A STUDY OF VIEWER RESPONSE TO THE TELEVISION PRESENTATION, "ROOTS"

THESIS

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By

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The problem of this research is to discover viewer response to the television series, "Roots," as revealed through newspapers and magazines published from December, 1976, to June 20, 1977. Thirty-seven articles and 134 interviewee responses were analyzed. The responses with the highest frequency of occurrence in the sample provided eight major categories (listed in the order of highest to lowest frequency of response): inaccuracy/oversimplification, increased awareness, future race relations, white guilt, black anger, future prime time television programming, black pride, and sadness. The predominant appeal of "Roots" was to the emotions of the viewers. Despite the criticism of inaccuracy and/or oversimplification, "Roots" was a timely presentation relating to a current social concern with justice and heritage.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Roots" was a television drama based on Alex Haley's best-selling book by the same name. It was aired by the ABC Network on eight consecutive evenings from January 23, 1977, through January 31, 1977. Approximately 130 million people viewed the series; it was one of the largest audiences in television history.

The purpose of this research was to discover the dominant reasons for the impact of "Roots" as they have been revealed in newspapers and magazines since December of 1976, through June 27, 1977. The categories representing the viewer response items were black pride, black anger, white guilt, sadness, increased awareness, inaccuracy/oversimplification, future race relations, and future prime time television programming.

The "Roots" Phenomenon

In Africa, drama, history, sociology, psychology, and even mathematics are wrapped up in one simple phenomenon—the storyteller. Known by another name in Africa, the "griot," the storyteller passes down information from one generation to another—information about real live people, about their beliefs, their emotions, their family or group interaction, and
their numbers. Alex Haley, a seventh generation descendant of Africa and author of the award winning book, \textit{Roots}, assumed the role of the "griot" in America when writing \textit{Roots}, a role which took him twelve years to fulfill.

In answer to the question, "How did \textit{Roots} get started?" Alex Haley says that his earliest memory is of Grandma, Cousin Georgia, Aunt Plus, Aunt Liz, and Aunt Till talking on their front porch in Henning, Tennessee. He said,

At dusk, these wrinkled, graying old ladies would sit in rocking chairs and talk, about slaves and massas and plantations--pieces and patches of family history, passed down across the generations by word of mouth (2, p. 148).

According to Haley, the "furthest-back" person whom his grandmother, aunts, and cousins ever mentioned was "the African" (2, p. 148). They told him how he was brought to America on a ship and was sold as a slave in Virginia. They said that there he mated with another slave who bore a child named Kizzy.

When Kizzy became four or five, her father began to point out to her various objects and identify them by their African name. When Kizzy grew up, she told her son the same stories which she had heard from her father, identifying the same objects by their African names. Her son, in turn, did the same with his children. His granddaughter became Alex Haley's grandmother and she subsequently became the stimulus for Haley's search for his "roots."
ABC's television drama was essentially a modified version of the book by Haley, a book which describes his ancestral beginnings seven generations back in Africa, and traces progress of this family through five of these generations.

The television series began on the evening of January 23, 1977, and continued to run for eight consecutive nights.

Says Time Magazine,

The sheer number of people who were exposed to "Roots" is staggering. In all, some 130 million Americans watched at least part of the eight episodes ranked among the Top Ten in all-time T. V. ratings [two others were: this year's Super Bowl and Parts I and II of "Gone With the Wind"]. The last episode drew an audience of 80 million (6, p. 69).

The ABC dramatization spurred a rush for the book whose sales hit a one day peak of 67,000 on the third day of the television series. By March 1, Doubleday, the publisher, had one million copies in print (6, p. 70).

The Chicago Tribune referred to "Roots" as "Haley's Comet" and television executive Neil Kuvin of Atlanta called the series "Super Bowl Every Night." In New York, a member of the National Urban League called it "the single most spectacular experience in race relations in America" (6, p. 69).

Statement of the Problem

The primary thrust of this research is to discover viewer response to the television series, "Roots," as revealed through newspapers and magazines published just prior to the series and
covering the topic up to five months later. It attempts to answer the question: What are the viewers saying about "Roots?" Specifically, an effort is made to discover the relative emphases given to the "why" of "Roots'" impact and to its possible latent effects upon society. In addition, there is an attempt to determine who is responding in the event that there is a relationship between the overall types of responses and those responding.

Methods

All issues of the National Observer, the Dallas Times Herald, the National Enquirer, the Dallas Morning News, the Chicago Tribune, the Los Angeles Times, and the New York Times, which were printed from December, 1976, and extended coverage until June 27, 1977, were obtained. Ebony, Militant, and Freedomways were sources chosen for their black perspective. Time, New York, and Newsweek were used because they covered many viewer perspectives. Education Today also became of interest in the analysis because there were references made in this source to the effect that "Roots" had on black studies programs. Then certain categories were chosen which seemed to reflect the topics most emphasized in the viewer response items. These categories were derived not only from information revealed by personal interviews reported in the articles, but also from comments made by news reporters themselves.
In all, there were eight categories chosen for analysis. They were: (1) black pride, (2) black anger, (3) white guilt, (4) sadness, (5) increased awareness, (6) inaccuracy/oversimplification, (7) future race relations, and (8) future prime time television programming.

At this point in the research, all comments which fell under one of these categories were filed on index cards, along with the bibliographic information and a description of the respondent. (The respondent was described as being one of the following: white female, white male, black female, black male, unidentified, or reporter.)

It soon became apparent that some categories would require sub-categories. These additions were distributed in the following ways: The first four categories (black pride, black anger, white guilt, and sadness) remained the same. Under the category, "increased awareness," were added the sub-categories, "black history" and "curiosity about personal roots." The next category, "inaccuracy/oversimplification," was further specified to mean either "factual inaccuracy" or "mythic veracity." The seventh category, "future race relations," included three types of responses. These three sub-categories were "better," "worse," or "unaffected." The eighth and final category, "future prime time," remained unchanged.
After the cards were divided into their appropriate sub-categories, the counting began. Because of the relatively small size of the sample—thirty-seven articles and 134 personal interviews—the findings were not tabulated by a computer.

The method for this research is in the form of content analysis. As defined by Berelson, content analysis is "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (1, p. 5). The "communication" being analyzed in this study refers to written responses made by magazines and newspapers (dating from December, 1976, to June 27, 1977), whose content is about the television series, "Roots."

Content analysis of necessity makes certain basic assumptions. It assumes that inferences can be validly made or that the actual relationships can be established, between intent and content or between content and effect. Content analysis assumes that the study of manifest content is valid, that the meanings ascribed to a body of content are meanings intended by its producers. The assumption is made that the quantitative description of content is useful; the frequency of the occurrence of the categories is an important factor (1, p. 6).

Frequently the various media which are chosen for content analysis share certain common characteristics. They focus on
the manifest content of the material being analyzed. The semantic and/or syntactic characteristics of the language symbols are central to the analysis. Various units of analysis are classified into categories and the results of this classification are analyzed quantitatively (1).

Although content analysis is a relatively new method of research, it has been used to study a wide variety of problems. However, it is possible to divide these problems into three major areas of concern.

The first area is the content of the mass media. It may be a purely descriptive analysis of content or it may move in a more subtle direction, implying a more specific direction of study.

The structure of the communications industry is sometimes a second area of concern. Because there is frequently a conflict of interests among the diversified groups within the mass media, many studies are concerned with the analysis of content which may imply these various role conflicts in the industry.

Thirdly, content analysis is a method used to study the effects of mass media on society and its values. An example of this type of analysis is the study of the possible cause and effect relationship between violence as portrayed on television and the degree of actual violence in society.

Berelson says that content analysis is used to determine "who says what, to whom, how, with what effect" (1, p. 6).
He has developed a system of five general categories into which the specific uses of this method could be classified. They are (1) substance of content, (2) form of content, (3) producers of content, (4) audience of content, and (5) effects of content (1). In addition to these five, content analysis can also be used to study nonverbal communication (e.g., cartoons, maps, paintings, drawings, gestures, voice patterns, or music). Sometimes the extent of reliability is a problem with this type of analysis. However, the only actual difference between the analysis of verbal and nonverbal communication is the form of the content. Also, some content analyses are more qualitative than quantitative (1).

The content of the articles used in this research indicated that certain responses to "Roots" were fairly common among viewers. These responses were designated as the categories and sub-categories for analysis.

Definitions of the Categories

The viewer response items found in the newspapers and magazines seemed to emphasize eight primary topics. These topics provided the categories. They were (1) black pride, (2) black anger, (3) white guilt, (4) sadness, (5) increased awareness, (6) inaccuracy/oversimplification, (7) future race relations, and (8) future prime time television programming.

The first five categories can best be described as "feelings" which the viewers had during or after the series
was aired on television. These responses were generally reported in connection with efforts made by news writers to discover why the impact of "Roots" was so great. Additionally the responses appeared to be rather evenly distributed between blacks and whites, perhaps an indication that reporters were trying to correlate certain responses with certain ethnic groups. These five types of responses were often linked with the more emotional scenes in the series, such as the scene in the hold of the slavership.

**Black Pride.** More specifically, the category "black pride" was one in which black viewers responded to being proud of Kunta Kinte and his family. They were also proud of the progress of the black race from Africa, through slavery--to now, a time when Alex Haley, a black man could win a Pulitzer Prize. They were proud of their grandparents and proud to identify with the people in "Roots."

**Black Anger.** "Black anger" was a response which was indicated by blacks as they recalled how they felt watching "Roots." Sometimes, incidents of violence which occurred after the series was aired were cited as results of black anger. A few comments which were included in this category described black anger as being a "healthy" response by blacks -- a kind of "catharsis" (5).

