

Minority Programming in Television and the Story of Detroit's "Profiles in Black"

ALICE A. TAIT

Central Michigan University

During the heat of civil rights protests in the 1960s, the leadership of the African-American community focused on the mass media and singled out television as the prime offender for its lack of fair employment practices and for its failure to present accurate, credible representations of African-Americans to the larger society.

It's hard to imagine it in this era of the successful Bill Cosby Show and its clones, but there was a time when one could look long and hard without seeing a Black face on any television program. In the 1950s, African-Americans had experienced the "ridicule stage," typecast as menial servants and comical characters in "Beulah," "The Stu Irwin Show," and "The Jack Benny Show." Nat King Cole's network program was an exception to this treatment. In the 1960s, civil rights issues became a daily national news feature, and African-American reporters increased in numbers. CBS produced the documentary, "Of Black America," and several African-Americans appeared in various dramatic programs, for example, Diahann Carroll, in "Julia," and Ossie Davis, in "Car 54, Where Are You?" However, the '60s, or the "regulatory stage," brought little change in the African-American's television image and was criticized as such.

A number of groups and organizations became involved in the effort to increase the number of communication jobs and relevant programming for African-Americans: the New York Urban Coalition; the Federal Communication Commission (FCC); the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ; Black Efforts for Soul in Television; and the National Association of Black Media Producers.

The persistent demand for programs showing the true African-American culture resulted in a few recognizable efforts to remedy the dearth of African-American television exposure. The '70s, or the "egalitarian stage," ushered in modest increases in television appearances of Blacks. "Mod Squad," "Get Christie Love," "Shaft," "Tenafly," "That's My Mama," "The Jeffersons," and "Sanford and Son," which appeared

during the '70s, were widely viewed, although they received limited television and activist acceptance. Their strongest critic was the National Black Feminist Organization, which stated that African-American roles in these programs were demeaning.¹ While research documented the increased trend toward more appearances by African-Americans on television, they noted that the number of television portrayals was not in proportionate to the number of Blacks in the national population. Thus objections to the television portrayals of African-Americans—that they were stereotypical or demeaning and disproportionate in number—remained relatively unaddressed.

An outstanding factor however, and one which established the need for improved African-American television programming, was the discovery that African-Americans were heavy consumers of television. Studies on the African-American community's television viewing habits revealed that African-Americans have consistently looked to television for political information and news of other African-Americans, a dependency which was increasing.

As late as 1974, however, minorities rarely appeared in or reported the news, and news relating to African-Americans was scarce. The representation of African-Americans in the news had been a subject of concern since the Kerner Commission pointed out the medium's failure to present African-Americans as integral members of society.² In an analysis of the news medium's coverage of African-Americans, Williams Rucis argued that African-Americans are portrayed primarily in terms of their "plight." The continuing substance of African-American life in the United States seemed not to matter at all. While the need for improved African-American public affairs and news programs continued, this area remained woefully lacking. Few stories in the network evening news treated minorities; no network evening news focused on minorities' achievements; and African-American newsmakers, both male and female, were primarily portrayed in association with stories about their economic victimization.³

National Programs

Alvin Perlmutter, a white staff producer at National Education Television (the national public television system existing prior to the Public Broadcasting Service) conceived of the idea for "Black Journal," the first

¹U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Window Dressing on the Set: An Update*, August 1979, 49.

²U. S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*. New York: Bantam Books, 1968, 366.

³United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities on Television*, August 1977, 4-5.

national African-American public affairs series, in April 1968, following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. After meeting with African-American community leaders and other lay persons, a magazine format oriented towards public affairs was adopted. Aired one hour per month, "Black Journal" articulated and documented African-American political, economic, and cultural issues. The program premiered in June, 1969, and received critical acclaim and viewer response unprecedented for public television. The first show's segments consisted of an interview from an Oakland prison with Huey Newton on the future of the Black Panthers; a report on the Poor Peoples' Campaign in Washington, D.C.; a satirical skit about the use of African-Americans in advertisements; an essay on the view of the future by graduating African-American seniors; a profile of a Harlem-based manufacturer of African style clothing; a portrait of an African-American jockey; and coverage of an address by Coretta Scott King at Harvard University.

