation to higher heights:

...it is time for the black race to forget about rhetoric and instead show what we are capable of doing. The testing will surely go on for the next generation and the next, but each time we meet the test, we'll climb another rung of the ladder until finally we arrive at parity, having earned our place rather than pleading or demanding that it be given to us.

(Thornton, 1995, p. 182)

However, the negative changes that DuBois spoke of and Cornel West speaks of in his book, *Race Matters* (1993), concerning the opposing members of the community who were and are a threat to the values and upward mobility goals of African Americans were rearing their head. Although the names change throughout the years, there was a common understanding that traditional African Americans had about those in the Black community who did not fit the moral code of the Black community. Dr. Yvonne Thornton (1995) recounts how her mother and her husband's mother (his name Shearwood—whom she was dating at the time of this anecdote and met at the Columbia University medical school)

would call carousing members of the Black community “barrelhouse niggers” (p.156):

My mother used to talk about barrelhouse niggers, people who were always dancing and drinking. ‘In twenty years,’ she said, ‘they’ll be just the same as they are today, or they’ll be dead. Shearwood’s mother said, My son is going to be a doctor. He’s going to be a doctor. He’s no barrelhouse nigger.’ Shearwood and I used to laugh and say, ‘Did your mother know my mother?’ (Thornton, 1995, p. 156)

In his 1996 HBO stand-up comedy special “Chris Rock: Bring the Pain,” Chris Rock reiterates this common knowledge that African Americans have about this sub-group in their community. In the routine “Black People vs. Niggas,” Rock describes the characteristics of “niggas” from that of “Black people” in order to articulate the divide:

There’s some sh\*\* going on with Black people right now. There’s a Civil War going on with Black people...and there’s two sides. There’s “Black people” and there’s “niggas.” Niggas have to go! Anytime Black people want to have a good time, ignorant a\*\* niggas fu\*\* it up! Can’t do sh\*\* without some ignorant niggas fu\*\*ing it up! [...] Books are like kryptonite to a nigga. [...] Niggas hate knowledge. [...] Niggas just ignorant and enjoy being ignorant. [...] Niggas are singing welfare carols. (Truesdell & Bull, 1996)

Although Rock is speaking from an insider's view of Black culture and using his talented ability to tell the truth in a comedic fashion, it still carries too much weight to ignore on a serious note. His mentioning of welfare carols is in relation to a rap group by the name of "Bone Thugs in Harmony," whose 1999 single "1<sup>st</sup> of the Month" is an ode celebrating welfare checks. These kinds of artistic expression by popular artists are impressionable upon African American youth.

The concern of morally driven African Americans is that the image of the Black community is being replaced by this sub-group of *niggas*. A group who are of the mind that education is not a necessity, values are relative, and that however income is made is of no consequence--as long as their bills are paid—"that it is fine to do anything that will make money" (Barboza, 1998, p. 583). This kind of mentality compared to that of the traditional mindset has now permeated the mainstream in the term *ghetto*. Although a study of the term "nigga" (Fong & McEwen, 2004) did not reveal any use of the term as "ghetto," the study did reveal that it is used in a "negative sense" (Fong, M. & McEwen, K., 2004, p.176); as is the case with Chris Rocks' comedy routine. However, many participants who choose to use the term "nigga" as reported in Fong & McEwen's (2004) study said it is primarily used to make reference to their close friends or significant other in an endearing way that they identify they identify themselves as the in-group.

*Ghetto* has become a euphemism for immorally driven African Americans for the word *niggas* because the term defines the same characteristics as *niggas*. *Niggas* are those who believe that receiving welfare checks is not a means to an end but simply an ongoing means for living; those individuals who believe that the virtue of hard work does not involve an education but through (immoral and unethical) entrepreneurial street efforts such as *hustling* (i.e. “anything you need to do to make money...be it sellin [sic] cars, drugs, ya body. If you makin [sic] money, you hustling [sic]”; Urban Dictionary, 2014, def.1) or by “obtaining [something] by forceful action or persuasion” (Google, 2014, def. 1]). This new definition of making money “by any means necessary” (West, 1993, p. 10) takes Malcolm’s slogan to a whole other plain of thought. The value of hard work as a *hustler* is a constant theme today (especially in entertainment) that has replaced the traditional black folk virtue of earning a living through a means that breeds dignity and respect.

### Black History

Along with dignity and respect, came the importance of knowing one’s history. According to Mary McCleod Bethune,

Another important practice we need to reconstruct is the sharing of stories that taught history, family genealogy, and facts about the African-American past. [...] Today young people often have no knowledge of black history and are unable to identify important black leaders like Malcolm X” (Barboza, 1998, p. 583); assimilation has so divided the black community

that many young people today do not have a clear concept of what the “black experience” actually is. (Barboza, 1998, p. 575)

With the popularization and influx of the *nigga* or *barrel house nigger* (Thornton, 1995, p. 156) mentality, there has been a loss of what is considered to be the “traditional black folk experience” (Barboza, 1998, p. 581). (Although there is debate as to what constitutes the black experience, in this study, the research focuses on the varying mentalities that exist within the Black community and are measured against the traditional values that segment the African American community from those who deviate from those values. Thus, the “multiple black experiences” [Barboza, 1998, p. 580] highlighted by opposing values helps to account for the “specificity and diversity” [Barboza, 1998, p. 580] of the African American experience written in this study). Generations today are growing up feeding off of entertainment as a means to understand Black culture; instead of learning about historical figures of the Black community such as Dr. DuBois, Frederick Douglass, George Washington Carver, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, etc., the generations today are missing the richness of their culture that involves more than knowing who Dr. King is.

In an episode of the television show, *The Fresh Prince*, Will Smith’s character (*Will*) felt that his reading of Malcolm X’s biography several times meant he was knowledgeable about the Black experience. It wasn’t until taking a Black history course, taught by his *Aunt Viv* did he realize he did not know much about the Black experience. *Aunt Viv* lovingly but sternly admonished *Will* that

reading Malcolm's biography, wearing clothing with the X on it that referenced Malcolm, and shouting slogans such as *by any means necessary* was not respecting Black history, but *trivialized* it.