**White Guilt.** The third category, "white guilt," represented white viewer response often in the form of comments
such as "was shamed," or "didn't want to think about it" (6, p. 70). Some indications of this type of response came from college professors hypothesizing about the impact of "Roots" on white people in America. The topic of white guilt was one which included not only a feeling of guilt about the past treatment of blacks, but also guilt about present racial injustice.

Sadness. "Sadness," the fourth category, was a feeling which blacks and whites expressed as a response to seeing "Roots." It was described in some instances as being sad about "man's inhumanity to man." This category and the fifth, "increased awareness," included comments which were of a less emotional nature than the first three.

Increased Awareness. "Increased awareness" was a category which required two sub-categories, "black history" and "curiosity about personal roots," to accurately represent the feeling of increased awareness which viewers described. Both blacks and whites expressed the idea that "Roots" had made them more aware of history, especially history from the black point-of-view. Likewise, both races commented that "Roots" had created a desire to know more about their ancestors. Specific incidents were cited in which individuals asked their grandparents about their knowledge of the family tree. This category included articles on genealogy in which the series, "Roots," was noted as sparking new interest in the subject.
Inaccuracy/Oversimplification. The sixth category, "inaccuracy/oversimplification," was one which could generally be described as public debate among (and not between) members of both races. Since viewer response came in the form of "pro and con" on the issue of whether or not "Roots" was inaccurate and/or oversimplified, it was necessary to divide the category into sub-categories. They were (1) "factual inaccuracy" and (2) "mythic veracity."

The first sub-category represented viewer response which noted specific factual inaccuracies in the movie script. The types of inaccuracies varied from wrong dates to wrong linguistic expressions among the characters. Comments of a slightly different nature but nevertheless citing inaccuracy were those which challenged Haley's research methods and questioned the legitimacy of his primary source—the "griot" from Juffure. "Oversimplification" included comments which noted that there were no good whites and no bad blacks. In general, racial stereotyping was linked with responses referring to melodramatic television technique.

The second sub-category, "mythic veracity," was a term borrowed from one of the viewer responses (6, p. 70). It represented the idea that the function and goal of the novel and the television drama justify the methods which were used for "Roots." Most responses did not deny that inaccuracies were possible. The argument was that the main events, such
as slavery, the war, emancipation, and "psychological trauma" did exist for the black people. The mythic veracity of the show was defended for another reason: it was the black man's Gone With The Wind, his "Cinderella Story," and long overdue (5, p. 31).

**Future Race Relations.** "Future race relations," the seventh category, was another one requiring sub-categories. They were (1) better race relations, (2) worse race relations, and (3) unaffected race relations. Scattered throughout the sources were references to "Roots" having some effect on how blacks and whites would begin to interact.

"Better race relations" in the future was a prediction which frequently accompanied another category—"increased awareness." However, they have been chosen as separate categories because there was not always the suggestion that increased awareness would result in better race relations in the future. Whereas an "increased awareness" response could be described as a comment implying revelation in terms of learning something new about black history, a "better race relations" response implied that new efforts to open communications (such as television) would bring about more understanding and consequently better relations between the two groups.

The sub-category, "worse race relations," included those viewer responses predicting that blacks and whites would become more hostile to each other as a result of seeing "Roots"
on television. The fear of whites was that blacks would "get stirred up again." The black response indicated that the beliefs of prejudiced whites would only be reinforced.

Those responses which suggested that race relations would be unaffected by the television series seemed to describe the impact of "Roots" as transitory. There were expressions of skepticism from both races. It was a response generally not associated with any particular cause.

**Future Prime Time Television Programming.** The eighth and last category, "future prime time," represented those response items pertaining to television content and scheduling—topics which were frequently mentioned together. The prediction was that in the future and as a direct result of the impact of "Roots," television writers and producers would present more socio-historic drama, specifically black drama. In addition, more best-selling novels would be prepared for television presentation and would likely run on some type of compact schedule, possibly consecutive night scheduling as was the case with "Roots."

**Summary**

*Roots,* a book by Alex Haley, is related to an African tradition known as storytelling and performed by the traditional village "griot" or storyteller.

Haley was motivated by his grandmother, aunts, and cousins to find out more about the stories which had been related
to him since childhood. His personal curiosity about his ancestors in Africa and those shortly thereafter in America inspired him to research and write his best-selling book, *Roots*.

ABC's television drama, "Roots," was based upon Haley's book about seven generations of his family and their progress from Africa, through slavery in America, to now. This series began on the evening of January 23, 1977, and was aired for eight consecutive evenings. It drew a viewing audience of some 130 million Americans. Major newspapers and magazines throughout America reviewed the series and provided condensed versions of the story, episode by episode, for the benefit of those who might miss an evening of the series.

The problem for this study was to discover viewer response to the television series, "Roots," as revealed through newspapers and magazines published just prior to the series and covering the topic up to five months later. An effort was made to discover the relative emphases given to the "why" of "Roots'" impact and to its possible latent effects upon society. There was an attempt to describe who was responding in the event that there was a relationship between the overall types of responses and those responding.

The method or procedure was begun in the examination of copies of major newspapers from Dallas, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. In addition, the *National Observer*, the *Militant*,

and the National Enquirer were used. The magazines represented were Time, Newsweek, Freedomways, Ebony, and Education Today. The sources ranged from December of 1976, to June 27, 1977. The idea was to include a wide range of viewer perspectives.

The topics which received the most attention from the viewers became the categories chosen for the analyses. These eight topics were (1) black pride, (2) black anger, (3) white guilt, (4) sadness, (5) increased awareness, (6) inaccuracy/oversimplification, (7) future race relations, and (8) future prime time television programming.

Some of the categories required more specified sub-categories to adequately designate the viewer response items. The first of these categories was "increased awareness." More specifically, some viewers responded that they were more aware of black history as a result of seeing "Roots." The other sub-category included those responses indicating more curiosity about their own "roots" after viewing the series.

The next category requiring sub-categories was "inaccuracy/oversimplification." Because this category essentially represented a debate over the issue of whether "Roots" was accurate or not, two categories were needed— one for the responses challenging the factual accuracy of the story and the other defending the story's "mythic veracity."

"Future race relations" was a topic which included viewers' predictions as to how or if "Roots" would affect the future
interaction between blacks and whites in America. The various responses, or sub-categories, were "better race relations," "worse race relations," or "unaffected race relations."

Content analysis, which was the specific method of researching the data in this study, is defined by Berelson as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of the communication" (1). The communication being analyzed here was the articles from the specific newspapers and magazines previously described.

There were certain basic assumptions involved in this method. They were (1) that inferences could be validly made or actual relationships established between intent and content, or between content and effect, (2) that the study of manifest content is meaningful, and (3) that the quantitative description of the content is also meaningful (1).
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND FOR THE TELEVISION VERSION OF ROOTS

To know the story of "Roots" is to better understand the significance of the problem and the meanings of the various responses expressed by television viewers. To become aware of some of Haley's experiences during the twelve years of research is to gain a fuller understanding of where his talents lie, therefore clarifying some of the reasons for the success of "Roots." And finally, to know some of Haley's personal opinions as to why "Roots" had such an impact is to discover some of his motivations in presenting the story as he has done--from a distinctly black point-of-view.

A Synopsis of the Story: Roots

The story of Roots begins in the African village of Juffure and ends on a hilltop in Henning, Tennessee. It was Alex Haley's intent that for the millions of black television viewers of "Roots," the story could have begun in any African village and ended in any rural or urban setting in America (2, p. 52). The basis for this synopsis was largely provided by a condensed version of Roots from Reader's Digest.

It was early in the spring of 1750, near the coast of Gambia, West Africa, that a child was born to Omoro Kinte and Binta Kebba. In accordance with the Juffure ancient custom,
for the next seven days Omoro dedicated his time to selecting
a name for his son. It would have to be a very special name
in the history of his people or his immediate family, for his
tribe, the Mandinkas, believed that a child would develop
seven of the characteristics of his namesake (3, p. 153).

On the eighth day, the villagers gathered at dusk before
Omoro's hut. As Binta proudly held her child, a small patch
of his hair was cut off (a tribal custom) and the women com-
mented on how well-formed the baby was. Then the beat of a
small "tantang" drum was heard, the "alimano" said a prayer
over the calabashes of boiled grain and "munko" cakes of
dried rice brought by the villagers. Omoro then walked to
Binta's side, leaned over the infant and whispered into his
son's ear the name he had chosen for him. Omoro's people
believed that each human being should be the first to know
who he is. He proceeded to whisper the name to his wife
and then to the village schoolmaster who announced: "The
first child of Omoro Kinte and Binta Kebba is named Kunta!"
(3, p. 154).

This is how both the book and the television series be-
gan. Kunta proceeded to grow up in the normal Juffure village
style. He participated in work and play activities with his
"kafo" (his local peer group). With his kafo he was ceremoni-
ally ushered into manhood with a tribal ritual—a ritual whose
central task was that of performing the "kasas boyo" operation
in order to purify the boys and prepare them to father many sons. He frequently listened to the village "griot" tell stories about his family history. The griot was an integral part of African life.

The long journey to America began when Kunta, while in the jungle cutting wood to build a drum, was captured by slave traders, the "toubobs" or "white men." The pain and psychological suffering which he and the other slaves endured (if indeed they even survived) on the slaveship to America provide a major part of the emotional impact of the book and the movie (8). There was the humiliation of being stripped naked and shaved; there were numerous whippings, and all were branded between the shoulder blades. The slaves lay on sixteen-inch wide slats in an area not high enough to raise the head. They lay in their own excrement and vomit. Covered in lice and eating only cornmeal mush, forty-two slaves died and were tossed overboard. The remaining ninety-eight, suffering from intestinal disease and infected, pus-covered sores, were delivered onto the shores of "toubob land" three months after they had set sail (3).