The process of making a "Black Journal" documentary usually involved selecting topics culled from personal contacts or from the library filled with various African-American newspapers from around the country. Potential topics were discussed at the weekly editorial meeting. The producer, sometimes aided by an overworked staff researcher, then researched background and afterwards flew to continue this work on location, never for more than four to five days. Upon his or her return, a script was written and budgeted, and within two weeks or so, the producer and crew flew back to shoot. The editing process rarely took more than two or three weeks, and the documentary, which could range from ten to 30 minutes, often aired on the next program.

"Black Journal" undertook several satellite projects to improve African-American participation in the media. The "Black Journal" Film Workshop, created to achieve this goal, consisted of a ten-week crash course in basic film production and camera crew assignments. Instructors were both African-American and white technicians who volunteered their time to teach the new recruits.

The life of "Black Journal" was closely allied to the African-American movement that gave birth to it. As money for social programs diminished in the early '70s, the production budget for the program was reduced from \$100,000 per program to \$50,000 by the NET management. As the production funds decreased, it became more difficult to maintain the high standards with which the program started, and, little by little, the staff began seeking other avenues for their ideas and talent. Producer William Greaves, who had his own company before he joined the "Black Journal" staff, resigned; other staff took jobs at network news departments. Several months later, Tony Brown became the news executive producer and began experimenting with formats that would attract fi-

nancial underwriting. After several format changes—ranging from a game show to a Carson-type talk show to a variety entertainment show—Brown changed the name of the series to “Tony Brown’s Journal.” He continues as executive producer/host to this day.

In addition to “Black Journal,” there was a series called “Soul!”, an entertainment program that provided a forum for performers who had virtually been ignored by mainstream television. Both “Soul!” and “Black Journal” were pioneering programs that performed a necessary function quite effectively, but they were created as a response to an admitted deficiency: to serve an audience that had never been adequately addressed directly before. These programs and their imitators could be called “the first generation of minority programming.” If there was a flaw in this first effort, it was a narrowness of vision that could not be avoided at that time. By addressing Blacks about Blacks only, for example, a large part of the viewing audience was excluded, but more importantly, the role of the so-called “minorities” within the total framework of U. S. society and culture was ignored.

The second generation of “minority” programming—based on the premise that was first necessary to affirm Black culture—attempted to correct some of these limitations. An example of this corrective programming was a PBS program called “Interface,” which showed the interaction of various cultures in the U. S. by tackling topics based in everyday life. Developed by Black producer/writer Ardie Ivie and hosted by “Black Journal” graduate Tony Batten, “Interface” concentrated on ethnic group interactions but also limited itself to a certain aspect of life in the United States, namely, cultural interaction in the anthropological sense. At the same time, another program, “Black Perspectives on the News,” took a “hard news” approach and opened its list of guests to all races, with the understanding that all of the people in this country can be affected by a variety of newsmakers of all skin colors. However, the news format prevented the viewer from receiving a multi-dimensional understanding of the issues covered. In short, we still addressed Blacks, but about non-Black issues as well as Black issues.

Local Programs

“Black Journal” ushered in an explosion of local public affairs shows aimed at the so-called “minority” audience. The creators of “Haney’s People,” “In Your Own Interest,” “Black Heritage,” “Nitty Gritty,” “Pride,” Detroit’s “Black Journal,” “Black Talk,” and “For My People” presented several Detroit forums for African-American expression. “Haney’s People,” Detroit’s oldest continuing series, was hosted by Don Haney, and explored topics of a general nature and of special concern to

Detroit's African-American community.⁴ "In Your Own Interest," a five-program documentary created by the Southeastern Michigan Forum and sponsored by the Interfaith Action Council, sought to bring racial understanding to the Detroit community. Each program was viewed by groups of six to eight persons and then discussed under the guidance of a trained discussion leader. The initial show attracted 300,000 Detroit-area persons at more than 1,200 participating churches and synagogues.

