Timothy Havens, **Black Television Travels: African American Media around the Globe**, New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013, 224 pp., $23.00 (paperback).

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Timothy Havens' *Black Television Travels* explores television featuring black bodies and its export to global markets. This well-researched book offers an examination of the programming and marketing strategies employed by international sales and programming executives and the ways that industry lore permeates the global television trade. Using a wide range of temporal and generic examples from *Roots* and *The Cosby Show* to *Grey's Anatomy* and *The Boondocks*, Havens undertakes an examination of the black television trade and how it has remained relatively unchanged through the decades and across genres. Havens forwards two main purposes for *Black Television Travels*. The first is to work against dominant idea(l)s about black television and its viability in the global marketplace. The second is to explore and uncover the interconnectivity of U.S. and global markets concerning representations of black bodies on television.
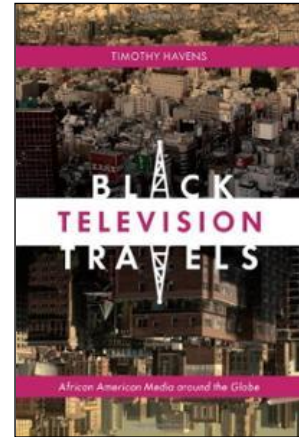
Each of the six chapters (plus the introduction and conclusion) is between 20 and 30 pages and utilizes different methodological and theoretical frames to examine the industry lore that permeates a particular time period and genre. Havens uses this concept as a frame for the book because industry lore's "main function is to carry the discourses encoded into television programming . . . from one location to another" (p. 4). To that end, Havens frames the book under three major methodological approaches; first, he examines the moment of a text's broadcast abroad; second, the moment of program exchange; and, lastly, the moment of a text's production. *Black Television Travels'* greatest strength is its well-researched approach to a wide expanse of black television, clearly demonstrating, as noted in the acknowledgments, that Havens has "been working on this book for the past fifteen years" (p. ix).

The introduction lays the foundation on which the rest of *Black Television Travels* is built. Havens begins discussing the intricacies of the television trade as it relates to African American programming by examining a 2005 comment from Susanne Daniels, Lifetime Entertainment Services' then-president of entertainment, who suggests international markets pay less for programming that features ethnic leads. This industry lore permeates the responses most executives have toward black television in the global television trade. However, Havens cautions that these are not mere business decisions—rather, these decisions shape how global viewers think about blackness and police the kinds of representations permissible in television, particularly for those programs with hopes of being sold globally.

Chapter 1 focuses on selling the groundbreaking miniseries *Roots* internationally. What is most fascinating about Havens' findings in this chapter is his conclusion that "prevalent industry lore at the time

tended to deflect attention from the distinctly African American elements of *Roots* in explaining the miniseries' success abroad" (p. 29). Because of the expense associated with producing a miniseries, international sales were extraordinarily important to the financial success (or failure) of a miniseries. Havens found that executives jumped through several ideological hoops to downplay the miniseries' blackness and instead, depending on the market, sold the series as a story about white guilt (West Germany), the evils of capitalist systems/anticolonialism (Hungary), ancestry, and racial pride. Ultimately, Havens concludes that because of the way the series was sold in global markets, the benefactor of *Roots'* success were miniseries that took up these broader themes with white protagonists, such as *Centennial, North and South* and *Winds of War,* not programs that continued to feature black-focused narratives.

Chapter 2 examines the acquisition and programming strategies employed for integrated situation comedies in apartheid South Africa. While the chapter is broadly concerned with these strategies, it presents a detailed case study of Bop TV and the ways it used U.S.-imported integrated situation comedies to not only create an identity that differentiated it from its competitors, but also, through programming, forwarded an antiapartheid ideology. Because industry lore remains central to *Black Television Travels*, Havens underscores that Bop TV actively and deliberately articulated "the cultural connections between viewers, channel identities, and imported texts" (p. 76). This articulation is a direct challenge to the ways industry lore posits black viewers abroad interact with television texts—that it is the skin color of the bodies within a text that makes it less foreign.