Once upon land, the slaves were herded into a small, barred space where they were kept for six days. On the seventh day they were ushered onto the auction platform which was surrounded by anxious slave purchasers listening to the traders announce brightly, "Just picked out of the trees! ... Bright as monkeys!" (4, p. 148).
Kunta was bought for eight-hundred and fifty dollars, hurried into a flat-bed wagon pulled by horses (the first time Kunta had seen a horse), and hauled to Spotsylvania County, where he was to be the property of a Mr. Waller (4, p. 149).

He had only been on the plantation a short time when he made an effort to escape. After four days of running in the forest, Kunta was tracked down by the "toubobs" with their sniffing dogs. He was clubbed brutally, tied to a tree, and forced to watch the "toubob" chop off a portion of his right foot with an ax (4, p. 155).

He was then taken to another plantation, one belonging to his owner's brother, Dr. William Waller. Dr. Waller took care of Kunta's wounds and continued to keep him on his plantation. A black woman named Bell helped Kunta to further doctor his wounds and adjust to the shock of having a bandaged stump instead of a complete foot. He was now eighteen "rains" (years) old.

Ten years later, Bell and Kunta "jumped de broom" into slave matrimony, a ceremony where they actually jumped over a broom to signify their married status (4, p. 163). Later, when their first child was born, Kunta spent a night beneath the stars, deciding on a proper name for her. He could not take the seven days provided for in his African home, but he would give her a "proper" name in accordance with his African tradition.
As he walked the paths where he had courted Bell, he remembered Bell telling him of her greatest grief. Before she was twenty she had been married, but her husband had been killed in an escape attempt, leaving her with two babies. Suspicious of her, the owner had sold Bell without the children. She never saw her children again.

Thinking of this, Kunta chose a name which meant in Mandinka, "You stay here." He did not tell his wife the chosen name at first. He would do it the "right" way and tell his child so that she would be the first to know who she was.

The next night, he wrapped the new baby in blankets and took her a short distance from Slave Row. He raised her and whispered three times into her right ear: "Ee to mu Kizzy leh." ("Your name is Kizzy." 4, p. 164). Lifting a corner of the blanket, he bared the small black face to the moon and stars, repeating the words that once, in his African village, had been spoken to him: "Behold--the only thing greater than yourself!" (4, p. 1964).

As Kizzy grew into womanhood, Kunta taught her the African stories and the African words. She learned quickly and she remembered well. Kunta was very pleased. "You will have children," he said. "They must know from you where they come from" (4, p. 165).
By 1806, when Kizzy was sixteen years old, more than 20,000 blacks had been brought into just two states, Georgia and South Carolina. Slaves were being bought at very high prices. A baby just a few weeks old was worth $200.

On one morning in that same year, "Massa" Waller sold Kizzy because she had broken the plantation rule by helping a slave escape. She was taken to Tom Lea's small plantation in North Carolina. She bore a child by the slave owner and the child was named George.

By the time George was four, he knew that his grandfather was African. Since few slave children on the Lea plantation knew who their fathers were, George pestered his mother for more information about the man who had said his name was "Kunta Kin-tay," who called a fiddle or guitar "ko," and a river "Kamby Bolongo."

"Where he from?" George would ask.

"He were a African, I tol' you!"

"What kin' of African, Mammy? Where 'bouts in Africa he from?" (4, p. 166).

Kizzy, remembering how her father had said she must tell her children where they came from, told George how Kunta Kinte had been captured while looking for wood to build a drum, how they had put him on a ship, and taken him to a place called "Naplis" (4, p. 167).

When George was twelve, he was apprenticed to a man who trained the massa's fighting cocks. He established such
a reputation as a gamecock trainer that he was given the nickname of "Chicken George," a name he would carry with him to his grave.

In 1827, when George was twenty-one, he "jumped de broom" with a slave named Matilda. Between 1828 and 1840, they had seven children. George told each of his children the story of his/her African ancestry and the journey of Kunta Kinte to America.

The fourth child, Tom, became a blacksmith. When the family was sold by "Massa" Tom Lea to a tobacco plantation in Alamance County, Tom met and married a half-black, half-Cherokee slave named Irene. Their children heard the same stories from their parents as their parents had heard before them.

When the Civil War was over, they became free. But they had no land and no money, so they stayed at the Murray Plantation, with white Murrays and black Murrays struggling on together.

Then in 1872, Chicken George led twenty-nine wagons of black families out of Alamance County, North Carolina, and through the Cumberland Gap to Henning, Tennessee. The last wagon was driven by Tom Murray, the blacksmith, with his wife and seven children, the youngest of whom was two years old. Her name was Cynthia and she, many years later, repeated the seven-generations-story to her grandson, Alex Haley.
Haley's Research

The story of how Alex Haley was finally able to finish his research and get the book into print is an amazing one. The most interesting version of this tale was found in an article in the *New York*, entitled "Alex Haley: Tale of a Talker." It seems that during the twelve years in which Haley spent researching *Roots*, Haley established a reputation of being a pretty good "storyteller," himself. According to this article, Ken McCormick, the editor-in-chief at Doubleday, after hearing the story of Haley's storytelling—grandmother, aunts, and cousins, across the lunch table from Haley, remarked to his secretary, "I've been in this business for 35 years, but that's the most intriguing lunch I've ever had" (1, p. 50).

Three days later, Haley signed a contract with Doubleday. Though McCormick did not even ask for a written proposal, he offered a cautious advance of $5,000. The book was to be finished one year later, August of 1965.

But by the proposed delivery date, Haley had become engulfed in the possibility of identifying "the African" whom Grandma Cynthia had described. Furthermore, he had written nothing. Instead, he wanted to go to Africa and research, but his advance money was gone. In 1966, he met Mrs. DeWitt Wallace, the cofounder of *Reader's Digest*, at
a party. She remembered Haley from his earlier writing for this publication and his collaboration in the writing of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. She asked what he was doing and he proceeded to tell her.

The following day, Mrs. Wallace called a meeting of her editors. For three hours they listened as Haley described his dream. Overwhelmed by his fervor, they agreed to buy the first serialization rights to the proposed book. They were able to pay a retainer of $300 a month for a year, plus "reasonable necessary travel expenses" (1, p. 50).

By the end of the year, those expenses had amounted to more than $40,000. Haley had traveled nearly all over the United States, back and forth to Africa, and in one week, made three trips to London in search of a single piece of information. He was able to identify "the African" as Kunta Kinte and his homeland as Gambia; broadened the scope of his book and the style of his research; but as of yet, had not written a single word.

Upon receiving his last retainer check, he paid all of his back bills, but none of the checks that he wrote were honored by his bank. The Internal Revenue Service had put a lien on his account because he had not paid taxes in years.

Panic ked, Haley called his agent. Obviously, no more money could be expected from Doubleday, the book being two years overdue. However, permission was given for Haley to
sell the paperback rights in advance, and a meeting was arranged with Helen Meyer, president of Dell.

Haley gave Ms. Meyer his pitch, and as might be expected, Ms. Meyer gave Haley $18,000. Half of his new advance went to Doubleday, which had now made a profit on a nonexistent book. With the remaining half, Haley continued to research. On a whim, he decided to abandon his mother's family and trace his father's. His father's grandfather had been an Irish slave owner, and Haley impulsively made a trip to Ireland, wiping out the Dell advance.

Broke again, Haley then decided to sell the movie rights to his still nonexistent book. Unbelievable as it may sound, a prominent Hollywood lawyer, Lou Blau, listened to Haley tell his story one more time, and not so unbelievably, he commented afterwards, "I consider myself a devoted liberal, devoted to good causes from early on until the grave. I immediately became devoted to having Alex Haley's story told to the whole world" (1, p. 51).

Blau called Columbia Pictures and suggested that they come to Hollywood to meet his new client. When they suggested that he send them what was written, he replied, "He hasn't written anything yet" (1, p. 51).

Two weeks later, Haley outlined his plans to Columbia: a 200-year history of a black family through slavery to the present. Columbia envisioned an epic--Gone With The Wind
from the slave quarters. They took an option and gave him $50,000 and a guarantee of 10 cents on every book sold over 100,000.

Now, with the hardcover, paperback, first serial, and movie rights sold, Haley was left with no more rights to sell. And a year later, he had no more money either. But, he had another scheme: instead of having a few people pay him thousands of dollars for his story, why not get thousands of people to pay a few dollars?

So Haley lined up a lecture agent and went out to talk about how he traced his own genealogy. In 1969 alone, he netted $80,000 from 120 lectures.

However, in 1971, Haley was besieged by back debts. Columbia wanted repayment of the $50,000; Doubleday would no longer accept his procrastination. After a period of depression and near suicide, the first written evidence of Haley's extensive research appeared as a story in The New York Times, describing his search for Kunta Kinte. In actuality, it was only a written version of his lecture. His hope that this would appease his publishers and creditors were dashed.

Fortunately, Haley continued to lecture--one of his devoted listeners donated $10,000 to his cause. This amount carried him until November of 1973, when he was able to deliver 900 pages of his manuscript, the first third of the book now retitled Roots.
Stan Margulis, the line producer for Wolper Productions, read the first serialization excerpts which appeared in *Reader's Digest* in May of 1974. He had been planning to combine two innovations in television programming—the family saga and the mini-series based on a novel. Already, Universal had been developing Irwin Shaw's *Rich Man, Poor Man* into a twelve-hour series for ABC network. Margulis wanted a similar project.

Within three months after reading the Digest, Haley had lunch with Wolper and Margulis—the story was told again. Says Margulis to Wolper, "Whatever it takes, we've got to have that book" (1, p. 51). He immediately contacted Stoddard and Rudolph of the ABC network.

There were two precepts of television which worked against Haley: "No network had ever bought the advance rights to an unpublished book, and all the networks shied away from serious treatments of black problems" (1, p. 51). After ABC had purchased the rights for $250,000, Stoddard found himself saying a production meeting, "We have a serious black property here. What the hell are we going to do with it?" (1, p. 51).