"Black Heritage: A History of African-Americans" was a CBS-produced series of 108 lectures on the history of Black Americans which featured some Detroit personalities. "Nitty Gritty," a thirty-minute talk show, aired Sunday nights at 9:30 P.M. on Channel 50 (WKBD-TV). Originally hosted by Jim Ingram, a columnist for the *Michigan Chronicle* and former host of a radio talk show, the show concerned topics of interest to Detroit's Black and white communities. "Pride," a half-hour musical variety show which featured performances by local Black youth, debuted April 25th, 1970, on Channel 7. The program, which aired at 3:30 p.m. on Saturdays, was hosted by Ted Talbert and produced by Nadine Daniels and Gary Bennett, all African-Americans.⁵

"Profiles in Black"

One of the most viable and successful creative efforts in this genre was "Profiles in Black," produced and hosted by Dr. Gilbert A. Maddox. "Profiles" was initiated in 1969 by WWJ-TV (Detroit) as a positive response to those advocating the repeal of the station's license. Community leaders protesting the license to FCC argued that the station was not operating in the best interest of the community, since neither the station's personnel nor any locally-produced programs financed by the station reflected the overwhelmingly African-American composition of the community. As a result, the management of WWJ-TV perceived a need for a program that employed minority group members and discussed achievements of African-Americans in the community.

An FCC ruling of the day may also have contributed to the development of "Profiles." The Commission voted to restrict the amount of programming a television network could supply to its affiliates during prime time. This gave syndicates and local stations as much as one hour of prime time per night in major markets. "Profiles" helped fill that time.

"Profiles in Black" was an award-winning public affairs program patterned after Edward R. Murrow's highly successful "Person to Person"

⁴Gilbert A. Maddox, "A Study of C. P. T.: Public Television for Detroit's Black Community." (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 1970), 50.

⁵*Ibid.*, 77-79.

series. A half-hour weekly television community service series, "Profiles" was filmed in color and broadcast by WWJ-TV during prime viewing time, initially Saturdays at 8:30 p.m., from November 1969 through December 1979. Maddox made the following predictions about the series in an interview published by the *Detroit News*:

We, black people, are moving in the direction of establishing identities and of gaining political, economic, and social control of the black community. We are not opposed to the white community, but we want to make our own community as viable as possible. . . . The series will show the full range of people comprising the black population—the professionals who have succeeded, the ADC mothers with their problems and hopes, young students, conservative and militant clergymen.⁶

To Ian Harrower, program manager for WWJ, Maddox wrote:

. . . in this summer of tension and fear, it appears to me that if people understood the personalities behind the various forces which are emerging in the black community, they would more readily understand the conditions which motivate these movements.⁷

"Profiles in Black" offered a new alternative to news programming still largely oriented to and about whites. It provided a different and more realistic perspective of African-Americans and an opportunity for increased frequency of African-American appearances. It provided African-Americans with broader representation, and it covered issues significant to the African-American community.

To evaluate the impact of "Profiles in Black," this paper discusses the view of the program by the staff and by the public. The entire series consisted of 480 programs, and during its existence received such awards as the Meritorious Service Award in the Field of Public Affairs (awarded in 1974 by the 23rd Annual Southern Regional Press Institute), the Outstanding Community Service Award in the Field of Communication from the Trade Union Leadership Council awarded in 1975, and the Alumni Award from Wayne State University in 1973. For its excellence in public affairs programming, "Profiles in Black" received the *Variety Magazine* Cross Country Award.

Like Murrow's "Person To Person," "Profiles" sought to represent extraordinary people doing ordinary things. It was distinctive in focusing on African-Americans of diversified backgrounds and careers, featuring

⁶Frank Judge, "Channel 4 to Launch Black Profiles," *Detroit News*, 27 November 1969.

⁷Gilbert Maddox to Ian Harrower, 23 July 1969. Personal Files of Gilbert Maddox, Detroit, Michigan.

national figures such as Rosa Parks, the "mother" of the civil rights movement, so-called because of her refusal to relinquish her bus seat in Montgomery, Alabama; Jimmie Wilkins, band leader; Stevie Wonder, internationally-known recording star; Dick Gregory, political activist; and sports stars Dave Bing, Willie Horton, and Ron LeFlore. But not all programs featured celebrities; segments describing the conditions of prisons or featuring Vietnam veterans contributed to the balance that Maddox wanted to achieve.

