



HOT TOPICS - [AWARDS SEASON 2015](#) - [BROAD CITY](#) - [FIFTY SHADES OF GREY](#) - [BETTER CALL SAUL](#)

HOME
ART
BOOKS
MUSIC
DESIGN
FILM
TELEVISION
MORE ▼

TELEVISION

'The Cosby Show' Is Too Important to Erase From TV History

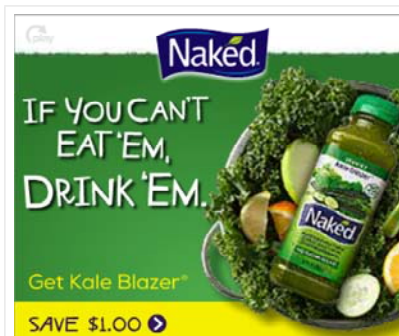
By Pilot Viruet on Nov 20, 2014 2:00pm



When I was a kid, I watched *The Cosby Show*. This is not surprising information: Basically every kid, every *person*, that I knew — black or white, but especially black — watched *The Cosby Show*. Older friends had the pleasure of watching the show during its original run; I was grateful for its existence in syndication, airing 24/7. It was on Netflix for a while, and now it's on Hulu. There is always a way to watch it. But yesterday, in the wake of the [seemingly endless and horrifying rape allegations against Bill Cosby](#), TV Land pulled reruns of *The Cosby Show*. Earlier that day, Netflix pulled his stand-up special, *Bill Cosby 77*, which was set to air over Thanksgiving, and [NBC axed his upcoming sitcom](#). The latter two decisions are not only understandable but absolutely necessary. The former is a bit trickier to dissect.

This should go without saying, but: This is in no way a defense of Bill Cosby, his actions, or his frustrating (but telling) silence on the matter. I am 100 percent in favor of NBC yanking his sitcom (and hope no networks will work with him in the future), and I dread the possibility that Netflix will, once the story dies down a bit, quietly post *Bill Cosby 77*, unceremoniously adding it to the comedy section without an announcement.

But TV Land's decision to pull down *The Cosby Show*, which was once the most popular sitcom on TV, is more complicated. It remains a groundbreaking and essential part of television history, particularly when it comes to the portrayal (and the very existence!) of black



Have a news tip, story idea,
or artwork to submit?
tips@flavorwire.com

RECENT FEATURES

Exclusive: Kathleen Hanna on Voicing Myrna, the Alien Puppet That'll Rule SXSW 27m

10 Famous Artists Who Were Actually Decent Romantic Partners 57m

Christian Values vs. Christian Grey: Behind the Anti-Porn 'Fifty Shades' Backlash 1h

"The Blacker the Berry": Kendrick Lamar's Complex Portrait of American Race Relations 2h

Here's a Crazy Idea: See the Movie Before You Critique It 3h

Literature as Religion: Alejandro Zambra's 'My Documents' 4h

Haunting Photos of Abandoned Malls Buried in Snow 5h

It's "A Matter of Time" Until New Protests Explode: Author Michael Gould-Wartofsky on Occupy's Past and Future 5h

The 5 Best Movies to Buy or Stream This Week: 'Nightcrawler,' 'Laggies' 6h

'Sleepy Hollow' Season 2 Episode 16 Recap: "What Lies Beneath" 7h

POPULAR POSTS

[View All Posts](#)

 **Joni Mitchell Wants to Define Her Own Legacy -- So Why Don't We Let Her?** 1d

 **25 Love Songs That Need to Be Retired** 1d

[+ Follow](#)

families in the media, which hinged on Cosby's famous demand that the show make absolutely sure to paint blacks in a positive light, even if that meant taking the emphasis *away* from the family's race. *The Cosby Show* may have been about a family that *happened* to be black, rather than about a black family, but that doesn't negate the huge strides the show made. Most importantly, it doesn't negate the fact that for many people, myself included, this was one of the first times I was seeing myself — my family, my skin, my hair — represented on television in a way that actually made me feel good.

So you can see why it has been so strange and difficult for me to watch this Cliff Huxtable version of Bill Cosby, the one who was America's Dad, morph into the despicable Bill Cosby that we've been slowly learning about for years — first in vague whispers about his intimidating tactics and hunger for power (this is the guy who [once tried to buy NBC](#)), and now in shouts from over a dozen women. And you can see why it's possible to firmly believe that Bill Cosby should be punished while also believing that we shouldn't try to erase all traces of *The Cosby Show's* existence. It's too great and important of a program to let disappear.

Aside from the show's legacy, TV Land's decision brings up a whole slew of questions that are impossible to answer: What are the rules when it comes to public erasure of a prominent figure and his work? What makes Cosby different from Roman Polanski or Woody Allen — two filmmakers who continue to work and get their films distributed, and whose movies still regularly air on television (I can't imagine them ever getting yanked) — or any other terrible person who has also contributed something of value to society? Is it the sheer number and volume of victims, or something else at work here? And what does this mean for everyone else who worked, for so many years, on *The Cosby Show* and will now fail to get their share of the residuals? Will all of Cosby's past work eventually see the same fate?

The thing that strikes me the most about TV Land's choice is that it doesn't seem to have anything to do with righteousness or respect for the victims; it appears to be a panicked business decision, a preemptive strike to ensure the network doesn't receive any of the backlash that Netflix and NBC were getting prior to pulling their respective Cosby projects. Of course, TV Land isn't the only place to watch *The Cosby Show*, but this will definitely put pressure on the other networks and streaming sites that host it. There is no established protocol to follow in a situation like this one, and no right or wrong answer about how we should view Cosby's past work. But killing such an important and iconic program — in terms of not just black representation on television but also TV history as a whole — is akin to the erasure of an identity.

Filed Under: [Bill Cosby](#) [TV Land](#) [The Cosby Show](#) [bill cosby](#)

Like Share {134}

Tweet {66}  Share {0}

Related Posts



[+](#) Follow



It's Not Just About Beck and Beyoncé: Grammy Album of the Year Is a Flawed Award

1d



15 Valentine's Day Presents for Cinephiles

2d



Cinema's Lessons on Love: 20 Quotes From the Heart

3d

[View All Posts](#)