With popular artists today such as rapper Lil Wayne who used the horrific murder of Emmett Till as a means to describe his sexual prowess towards a woman (Washington, 2014, para. 3), rapper Niki Minaj who used a photo of Malcolm X looking out of his window with a rifle in his hand--during a time when his life and family were being threatened—with the caption of one of her songs entitled, "Looking A\*\* Nigga" as a caption (Coleman, 2014, para. 1), and business mogul Russell Simmons devaluing the legacy of Harriet Tubman by creating a sex tape parody video of the famed abolitionist (McCauley, 2013, para. 1); Will's adoration of Malcolm X and his literature makes his trivializing of the struggle look like a positive effort. After members of the African American community voiced their disgust and disapproval of Lil Wayne's and Niki Minaj's artistic choices, both issued apologies to the families of Emmett Till and Malcolm X.

However, the controversy created by Simmons' parody sparked outrage and disappointment within the African American community. An artist, Tina Martin Wyatt, insinuated that Simmons' act of creating this disrespectful piece of work was the equivalent of making him a "race traitor" (McCauley, 2013, para. 2). "Your parody of Aunt Harriet is not unlike parodies of African Americans by racist individuals in this country and others abroad" (McCauley, 2013, para. 3). "What is

worse is this parody is done by one from our own culture. [...] You have allowed yourself to become a tool for those who have sought to destroy us; you have played your role well" (McCauley, 2013, para. 3). Fashion designer Andre Leon Talley even went as far as to share his desire to have Russell Simmons forbidden from having a front row seat at New York's famed fashion week due to his disgust at Simmons' parody:

I don't think Russell Simmons should be seated on anybody's front row this week after having done that disgusting Harriet Tubman sex tape. He is a man of great achievement. He is a great philanthropist....why would he think it would be an honorable thing to do? He said he thought it was funny. That is not funny it is outrageously disrespectful to the legacy and history of Harriet Tubman and to the struggle. (Witherspoon, 2013, para. 5)

Despite Simmons' plea for forgiveness, many members of the Black community especially in the public eye were not so quick to receive his apologies. Harriet Tubman's direct descendant Rita Daniels, a great-great- niece was indifferent to Simmons' public apology and called him "crude and insensitive" (Tinuoye, 2013, para. 1). "In an emotionally-charged interview with "theGrio," (sic) Rita Daniels says, "When I looked at it [the Harriet Tubman sex tape] tears streamed down my eyes. This is a woman who helped people. She was not about this" (Tinuoye, 2013, para. 1).

Even amongst older generations, like Russell Simmons who is 56 at the time of this study, there exists the lower scale mentality. The moral traditional

mindset of African Americans in comparison to the non-traditional mindset has been a part of the Black community in every generation. The acceptance of traditional values and standards as a means of living one's life is not determined by age, economic status, or celebrity status. Thus, the unfavorable mindset of individuals in the African American community can be found in every societal status there is.

### Representatives

As can be seen in the history of African American values, *representatives* are as potent as the values themselves; simply by virtue of what values they represent. As wonderful as it can be when a member of the community adequately reflects these great values by the excellence of their character and contributions to the community, when the values are negative, it can be devastating and abusive to the legacy of the Black experience. The enormous financial success of so many African Americans over the past several decades has closed the eyes of many in the Black community who see financial achievement as the epitome of success. When public figures such as Russell Simmons, Lil Wayne, and Niki Minaj take to disrespecting the Black legacy, the African American cultural divide is stirred (as was seen in the Russell Simmons debacle); when controversial events such as that aforementioned take place, the saliency of these events reveal the disturbing reality of the devaluing and eroding of the African American values that were once the pillars of the community. Whether it's the disrespect of African American figures or blasphemous disregard



for religious beliefs as can be seen with artists like Lil Wayne, Jay Z, Beyonce, etc. who profane the name of Christ by calling themselves *Yeezus*, (Lil Wayne's spin on the name of *Jesus*) or *Hova* (Jay-Z's slang name for *Jehovah*), or placing one's self in the place of Christ in the biblical image of *The Last Supper* as Beyonce did in an instagram photo in 2013 ("Beyonce's Last Supper," 2013, para. 1), the image of African Americans is being changed (these blasphemous gestures are popular means of communicating how iconic these artists believe themselves to be in this generation and in their genre of music).

However, these disrespectful gestures are causing a commotion amongst more traditionally minded African Americans who believe that immoral acts such as these in the Black community (public figures or citizens) need to be chastised publicly:

We indeed must criticize and condemn immoral acts of black people, but we must do so cognizant of the circumstances into which people are born and under which they live. By overlooking these circumstances, the new black conservatives fall into the trap of blaming black poor people for their predicament. (West, 1993, p. 85)

Unfortunately, in the Black community, there is a lot of blame placed at the feet of the poor and uneducated when clearly (as seen in the behaviors of the celebrities mentioned in this study) the immoral acts are beyond economic positioning.

According to Mary McCleod Bethune,

The arts remain one of the powerful, if not the most, powerful realms of cultural resistance, a space for awakening folks to critical consciousness and new vision. Crossover trends in black music, film, etc., that require assimilation have a devastating anti-black propagandistic impact. We need to call attention to those black artists who successfully attract diverse audiences without pandering to a white supremacist consumer market while simultaneously creating a value system where acquisition of wealth and fame are not the only measures of success. (Barboza, 1998, p. 583)

Thus, media that broadcast images which pander to these kinds of messages and images ostracize and offend a large percentage of the Black community. They also trivialize and degrade African Americans and their history. It would not be until the year of 1980, when the first African American channel, Black Entertainment Television would step on the media scene as the first Black owned channel in total control of the Black image and cultural messages for the first time. BET would attempt to show another side to Black culture that would be in total contrast to the decades of negative representation of the Black community that had once dominated the (White owned) media.