Although ABC found themselves delayed for six more months while Haley completed the book, they did figure out what to do with the "serious black property." "Roots" was the highest-rated television show of all time and there is the possibility that the book will be the best-selling hardcover. ABC had already bought Haley's second book, *Search*. 
Haley is now a millionaire. He continues to lecture, and he recorded a double-album for Warner Brothers called (not surprisingly) Alex Haley Talks.

Haley's Response to the Impact of Television's "Roots"

*Time Magazine* printed some of author Haley's ideas as to the question of why "Roots" had so much impact. Haley responded to the general question and also tried to give some insight into the black versus the white response. Said Haley:

In this country we are young, brash and technologically oriented. We are all trying to build machines so that we can push a button and get things done a millisecond faster. But as a consequence, we are drawing away from one of the most priceless things we have—where we came from and how we got to be where we are. The young are drawing away from older people (5).

Haley, despite the accessibility which television provided for the message of his book, blamed television for this ever-widening gap between generations. He said,

TV has contributed to killing off the old form of entertainment where the family sat around listening to older people. TV has alienated youth from its elders, and this has cost us culturally and socially (5).

*Time* reported that Haley saw "some distinct differences in why whites and blacks were so attracted by it ["Roots"][". He discounted speculation that his book would "unleash black rage" by saying:
I've not heard one murmur of radicalization from blacks. I have heard ebullience and happiness that the story has been told. The blacks who are buying books are not buying them to go out and fight someone, but because they want to know who they are . . . . Some very important things are happening among young blacks. The generation of 1960's was so quick to label all older blacks as "Uncle Toms." *Roots* has helped to turn this around (5).

In reference to the white response, Haley said:

The white response is more complicated. But when you start talking about family, about lineage and ancestry, you are talking about every person on earth. We all have it; it's a great equalizer. White people come up to me and tell me that *Roots* has started them thinking about their own families and where they came from. I think the book has touched a strong, subliminal pulse (5).

*Freedomways*, before the television series was aired, described the universal appeal of Haley's book in the following way:

In the first place, externally *Roots* is a marketing success, demonstrating great professional skill. It is packaged to reach a universal audience. It is deliberately not a Black book. Its title is not "Home to Africa," or even "Black Roots." Its dedication is not to "my people" but to "my country." It has no pictures . . . it is, as somebody said, "a book for mankind" . . . . In the second place, *Roots* is a literary masterpiece (7, p. 253).

Haley believed that the public had "a subconscious hunger for something with weight, depth, and social value." And *Newsweek* commented that "they [the viewers] found it on television in 'Roots'" (8, p. 97).

"This story of our people," said Haley, "can help to alleviate the legacies of the fact that, preponderantly, the
histories have been written by the winners" (9). This view was one which was echoed by blacks, white, sociologists, historians, and film critics in various other articles printed since the series.

In addition, Haley offered an explanation similar to that of Congresswoman Barbara Jordan--the time was "ripe." He said,

The American people were ready for the truth about slavery. White people have come up to me and said things like "thank you for helping me better understand" or "thank you for an education that I feel I needed." The usual phrase for black people is "thank you for giving us our history" (6).

Haley told the National Enquirer why he believed that "Roots" would help unite blacks and whites.

You can't enslave a person or be prejudiced and discriminate against him if you really know the truth about him. To enslave people, we must also create the myth that the people we are going to enslave are inferior to us (6).

Haley, in this article, said that the American people were ready for the truth, therefore implying that his book, Roots, was based on truth.

Summary

Alex Haley's story, as presented by the ABC network drama entitled "Roots," began with the birth of Kunta Kinte in the village of Juffure, near the West African coast of Gambia, at approximately 1750.
What happened after Kinte was captured by slave traders and shipped to America provided the major portion of the story. Five more generations of his descendents experienced slavery in America. The seventh generation belonged to Haley and his immediate family who experienced varying degrees of freedom, but not legalized slavery.

Of primary importance to the story was how the initial desire of Kunta Kinte to have the story of his life in Africa be passed down to every generation did indeed come true. Despite the many forced separations of black families, and despite the attempts by white slave owners to keep the slaves illiterate and unknowledgable of life outside of the plantation, Kunta Kinte's story found its way to Henning, Tennessee, where it was told to Haley by his Grandmother Cynthia, aunts, and cousins.

Haley was always fascinated with the tale told by his grandmother. After serving in the army, Haley collaborated in the writing of The Autobiography of Malcolm X. In addition, he published some articles in the Reader's Digest, all the time becoming more interested in finding out more about "the African" and his personal "roots."

In August, 1964, Haley signed a contract with Doubleday. His book was to be finished one year later. By the time his first serialization excerpts appeared in Reader's Digest, it was May of 1974. Haley had not completed the book, but had
managed to sell the rights to the hardcover, the paperback, the first serial, and the movie. He had researched in Africa, Ireland, London, and extensively in the United States. In 1969, he netted $80,000 from lecture tours on the subject of genealogy. But until the show was aired on January 23, 1977, Haley was never out of debt. The Internal Revenue Service had put a lien on his account shortly before he had signed with Columbia pictures—as he had not paid taxes in years.

For the final completion of Roots, there was a winning combination: a good story and perhaps a better storyteller. Many of the television viewers of "Roots" attempted to describe what they thought was the "winning combination" or reason for the tremendous impact of "Roots." Sometimes their responses seemed to echo the response of Haley when asked what he thought made his story such a success. Haley's opinion of what really attracted Americans to his story was summed up in one line, "The universal appeal of "Roots" is based on the average American's longing for a sense of heritage."
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CHAPTER III

A DESCRIPTION OF VIEWER RESPONSE TO "ROOTS"

The sample, thirty-seven articles including 134 responses from viewers of "Roots," was analyzed according to eight categories. These eight categories were black pride, black anger, white guilt, sadness, increased awareness, future race relations, and future prime time television programming.

A maximum effort was made to note the characteristics of each person interviewed and to include this data in the findings. The intention was to discover any possible relationship between responses and characteristics of those interviewed.

Description of the Sample

In this study, there were twenty-nine articles from newspapers and eight articles from magazines used for analysis. The dates for the articles extended from December of 1976, to June 27, 1977. In all, there were thirty-seven articles chosen. The magazines were Time, Newsweek, Education Today, Ebony, New York, and Freedomways. The newspapers were the Dallas Times Herald, the Dallas Morning News, the Los Angeles Times, the New York Times, the Chicago Tribune, the Militant, National Observer, and National Enquirer.
From these thirty-seven articles, 134 interview responses were analyzed. Twenty-six persons were black males; sixteen were females. There were also twenty-seven white males and eighteen white females interviewed.

Fifty-three persons interviewed were unidentified as to race and twenty-seven reporters for these articles expressed personal opinions relating to the categories being analyzed.

Analyses

Even before the series was aired, there were predictions made as to the impact of the television drama, "Roots." One such prediction was found in Education Today. It read, "We expect 'Roots' to be even more popular than the 'Ascent of Man,' which was first seen on TV in early 1975" (27, p. 665).

There was constant coverage throughout the week that "Roots" was being shown. Quite common were daily excerpts in local newspapers trying to keep the viewing audience abreast of what was happening. Although it appeared, according to statistics, that few people missed a single night, the media were prepared for such an occasion by providing this daily glimpse at the story.

Not only were there excerpts in the papers, but also there were predictions as to how popular the drama was going to be. On January 29, with one more night of the story still to come, The Chicago Tribune ventured to state (4), "It's
believed to be the highest-rated program in Chicago T.V. history . . . 75 to 85 million Americans glued to their seats every night." The Tribune went on to state that the serial seemed to have a "lock" on Chicago's large black population. "Our grosses have been down and I would say the T. V. show has had some effect," said Irwin Cohen, an official of Pitt Theatres, which operates five Loop Theatres catering largely to young blacks (4).

Time Magazine surveyed business establishments across the country. It noted a complaint by a California restaurant owner that business had dropped by forty per cent during the week of "Roots." In addition, Time mentioned a Harlem bar whose patrons insisted that the jukebox be turned off while they discussed "Roots." One Los Angeles discoteque owner reported that his business was closed down altogether (33, p. 70). As The Militant summed it up, "Roots was being discussed in bars, homes, subways--everywhere. By Everybody" (18).

Even one of the stars of the television drama was quoted as saying, "I knew it was important and needed to be done, but had no idea how the public would react" (15). Newsweek devoted fifteen lines of information concerning viewer statistics alone (36, p. 97).

One article pointed out the fact that a Pan American commercial made indirect, but timely, reference to "Roots"
by talking about how "there were Irish who had never seen Ireland, Japanese who had never seen Japan, Swedes who had never seen Sweden, and Africans who had never seen Africa" (18).

Right on the heels of the dramatic conclusion of the series, one Atlanta Travel Agency was acknowledged as having arranged two back-to-Africa "Roots" tours—$1365 per person (36, p. 97). Newsweek announced that the Gambian Government planned to declare the village of Juffure a national monument (36, p. 97). It also stated that Haley was heading the Kinte Foundation which assists other people in tracing their family histories.

As a reflection of the new interest in genealogy, a February issue of Time reported that letters to the National Archives in Washington requesting information had tripled, to 2300 a week; and applications for permits to use the research facilities had jumped forty per cent to 560 a week (33, p. 70). However, Time made an additional observation:

Actually, American blacks' interest in their African heritage began years ago... in the 1960's. Hence "Roots" and the reaction to it are in a sense as much effect as cause (33, p. 70).