The format of on-location shooting, like Murrow's "Person to Person," had the effect of a documentary and could reveal dynamic personalities. When the program began in 1969, all interviews were filmed on location. This same format continued through 1973, though videotape replaced film. A new format was introduced in 1974 when in-studio interviews replaced those on location, a change which most likely came about because of the expense of on-location filming. Inserts of filmed or video-taped sequences provided visual relief by spotlighting the activities of such individuals as Joe Louis and unique events like the Jazz Mass at St. Cecilia's Roman Catholic Church in Detroit, and by describing controversial subjects such as life in the Wayne County Jail or the Attica Jail outbreaks.

"Profiles" Personnel

Gilbert Maddox came to the attention of WWJ through Norman McRae, an African-American historian and the person initially approached to host and produce the program. McRae described Maddox:

I think his qualifications are excellent. He has completed his course work for a doctor's degree in mass communications at Wayne. He is extremely knowledgeable about the black community because he was the producer of "C. P. T." which appeared on Channel 56. Finally, he has gained invaluable knowledge of the nuances and facts of the black community as the director of one of the Mayor's Community Human Resources Programs.⁸

Based on that recommendation, WWJ's Harrower approached Maddox, then director of the Mayor's Committee for Human Resources Development. Maddox expressed concern for fair compensation, adequate resources, and staff support.

Prior to producing and directing "Profiles," Maddox was responsible for a number of other programs with objectives similar to those of "Profiles." "Black and Unknown Bards," Maddox's first venture, was an

⁸Norman McRae to Ian Harrower, 1 July 1969. Personal Files of Gilbert Maddox, Detroit, Michigan.

eighteen-week series broadcast by WTVS and WDET in 1960.⁹ The program, which featured the literature of American Negro authors from the Revolutionary War era until 1960, was produced at the facilities of Wayne State University's broadcast studios and subsequently rebroadcast by WJBK-TV and numerous Michigan radio stations.

Following the conclusion of "Black and Unknown Bards," Maddox developed a proposal for a Negro history series entitled, "An Untold Story of Americans."¹⁰ The series proposed to identify outstanding Negroes and reveal their family backgrounds, their motivational sources, religious and educational influences, and their economical and social environment, and to provide some authoritative conclusions on all the factors which favored their rise.

In March, 1966, Maddox submitted a proposal for a high school series to Wayne State University; to Mr. Carl Westman, Deputy Director, Total Action Against Poverty; and to Dr. Louis Monacel, Director, Great Cities School Improvement Project, Detroit Public Schools. It was entitled, "A Descriptive and Analytical Study of the Utilization of Educational Television in Implementing Selected Projects of the Anti-Poverty Program of the City of Detroit."¹¹

In December, 1966, Maddox submitted "A Proposal for Use of the Television Medium in Effecting Increased Communication of Human Resource Development" to the Office of Economic Opportunity.¹² The major thesis of this proposal was that anti-poverty programs were failing to communicate effectively with large numbers of people in poverty areas. Maddox suggested wiring a specified target area in the Detroit area for closed circuit television. The programs to be broadcast in this area would be created by local residents and would emphasize the dissemination of information, especially that pertaining to educational, vocational, and social services, community resources, family guidance, teenage counseling, etc.

In 1968, "C. P. T." ("Colored People's Time") debuted, a television program designed to increase communication within the African-American community of the City of Detroit.¹³ "C. P. T." followed a magazine format which featured news, film documentaries, Black history and drama, choirs, bands, guest and man-on-the-street interviews. Maddox's involvement with these efforts established him as a *bona fide* communications person and endowed his ability to produce and direct "Profiles."

⁹Maddox, "Study," 175.

¹⁰Ibid., 177.

¹¹Ibid., 178-79.

¹²Ibid., 180.

¹³Ibid., 182.