CHAPTER THREE  
BLACK ENTERTAINMENT TELEVISION

Black Entertainment

The delight that African Americans took in seeing the manifestation of the first Black owned channel geared towards the African American community could be heard in the eloquent speech of a prominent civil rights activist at the annual BET music awards show. At the 2014 BET Awards, Myrlie Evers-Williams, the civil rights activist and wife of the late Medgar Evers (slain civil rights activist) was honored for her work during and after the movement. Mrs. Evers-Williams (she has remarried) gave a moving speech about African Americans and television prior to the changes that the movement had inspired:

I can only recall the television stations that would go black when someone of color would appear on the screen. That was something that the people of that movement--names known and unknown—who devoted themselves to see that change would come about. I am so fortunate to stand here some fifty odd years later, going through all of it and thinking of all the other people--I do hope that you will know and you well revere-- freedom riders who held onto the belief that we would one day own our own

television stations and be able to do what we wanted to do. (BET Networks, 2014)

For those freedom fighters that held to the belief that African Americans would have emancipation in the media, it must have been a joyous victory when BET was birthed. However, for those who lived to see the day when BET, “our own television” (BET Networks, 2014) station, where we were able “to do what we wanted to do” (BET Networks, 2014) would be attained by a huge non-Black media conglomerate—making BET no longer “our own” (BET Networks, 2014), it must’ve been upsetting; and absolutely devastating to see it change from content that represented the Black community in a positive light into the very negative stereotypical images they fought so hard to dispel.

In Henry Louis Gate’s documentary, *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* (2013), Gates reveals how it wasn’t until the early 1900s when, “Black audiences would see new images of themselves” (Gates, 2013), “many of them for the first time” (Gates, 2013); “beginning with W.E.B. Du Bois’ *American Negro Exhibit*, a collection of nearly 500 images of dignified, well-dressed, African American men, women, and children. Fine images of African Americans of every color, every shape, every size, every professional pursuit...” (Gates, 2013) and the Black independent film maker, Oscar Micheaux’s 40 decades of films showing a “whole range of Black characters on screen—assertive, articulate, often sophisticated” (Gates, 2013) and “men, strong characters who are trying to do something for themselves in the community” (Gates, 2013). It wouldn’t be until

almost 40 years after Micheaux, that there would be a medium for African Americans, controlled by Africans where they would be able to see positive images of themselves--a rebuttal to the racist images that films such as *Birth of a Nation* by D. W. Griffith created and depicted of the Black community (Gates, 2013).

The 1980's and 1990s would be a time where the depiction of African American images would take a change for the better; the era with shows like the *Cosby Show*, *Family Matters*, *A Different World*, etc. where the Black reality "looked nothing like what was going on in the America's ghettos" (Gates, 2013) but were of people entering professional life, going to college, and finding their place "in the nation's elite" (Gates, 2013). This was the era of "owning our own" (BET Networks, 2014) and BET was the antecedent of them all.

#### Black Entertainment Television Pre-Viacom

In the 1980s, Black Entertainment Television or BET became the first television station geared towards the African American community. "BET was created by Robert L. Johnson on January 25<sup>th</sup> 1980" (Dobro, 2012, para. 1) and the BET mission statement was "to broadcast the culture, genius, beauty, and talents of the Black race" (Williams, 2007, para. 3). "This was a profound moment in black history because African Americans had never before had a television channel they could call their own. It was made by African Americans, for African Americans" (Dobro, 2012, para. 1):

The first shows on BET were made to build up the black community. They included *Our Voice with Bev Smith* and *Weekly with Ed Gordon*. Many issues covered in these shows included racism, riots, and sexuality. These shows were an important form of education for black youth. (Dobro, 2012, para. 2)

BET's programming was mostly music video oriented in the beginning due to how profitable it was to marry music and television (Williams, 2007, para. 7)—especially in the early 1980's—during the advent of music videos. BET had several R&B video shows such as *Video Vibrations*, *Midnight Love* (R&B ballads show), *Video Lp* (which also interviewed music artists), and its most popular show, *Video Soul*--hosted by Donnie Simpson—a beloved DJ and personality from Detroit who also had his own morning radio show in Washington, DC. During this time in the 1980s and 1990s, music videos were chosen with the most scrutiny; any videos that had images and messaging that were demeaning to women and promoted violence were not permitted to be shown on the station. In the words of the wife and co-founder of BET Sheila Johnson, “we would sit up and watch these videos and decide which ones were going on and which ones were not” (Grove, 2010, para. 5). This was during the era when rap had one hour on the station via the show, *Rap City* (rap now permeates the station since its acquisition). Much to the dismay of the owners and BET's investors, the music video revolution and a backlash from artists (Grove, 2010, para. 5) caused BET executives to acquiesce to playing these kinds of videos...albeit limited.

In the words of Sheila Johnson, “I didn’t like the way women were being portrayed in these videos” (Grove, 2012, para. 5); Mrs. Johnson and the BET group prided themselves on “public affairs programming” (Grove, 2012, para. 5) with shows such as *BET Nightly News* and award winning shows such as *Teen Summit* (a youth forum started in 1991 that allowed African American youth “to openly discuss issues and trends that touched their generation. It came to national attention in the late 1990s, when First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton was a guest; it won several awards, including a NAACP Image Award”) (“BET Makes Layoffs,” 2001, para. 2), and Tavis Smiley’s “show, premiering in 1996 as ‘*BET Talk*,’” was a casual but frank discussion program in a one-on-one format with guests on social issues, entertainment, and current events” (“BET Makes Layoffs,” 2001, para3). BET also aired, “‘*BET on Jazz*’...the nation’s only cable channel hosting jazz on a daily basis” (“BET Makes Layoffs,” 2001, para. 3). BET also dabbled with international programming with shows such as *Caribbean Rhythms*, a video show that aired Caribbean music videos hosted by a beautiful African Caribbean model named, *Rachel*; there was also a British television sitcom called *Desmonds* about a Guyanese working class family living in Britain.

A study in 1990 found that “the black audience as a whole tends to gravitate heavily toward television” (Bower, 1985; Darden & Darden, 1981). “Moreover, the black audience prefers to watch television programs that feature black characters or performers and themes emphasizing the black experience” (Jones, 1990, p. 478); this kind of understanding is evident in the program

choices that BET executives made during their period of control of the channel. Thus, in the 1980's and 1990's, BET "provided public affairs, dramatic and comedy series, and musical programs that primarily offer black characters and black themes not shown on the other channels" (Jones, 1990, p. 477).

Unfortunately, since its sell to Viacom on November 3, 2000 ("BET Sold," 2000, para. 1), and despite the promise of BET executives, "that the sale would not change the programming mandate of BET" (Fabrikant, 2000, para. 4), BET's programming has not been the same; and has been accused by critics of presenting "negative stereotypes of African Americans" (Farhi, 2007, para. 10).