In Chapter 3, Havens turns his attention to *The Cosby Show* to examine the ways the series was sold into international markets. The series proved a financial bonanza for international sales. For contrast, Havens compares *Family Ties* to *The Cosby Show* because they were both on the air during roughly the same period and were both popular among U.S. viewers. According to Havens, *Family Ties* performed well only in Europe and Australia while *The Cosby Show* was successful in those markets as well as in the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, and East Asia. While there was interest in smaller international markets, *The Cosby Show* was programmed as a way to attract undifferentiated market segments. In this way, *The Cosby Show* (in terms of the ways in which the series was sold and programmed) had its racial specificity removed and became less about selling a television comedy about a black family and more about selling a television comedy with strong family themes. Ultimately then, the industry lore that black sitcoms do not sell internationally had industry executives jumping through ideological hoops to deracinate *The Cosby Show* to explain its success. As such, the "strong family themes" that assisted in the international success of *The Cosby Show*, like *Roots*, benefitted not other black-cast situation comedies but situation comedies featuring and concerning white protagonists.

Following black-cast situation comedies into the 1990s with *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, Chapter 4 examines how the series worked to simultaneously rebrand blackness as "youth resistance" while assisting international markets with channel/audience fragmentation. Havens suggests that part of the success of *Fresh Prince* was rooted in the worldwide circulation of hip-hop culture and series star Will Smith's unique brand of family-friendly hip-hop that included such song titles as "Parents Just Don't Understand," which made him an ideal and nonthreatening poster child for the televisualization of hip-hop. However, while *Fresh Prince* was initially appealing in international markets among smaller start-up channels who sought teen viewers, the series was dropped once these channels were able to afford their own locally produced

programming. The larger international broadcasters used *Fresh Prince* in similar ways to inexpensively attract teen viewers, who many broadcasters view as a loyal, if not financial lucrative, audience segment. The international success of *Fresh Prince* caught executives off guard. Industry lore continued to suggest that series with African American leads (reflecting African American "urban" culture) would not sell well internationally. Havens suggests, then, that executives began to acknowledge that if they wanted to attract young viewers, they needed to program series that included allusions to hip-hop culture, visual comedy, and/or international black musicians. Unlike the case of *Roots* and *The Cosby Show*, the benefactors of this industry lore realization were other black-cast shows including *Family Matters* and *Moesha*.

Havens next turns his attention to series that are more contemporary including *Grey's Anatomy*, *That's So Raven*, *Everybody Hates Chris*, *The Boondocks,* and *Chappelle's Show*. Chapter 5 concerns the ways these more recent series work to define audiences and channel branding. Havens suggests that in one way or another, *Grey's Anatomy*, *That's So Raven,* and *Everybody Hates Chris* rely on integrationist models of American black experiences to maximize the appeal of the series in international markets. Particularly, Havens suggests that *Grey's* international syndication success originates, in part, from its ability to feature black characters who fit the mold of *The Cosby Show* as well as "Super Negro" series from the 1960s including *I, Spy* and *Julia*. Conversely, *The Boondocks* and *Chappelle's Show* fit the industrial logic of "edginess" by deploying a combination of profanity and sexuality. These shows feed the international appetite for edgy content. While Havens suggests that each of these series works in multiple ways in international markets, he concludes that industry lore continues to police the kinds of representations of black bodies produced in the United States to better gain international distribution.

The final chapter moves beyond U.S.-based programming and instead examines programming produced elsewhere and the ways those programs navigate commercial television and global distribution. Examining the Samoan-produced animated series *bro'Town* and the Belizean-produced drama *Noh Matta Wat*, Havens moves his discussion to issues related to the era of digitization and its effect on the ways black television travels. Havens finds each of these examples fascinating and illuminating for several reasons. First *bro'Town* helps Havens illuminate the ways that cultural (and racial) specificity, once seen as the death knell of a series, can prove successful in the fragmented television culture in which we live. Second, Havens underscores the centrality of legal DVD sales to the success and continuing production of *Noh Matta Wat* in the age of easy digitization and pirating.

Ultimately, *Black Television Travels* is a detailed, well-researched examination of the ways black television culturally circulates and the ways industry lore continues to police how blackness is defined televisually in international spaces. The one weakness in the text is that while Havens concludes the book by suggesting that the industry "must change to accommodate these contemporary black television travels" (p. 187), he does not suggest how these changes might occur and what they might look like.