

Segmented audiences

Last night, PBS aired African American Lives Part 2, a series exploring African American history featuring Henry Louis Gates, Jr. This documentary is really wonderful—interesting and informative. I highly recommend it (it goes on Wednesdays through February). On the marketing side, it was interesting to see who was sponsoring the show: Coca-Cola, Johnson and Johnson, AMBI and others. Coke had an ad made specifically for the series, focusing on African American history and achievement. It was highly stylized and designed to appeal to emotion. Johnson and Johnson did something similar...about generations and showing how “baby changes everything.” The family appearing the J&J ad was black. I started thinking about how we process messaging in this day and age. If I am black, do I have to see a black family using a product to consider it? If I am white, and I see the aforementioned J&J commercial, do I disregard it because it is so clearly targeting African Americans?

Audiences have always been segmented, and advertisers have always worked to tailor their messages to each audience's needs. Aren't we so tremendously media exposed that we would see different ads for the same product on different channels/media outlets? Does the message really change? Certain products, like AMBI, are meant specifically for African Americans. The company probably does not advertise too much on mass media. But do other products, which may not be so specific (Coke for instance), need to present different advertising? Or maybe it is not about need per se, but rather image...