

Ms. Janitra Patrick: Dear BET, Why Do You Hate Us?



Dear Debra Lee,

I'm Janita Patrick, a 15-year-old African-American female from Cincinnati. Recently, I watched the 2009 BET Awards and felt the strongest urge to reach out to the program. My family is of the typical middle-class variety; both parents and four brothers. See, I'm a junior in high school (got skipped), so naturally EVERYBODY in my age group watches BET. I'm used to seeing the sagging pants, tattoos, lack of emphasis on reading and respecting women that makes up your videos. People in my class live this out everyday, while teachers tell us that we're acting just like the people in your shows.

In your shows. That struck me as odd, because I would think that with your show being the primary outlet for black entertainers and musicians, and considering the context of blacks in this country, there's a social responsibility factor to consider. I would never blame BET alone for the way a great deal of my classmates act and talk and dress. Everybody makes their own choices. However, if anybody is aware the power of television on impressionable minds, it's the people running the television operations. If you are not aware, then perhaps you shouldn't be running the operations.

Guess who watches your network the most? Not those who are intelligent enough to discern foolishness from substance, but those who are barely teenagers, impressionable and believing. It's awfully cruel to plant seeds of ignorance in fertile minds. You know it's really bad when the co-founder of BET, Sheila Johnson, said that she ["really doesn't watch it"](#) anymore.

I am constantly fighting against the images and messages put forth on your program. What made you think that it's okay to bring my classmates on stage to dance behind Lil Wayne and Drake to a song talking about boffing "every girl in the world"? Why does reality train wrecks have to be thrown in our faces? Are you aware of the achievement gap going on in inner-city African-American communities? A report from America's Promise Alliance, a non-profit group started by Colin Powell, recently stated that 47 percent of high school students in the nation's top 50 cities don't graduate. ***(Fifty-four percent of males of color in Ingham County graduated from high school, compared to 74 percent of white males)***. This isn't because of BET per se, but I don't see any episodes on your show doing anything to counteract this disturbing trend. In fact, your show is a part of this cycle of media depicting us at our worst.

My older brother told me something about profit being the number one goal for every business. I'm not sure I understand what that means, but I do know that your shows have to be entertaining enough to generate viewers, which is how you make your money. But surely our culture is rich enough to entertain without anything extra to "boost" ratings; why the over-the-top foolery? I listen to classmates talk about Baldwin Hills like it's the Manhattan Project. It doesn't take much effort to produce a throng of degenerative reality shows, nor does it take much to eliminate socially conscious shows off the air. MTV isn't much better, but since when does two wrongs ever make a right? It's one thing for white television shows to depict us in a particular way, but for black television shows to do it is baffling.

Why do you hate us?

All of the values that my parents seek to instill in me and my brothers seems to be contradicted by a more powerful force from the media, and your show is at the forefront. Your network is the only network that features rap videos and shows exclusively to children of my color. I know that you have no control over the music that the artists put out, but you do have influence as to how you air these videos. I'm sure if a stand was taken to use the talent in your organization to actually crank out thought-provoking entertaining shows and videos, then artists will follow suit. Being that they need you as much as you need them.

There was one awkward segment in the BET Awards when Jamie Foxx singled out three black doctors-turned-authors, but the introduction was so powerless that many of the viewers had no idea who they were. Had they been introduced as Sampson Davis, Rameck Hunt and George Jenkins, three brothers who overcame major obstacles to become a success without the use of lyrics that berate women, the sell of substance that destroy communities or through raps about loose gunplay, then maybe my classmates would have come to school talking about more than Beyonce, T-Pain's BIG ASS CHAIN and Soulja Boy Tell Em's hopping out the bed.

But they weren't introduced like that. It seemed like a throwaway obligatory tribute to appease some irritated fans. It missed the mark. Big time. Ask Michelle Obama if she watches BET or encourages Sasha and Malia to do so. Ask President Obama. It's a reason he is the leader of the free world, and it isn't because of **Buffoonery Exists Today**.

You'd be surprised how smart young black children can be with the absence of **Blacks Embarrassing Themselves**. If your goal is to deter engaged, forward-thinking articulate black minds, then consider your goal fulfilled. It's hard-pressed to think that your shows are working to promote cultural betterment. However, it's quite easy to conclude that the destruction of black children through the glorification of immoral behavior and rushed production is by design. Poison is being swallowed by every viewer who adores your network, and the worse thing is, these viewers - my classmates - are not even aware what they're swallowing.

There is nothing edifying for black women on your show. I don't judge people who do throng to your programs though; I mean, if a jet crashes in right in front of me, I'll watch it too. That's why I don't flip by your channel...I don't even want to be sucked in.

I have aspirations of acquiring a law degree and possibly entering the public sphere, so I can counteract conditions in my community perpetuated by the images on your channel. So I should thank you, because in a weird sense, your shoddy programming is the wind behind my back. And it is my hope that I can accomplish my dreams despite BET's pictorial messages, because Lord knows it won't be because of them.

Sincerely,

Janita Patrick