Sue Marx, president in 1983 of Urban Communications, a non-profit, local film production company, worked with "Profiles" as an assistant to the producer from its inception in 1969 to its termination in 1979. Prior to "Profiles," she had no broadcasting experience; however, she was familiar with the Detroit community. In her own words: "I think the station was comfortable having someone white in touch with that show. I was sort of a buffer. They hadn't dealt with Black people yet."¹⁴

Victor Hurwitz, the person with the second longest program involvement, was "Profiles" producer-director for approximately eight years. At the time of this interview, he was president and sole owner of Hurwitz Enterprises of Southfield, Michigan. Prior to directing "Profiles," he produced two programs, "Juvenile and Traffic Court" and "Michigan Outdoors." Hurwitz felt: "Generally speaking, the program production went remarkably smooth," owing perhaps to his skill as a director.¹⁵

Chauncey Burke, the third longest participant with "Profiles," began working in 1971 as a cameraman and resigned in 1976. Shortly thereafter, he created a freelance production firm, Video by Jerry Burke. Burke's television experience prior to "Profiles" spanned 20 years, during which time he shot 90-percent of the station's remotes. His objective with "Profiles" was described as follows: ". . . I didn't have any overall goals of trying to carry the plight of the black Detroiter in front of a citywide television audience. Mine was strictly show by show, trying to make it look good." With respect to the producer's objectives, Burke very seldom felt Maddox or his guests promoted a political bias. He felt Maddox was trying to spread information from leaders to the man on the street.¹⁶

The staff of "Profiles" thus included two seasoned broadcasting professionals: Victor Hurwitz and Chauncey Burke, who ensured the program's technical quality. The program relied on state-of-the-art equipment throughout its existence.

Marty O'Fiara, associate producer of "Profiles," served the least amount of time with the program. However, she had been with the station for nine years before her assignment to "Profiles," and thereafter became Public Affairs Director for WDIV. Her objectives in working with the program included:

Making it the best program I could, to bring something new and different to it. . . . Gil and I determined program content along with the program director. The format was to talk about issues related to the Black community and issues that were of interest to anyone important to Detroit, so that we had an empha-

¹⁴Interview with Sue Marx, 12 August 1983.

¹⁵Interview with Victor Hurwitz, June 1983.

¹⁶Interview with Chauncey Burke, 10 August 1983.

sis on issues nationwide. There were business issues, features—whatever we chose, any topic we deemed interesting that the public might want to know.¹⁷

Sue Marx and Marty O'Fiara were the least experienced in broadcasting, but they seemed to make up in commitment what they lacked in experience. Gilbert Maddox, although not quite as experienced as Hurwitz and Burke, had sufficient broadcast background to be able to generate programming ideas. Despite the difference in time spent with the program and the differences in broadcast experience, there was rapport among the crew. Maddox was generally credited for this rapport, as Chauncey Burke stated:

We accomplished a lot, due to the interest and the ability of the engineering crew. I've got to give Gil credit for instilling that. If he had been an egomaniac or something like that or rubbed people the wrong way, that wouldn't have been possible.¹⁸

According to the crew members, Maddox functioned as an experienced professional. He could put the programs together because he knew the community, and he demonstrated excellent interviewing skills.

Gil was a very competent interviewer, relaxed people and got them to open up.¹⁹

Gil was a wonderful resource because he knew more people obviously, than I did. Much of what I learned, I learned from him. He was the driving force behind it. He taught me how to produce better.²⁰

In a more general review of the program, everyone interviewed commented on the pressure of time. There was insufficient time to prepare, no time for retakes, and little time to actually do the shooting. Time meant money, and a program that was unsponsored did not have the luxury of either.

We did lots of segments with Kenny Cockerel, which was fascinating. [Kenny Cockerel, now deceased, was a young attorney and civil rights activist with a Marxist philosophy.] Interviewing Kenny Cockerel was just sitting back and letting him talk. We did a show on Coleman Young when he was in Lansing as a state senator. That program came a lot closer to the kind of programming I thought we ought to produce. We examined where he lived, with whom he lived and how he went around the state capitol. We went to Black Bottom, we

¹⁷Interview with Marty O'Fiara, 23 July 1983.

