

Where I Live: Help Comes To Harlem

Rev. Jesse Jackson, Bill Cosby and Loyal TV Fans Mobilize to Save Realistic Television Portrayal of Family Life in Harlem.

Thanks to a coalition of dedicated individuals and organizations, "Where I Live" will return for a second season this Fall on Saturdays (8:30 PM ET/PT) on ABC. A campaign conducted by television viewers, worried that "Where I Live" would not return for another season, jammed phone lines and fax machines at the network. The outcry came from a national grassroots effort to save from cancellation the only positive portrayal of an African-American family on network television.

At a time when the television industry faces increased public pres-

sure to "clean up" its prime-time programming, networks might now take a closer look at content and see beyond the ratings before deciding the fate of TV shows. With the threat of cancellation by the network hovering over television viewers in cities across the country successfully mobilized to keep "Where I Live" on the air.

From Los Angeles to Philadelphia to New York, youth centers and community based organizations quickly took action, asking the television audience to write, call or fax the ABC network showing their support for the show.

Even nationally respected organizations, like the Urban League, the Black Filmmakers Foundation and the National Black Media Coalition,

added their voices by writing letters on behalf of "Where I Live."

Why all the fuss? Viewers demanded that "Where I Live" was not just any television show. It was a positive, authentic reflection of daily life in the inner city. "Where I Live" portrayed realistic people—people who work every day and spend time with their families.

Dr. James Comer, child psychiatrist with the Child Study Center at Yale University, said, "We are very pleased to view a television program that presents positive images and values which are important for all young people...and because your characters are African-American, you challenge and weaken negative stereotypes without preaching." Multi-award-winning

actor and entertainer Bill Cosby, who has spoken out against the shameful portrayal of African-Americans on television, said in a press interview, "I love the show."

Community leaders stated that it was refreshing to see images of an African American family and its associates who embody the panorama of the Black experience. Others stated that the series was a true-to-life reflection of this community which is rarely seen on television—a television show about the Black community without drugs, sensationalized murders or gang fights.

In Washington DC, where Congress and legislative officials are voicing concern about the harmful effects of some television programming, an

endorsement came from America's Congressional Black Caucus and the District of Columbia's Shadow Senator Rev. Jesse Jackson.

Once the word was out that "Where I Live" may not return, some members of the cast were unexpectedly pressed into service. Veteran stage and television actor Sullivan Walker, who portrays the hard working father, James St. Martin in "Where I Live," was shooting a feature film out of the country. He returned to receive invitations to speak at churches, on urban radio stations and national TV shows, in response to the overwhelming outcry by fans.

Born in Trinidad, Walker's many fans in New York's large West Indian community also joined the campaign

by getting the word out through stories in local Caribbean-based newsletters and monthly magazines.

Actor/Comedian Doug E. Doug, who plays the quirky, off-beat son in the series, was in great demand for interviews on national radio shows and in newspapers. His teenage fans stood on street corners and parking lots at sports events, and in a matter of a few days, handed out over 20,000 flyers asking for support to save the series.

To many, television is a form of entertainment—a way to escape and relax after a long day. But to the fans of "Where I Live," it was much more, and thanks to their outcry, the series is back for another season.

The Middle East Peace Accord

After decades of intense conflict, there stood Yasir Arafat, Chairman of the Palestinians. Liberation Organization (PLO), and Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel on the White House lawn for a ceremony to consummate the first peace accord between the Israelis and Palestinians. As the thousands of guests assembled on the White House lawn looked on the big question was, would these two leaders be able to manage a handshake to seal the agreement. The suspense was ended when chairman Arafat extended his hand to Prime Minister Rabin and Mr. Rabin responded in kind. On this historic day the world watched as two people who have been at war with each other of regeneration seemed to be moving cautiously toward reconciliation. But will this agreement mark the beginning of a just and lasting peace?

There was considerable sentiment among the Israelis that the Palestinian people could never be trusted to co-exist with Israel in peace under the leadership of the PLO. Among the Palestinians and the Arab world in general many people expressed the view that the agreement was a sell-out. The PLO was asked to recognize Israel and renounce the use of terrorism in exchange for which Israel agreed to recognize the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and grant limited Palestinian autonomy/self rule over the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho. Most observers feel that Israel did indeed get the best end of the deal. Thomas Friedman in a special to the New York Times described the PLO's recognition of Israel in the following terms: "Mr. Arafat's letter to Mr. Rabin is not simply a statement of recognition. It is a letter of surrender, a typewritten white flag, in which the P.L.O. chairman renounces every poetical position that he held on Israel since the P.P.O.'s foundation in 1964."

In reality the agreement reflected the pragmatism and self-interest of Yasir Arafat and the PLO and Yitzhak Rabin and his Labor Government. The PLO which negotiated this agreement is but a pale shadow of the PLO that the world knew prior to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Forced to withdraw from Lebanon as a principal base of operations and scatter its forces throughout the Middle East, the PLO with the encouragement and sponsorship of Syria and Iran has also taken its toll. As a result, in the occupied territories, revolutionary muslim groups like Hamas have emerged to seriously challenge the hegemony of the PLO particularly among the thousands of young Palestinians who form the backbone of the Palestinian uprising known as the Intifada. Finally, Yasir Arafat's embrace of Saddam Hussien during the Gulf War cost the support of the oil rich conservative Gulf States which had provided much of the financial backing for the PLO over the years.

On the Israeli side, it was a growing fear of revolutionary muslim organizations like Hamas and the increased casualties being inflicted on the Israeli army and civilian population due to the Intifada and bolder and bolder strikes into Israeli territory that drove prime Minister Rabin and his Labor Government to the negotiating table. From Rabin's perspective, a weakened PLO with a leadership hungry to salvage itself, represented a potential buffer, an acceptable alternative to the more radical and militant forces gaining ascendancy among the Palestinian masses. The PLO was the lesser evil. Hence the necessity to recog-

nize the PLO and offer at least limited self-rule as a means of bolstering and legitimizing a faltering Arafat and the PLO.

In effect the PLO has been put on probation. Now instead of Israeli soldiers facing Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip and in Jericho, the PLO will be expected to police and discipline these forces thereby sparing the Israelis further casualties. Given the deep ideological differences between the PLO

can prove that it can contain the Palestinians militants and persuade them to behave in a manner which is acceptable, with "good behavior" limited self-rule will be extended to the rest of the West Bank. And perhaps some form of Palestinian State in confederation with Jordan will be possible in the future under the right circumstances.

The PLO is reduced to hoping that the west will respond with the massive economic and financial

aide that will be required to induce good behavior on the part of a Palestinian population which has been ravished and impoverished by years of brutal occupation. It remains to be seen whether the PLO will survive this period of probation and whether the ceremony the world witnessed on the White House lawn will translate into a just and lasting peace.

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