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TV Review

N.E.T. Program Views Negro Middle Class

By JACK GOULD

THE changing mood of the Negro middle class from imitation of white middle class values to greater emphasis on enduring black dignity and achievement was exhaustively detailed last night in a documentary by William Greaves and William B. Branch. Their program was seen in a National Educational Television presentation over Channel 13.

With Ossie Davis serving as narrator, the program, entitled "Still A Brother: Inside the Negro Middle Class," first recited the awkward diffidence of well-to-do Negroes who are alienated both from their white counterparts and from the less privileged colleagues of their own color. In the acid test of true acceptance in society, the Negro middle class found its status was largely an illusory one. Now, said Mr. Greaves and Mr. Branch, the Negro middle class is realizing it must play an active role in liberating blacks, regardless of economic station, that no man can be an island unto himself.

The value of the 90-minute offering of Mr. Greaves and Mr. Branch was to underscore that Negroes on all levels are re-examining their attitudes, they are closing ranks to rid the country of the racism and discrimination that close doors to the militant and determined Negro youth.

The Greaves-Branch team was unsparing in its reporting of wealthier Negroes luxuriating in leisure while others of their color tramped the streets of the frustrating ghettos. By means of scores of interviews and newsreel clippings of last summer's outbursts, the program was at its best in examining the mental revolution that was enveloping the black middle class, the realization that no matter what a black person's income or accumulation of academic degrees he was still not immune to humiliation solely because of color.

"Still A Brother: Inside the Negro Middle Class" could have conveyed the substance of its message more succinctly and gained in editorial impact. Over an hour and a half, the program occasionally wandered from its central point, and was not entirely free from repetition. But such reservations did not detract from the thoughtful and serious concern for an element of the Negro community that heretofore has not been adequately studied.

Not the least interesting aspect of the TV program was the obvious fact that it was prepared in advance of the report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. The similarity of many of the points contained in the program and the report was striking. Mr. Greaves and Mr. Branch, incidentally, clearly anticipated the protest of Negro students at Columbia University. Their program should have been put on the air more promptly by N.E.T., but even in its delayed showing the presentation's usefulness was substantial.