



# **Color by Fox: The Fox Network and the Revolution in Black Television (W.E.B. Du Bois Institute)**

*Kristal Brent Zook*

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Following the overwhelming success of "The Cosby Show" in the 1980s, an unprecedented shift took place in television history: white executives turned to black dollars as a way of salvaging network profits lost to videocassettes and cable TV. Not only were African-American viewers watching disproportionately more network television than the general population but, as Nielsen finally realized, they preferred black shows. As a result, African-American producers, writers, directors, and stars were given an unusual degree of creative control over shows such as "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air," "Roc," "Living Single," Martin, and "New York Undercover."

Locating a persistent black nationalist desire--a yearning for home and community--in shows produced by and for African Americans, Kristal Brent Zook shows how these productions revealed complex and contradictory politics of gender, sexuality, and class. Incorporating interviews with such prominent executives, producers, and stars as Keenen Ivory Wayans, Quincy Jones, Robert Townsend, Charles Dutton, and Yvette Lee Bowser, this study looks at both production and reception among African-American viewers. Zook provides nuanced readings of the shows themselves as well as the political and historical contexts in which they emerged.

Though much of black television during this time was criticized for being "trivial" or "buffoonish," *Color by Fox* reveals its deep-rooted ties to African-American protest literature, autobiography, and a collective desire for social transformation.

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