

BLACK CHARACTER REVOLUTION IN THE BEGINNING...

Fat Albert and his friends, recognized as the first positive Black cast animated cartoon characters, originated from a stand-up routine by famed comedian Bill Cosby. Fat Albert was a part of Cosby's "Buck Buck" routine about a neighborhood game from his childhood, as recorded on his 1967 album *Revenge*. Cosby described Fat Albert "as the baddest Buck Buck breaker in the world."

Cosby - along with veteran animator Ken Mundie and Disney alum Amby Paliwoda - turned Fat Albert stories about growing up in North Philadelphia into a stand-alone Primetime special for NBC entitled *Hey, Hey, Hey, It's Fat Albert*, a mixture of live-action and animation which aired on November 12, 1969. The music for this special was written and performed by jazz keyboardist Herbie Hancock and later released on the album *Fat Albert Rotunda*. Ken Mundie directed the special. Leo Sullivan, a Black animator who would later work at Filmation, Hanna Barbera and Warner Brothers Animation, was one of seven animators who created the characters for the special.

Despite the success of the special, NBC declined to produce Fat Albert as a Saturday morning series because of its strong educational tone. Cosby - now aligned with Lou Scheimer and Filmation Associates - took the property to CBS, where the characters received a dramatic stylistic overhaul. *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* premiered on September 9, 1972 and continued at CBS over a period of 12 years with only small gaps in production. In 1979, the series was re-titled *The New Fat Albert Show* and *The Brown Hornet* superhero segment was introduced. *The Adventures of Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* also appeared for another season in first-run syndication in 1984-1985, overlapping with the phenomenally popular *The Cosby Show*. Throughout its run, three primetime holiday specials featuring the Fat Albert gang were also produced.

The Fat Albert cartoon series was the third positive "Black cast" cartoon to air on Saturday morning and remains the longest running Saturday morning cartoon series. The show is often cited by critics and fans as one of the great animated series of all time and was honored with an Emmy nomination in 1974. The 40th anniversary of the Fat Albert cartoon series was September 9, 2012.

