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Research Paper

TV Talk Not So Bad

“And here she is now your host--Ellen DeGeneres.” When the announcer for *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* informs the audience of Ellen’s appearance, the crowd goes wild with screams of loyal fan-hood and cheers of good-hearted fun. Likewise, this same reaction is easily seen for other television talk shows such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Live with Regis and Kelly*. Nevertheless, shows featuring Ellen, Oprah, and Regis have not always been as popular. Television talk shows have been around since the late 1940s but not all television talk shows are bad, as most would understand. Instead, daytime television shows such as *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, *Live with Regis and Kelly* and *The Oprah Winfrey Show* are not shows that talk trash, but rather these shows inform people about the societal tastes in America through the entertainment of simply talking about it.

The history of television talk shows better enables a person to understand the importance of talk shows and how they are not fully corrupted but worthy of captivating the American life in a historical sense is found in a valuable source written by Bernard M. Timberg. Bernard M. Timberg author of Television Talk A History of the TV Talk Show makes it clear that early talk shows that initially started the concept of television talk are harder to find or not found at all. Timberg explains, “Many of the best examples of early talk-show hosts and formats are gone or available only in archives or from the hands of private collectors” (Timberg 6). It seems as though when early shows were around, the importance of the shows just was not viewed as being evident, but now

anything dealing with the social or culture of the human race is part of history and it is easier to document. Timberg also states that

With all its limitations, dangers, potentials, and pitfalls, the TV talk show is now part of the fabric modern society. Talk shows represent skewed but instantly recognizable constructions of American experience. Their political and cultural importance can no longer be discounted. (Timberg 18)

This is true because there are numerous talk shows both daytime and late night ones that capture this American essence and people watch talk shows to gain information about various topics both political and cultural as Timberg states in his book about the history of television talk shows. Since the rise in interest for talk shows, Timberg makes clear that “An understanding of the TV talk show is now crucial to an understanding of American public life itself” (Timberg 18). Timberg made clear that pieces of early talk show documents are rare, but in today’s society with an advance in technology, talk show information is readily archived and easier to access with the use of a computer. Therefore, it is a useful tool to capture the history of the American public life and television talk shows do just that through broadcasting the show and archiving their transcripts.

Another point to make clear of how television talk shows are not as raunchy as some people think is to illustrate the diverse landmarks in history that talk show hosts have brought to the broadcasting arena. Oprah Winfrey for example steer headed the direction of being the first woman talk show host to make her life an example for other women in the areas of weight loss and self-help. According to Ella Howard’s essay

“From Fasting toward Self-Acceptance Oprah Winfrey and Weight Loss in American Culture” Howard discusses Winfrey’s revolution through the meaning of being personal during her talk show. Howard says “Winfrey welcomed her audience into her struggles with weight loss and body image as well” (Howard 102). Howard also notes, “Winfrey has been central to the development of the self-help industry, her television show providing an unprecedented platform for authors to disseminate their ideas and promote their books” (Howard 102). Not only does Winfrey allow a personal connection with her viewers, but also has influenced the self-help industry in allowing authors to publicize themselves on her show.

Besides Oprah Winfrey, Ellen DeGeneres has come a long way into the television spotlight in making a change of just expressing her true self. Ellen DeGeneres is the first openly out lesbian talk show host. However, before that, DeGeneres made television history with coming out through her sitcom *Ellen*. In Anna McCarthy’s essay “*Ellen* Making Queer Television History” for the Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, she explains why *Ellen*’s coming out episode was a landmark in television history. McCarthy states “The first was the perception of the show’s lesbian character and star as a first, as something that had never before occurred in television” (McCarthy 593). McCarthy concludes her essay with inspiration that “...after all, one thing *Ellen* did teach us is that there are numerous ways to make queer television history” (McCarthy 616). That is what DeGeneres has done back in the 90s, but today she is re-shaping the television talk show world with being a first lesbian.

A strong case in how television talk shows are beneficial is expression in the political candidacy throughout the United States. It seems since the Clinton

administration went to Larry King's show as a new outlet to reach the American people, this milestone move made many people curious as to how effective it can be to have a political public figure over the air. According to Kenneth Jost from CQ Researcher in his overview of "Talk Show Democracy" he claims that "...the Clinton administration took office, some staffers thought they could continue to use "the new media" to get their message to the voters rather than using traditional forums, like the presidential press conference," (Jost). Since this, move from the administration more and more political candidates such President Barack Obama and John McCain did go on talk shows like *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* and late night television shows like *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*. Having the political public figures as guest on talk shows does exactly what the Clinton administration wanted to achieve and that is another outlet for the American people to ask questions and recognize that the politicians are people too and being talk shows is another outlet to demonstrate this view.

Overall, television talk shows help capture the historical essence of popular culture in the United States, express an outlet to create an idea of "firsts" among diversities, and aid politicians in their efforts in reaching the public opinion. Without talk shows, the opinion of others would not be brought up and publically displayed to create the necessary change in the world as surely Oprah Winfrey or Ellen DeGeneres has done with their careers. With each great story, an end is always in the midst and so one of the most infamous talk show hosts, Oprah Winfrey will be ending her talk show in 2010. The New York Times Brian Stelter reports "Ms. Winfrey will concentrate on her cable channel, OWN, which will make its debut in January 2011" (Stelter). It may be an

ending, but in the eyes of Winfrey, it is only a new beginning for herself and another future talk show host to take her daytime place.

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