¹⁸Burke interview.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰O'Fiara interview.

sat and had a few drinks in Coleman's bar, where he visited as a union man. That program really examined Coleman Young, not the issues he represented. We did one of the same kinds of things with Basil Brown and it came out kind of the same way.²¹

Sue Marx commented:

I think it just gave the white community a taste of Black life, which wasn't any different from whites, which they had always thought was. I think it gave Black people a good feeling about being Black. So, I think it served a dual purpose. I think it was a very important show, and especially important to be shot on location.²²

The Station's Commitment

An issue in assessing the success of "Profiles in Black" was the station's commitment to the program. WWJ, owned and operated by the *Detroit News*, established an early lead in combining broadcasting with community service. Under the guidance of William E. Scripps, the station transmitted the first radio newscast complete with local, state, and congressional election returns and other news stories on August 31, 1920.²³ Public affairs programming, according to the station's management, was always a priority for the station.

Chauncey Burke described the station as ". . . having a high commitment to "Profiles," . . . they wanted to put a nice product on the air; they wanted to do it well. . . . That was a quality station in those days. They didn't do anything that wasn't top of the market in those days." Burke also felt the program spread good will, and, compared to similar programs, "Profiles" was much better.²⁴

The station initially placed "Profiles" in a prime time slot, 8:30 on Saturday evening, and also vigorously promoted it through weekly picture ads in both the *Detroit News* and *TV Guide*. For a time, the station also supported on-location shooting, an innovative but costly format. In 1971, WWJ rescheduled "Profiles" to 7:30 p.m. on Mondays. Other variables—particularly promotion and format—remained unchanged, and "Profiles" acquired its largest viewing audience.²⁵ Despite this strong showing, WWJ rescheduled "Profiles" to a somewhat less optional view-

²¹Hurwitz interview.

²²Marx interview.

²³Alice A. Tait, "A Descriptive Analysis of the Television Program, "Profiles In Black," (Ph.D. diss., Bowling Green State University, 1985), 11.

²⁴Burke interview.

²⁵This and following references to the programs' ratings are based on a composite of Nielsen and Arbitron ratings. Arbitron Television (New York: The Arbitron Company, 1970-77); Nielson Station Index (New York: A. C. Nielsen Company, 1975, 1976, 1978.)

ing time of 10:30 p.m. Fridays in 1972. The time change undoubtedly decreased the program's audience, as weekend television, in general, competes with other leisure pursuits for viewers' time. In November 1972, the program was again rescheduled, this time to 10:30 p.m. on Sundays. The station continued to promote the program and the format remained unchanged, but viewerships of programs preceding and following "Profiles" decreased to approximately half that of their counterparts in the former time slots. The 10:30 p.m. Sunday airing time remained unchanged through 1974, but during 1973, the station started to videotape the segments. During 1974, the program's format changed from on-location to in-studio production, and its death became inevitable. Advertising in the regional *TV Guide* was discontinued, although scattered promotion continued to appear in the *Detroit News*.

In 1975 "Profiles" was rescheduled yet again to 7:00 p.m. on Saturdays, the station ceased promoting the program, and its viewing audience continued to decline. With the move in 1976 to 6:30 p.m. on Sundays the audience increased slightly, but not significantly. The format had become entirely in-studio interviews—"talking heads"—although some dimension was added through the use of slides and graphics.

More significant to the continuing decline of the program's audience was the use in 1976 of reruns and program preemptions. These unannounced interruptions were possibly occasioned by the station's impending change of ownership. In 1977, Scripps sold WWJ to the Post-Newsweek Group, then considered one of the most progressive organizations in the national mass media, and its call letters were changed to WDIV-TV. The program was rescheduled at 1:00 p.m. on Sundays. Ironically, "Profiles" experienced an increased in viewership. However, in an effort to expand its viewer base, the station changed the program's name from "Profiles in Black" to "Profiles," a name change which reflected a pluralistic perspective and obviously de-emphasized the African-American focus. The station provided less support of the program, and it became increasingly difficult to acquire studio and editing time. Promotion ceased, fewer programs were produced, and preemptions became more frequent. In 1979 the airing time changed to 8:30 p.m. Thursday in May and in October and November to different times on Saturday and Sunday evenings. The program's viewing audience dropped to the lowest point in the history of the program.