#### Black Entertainment Television Post-Viacom

BET's success in avoiding the negative stereotypes as mentioned above, relied heavily upon the BET mission; "Previously, BET's mission was to upgrade the African American image and focus more on culture than bad stereotypes" (Dobro, 2012, para. 3). However, since it was acquired by Viacom, the quality of shows on BET has diminished. "The first major programming change since Viacom purchased BET" was the cancellation of programs "'*Teen Summit*,' '*BET Tonight with Tavis Smiley*' and the channel '*BET on Jazz*'" ("BET Makes Layoffs," 2001, para. 1), that depicted "sophisticated and consciousness-oriented Black people" ("BET Makes Layoffs," 2001, para. 3).

Viacom, at the beginning of their ownership replaced these programs with new ones such as "*Lil Kim: Countdown to Lock Down*, *BET Uncut*, *College Hill*, *Hell Date*, and *The Game*" which "put African Americans in a bad light" (Dobro,



2012, para. 3). The new programming “portrayed African Americans as raunchy, outrageous fools. The channel has exploited African American females, portraying them as video girls shaking their half naked bodies in front of rappers. [...] BET has begun to make a joke out of African American culture. They will show just about anything just to get viewers” (Dobro, 2012, para. 5). According to journalist Barbara Reynolds, one of the voices who fought to have a Black entertainment channel, BET was not what she had in mind when she envisioned a channel geared toward the African American community; “I can’t believe this is what I fought for: half-nude women and gangsters. It was just trash” (Williams, 2007, para. 4).

The aforementioned programming such as *BET Uncut* aired explicit uncensored rap videos and the show featuring rapper *Lil’ Kim* was a reality based program that had cameras following her every step for two weeks until she turned “herself in to U.S. Marshals” (“Lil Kim,” 2006, para. 1) custody—she was sentenced to prison for perjury. These kinds of programs are the antithesis of what BET once stood for and the values of the Black community that the visionaries were ambitious to disseminate via their mission statement goals. Dr. Boyce Watkins, an African American Professor at Syracuse University, stated that BET’s parent company is “operating with the same agenda as the Ku Klux Klan” (Roper, 2011, para. 1). Watkins also “penned a column detailing his distaste for rapper Lil Wayne and the network’s support of the Young Money emcee” (Roper, 2011, para. 1) after he received a numerous amount of BET

award nominations for his music; music that is misogynistic, promotes the murder of children and women, and promiscuity; the kind of degrading genre of music, messages, images, and artists that have dominated the BET awards for the last decade.

Although BET has made attempts to change its programming by adding shows such as *Being Mary Jane*, a show about a mid-thirties professional woman “who has no man, no children and a lot of family drama” (Wright, 2012, para. 5) and played by the well-known African American actress Gabrielle Union, the channel still “skews heavily toward the hip-hop generation” (Roberts, 2009, para. 6). BET has “boosted rap music and hip-hop, for better or worse. That marriage of money and music proved that a black-owned business could make billions. But to cultural critics and to young people seeking images of themselves, the money has come at the expense of a distorted view” (Williams, 2007, para. 22) of the Black community. BET’s new goal is to continue to reach a “median age of 22, and it does not seem to be looking to reach beyond it” (Williams, 2007, para. 20).

Thus, continues the programming which skews the image of the Black community in order to attract a values-challenged audience that does not have any qualms about stereotypes of blacks on television; since playing upon those stereotypes with shows such as the controversial *Hot Ghetto Mess* (a show that lampooned the Black working class [Alston, 2007, para. 3] which “evoked scorn from the black community, and several big advertisers pulled out” ; Poggi, 2012,

para. 2), it seems as if BET attempted to do damage control by creating a show such as *Being Mary Jane*. The show written by Mara Brock Akil, “who has been working steadily in the business for two decades” (Burton, 2014, para. 4) having created highly successful shows such as *Girlfriends* and *The Game* (which was originally aired on the CW network but cancelled in 2009; “The Game,” 2009, para. 1); the latter was picked up by BET and debuted “with 7.7 million viewers” (Burton, 2014, para. 2). *Being Mary Jane* was picked up for a second season for 2014 after becoming the No.1 show on BET in 2013 thanks to its “impressive 2.0 rating with adults 18-49 and 4 million views. Among the talented demographic, only NBC’s *America’s Got Talent* (2.4 adults rating) bested *Being Mary Jane* across all of television.” (Burton, 2014, para. 5)

If this is BET’s way of doing damage control and changing BET from a “Black kids channel” (Roberts, 2005, para. 7) aimed to a demographic entertained by demoralizing and valueless messages that do not promote dignity and respect (attracting a lower social grade of the African American population), then they may be making amends (according to the show’s ratings). Although Mary Jane, the heroine of the show, may be childless, without a committed romantic partnership, and have quite a few family issues she is dealing with, she is a successful “network television news anchor” (Burton, 2014, para. 3) who is struggling to find peace in her life amidst the complicated situations she finds herself in. She has a circle of family, friends, and acquaintances that, at the end of the day, remind her of the virtue of taking the higher road of morals and

values--thus driving her back onto the right path despite her stubborn desire for personal fulfillment; something that BET may want to put into practice itself if they want to reclaim the goal of disseminating images and messages of “black being beautiful, embracing our culture, and decolonizing the mind” (Gates, 2013); a message African American entertainment of a higher standard aims for when owned and controlled by African Americans (of a higher social scale), but becomes distorted and bastardized when seeking to appease the artistic appetites of African Americans of a lower social scale. This tends to be the historical norm when Black entertainment is controlled by white conglomerates.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHOD

#### Research Questions

RQ 1: What are the attitudes of African American viewers who watched BET (Pre-Viacom owned) from 1980-1999?

RQ2: What are the attitudes of African American viewers who watch BET (Viacom owned) from 2000-2015?

#### Methodology

##### Participants

The participants of this study were 100 individuals who identify as Black, African American, or mixed African American and who were born prior to the year 1984; within the Baby Boomers (age range of 47-65) and X-generation (early-30s to mid-40s) eras respectively (Holroyd, 2011, para. 1 & 2). These particular groups were old enough to be familiar with the early years of BET in the 1980s and 1990s. They were also of age to have seen the transition BET underwent when Viacom acquired BET in 2000. The participants were randomly recruited via the social media platform Facebook within African American chat groups and private messaging in which additional participants agreed to participate in this

study. The participants were encouraged to recruit additional participants who fit the criteria thus allowing a snowball method to draw in the necessary amount of participants for the research.