Many of the media sources discussed the emotional impact of "Roots." "'Roots' is a haunting, sometimes horrific exploration of the black diaspora," said Newsweek in an issue which came out on the first day of the series (37).
More specifically, they hypothesized, "The scenes in the
hold, where 140 shackled slaves writhe in anguish, may be
the most harrowing ever to enter our living rooms."

The Chicago Tribune gave their reading audience an
emotional description of an upcoming episode: "The abducted
blacks are shackled and packed like sardines, writhing and
sweating and lying helpless amid their own waste" (5).

When Haley appeared in the final chapter to sum up his
twelve years of research by saying that he was the last of
the Kinte line, Newsweek described the moment as being one in
which "the significance of all that went before comes together
with an emotional jolt" (36).

There were frequent occurrences of black-white response
items. According to Time, "There seemed to be scarcely any
black Americans, even ones who thought they were well versed
in their race's history, who did not come away from their
T.V.s shaken to the core by 'Roots'" (33, p. 70).

One headline in The New York Times read, "Guilt and Pride
Felt by Youths Viewing 'Roots'" (27). In this same article,
one black high school student from Washington interpreted
the "Roots" phenomenon as follows: "Whites were admitting
what they did was wrong: It was an apology to help us forget
about the past and move on" (27). For a black seventeen-year-
old girl, the emotion was anger: "The show made me angry . . .
it should never have been shown because it only created more
animosity between blacks and whites" (27).
Some media sources noted that emotional response came in the form of action or changed behavioral patterns in a few scattered incidents. For example, the day after the series concluded, the New Jersey Assembly debated reinstating the death penalty. Leading the fight against the death penalty were two black Democrats, one of which said that he hoped that other assembly members had watched "Roots" because it might "explain why Black folks get a little upset when some laws are passed ... We know some laws are going to hit us harder" (18).

"'Roots' had a raw, visceral impact on many viewers," said Time (33, p. 70). The direction of the statement was focused primarily on the few cited incidents of violence among high school youths. In Greenville, Mississippi, some white students taunted blacks: "You ol' slave, my granddaddy owned you once upon a time" (23). And at Detroit's Ford High School, some blacks roughed up four white youths (33, p. 70).

The Militant quoted The Philadelphia Inquirer as stating:

... four Black students at Harrisburg Middle School were suspended after a shoving match with some white students. The Black students had been shouting "Roots, Roots" before the scuffle began. Harrisburg ... is 76% Black (18).

Dr. Howard Taylor of Princeton agreed (23) that a major impact of "Roots" was anger--especially among young blacks. But he was quoted as saying that this was "a healthy thing" because it causes blacks to struggle for their rights.
In *The National Enquirer*, one person responded in an interview: "The T.V. production was superb. Many scenes moved me to tears, sadness, and anger" (19). In conjunction with this response was a finding in a nationwide telephone survey made by a team of sociologists at the Center for Policy Research in New York: "Sadness was the most frequent emotional response among viewers of 'Roots.' Anger ranked second" (25). More specifically,

For both races, sadness (92 per cent) and anger (71 per cent) were the principal responses. More women, both black and white, would admit to such responses as crying (25).

A principal finding in the survey was the differing importance of the "Roots" series to black and white families. For blacks, the series was more of a social event with the young children encouraged to watch the program. It was indicated by the interviews that this was a learning device in the home (25).

Another aspect of the survey, whose average interview was twenty-two minutes, was the willingness of those called to discuss the series and their feelings in detail. There was a "residue of excitement," said one of the sociologists (25).

Dr. Judd Marmor, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Southern California, felt that there was more than an emotional response:
And not only did people feel for this family—it made them think. The story captured both their minds and their hearts, for it made people ask themselves questions like: "What would I have done if I'd been living in those times? If I were white, would I be as ugly as the whites depicted there? If I were a black husband, how would I react if my wife had to submit to sexual relations for me to survive?" (23)

There were many references made to "Roots" being an experience which caused more overall awareness of history and present racial problems. Said one article, "'Roots' was one big consciousness raiser" (18). Another article pointed out the fact that "many students share a lack of knowledge about the history of slavery in the United States . . . 'Roots' inspired heightened discussion on race relations" (27).

Said Aurora Jackson, a black social worker in Chicago,

It's one thing to read about this, and another thing to see it. My concept of slavery was always intellectual. For the first time, I really felt I had a picture of how horrible life was (33, p. 70).

According to Time Magazine, many observers felt that the television series left whites with a more sympathetic view of blacks by giving them a greater appreciation of black history. "This, in fact, seemed to have been the case in many white households" (33, p. 70).

Admitted Lydia Levin, a law student at the University of California at Los Angeles:
I don't think I ever sat down and thought about what slavery really meant. Whites knew that this happened. We just didn't have to look at it on such a personal level (33, p. 70).

Some sources reported that "Roots" was a unifying factor for white and black television viewers. An article in The Dallas Morning News was headlined, "My Roots Are Your Roots" (16). And another newspaper quoted John Callahan, professor of American Literature at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon, as saying, "We now know our roots are inextricably bound with the roots of blacks and cannot be separated" (33, p. 70).

Regardless of the type of response which various media made to the showing of "Roots," there was much consensus on the show's impact. As one newspaper put it, "The show's impact cannot be denied." Harvard sociologist Thomas Pettigrew was interviewed by both Time and The National Enquirer. He compared "Roots" to "the aftermath of John Kennedy's assassination as a major television event" (33, p. 69). And Time suggested the possibility that the large audience of television might be "every bit as significant in its own way as the civil rights marches of the 60's" (33, p. 71).

Time also tried to find out the "why" of "Root's" success. Very simply, Time's major news item on this topic was titled, "Why 'Roots' Hit Home" (33, p. 69). The question was asked, "What were the reasons for 'Root's' huge success?"
Included was a quote from Washington Post columnist, William Raspberry, "The only question remaining on the subject of 'Roots' is: Why? Why did this work become an instant classic, a literary-television phenomenon?"

Some critics gave a large percentage of the credit to television technique, including widespread publicity tactics. Said The National Enquirer,

["Roots"] . . . had all the elements of a good detective thriller . . . plenty of soap opera and sentimentality . . . plenty of sex and violence . . . tragedy and comedy following closely on each other's heels (21).

According to Newsweek, it fulfilled the "novels-for-television formula: lots of soft core sex, blood, sadism, greed, big-star cameos, and end-of-episode teasers" (36). In a later issue, much of the show's impetus was attributed to the eight-consecutive-nights scheduling: "To schedule it over a period of 8 or 10 weeks would have dissipated the emotional impact" (37). Said black historian, Benjamin Quarles of Morgan State College in Maryland, "There was the threat of violence, the appeal of sex, all building up to a wonderful climax—all the things that make for good television" (33, p. 70). As for the widespread publicity, The Chicago Tribune stated,

Well, the hype is on. "Roots" . . . enters the second leg Monday of its unprecedented eight-night run, and ABC is beating its breast (and our brows) by relentlessly publicizing it as one of the crowning achievements in TV history (5).
Although one black was quoted as saying that the wide viewing response "is just them honkies trying to wash off their guilt . . . . It ain't gonna impress me," (31) Dr. Charles Smith, a black professor of sociology at Florida A&M University, felt that blacks continued to watch the program because it allowed them "a kind of catharsis or release" of their pent-up frustrations (21). He believed this to be a very beneficial outcome of the viewing experience.

Perhaps supporting Dr. Smith's hypothesis was the following statement from Allen Counter, a black biologist at Harvard:

"It sounded like us, it looked like us, it was us. We've always wanted whites to understand how our backgrounds are different from theirs. Now they should understand a little better where we are coming from (33, p. 71)."

Just as the black was not impressed by "honkies washing off their guilt" (31), there were frequent references made to the topic of "guilt." Although this topic may be thought of as simply a "kind" of reaction to the show, there seemed to be the suggestion that this feeling of guilt already existed among white Americans, thus accounting for why the show had such an impact on that segment of the viewing audience.

According to one interview,

"There seems to be a collective guilt in this country about the treatment of blacks --and in a way, people adopted this family as their own for one week, and were on their side (21)."
In *Newsweek*, on the first day of the series, "Roots may be a story that white Americans would prefer to forget" (28). And one month later in *The National Enquirer*,

It's a firm psychiatric principle that to relieve one's self of guilt, you must face the facts, discuss what happens and then release it. "Roots" did that for people regarding the slave experience (23).

In another source, Beti Gunter, the wife of a lawyer in Little Rock, Arkansas, was quoted as saying, "Something inside me tried to say that slavery wasn't bad, but now I know that it really was a lot worse" (33, p. 70). Barbara Ash, a vice-president of Hart, Schaffer, and Marx in Chicago, described her reaction this way: "I just hurt for them. Guilt is not a good word to describe my feelings--I felt agony" (33, p. 70). Added Beverly Stallworth of Manchester, New Hampshire: "I feel some shame that I never cared enough to learn what it was like" (30). Said one unemployed Brooklyn teacher, "I cried all the way through one show. I have a child, and the fact that black women lived in fear of losing their children was devastating" (31).

For some people, the fact that the story of "Roots" was based on real happenings in history, the fact that its theme embraced such universal topics as family unity, justice, freedom, and survival against great odds, and the unique twist which ABC took in presenting a so-called "black Cinderella story" were the reasons for its success.
The National Enquirer summed up one of its findings after conducting interviews: "It ["Roots"] reflected every American's personal struggle to see that right and compassion prevail" (23). Another finding, "The story was based on fact, and people have always had a deep curiosity about the lives of others" (23). In The Dallas Morning News, "Now, some truth, though not all, was displayed to America in the showing of "Roots" (16). Also from the same issue:

... the truth of the black American's history, heritage and contributions to the world, especially to western civilization, has not been published in our American history textbooks in proper perspective for all America to know the truth--but truth stamped out will rise again (16).

