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“TV is its Own Kind of Education”

The title of this essay is from Charles Kenny’s article, “Revolution in a Box,” which appears in the November/December 2009 issue of the *Foreign Policy*.¹

What kind of education does TV provide?

Kenny says that TV works with great stealth, influencing outcomes all over the world: e.g., reducing population growth in rural India, reducing disease in Ghana, and reducing birth rates and increasing divorce rates in Brazil.

A very important result that is attributable, at least in part, to television is the integration of women into the workforce. In the 1950s, few married White women worked outside of their homes. Today, most married White women work. More importantly, a recent report on MSNBC’s Internet Web site revealed that women increasingly out-earn their husbands.²

You’ll agree that it is not uncommon to observe a TV program that features a woman who is doing quite well, thank you, as the primary bread winner for her family.

I can add even another case of TV’s effectiveness. I authored an article, “Black Unemployment and Infotainment,” in the January 2009 issue of *Economic Inquiry* that linked the number of Black primetime television programs during 1972-2002 to the Black unemployment rate, which is typically twice that of the White unemployment rate.

Are we in a “Life Imitating Art” paradigm or is “Art Imitating Life?”

¹ The article can be found on the Internet at the following location;

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/10/19/revolution_in_a_box#.

² See Allison Linn’s, “Rising Number of Women Earn More Than Mates”;

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/33196583/ns/business-consumer_news/.

If the former is true, shouldn't Black Americans discern that TV could be a very important factor in producing outcomes in our communities? This is a very logical concern given that Black Americans watch more TV than any other group in America.³

Shouldn't Black Americans ask, What is TV's role in: (1) producing self-hatred; (2) motivating a high rate of Black-on-Black homicides; (3) stimulating a high level of homosexuality in certain facets of the Black community; (4) producing a low Black saving rate given that Blacks have a previous history of high saving; (5) stunting the growth of Black businesses; and (6) sustaining the White-Black wealth gap?

Answers to these questions would comprise a long and interesting book. However, even without such a book, I can say with certainty that TV is a correlated factor in each of these problems/issues.

But just as TV is powerful enough to create adverse outcomes, it should be possible to turn TV on its head and use it to create positive outcomes for Black Americans. At a minimum, we should endeavor to use TV to produce a positive kind of education, not just "its own kind of education."

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³ See "American Time Use Survey Results for 2008" from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor; http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/33196583/ns/business-consumer_news/. Table 3 that appears at the bottom of this press release contains time use statistics by race; <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/atus.t03.htm>. The release states that about 50 percent of leisure time is spent watching TV. Black Americans over 15 years of age enjoy 5.87 hours of leisure time, while Whites enjoy just 5.13 hours of leisure time each day.