Invitations were made on Facebook in African American chat groups and via personal messages in which additional participants agreed to participate in the study. Those who agreed to participate were given a direct link to the survey on Survey Monkey to complete the questionnaire; participants were asked to recommend friends or acquaintances who met the criteria and these individuals were approached via personal messaging to participate in the survey. There was no compensation for the participants who participated in this survey.

### Design

The participants of this study were drawn through random selection and snowballing in order to reach additional participants.

### Procedure

The online participants were given a link to the website Survey Monkey where a Likert-scale questionnaire was prepared for the participants to complete. The participants completed the Likert-scale questionnaire which was used to determine the participants' attitude towards the images and messages that have been disseminated via BET programming in the pre-Viacom (Robert L. Johnson ownership) years (1980-1999) as well as during the post-Viacom (Mel Karmazin) ownership years (2000-2015). The questionnaire was both an attitude and value-set constructed questionnaire in order to determine if in fact values have an

association with the attitudes participants have towards the images and messages seen on BET (past and present). Thus, attesting to the social identity theory concerning how members within groups self-categorize themselves through a cognitive process of social comparison (Burke & Stets, 2000, p. 6). Hence, comparing “self” with the content they view on a network that is supposed to represent their ethnic group and culture. The participants were asked:

1. “Have you ever watched BET?”
2. “Are you familiar with BET’s programming in the 1980s and 1990s?”
3. “Are you familiar with the programming on BET in the last 14 years?”

If you can answer yes to any of these questions and are 18 years of age and older, Black/African American/or mixed African American please click this link and participate in my research

survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MK9KBKY>

Also, feel free to forward this invite to anyone you know who meets up with this criteria and may be interested in taking this survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated as it will help me to attain my Master's degree in Integrated Marketing Communication. Thank you!

Participants who were able to establish through their answers to the above questions that they were familiar with BET’s programming over the last 34 years were asked to take the survey. Before taking the survey, the participants were asked to recall (as they take the survey) the images and messages that were displayed on BET (programming) during the 1980s/1990s and to compare them

to the images and messages they have seen on BET in the last 14 years. The survey should take no more than 10-15 minutes to complete.



CHAPTER FIVE  
FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Demographics

The Survey Monkey data analysis tools measured the participants' attitudes toward BET in the past (1980s and 1990s), in the present (2000-2015), and their feelings toward traditional values; the site also measured the demographic characteristics of gender, marital status, age, education level, and income of the participants.

Demographic Survey Results

Gender. Table 1 reveals the percentage of the participants that were male and female. The 100 participants consisted of 35% male participants and 64% female.

Table 1. Gender.

Answer Choices	Responses
– Male	35.23% 31
– Female	64.77% 57
Total	88

Marriage. Table 2 reveals the marital status of the participants; 46% of the participants were Single, 34% Married, and 18% were Divorced. Out of the 100 respondents, 22 skipped this question.

Table 2. Marriage.

Answer Choices	Responses
–	<b>46.67%</b>
<b>Single</b>	42
–	<b>34.44%</b>
<b>Married</b>	31
–	<b>18.89%</b>
<b>Divorced</b>	17
–	<b>0.00%</b>
<b>Widowed</b>	0
Total	90

Age. Table 3 reveals the age of the participants; the majority of the participants were 36-39 years of age thus making up 26% of the respondents followed by 17% in the 30-35 age bracket and 16% being from the 50-59 age bracket.

Table 3. Age.

Answer Choices	Responses
–	<b>0.00%</b>
<b>18-25</b>	0
–	<b>7.78%</b>
<b>26-29</b>	7
–	<b>17.78%</b>
<b>30-35</b>	16
–	<b>26.67%</b>
<b>36-39</b>	24
–	<b>11.11%</b>
<b>40-45</b>	10
–	<b>12.22%</b>
<b>46-49</b>	11
–	<b>16.67%</b>
<b>50-59</b>	15
–	<b>7.78%</b>
<b>60 plus</b>	7
Total	90

Education. According to Table 4 which reveals the educational status of the participants, the majority of the participants were college educated; 33% have completed a Bachelor’s degree, 30% have Graduate degrees, and 24% reported to have had “Some College” completed.

Table 4. Education.

Answer Choices	Responses
–	<b>0.00%</b>
<b>Less than 9th grade</b>	0
–	<b>0.00%</b>
<b>9-12 grade, no diploma</b>	0
–	<b>3.33%</b>
<b>High School graduate/GED</b>	3
–	<b>24.44%</b>
<b>Some College</b>	22
–	<b>3.33%</b>
<b>Currently in College</b>	3
–	<b>5.56%</b>
<b>Associate Degree</b>	5
–	<b>33.33%</b>
<b>Bachelor Degree</b>	30
–	<b>30.00%</b>
<b>Graduate</b>	27
Total	90

Family Household Income. Table 5 reveals the household income of each participant; the majority (22%) of the participants reported to have a household income of \$100,000 or more; 16% reported to make \$60,000-\$74,999, and 15% of the respondents answered they made \$50,000-\$59,999 a year.

Table 5. Family Household Income.

Answer Choices	Responses
–	<b>4.76%</b>
<b>Less than 14,999</b>	4
–	<b>4.76%</b>
<b>15,000-19,999</b>	4
–	<b>9.52%</b>
<b>20,000-29,999</b>	8
–	<b>9.52%</b>
<b>30,000-39,999</b>	8
–	<b>9.52%</b>
<b>40,000-49,999</b>	8
–	<b>15.48%</b>
<b>50,000-59,999</b>	13
–	<b>16.67%</b>
<b>60,000-74,999</b>	14
–	<b>7.14%</b>
<b>75,000-99,999</b>	6
–	<b>22.62%</b>
<b>100,000 or more</b>	19
Total	84

## Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed using the Survey Monkey weighted-scale-average calculation which assigns a Weighted Average (*WA*) to each answer choice provided in the questionnaire. In this research, the Likert 5-point rating scale was used to generate answers for the survey with *W* equaling *weight* of the answer choice and *X* equaling the *response* count for each answer choice, the *weighted average (WA)* is calculated as follows:

Strongly Disagree (1)

Disagree (2)

Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)

Agree (4)

Strongly Agree (5)

After collecting responses to the survey, the results will look something like this.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Average Rating
Responsibilities are shared fairly among your team members.	20.45% 9	27.27% 12	20.45% 9	11.36% 5	20.45% 9	44	2.84

Figure 1. Likert 5-Point Rating Scale.