In Education Today, there was an abundance of coverage on this same topic:

Black historians are ... enthusiastic over the fact that American history will finally be presented with the blinders off--that the black experience will be presented with insight, compassion, and understanding (30, p. 664).

Similarly, this same source stated,

The lack of shows dealing with black Americans, in true-to-life situations, is still the rule rather than the exception; it is difficult to think of many programs, outside of "The Life of Miss Jane Pittman" ... in which the black experience was treated with dignity and intelligence (30, p. 664).

Many critics and other viewers, while conceding that the series was not a precisely accurate account of history, nonetheless praised the production for what one of them called
its "mythic veracity." As *Time Magazine* wrote, "For millions of Americans, "Roots" was real--if not necessarily literally true."

Not all writers or persons interviewed could agree that "Roots" was "true-to-life." Many responses pointed to the idea that the series was often inaccurate and/or oversimplified. Particularly outspoken was *Time Magazine*.

Not one sympathetic white character appears. Not a single black man of less than shining rectitude turns up either. This is dramatically vulgar and historically preposterous.

In a *Time* publication almost one month later, opinion had not changed:

*Roots* is rooted in the paperback mentality. It is *Mandingo* for Middlebrows . . . offered "almost no new insights, factual or emotional, about slavery;" instead, there was "a handy compendium of stale melodramatic conventions" (33, p. 70).

The type of inaccuracy cited seemed to depend upon the particular "social view-point" of the publication. The *Militant* made the following critique:

There were some holes and inaccuracies . . . . The Civil War was not dealt with adequately. This clash between slavocracy and Northern Industrialists was decided by the participation of 200,000 Black troops on the side of the North . . . . Nat Turner's rebellion took place in August, 1831. The T. V. placed the date in 1841 (18).

A passage from *Time Magazine* argued that "The manhood rite of the Mandikan tribe took three or four years, not a couple of days" (32).
The Chicago Tribune commented that "Roots" missed an important part of the slavery issue, "the psychological trauma," the point being that the series overemphasized the "physical brutality of slavery" (5).

Judge A. Nelson Waller, 73, who still lives on a plantation in Virginia where Kunta Kinte was enslaved, offered a similar complaint. He stated: "There was no beating or carrying on in this county, nothing like they show on that gorgeous T. V. show" (30).

The Militant began with a tale that seemed to sound like some of the previously mentioned complaints on racial stereotyping, but which ended with a unique twist. Its information was taken from a New York Times interview of a white family in Queens, New York. It read:

It ["Roots"] doesn't show any good white people, said the wife. "There must have been some decent white people . . . ."

No, the good whites had their day with Gone With the Wind, said the husband. Anyhow, how good could any whites look to a slave? . . . All the white booses must have looked pretty bad, like Nazi Party members did to Jews (18).

Freedomways acknowledged that "the orthodox historian will content that 'Roots' was not, strictly speaking, biography" (20). The magazine added that "technically this criticism is valid. But all of the main events are absolutely accurate" (29). However, they also contend that "the heart of the Haley Story is that it establishes in the public mind the
link of Afro-Americans with their homeland and that this link, though hammered and hidden, psychologically has never been broken" (29).

*Time* quoted Harvard sociologist Clifton Jones (33, p. 71) who also discussed the "psychological impact" of "Roots" on blacks, comparing it as second in consciousness-raising only to the "black-is-beautiful" movement of the sixties. Said he, "To see the spirit with which their much-maligned ancestors survived slavery is a great corrective to any lingering inferiority that blacks feel" (33, p. 70). Thus, the impact of "Roots" was partly credited to the idea that blacks watched the show because it bolstered their self-esteem, their sense of pride.

*Newsweek* interviewed a young, black Los Angeles woman. She said,

Most things you see on T. V. are from a strictly white point of view. The blacks shown rarely win. But the black people in "Roots" won in the end. It really made me feel good (37).

In reference to the theme of "freedom" an interviewee said. "'Roots' epitomized every American's fight for personal freedom and prosperity. That was its appeal" (23). In *Education Today*,

The viewer of "Roots" can readily empathize with the forebears of Kunta as they dream of freedom while enslaved, as they plan for a better life, and as they use their wits in order to survive (30).
Dr. Comer of the Meninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas, was quoted in The National Enquirer as saying,

It was a black Cinderella story--something we've never had before. It proved that in the most desperate situations, we can have hope. Tragic as the story was, it still carried this uplifting message. It showed what a human being can do--he can go from slavery to freedom (21).

His view seems to say that hope for survival against great odds was a major appeal of the dramatization--not only mere survival, but freedom.

Omari Musa, writer for The Militant, said, "I was drawn to the continuous battle to not only survive, but to be free... All were freedom fighters" (18).

The idea that "justice would prevail" seemed to be the attraction of "Roots" explained Dr. Herbert Modlin,

The show appealed to the basic American spirit--no matter how much you hit me, no matter how many times you spit in my face, no matter how much you debase me, I'll fight back until I get what's rightfully mine (23).

In an attempt to discover the "why" of the impact of "Roots" The National Enquirer interviewed a Dr. Parks, the great-great grandson of an Alabama slave. His explanations for the impact related to a "longing (of the viewers) for the type of close family ties which were highlighted in 'Roots'" (23). He went on to say, "The fascination of watching one family united in its personal struggle against inhumanity was a major appeal of this movie" (23).
In the same article, a professor of social psychiatry at Brandeis University was quoted as saying, "It [<"Roots"] hit the current nostalgia interest which could be described as a national effort to recapture the past" (23).

Also related to this "national effort to recapture the past" was a sentence from The Militant which said, "None of the networks had ever impressed me as interested in Black history" (18). Newsweek echoed,

One of television's less-noted failings is the fact that, throughout more than three decades, the networks have never produced a serious, black dramatic series. That omission will finally be rectified next Sunday . . . . This is a racial history that America has largely mislaid, and its dramatization on T. V. is an exemplary event (37).

One source from The Dallas Morning News described the "Roots" phenomenon in the following way, "I watched Alex Haley's timely and well-written literary work" (16). And Texas Congresswoman Barbara Jordan put the accent on "timing" as she explained the impact of the series,

Everything converged--the right time, the right story and the right form. The country, I feel, was ready for it. At some other time I don't feel it would have had that kind of widespread acceptance and attention--specifically in the 60's. Then it might have spawned resentments . . . . but with things quiet, and race relations moving along at a rate that's acceptable to most Americans, we were ready to take in the full story of who we are and how we got that way (33, p. 71).

The Los Angeles Times addressed itself to the question, "Why All The Sudden Digging For Our Roots?" (2). It came up
with topics such as (1) the geographical rootlessness of American society, (2) career rootlessness, (3) a quest to discover the possible inherited traits of yet unborn children, and (4) the desire of people to see themselves as part of a process, more specifically,

...to know that something came before and something will come afterward and maybe somewhere along the line there was a person of consequence—a king, a scholar, a great warrior or maybe a giant of a man with a white beard and a proud look in his eye who exists only in the imagination (3).

Another writer for The Los Angeles Times ventured to make this prediction, "I imagine that the why of watching 'Roots' would make one of the most fascinating sociological studies of modern America" (35).

Predictions, the third category for analysis, covered materials which were found scattered throughout the samples pertaining to the possible future effect of "Roots" on the American people.

Under the subheading, "Continued Impact," The Militant predicted: "Roots will continue to have an impact" (18). Education Today read: "...it ['Roots'] is expected to generate enormous interest among the general public in this long-neglected area of history" (30).

The National Enquirer interviewed five sociologists, and summed up the interviews with the general heading of the article, "Sociologists believe...Show's Impact Will Be Healthy for Americans" (21). Some of the specific
conclusions were

White people will be more understanding of black people, and black people will have more awareness of their history.

In the long term, this will be beneficial to black-white relations.

And several families say their elderly members—the grandmothers and grandfathers—have started talking now about things they never told the family before, things which were touched on [in "Roots"]. That has got to be good.

Feeling guilty will make some changes in people's attitudes, which is positive. Maybe they'll be nice to black friends and neighbors.

There's plenty of evidence people have developed a revived type of ethnic pride, in blacks as well as white ethnic groups, . . . (18).

Similarly, The Militant wrote

That "Roots" will increase Black pride is already clear. Check out the sisters and brothers at Harrisburg Middle School . . . . It has caused and will continue to cause a reevaluation of our history . . . . I suspect whites will be looking at Blacks a little differently, perhaps with a little fear and respect (18).

Time Magazine concluded from their interviews that "Roots" would spur black identity, and hence black pride, and eventually pay important dividends" (33, p. 72). Time quoted Columbia sociologist Francis Ianni, who said, "The civil rights movement seemed to be stopping for a breather. This may be a significant turning point" (38, p. 71).
Newsweek quoted the editor of Black Scholar, who predicted, "It's going to stimulate a re-evaluation of black-white interaction, much the way the writings of James Baldwin did in the late 50's" (36).

In The Dallas Morning News, a black Dallas teacher was quoted as saying,

I am optimistic that good will result because of "Roots"--an opportunity to enhance race relations and perhaps motivate us to practice what we know is morally right--the Golden Rule regardless of the color of a human's skin (16).

Newsweek, not unlike other media sources, noted that the viewing audience sometimes mentioned historical inaccuracies and racial stereotyping, but on the whole "surmised that it ["Roots"] would leave a positive long-term imprint . . . blacks and whites alike were moved to re-examine their racial attitudes" (36, p. 97). One 62-year-old interviewee from Essex, Massachusetts, said, "'Roots' has given me another view of colored people. From now on, I will see black through different eyes" (36, p. 97).