Some feel the station's interest in "Profiles in Black" waned after only two or three years.²⁶ Others felt the station only retained the program because it feared license attacks, picketing, and other harassment.²⁷

²⁶Burke interview.

²⁷Marx interview.

Whatever conclusion one draws about the station's commitment to the program, the fact remains that it was aired unsponsored for ten years. Factors that figured in the program's longevity included the change in Detroit's racial composition from predominantly white to African-American and the emergence of the African-American as a viable consumer.

The Public's View

An analysis of the public's perspective of "Profiles in Black" is based on 278 letters sent to the station and "Profiles" host, Gilbert Maddox, during the program's ten-year existence. They fell into five general categories: (1) guest appearance requests; (2) thanks for appearing on the program; (3) contracts and appearances for Gilbert Maddox; (4) actions resulting from a program appearance (such as a viewer's protest to the Director of the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation in Washington, moved by a segment on the plight of a returned veteran); and (5) letters written primarily to evaluate the program. Although all letters were examined from a quantitative perspective, quotes from this last category, those evaluating the program, are presented because they reflect the viewers' attitudes towards the program.

During its two months of airing in 1969, "Profiles" received 32 letters from the viewing audience, 27 of which evaluated the program.

Protests over Program Change: Nineteen letters, mostly from suburban viewers, protested the replacement of "Adam-12," a popular police show that had previously occupied the time slot. S. A. C. of Mt. Clemens, Michigan, was simply antagonistic to "Profiles": "I don't feel that it is fair to the children, young adults, and oldsters for television to cram such junky publicity about the lazy, unemployed blacks."²⁸

Congratulatory comments to the station included four letters thanking the station for its willingness to present "Profiles" during prime-time hours. They expressed hope that this effort would lead to better understanding and improved race relations. The following is representative of this correspondence: "Your show "Profiles in Black" is really topnotch. The interviews I've seen have been delightfully candid—bringing out all kinds of things that help to break down stereotypes."²⁹

One of the four congratulatory letters addressed to Gilbert Maddox included this statement: "The format and material—and people—presented, we feel definitely promotes better understanding between the races in the total community."³⁰

²⁸S. A. C., Mt. Clemens, 1 December 1969.

²⁹P. C. H., Ann Arbor, 29 December 1969.

³⁰J. T. B., Grosse Pointe Park, 27 December 1969.

Nineteen-seventy, the first full year of the program's airing, produced the highest level of viewer response, with 86 letters being received by the station. The 29 letters evaluating the program differed from those of the previous year in that there were no longer any protests concerning the program's replacement of "Adam-12." There were several congratulatory comments exemplified by the following: "We think that your program has focused on a part of the black community that we whites have never had a chance to see, and we appreciate the work you are doing."³¹

Nineteen other letters in this category considered the program an important factor in promoting racial understanding. As an example, B. S. of Windsor, Canada, wrote: "Although I have not had the opportunity of knowing many black people, through television you are now introducing us to many. With knowledge comes understanding and hopefully love for one another."³²

Other evaluative letters expressed appreciation for specific aspects or segments of the shows. One writer, sympathetic to the Black Panthers, found some support for her ethical and political philosophy in the appearance of a young lawyer on the program and ended her letter with the statement: "At least you are doing this fine thing with your program. Blessings on it and you."³³

The station received 44 letters during 1971, a reduction of one-third from the previous peak year; less than half of these evaluated the program. One letter from an assistant minister of St. Columbia Episcopal Church cited the program for "promoting racial understanding" and helping "a cut-off white community understand the degree and the depth of riches to be found in the study of black history."³⁴ Another criticized Maddox's handling of an interview.³⁵ The remaining letters received in 1971 were written primarily for the purpose of expressing the writers' views on some personal subject or philosophy than to evaluate the program. For example, D. L. D. of Pontiac disputed the statement of one guest that there was "no discrimination in the graveyard," by accusing White Chapel Cemetery of refusing burial to her husband who was a Filipino.³⁶

The number of responses from viewers in 1972 continued to decline, with only 18 received, less than half the volume of the previous year. Of the four evaluative letters received, two were complimentary. The President of Comprehensive Communications Services, for example, wrote:

³¹L. S., Pontiac, 30 November 1970.