The average rating of 2.84 indicates that the average sentiment among respondents is that responsibilities are not shared fairly among their team members. The average rating was calculated as follows:

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$$\frac{(9*1) + (12*2) + (9*3) + (5*4) + (9*5)}{44}$$
$$125/44 = 2.84$$

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Figure 2. Weighted Average Scale.

### Traditional African American Values

The first question (Q1) of the survey evaluated the traditional African American values discussed in the Literature Review concerning the history of African American cultural values. There were 11 questions that questioned participants about their values of an education, respect of family, success, money, integrity, hard work, Black history, and Black heroes. Table 6 shows on the far left column the calculated “Weighted Average” score for each value.

#### Values Survey Results

Education. The weighted scale value for the question “a college education is important for Black Americans to succeed” revealed a 4.48 Weighted Average (WA)—revealing 62% of the participants chose question number 5 --“Strongly Agree”—for their answer to the relationship between success and a higher

education. The statement “I feel an education is a waste of time” had a 1.22=*WA* score making answer 1--“Strongly Disagreed”—the answer most chosen by participants at a rate of 79%.

Family. “I feel that respect of family is of great importance” had a *WA* of 4.71 thus making the *value* of family a high priority with 78% of the participants answering “Strongly Agree”.

Money and Success. A 2.79=*WA* revealed a close average score between answers 2 (Disagree) at 31% and 3 (Neither Disagree Nor Agree) at 34% concerning the question “I equate money with success”; 20% of the participants “Agreed” to equating *money* with *success*.

A *WA* of 1.44 for the answer “Strongly Disagree” was chosen by 63% of participants when answering the question “I feel there is no right or wrong way to make money”.

Integrity. “I value integrity over money” had a *WA* of 4.4 making “Strongly Agree” (55%) and “Agree” (37%) the highest rated answers of participants who value *integrity* over money.

Hard Work. “I value a hard work ethic” is highly valued with 77% of participants who “Strongly Agree” with the statement—giving the answer a *WA*=4.76.

Black History. The statement evaluating the relationship between Black identity and Black history had a *WA*=4.45 with 59% of the participants answering



“Strongly Agree” to the statement, “I feel that knowing Black history is important to my identity as a Black American”.

Black Heroes. A WA of 3.79 revealed close percentage rates between the answers “Agree” (31%) and “Strongly Agree” (32%) as the highest rated answers for the statement, “I feel that Black American heroes are those who are well known for their integrity not those who are known for their talent or financial success.”

Table 6. Values.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Weighted Average
I feel that a college education is important for Black Americans to succeed.	0.00% 0	3.03% 3	8.08% 8	26.26% 26	62.63% 62	99	4.48
I feel that an education is a waste of time.	79.80% 79	18.18% 18	2.02% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	99	1.22
I feel that respect of family is of great importance.	2.06% 2	0.00% 0	1.03% 1	18.56% 18	78.35% 76	97	4.71
I equate money with success.	9.18% 9	31.63% 31	34.69% 34	20.41% 20	4.08% 4	98	2.79

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Weighted Average
I value integrity over money.	1.01% 1	2.02% 2	4.04% 4	37.37% 37	55.56% 55	99	4.44
I feel there is no right or wrong way to make money.	63.64% 63	29.29% 29	6.06% 6	1.01% 1	0.00% 0	99	1.44
My faith in God affects my views on life.	3.06% 3	2.04% 2	7.14% 7	14.29% 14	73.47% 72	98	4.53
I value a hard work ethic.	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	2.04% 2	20.41% 20	77.55% 76	98	4.76
I feel that hard work itself without an education is the key to success.	12.12% 12	45.45% 45	32.32% 32	8.08% 8	2.02% 2	99	2.42
I feel that knowing Black history is important to my identity as a Black American.	1.02% 1	2.04% 2	7.14% 7	30.61% 30	59.18% 58	98	4.45
I feel that Black American heroes are those who are well known for their	4.12% 4	10.31% 10	20.62% 20	31.96% 31	32.99% 32	97	3.79

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Weighted Average
integrity not those who are known for their talent or financial successful.							

### Black Entertainment Television from 1980-2000

In the research survey, Question 2 (Q2) evaluates the participants' attitudes toward BET in the 1980s/90s decades respectively; seven questions were constructed concerning participants' attitudes toward BET's images/messages, positive representation, respect of the Black experience, programming, the participants' enjoyment, overall feelings, and fulfillment of the old BET mission statement. Table 7 shows us the "Weighted Average" calculation of each statement in the last column on the left.

#### Black Entertainment Television 1980-2000 Survey Results

Images and Messages. To the statement, "BET provided positive images and messages of the Black community" an average of WA=3.38 shows that 43% of the respondents "Agree."

Representation. The study shows that 36% (WA=3.25) of the participants feel that "BET positively represented the Black community." The results also show that 23% "Neither agree nor disagree" and 21% "Disagreed."

The Black Experience. 42% (WA=3.52) of the respondents “Agree” that “BET respected the Black experience.”

Programming. 45% (WA=3.47) feel that “BET had positive programming.”

Enjoyment. A 3.47 WA score shows that 35% of the respondents “enjoyed watching the BET channel in this era.”

BET of this Era. A WA of 3.32 shows that 36% of the participants “Agree” that their “overall feelings towards BET in this era are positive.”

BET Mission Statement. To the statement, “I feel that BET fulfilled its Mission Statement to broadcast the culture, genius, beauty, and talents of the Black race” 29% (WA=3.18) “Agreed” with this statement and 23% “Disagreed.”