Time felt that race relations would be improved, "particularly because of the televised version's profound impact on whites" (33, p. 70). In reference to comments made by members of the Congressional Black Caucus in Washington, it appeared that "something good has happened in race relations--even if they cannot quite define what . . . the level of mutual understanding has been raised a notch" (33, p. 71).
These same members discussed how to make use of the anger, the energy unleashed by "Roots," They said:

We've been given a piece of literature that takes the civil rights struggle to a higher level. It doesn't cure unemployment or take people out of the ghetto. But it's a democratic statement as eloquent as any that's ever been devised, and we've been talking about what can be done with it (33, p. 71).

Time referred to the sixth episode of "Roots" as being of great significance. This is how they put it:

For . . . other blacks . . . the chief contribution of "Roots"--one that also provides its great potential for lasting effects--was crystallized in the sixth episode . . . "Sam wasn't like us. Nobody ever told him where he come from. So he didn't have a dream of where he ought to be goin'." Because of "Roots" countless American blacks now know, or are trying to find out (33, p. 71).

A wealthy white woman in Atlanta said, "I thought 'Roots' was awful. The blacks were just getting settled down, and this will make them angry again" (33, p. 70). However, Time expressed a fear from the exact opposite point of view, the fear that there was some danger in "breast-beating about the past," not because of stirring up the anger of blacks, but because of "distracting attention from the evils of the present" (33, p. 71). Specifically, this was their opinion: "Only if 'Roots' turns the anger at yesterday's slavery into anger at today's ghetto will it really matter" (33, p. 71).

Some people thought that the impact of "Roots" would be transitory. Said black New York Representative Charles Hangel,
"It helps people identify and gets conversations started, but I can't see any lasting effect" (33, p. 71). In an article in The Chicago Tribune titled "Slavery's Roots Were Driven Deep," Vernon Jarrett wrote,

... the series may have caused whites to stop believing that the treatment of the black slave was not much worse than that of other early immigrants who had a rough time, but it did not alter the frame of mind that causes the blind spots in the first place (10).

In an earlier issue of the Tribune, the Harris Survey was subtitled, "T. V. 'Roots' Didn't Change Whites." The survey found (8) that "Roots" did little to change the dominant view of white America that "most blacks in this country are not discriminated against." According to their findings, "The number of whites who see discrimination against blacks went up about 10% following exposure to 'Roots.'"

This finding echoed a fear expressed in an interview for The National Enquirer, which was,

For those who think blacks are only good enough to chop wood and draw water, "Roots" might act like a self-fulfilling prophecy. They'll think blacks ought to be dominated ... also, I suspect that for non-black hardened racists, "Roots" probably confirmed their prejudices against blacks ... I suspect the [positive] impact will not be long-lasting (21).

Some newspapers and magazines made predictions regarding future television content and scheduling. Specifically, Newsweek was interested in some of the possibilities for television.
CBS film producer, Paul Monash, who was interviewed, said:

"Roots is one of the healthiest things to happen to television. It shows we can move away from the mindless melodrama to stories that have some underlay of meaning" (36, p. 98).

Newsweek then made the comment, "If that should indeed happen, the real reward of Haley's quest may be just beginning" (36, p. 98).

Paul Cross of KABC television station in Los Angeles said: "I think it's the beginning of a dynasty" (36). Newsweek added, "The historic payoff on ABC's six million dollar gamble is bound to reshape the industry's scheduling methods. Both NBC and CBS are considering the consecutive-night approach for blockbusters of their own" (36, p. 97).

Time noted that executives at all three commercial television networks followed "Roots" with an immediate search for ways to "cash in on the new interest in black history" (33, p. 71). They, too, interviewed Paul Monash of the CBS network who began contacting author William Styron about getting the television rights to his bestseller, The Confessions of Nat Turner. In addition, Time wrote:

Because of "Roots," Frank Price, president of Universal Television, expects to have an easier time selling a series called All God's Children, which is based on the struggles of a black sharecropper. "Roots" also gave fresh impetus to another . . . production, The New Americans, a dramatic series with separate installments on blacks, Irish, Italians, Jews, and Puerto Ricans (33, p. 71).
Expressing the belief that "Roots" could cause "profound changes in T. V.'s prime time content," Newsweek said, without reservation that "in one fell swoop, it ["Roots"] has demolished the myth that white America will not sit still for a black dramatic series, or for a work with a heavy socio-historic them" (36, p. 98).

Findings

Viewer response to the television series, "Roots," was divided into eight categories. These categories were determined by what newswriters and respondents said pertaining to the effect of the series upon them personally or pertaining to their ideas about why the series had such a large viewing audience.

The first five categories can be generally described as viewer response items in terms of "feelings," specifically, the way viewers felt during or after viewing "Roots." These categories were derived from information revealed through personal interviews reported in the articles. In addition, information provided by the newswriter was included. These five categories were black pride, black anger, white guilt, sadness, and increased awareness.

The first category, "black pride," represented the idea that some black people felt pride in themselves and in their ancestors as a result of watching "Roots." This category
appeared in nine of the thirty-seven articles. Ten of the 134 persons interviewed commented on black pride as being a response to the series. Four persons unidentified as to race suggested that this was a typical response. Three black males and two black females were quoted as saying that they were proud. Some specific indications of "pride" were comments as: "felt good," and "was proud" to see "how far we've come."

The second category, "black anger," indicated the personal feelings of those interviewed. Also included in this category were citations of specific incidents of racial violence. Fifteen persons interviewed in eight articles responded in this manner. Two white males and no white females were included. Seven black males as opposed to one black female indicated anger as a reaction to seeing "Roots." Three racially unidentified persons and one news reporter commented upon this type of response. Interestingly enough, some of these responses did not carry a negative connotation: three of the fifteen indicated that anger was a "healthy" response and would, in effect, improve the lives of blacks.

Eighteen persons interviewed in seven articles commented upon the subject of "white guilt" as being a typical white response to viewing "Roots." There was not only the indication that whites responded in this manner, but it was also hypothesized that this was a possible reason for the impact of "Roots" upon white audiences. Those respondents indicating this kind
of reaction were: white males, five; black males, three; white females, four; black females, none; two persons racially unidentified; and four news reporters.

"Sadness," the fourth category, was a feeling expressed the least number of times in newspapers and magazines. This finding contradicted the telephone survey noted in the analysis. According to this survey, "Sadness was the most frequent emotional response among viewers of 'Roots.'" More specifically, there were only three newspaper or magazine articles which discussed sadness as a viewer response, one of which was the telephone survey. Respondents in this category were one white male and three white females.

A more common response was the fifth category, "increased awareness." This category was divided into two types of response items, or sub-categories. They were: (1) increased awareness of black history, and (2) increased curiosity about personal roots.

In the first sub-category, "black history," twenty-three persons in eight articles commented. There were seven blacks, seven whites, six racially unidentified person, and three reporters. Some of these responses linked the "increased awareness category" with another category--"better race relations in the future." Specifically, it was indicated that because people became more aware of past racial injustices, they would try to avoid future injustice.
The second sub-category, "curiosity about personal roots," was evident in thirteen interviews from nine articles. Two of these articles were primarily about genealogy in general, but references to the television drama, "Roots," were made in both. More than half of the articles seemed to indicate that this new interest in genealogy was one of the most "shared responses" of both whites and blacks. Indeed, three respondents suggested that the reason for the popularity of the show was because people today need a "link-to-the-past," they need to feel as if they are "part of a process which has a definable before and after." Associated with this idea were comments which attributed the popularity of "Roots" to its "factual base." Five respondents commented on the "truth" of the story--an issue which was frequently challenged, but which, nevertheless, might indicate the possibility of a pervading need for "truth" or "history."

The next category moved away from the general topic of "feelings," and applied to a more rational-type response--the "inaccuracy or oversimplification" of the television series. There were more interviews (forty-four) and articles (twenty-one) in this category than any other. The responses were very obviously divided: those who questioned the factual basis for the story versus those who defended Haley's work in terms of its "mythic veracity." None of the respondents argued that there were "possible factual errors." The real division
seemed to be between those who felt that "Roots" had been falsely publicized as "truth," (spurred primarily by the accusation of Mark Attoway who carefully researched the "facts" of the book, challenging Haley to a debate), therefore misleading the 130 million people who watched it, and those who argued that essentially all of the "big events" really did happen, the dramatic "technique" was justifiable, and the tremendous viewing response proved it so.

Twenty-eight respondents from sixteen articles noted that "Roots" was factually inaccurate or guilty of gross oversimplification (no "good whites" and no "bad blacks"). Five whites and four blacks made this response; fifteen persons racially unidentified and four reporters agreed. In almost every instance, there seemed to be a relationship between the inaccuracy cited and the race of the person responding. For instance, one white lady said, "It doesn't show any good white people" (18). Judge Waller, a descendent of the slave owner portrayed in "Roots," responded, "There was no beating or carrying on in this county . . ." (31). However, the Militant cited a different complaint--

There were some holes and inaccuracies . . . . The Civil War was not dealt with adequately. This clash between slaveocracy and Northern Industrialists was decided by the participation of 200,000 Black troops on the side of the North . . . . Nat Turner's rebellion took place in August, 1831, The T. V. placed the date in 1841 (18).
The first of these two categories is divided into three types of response: (1) better race relations, (2) worse race relations, and (3) unaffected race relations.

The first response received the most coverage: eighteen interviews and six articles. Seven white respondents felt that race relations would improve after the viewing of "Roots," and three black respondents agreed. Seven were racially unidentified and one was a writer.

Commenting that "Roots" would make race relations worse in the future were only two respondents. Specifically, they expressed these two fears: (1) blacks would "get stirred up again" and (2) those who were already prejudiced against blacks would only be reinforced by seeing the movie. One person interviewed and two reporters felt that the impact of "Roots" on race relations would be transitory.