³²B. S., Windsor, Ontario, Canada, 10 February 1970.

³³P. B. S., Troy, 27 June 1970.

³⁴C. D. R., Detroit, 5 May 1971.

³⁵B. T., Detroit, 21 January 1971.

³⁶D. L. D., Pontiac, 25 January 1971.

“We thank you for your continued communications leadership.”³⁷ The other two letters were distinctly critical, one of Maddox for his alleged mispronunciation of “the simple 5-letter word ‘often’,” and the other of the program itself, which the writer labeled “a farce” and “a racist theme song.”³⁸

There were 18 comments from viewers in 1973. There was only one evaluative response, but that was a unique one: The writer, commending the program on Paul Robeson, expressed his regret that he had been unable to see it and asked about the possibility of a “repeat performance,” or rerun.³⁹

“Profiles” received 19 letters in 1974. Of the four letters evaluating the program, three complimented the program while seeking help or counsel from Maddox. In contrast, a letter from a member of the Detroit Board of Education, commented on the appearances of two prominent labor leaders: “A note of appreciation for the tremendous and often difficult job you are doing in presenting black people of achievement to the viewers of Channel Four.”⁴⁰

The number of letters received during the midpoint of the program’s existence, 1975, increased more than 50 percent over the previous year to 23. Of the six evaluative responses received, only one, a telegram from the Junior League of Detroit, compliments the program without reserve.⁴¹ The others included a brief compliment, but primarily request information or help in their own personal objectives. For example, one letter from L. H. of Action House, Inc., a teenage counseling and job training organization, asked for \$13,000 as part of a matching funds campaign to qualify for a \$90,000 grant.⁴²

During the years 1976 and 1977 there were no letters evaluating the program. 1978 saw five letters. One was from the Brewster Old Timers, a charitable organization in Detroit, which stated: “Thanks to your very enlightening show on television, *Profiles in Black*, the accomplishment of Detroit’s Black Citizenry can no longer be ignored or go unacknowledged.”⁴³

Another wrote more specifically: “‘Humanizing the Police Department’ last Sunday night was a superior program, for Susan Mills Peek

³⁷L. M. J., Detroit, 21 July 1972.

³⁸L. J. J., Detroit, 5 July 1972; H. E., Detroit, 10 July 1972.

³⁹S. R., Detroit, 19 February 1973.

⁴⁰C. W. R., Detroit, 15 June 1974.

⁴¹Junior League of Detroit, Telegram, 1975.

⁴²L. H., Detroit, 3 February 1975.

⁴³R. S., Detroit, 10 August 1978.

was so clear in her responsibilities as well as those of the Police Commission."⁴⁴

"Profiles in Black" was discontinued in 1979-80, and despite that fact, or perhaps as a result of it, 14 letters were received by the station, all of them evaluative. One commended Channel 4 for having the vision and courage to broadcast such a unique program as "Profiles,"⁴⁵ and the remaining 13 protested the program's discontinuance. The following is representative: "Gil Maddox and 'Profiles' were enjoyable aspects to our otherwise suburban-oriented programming by WDIV. "Profiles" should be returned, now."⁴⁶

Did "Profiles in Black" succeed in reversing existing pathologies in the African-American presence in television? Crew members' comments and letters sent in by viewers during the ten-year life of the program suggest that it did. The majority commended Maddox for producing a quality program, increasing the appearance of African-Americans on television, covering significant issues, and for not portraying African-Americans in demeaning or stereotypical roles. Many felt the program enlightened members of the uninformed white community about African-American life.

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⁴⁴V. B. P., Detroit, 18 August 1978.

⁴⁵P. D., Detroit, 5 January 1980.

⁴⁶J. T., Birmingham, 10 February 1980.