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## 'Black Programming,' CW Merger Discussed at Film Festival

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By Nicole Porter

On June 17, the Hollywood Black Film Festival hosted a panel titled "The Merger & The Future of Black Programming" at the Le Meridian Hotel in Beverly Hills to discuss what impact the CW merger will have on African-Americans and minorities in front of and behind the camera. The panelists included entertainment lawyer Gary A. Watson of Gary A. Watson and Associates, writer Chauncey B. Raglin-Washington (UPN's *Half & Half*), and former SVP of Current Programming at Warner Brothers, Brett King. Warner Bros. TV's Director of Current Programming Odetta Watkins, moderated the event.

According to Watkins, African-American programming has often been used as building blocks to draw viewers to new networks. "When [UPN and the WB] first began they had mostly African-American programming," she said. "Fox also started that way so what we've learned throughout history is that these networks start with African-American programming [and then] slowly but surely weed it out once advertisers start to come and viewers start to come. They can show advertisers how many viewers they have to switch over to white 18-to-49 [year old] programming."

Watson, who has represented film, television, and music personalities Dr. Dre and Michael Jackson as well as BET, said the failure of "black programming" might be the fault of networks not marking to larger demographics. "It's a self-fulfilling prophecy, if you look at a show and structure a show [in which] your target demographic is African-American then you go for that and only advertise that way than that's really all you're going to get," he said. "In the movie business if you build [your product] differently then you're going to do different business. Will Smith [is a] black man, but he's a major movie star. If [studios] build a movie around Will Smith and they target it to a huge demographic, get that demographic and he has."

Former WB exec Brett King said the CW doesn't signal a closed door for minorities and could actually capture wider demographics. "If you are presenting a world that is racially homogenous then you will get a racially homogenous audience and everybody in that group has shown up for that picture of the world. However, if you want that broad based success, I think that [television should be] reflective of a world that we live and interact in. I think that if comedy began to resemble *Grey's Anatomy* then those comedies would have a much better shot at getting a bigger audience," said King. "Broadcast networks are desperately trying to increase and grow their audience and get as many people as they can. I think that if you're trying to sell your story to broadcast television as Keenan Ivory Wayans said after doing the first *Scary Movie*, 'It seems to me the success of the best idea to make money in movies or in television is to put white people in your shit.'"