Table 7. Black Entertainment Television from 1980-2000.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Weighted Average
BET provided positive images/messages of the Black community.	2.20% 2	23.08% 21	19.78% 18	43.96% 40	10.99% 10	91	3.38
BET positively represented the Black community.	6.59% 6	21.98% 20	23.08% 21	36.26% 33	12.09% 11	91	3.25

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Weighted Average
BET respected the Black experience.	2.20% 2	13.19% 12	28.57% 26	42.86% 39	13.19% 12	91	3.52
BET had positive programming.	3.33% 3	16.67% 15	22.22% 20	45.56% 41	12.22% 11	90	3.47
I enjoyed watching the BET channel in this era.	5.49% 5	19.78% 18	17.58% 16	36.26% 33	20.88% 19	91	3.47
My overall feelings towards BET in this era are positive.	6.59% 6	21.98% 20	19.78% 18	36.26% 33	15.38% 14	91	3.32
I feel that BET fulfilled its Mission Statement “to broadcast the culture, genius, beauty, and talents of the Black race.	10.99% 10	23.08% 21	19.78% 18	29.67% 27	16.48% 15	91	3.18

## Black Entertainment Television from 2000-2015

In the research survey, Question 3 (Q3) evaluates the participants' attitudes toward BET in the last 15 years; seven questions were constructed concerning participants' attitudes toward BET's images/messages, positive representation, respect of the Black experience, programming, preference, overall feelings, and fulfillment of the new BET mission statement. The calculated "Weighted Average" score for each section can be seen in Table 8 in the far left column.

### Black Entertainment Television 2000-2015 Survey Results

Images and Messages. In response to the statement, "I feel BET provides positive images/messages of the Black Community" 34% ( $WA=2.63$ ) "Disagree" with this statement.

Representation. 39% ( $WA=2.54$ ) of the respondents "Disagree" to the statement, "I feel BET positively represents the Black community."

Respect. A  $WA$  of 2.66 was calculated for 29% of respondents who "Disagree" with the statement, "I feel BET shows respect for the Black experience"; 23% "Neither Disagree nor Agree" and 24% "Agree."

Programming. 37% ( $WA=2.64$ ) of the respondents "Disagree" with the statement, "I feel BET broadcasts positive programming."

Era Preference. 33% ( $WA=2.27$ ) of the respondents "Strongly Disagree" with the statement "I prefer the BET channel of this era"; 29% "Disagree."

Overall. 30% (WA=2.45) of the participants “Disagree” with the statement, “My overall feelings of BET in this era are positive”; 25% “Strongly Disagree.”

Mission Statement. To the statement, “I feel that BET is fulfilling the Mission Statement of ‘serving African Americans and consumers of Black culture globally” 34% (WA=2.51) of the respondents “Disagree” and 22% “Strongly Disagree.”

Recommend BET. 38% (WA=2.05) of the respondents “Strongly Disagree” with the statement, “I would recommend BET as a reputable source for anyone who would like to learn about Black culture”; 36% of the respondents “Disagree.”

Table 8. Black Entertainment Television 2000-2015.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Weighted Average
I feel BET provides positive images/messages of the Black community.	17.98% 16	34.83% 31	21.35% 19	17.98% 16	7.87% 7	89	2.63
I feel BET positively represents the Black community.	17.98% 16	39.33% 35	21.35% 19	13.48% 12	7.87% 7	89	2.54

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Weighted Average
I feel BET shows respect for the Black experience in its programming.	19.10% 17	29.21% 26	23.60% 21	22.47% 20	5.62% 5	89	2.66
I feel BET broadcasts positive programming.	14.61% 13	37.08% 33	23.60% 21	19.10% 17	5.62% 5	89	2.64
I prefer the BET channel of this era.	33.71% 30	29.21% 26	19.10% 17	12.36% 11	5.62% 5	89	2.27
My overall feelings of BET in this era are positive.	25.84% 23	30.34% 27	22.47% 20	15.73% 14	5.62% 5	89	2.45
I feel that BET is fulfilling the Mission Statement of “serving African Americans and	22.47% 20	34.83% 31	20.22% 18	14.61% 13	7.87% 7	89	2.51



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Weighted Average
consumers of Black culture globally”							
I would recommend BET as a reputable source for anyone who would like to learn about Black culture.	38.64% 34	36.36% 32	12.50% 11	6.82% 6	5.68% 5	88	2.05

### Excel T-Test Analysis

I created a 6-item scale evaluating BET “then”. The scale ranges from 1 to 5. The scale rates how positively participants rated BET in the past, with 1 meaning a strongly negative rating and 5 meaning a strongly positive rating. The Chronbach’s alpha for the scale is 0.950, indicating that the scale is highly reliable. The mean on the scale is 3.39 and the standard deviation is 0.33. This means that, on the average, participants rated BET performance “then” as somewhere between “neither positive, nor negative” and “positive.”

I created a 9-item scale evaluating BET “now.” The scale ranges from 1 to 5. The scale rates how positively participants rated BET in the past, with 1 meaning a strongly negative rating and 5 meaning a strongly positive rating. The Chronbach’s alpha for the scale is 0.952, indicating that the scale is highly reliable. The mean on the scale is 2.55 and the standard deviation is 0.31. This means that, on the average, participants rated BET performance “then” as somewhere between “negative” and “neither positive, nor negative.”

A paired T-test comparing the means on the two scales, that is, the mean evaluation of BET “then” and “now,” shows a statistically significant difference in the means:  $t=6.956$ ,  $df=86$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.000$ . That means that participants rated BET higher on the average “then,” as opposed to “now.”

## CHAPTER SIX

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OVERVIEW

#### Values

Question 1 (Q1) of the survey that sought the attitudes of the respondents concerning the African American traditional values discussed in this study, the results were favorable to the study. The statistics revealed the respondents were in favor of the values discussed in the study which were education, respect, integrity, faith, hard work, Black/African American history, representatives, and money (earned honestly). However, the value of success (money being the determining factor of one's success instead of character) and hard work (as being the key to success without an education) were not favored significantly.

#### Black Entertainment Television Past versus Black Entertainment Television Present

Research Question 1 (RQ1), what are the attitudes of African American viewers who watched BET (Pre-Viacom owned)? The T-test analysis has revealed the attitudes of the participants to be somewhere between "neither positive nor negative" and "positive." Research Question 2 (RQ2), what are the attitudes of African American viewers who watched BET (Post-Viacom)? The T-test analysis has revealed the attitudes of the participants to be somewhere between "negative" and "neither positive nor negative." Thus, there is a significant difference between the attitudes of African Americans towards BET

past and present. The attitudes were more favorable towards BET in the past than in the present.