The subject of "future prime time" was a topic for fourteen persons questioned about "Roots." These comments were interspersed through only six articles, the reason being that these articles were primarily written to discuss the content and scheduling of "Roots" as a unique television approach and one which would probably be repeated because of the impact of "Roots." As one respondent noted, "It's the beginning of a dynasty." The majority of those interviewed were television producers and writers; the number of white respondents was eleven.
The following table was designed to indicate the frequency of responses for each of the eight categories and their sub-categories. The findings have been described according to the number of persons interviewed by reporters, by the number of reporters themselves, and by the number of articles in which the responses appeared.

The first column of frequencies indicates the total number of persons interviewed who responded for each category. The second column designates the number of responses made by white males for each category. The preceding three columns indicate numbers of responses from white females, black males, and black females for each category. The sixth frequency-column is an indication of those responses per category which were made by persons unidentified by race or sex. The seventh column represents the frequency of responses by reporters of the articles for each category. The last column in the table reports the number of articles reporting each category.

These frequencies represent a total of thirty-seven articles and 134 persons interviewed. For any given category, there may be a person or an article represented which is also included in another category(ies). This is an indication that one or more responses were made by the same person or the same article.
### TABLE I

**VIEWER RESPONSE TO "ROOTS" AS INDICATED BY INTERVIEWS AND OPINIONS OF NEWS WRITERS REPORTED IN MAGAZINES AND NEWSPAPERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Reporters</th>
<th>Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>White Males</td>
<td>White Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Pride</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Anger</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Guilt</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Awareness</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black History</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity about personal roots</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inaccurate/Over-simplified</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factual Inaccuracy</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mythic Veracity</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Future Race Relations</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>Better</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Future Prime Time</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

There were thirty-seven articles selected for analysis in this research. Within these articles, there were responses from 134 persons who were interviewed in the articles, plus comments by news writers themselves which were analyzed.

Some articles simply stated that "Roots" had impact. These statements were backed up with statistical references, but primarily, interviews with viewers of the series provided the most evidence of this impact. The impact was measured in terms of numbers, in terms of emotional reactions from both whites and blacks, and in terms of future impact on daily American life.

The first five categories defined in Chapter One represented this emotional impact on television viewers. They were: black pride, black anger, white guilt, sadness, and increased awareness. The last two categories, "future race relations" and "future prime time" were responses expressing the future impact of "Roots" on daily American life.

Many viewers did not deny that "Roots" had impact, but they questioned the accuracy of the story and described it as being "oversimplified." Under this sixth category, "inaccuracy/oversimplification," there were also those respondents who defended the book and/or the television series because of its "mythic veracity."
By far, the most common question which respondents attempted to answer was, "Why did 'Roots' have such an impact?" The most frequent responses were identified among some of the categories. "White guilt" was one category which, for some, seemed to describe the appeal of "Roots" to white audiences. The movie was thought to have provided a type of "cleansing of past wrongs" for these people. Another category, "black pride" was offered as a major appeal of the series for blacks. It was suggested that they continued to watch night after night because it was for them, also, a kind of "catharsis." Some respondents seemed to feel that the major appeal of the series was its ability to make people of both races more aware of black history and more curious about their own ancestry. The idea was expressed that Americans, prior to the series, had shared a subconscious desire to know their beginnings, to feel part of some "process." They identified with what was described by one respondent as a "national effort to recapture the past."

The findings revealed that the three categories receiving the highest frequencies of response of those interviewed were, (1) inaccuracy/oversimplification: forty-four, (2) increased awareness: thirty-six, (3) future race relations: twenty-three. The category which appeared in the most number of articles was "inaccuracy/oversimplification: twenty-one."
Interestingly enough, these three categories with the highest frequencies of response were almost evenly divided according to blacks and whites, an indication that these were the most universally shared responses to "Roots."

The newspapers and magazines which were analyzed indicated that one of the categories, "sadness," received only four responses from interviewees and appeared in only three articles. This finding differed from findings reported by the Harrises in a nationwide television survey. According to them, "sadness" was the response which appeared most frequently among those in the survey.
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Summary

From the first evening when the ABC Network aired "Roots" on television on January 23, 1977, until the end of the eighth episode on January 31, approximately 130 million people had seen the series. It has since been labeled as having one of the highest television ratings of the dramatic television presentations. It topped this year's Super Bowl and Parts I and II of "Gone With the Wind." There has been much media coverage referring either to the series, the book, or the more recently publicized nationwide interest in genealogy.

After twelve years of research and much talking about his story-in-the-making, author Alex Haley completed his soon-to-become best-selling book, Roots. ABC's version of this book was somewhat of "a first." It was the first time that a television network had scheduled one show to be continued on eight consecutive nights. It was the admitted exception that a "serious black drama" was even considered; producers were afraid of a "white backlash." The idea of "novels for television" was also rather new--before "Roots" it was Irvin Shaw's "Rich Man, Poor Man."
Haley's story was about the progress of one black family through seven generations. It began in the village of Juffure, near the coast of Gambia, West Africa, at about 1750. Kunta Kinte was born here at this time. When he was in his teens, he was captured by slave traders and shipped to America.

The story proceeded to reveal what happened to him and/or his descendents as they progressed through the days of slavery in America and began to attain freedom. The story of African beginnings in Juffure was passed down from one generation to another. The last one to hear the story as depicted in the television series and the book was the author of *Roots*, Alex Haley.

It has been the specific problem of this research to discover viewer response to "Roots" as revealed through newspapers and magazines published from December, 1976, to June 27, 1977. In particular, an effort has been made to discover the relative emphases given to various reasons for the impact of "Roots," and to explore its possible latent effects upon society. There has also been an attempt to determine the characteristics of the people responding.

The method of research has been content analysis, which Bernard Berelson defines as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication." It assumes that
inferences about the relationships between intent, content, and effect can be validly made, or that the actual relationships can be established.

The sample for this analysis consisted of the following newspapers: the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Dallas Times Herald*, the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *National Observer*, the *National Enquirer*, and the *Militant*. The magazines were *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Ebony*, *Freedomways*, *New York*, and *Education Today*. These sources provided articles pertaining to "Roots" which were subjected to content analysis.

Eight categories for analysis were determined by those topics which seemed to dominate the news coverage in these articles. Writers of the articles and persons interviewed provided these eight topics as they explained viewer response to "Roots." These topics were (1) black pride, (2) black anger, (3) white guilt, (4) sadness, (5) increased awareness, (6) inaccuracy/oversimplification, (7) future race relations, and (8) future prime time television programming.

The order of occurrence from highest to lowest frequencies with reference to persons interviewed was (1) inaccuracy/oversimplification, (2) increased awareness, (3) future race relations, (4) white guilt, (5) black anger, (6) future prime time television programming, (7) black pride, and (8) sadness. The number of articles per category corresponded with the above frequency distribution, with one exception--
"black pride" appeared in more articles than "black anger." To clarify three of the categories, they were divided into sub-categories. For "increased awareness," twenty-three persons expressed the idea that they felt more aware of black history and thirteen said that they were more curious about their own family histories. For "inaccuracy/oversimplification," twenty-eight respondents questioned the factual accuracy of "Roots" and sixteen defended "Roots" for its mythic veracity. On the topic of "future race relations," eighteen responses indicated that "Roots" would improve race relations, two indicated that race relations would get worse, and three said that race relations would be unaffected.

Author Alex Haley stated that the white response was more difficult to explain than the black response. However, he believed that one reason why "Roots" appealed to both races was because many people today are lacking a "sense of heritage." He felt that the television series and the book had helped to unite the old with the young.

Conclusions

The sociological significance of the findings in this research lies not so much in the fact that many respondents questioned the accuracy of "Roots," but that almost as many people said that they felt more aware of the past and the present after seeing the series on television.
It may be concluded that since the two categories receiving the highest frequency of response were (1) inaccuracy/oversimplification and (2) increased awareness, the real impact of the drama was emotional. This conclusion is further strengthened by the fact that five of the eight responses which dominated the sample were those describing how the viewers "felt" as they watched "Roots."

Blacks felt more aware because they discovered something new about their past—not that slavery happened, but how it "felt" to the blacks who were enslaved. The young blacks gained new insight into the experiences of their great grandparents and an even better understanding of themselves. They felt pride and respect for their own ancestors' will not only to survive, but to be free.

Whites felt more aware of the "psychological trauma" of slavery and better understood the current emphasis of blacks for civil rights. Whites and blacks no longer felt that their understanding of slavery was purely "intellectual." As one white lady said, she would now see blacks "through different eyes."

Undoubtedly, part of the appeal of "Roots" was that it offered a black perspective which had rarely, if ever, been presented on television. People who do not ordinarily read the papers or study history were exposed to a point-of-view that they may never have thought of before. The very fact
that it did stereotype, that it did oversimplify the issue of slavery, but that much of the oversimplification was presented from the viewpoint of the black American way, in effect, a major reason for its impact.

Implications for Further Studies

From a sociological standpoint, it might prove to be a very worthwhile endeavor to study the possible effects of "Roots" on actual behavior over an extended period of time. The research might be directed toward analyzing television content in terms of black drama since the airing of "Roots" on television. In addition, some method of discovering whether or not ABC's dramatic presentation did, in effect, improve some area of race relations would be an interesting project. Studying the actual effect of "Roots" on the heightened interest in genealogy could be easily accomplished because most libraries keep daily records of how many people use their genealogy department. Personal interviews with librarians might serve as an indication of what types of persons have become interested in discovering their "roots."

A second direction of study might involve research which could somehow relate the impact of "Roots" to current cultural trends, such as the more widespread desegregation of schools. Perhaps in response to increased interaction between blacks and whites in school, specifically in the South,
the impact of "Roots" was made more meaningful. The particular direction of this study would be to correlate the impact of "Roots" with cultural trends happening either prior to or simultaneously with the series, more fully explaining Congresswoman Barbara Jordan's statement that "it was the right time . . . the impact would not have been as great in the sixties."
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