Although not ranging in high percentages as the *values* in Q1 of the survey, the majority of the respondents (57%) favored BET in the 1980s and 1990s more so than they do BET in the last 15 years. A steady average of about 20% of respondents were neutral (“Neither Disagree or Agree”) in their answers concerning BET in the past while 28% were unfavorable. Concerning “overall” feelings toward BET as being “positive,” the majority of the participants were in favor of BET in the past thus having overall positive attitudes toward BET in the 1980s and 1990s . However, concerning the present (the last 15 years) the majority of the respondents do not hold overall positive feelings toward BET. Out of the 88 respondents who answered the question (12 skipped the question), “I would recommend BET as a reputable source for anyone who would like to learn about Black culture,” 75% of the respondents (adding together the participants who checked the “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree” answers) would not recommend BET as a reputable source to learn about Black culture.

## Theory

This study based its argument on “identity theory” as a way of examining the African American participants in terms of their attitudes and values. The aim of this study was to determine whether or not a favorable attitude toward traditional African American values would influence a favorable attitude towards BET in the past and a low favorable attitude toward BET in the present. In addition to this relationship between values and favorable attitudes, this research also aimed to see a negotiation of personal and social identity guided by traditional values as the reason for the differing views held by the participants in the study.

While a paired T-test shows a statistical significant difference in participants’ attitudes towards BET as being more favorable to the post-Viacom ownership era of BET as opposed to the present post-Viacom ownership era, the results of the two research questions does not support that the participants based their favorable attitude towards BET on their values and negotiated their personal and social identity in relation to these values in order to determine their views on BET past and present. Thus, the relationship is spurious.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### FUTURE RESEARCH, MARKETING IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

#### Future Research

Due to the spurious connection in this research concerning the relationship between participants' attitudes, BET, and identity theory, a qualitative study of this research should be done with discussion groups and one-on-one interviews with participants to discover whether or not their views toward BET are in fact related to their core values and their personal and social identity. Also, the research results reveal that out of the 100 respondents who participated in the survey, 79 of the participants were college educated (27 Graduates, 30 with Bachelor degrees, and 22 with "some college"), further research should examine whether or not educated African Americans have a higher negative attitude toward BET than African Americans without a higher education—something this research study can only assume from the survey results.

#### Marketing Implications

It is clear from this research that *values* must be heavily considered when communicating or attempting to appeal to the African American community. The high percentage of answers that weighted heavily toward values such as respect of family, faith, education, and Black history cannot be ignored. It is highly probable that many Americans of all ethnicities would probably score high in a

research survey when it comes to traditional values, however due to the unique history of African Americans in the United States, the various lifestyles that make-up the community, and the uniqueness of the culture it is not wise to treat the entire group as homogeneous with other Americans nor within themselves. The book *Shoveling Smoke: Advertising and Globalization Contemporary India* by William Mazzarella (2003) revealed the huge mistake Coca Cola made in their attempt to gain India as a major market for their product when they used a Westernized one size fits all marketing campaign strategy to win over a very diverse and unique people. The African American culture may not be as diverse as the Indian community, however the results of this research clearly shows that assuming African Americans are all the same would be poor decision making for any marketing practitioner.

### Conclusion

“The studies have shown that blacks have turned to media owned and operated by blacks because of their dissatisfaction with the way they are portrayed in the mainstream, white-owned media.” (Jones, 1990, p.3) Clearly from the research in this study, African Americans prefer BET when it was owned and operated by African Americans. The T-test statistical analysis has revealed that participants prefer BET in the past (1980-1999) when it was Black owned as opposed to the Viacom (White) owned BET of today (2000-2015).

It is evident from the literature review that once Viacom acquired BET, the network underwent drastic changes that totally revamped the network into the antithesis of what the original owner of BET was trying to accomplish:

It's a far cry from the vision Johnson articulated more than twenty years ago, when he launched BET. Those of us who heeded his call to demand that cable companies carry the network were fighting for a space of our own where we could find programming that respected African-Americans, valued our intellects and offered a real venue for discussion. The network's initial offerings were so promising. Great black films, innovative news and public affairs programs, and youth oriented productions were a welcome respite from standard TV fare. (Themba, 2001, p.18)

BET may not have been perfect in its programming during the time when it was Black owned, but it made the effort to provide programming that made it clear that they understood the Black community and their values. The network did not flood the air waves with programming that devalued or blatantly disrespected the Black community even when acquiescing to demands from some Black viewers who wanted to see edgier programs. At the end of the day, what it really comes down to is *who is in control*. As of 2000, African Americans are no longer in control of a network that considers it-self to be the "pre-eminent entertainment brand serving African Americans and consumers of black culture globally." (BET, 2015) Consequently, it's not surprising that African American



traditional values, the rich history, and uniqueness of the Black experience are nowhere to be seen.

APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



Academic Affairs  
Office of Academic Research • Institutional Review Board

November 17, 2014

Ms. Sasha M. Rice and Prof. Eric Newman  
Department of Communication Studies  
Department of Marketing  
California State University, San Bernardino  
5500 University Parkway  
San Bernardino, California 92407

**CSUSB  
INSTITUTIONAL  
REVIEW BOARD**  
Administrative Review  
IRB# 14035  
Status  
**APPROVED**

Dear Ms. Rice and Prof. Newman:

Your application to use human subjects, titled, "Black Entertainment Television (BET) Programming Past and Present Survey 2014" has been reviewed and approved by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of California State University, San Bernardino has determined that your application meets the requirements for exemption from IRB review Federal requirements under 45 CFR 46. As the researcher under the exempt category you do not have to follow the requirements under 45 CFR 46 which requires annual renewal and documentation of written informed consent which are not required for the exempt category. However, exempt status still requires you to attain consent from participants before conducting your research.

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required.

Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator reporting to the IRB Committee include the following 4 requirements as mandated by the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 listed below. Please note that the protocol change form and renewal form are located on the IRB website under the forms menu. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years. Please notify the IRB Research Compliance Officer for any of the following:

- Submit a protocol change form if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your research prospectus/protocol for review and approval of the IRB before implemented in your research,
- If any unanticipated/adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research,
- 1. When your project has ended by emailing the IRB Research Compliance Officer.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the IRB Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at [mgillespie@csusb.edu](mailto:mgillespie@csusb.edu). Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,  
  
Michael L. Gillespie,

Research Compliance Officer, Institutional Review Board

JS/mg

cc:

909.537.7588 • Fax: 909.537.7028 • <http://irb.csusb.edu/>  
5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

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