

Halftime peep show sparks call for restraint_20904

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WASHINGTON (ABP)-Standards of decency on broadcast television are again in the news as the Federal Communications Commission investigates what led to an incident during the halftime show at Super Bowl XXXVIII.

The show, watched by an estimated 99 million viewers, was broadcast on CBS Feb. 1. During the show, recording artists Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake created a sensation when, at the end of a performance featuring a sexually suggestive dance routine, Timberlake ripped off a part of Jackson's costume, exposing her right breast.

"I am outraged at what I saw during the halftime show of the Super Bowl," said FCC Chairman Michael Powell in a Feb. 2 statement announcing the investigation. "Like millions of Americans, my family and I gathered around the television for a celebration. Instead, that celebration was tainted by a classless, crass and deplorable stunt. Our nation's children, parents and citizens deserve better."

All of the commission's other members also released statements

denouncing the performance and criticizing CBS executives for letting it slip through.

The investigation reportedly will include the entire halftime show, which contained other elements that apparently offended media critics and pro-family organizations.

Phil Strickland, director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas Christian Life Commission, called the Super Bowl halftime spectacle “regrettable” on several fronts.

“It is regrettable that a performance which was intended for general viewing by persons of all ages ended up being R-rated. It is regrettable that professional singers and dancers have come to feel that singing and dancing is no longer sufficient to entertain their publics,” he said.

“It is regrettable that the NFL's premier venue has passed control of pre-game, post-game, and half-time entertainment into the hands of parties who have nothing to do with football,” he said.

“And it is regrettable that a world that is already suspicious about American values got a bad demonstration of those values. ... The inappropriate exposure of Janet Jackson's body parts was only the most sensational moment of a sexually-oriented performance that had no rightful place on the national stage.”

Viacom, Inc., owns both CBS and MTV, which produced the halftime show. According to reports, NFL officials have said they likely will not allow MTV to produce halftime shows for future Super Bowls.

Jackson released a statement apologizing for the incident, and Timberlake released a statement saying he regretted the “wardrobe malfunction.”

The controversy is just the latest to surround the FCC and broadcast

decency standards. In January, the commission fined Clear Channel Communications for several raunchy radio broadcasts.

It also has announced it is considering harsher penalties for media outlets violating decency standards.

Powell and the FCC have garnered repeated criticism since last year, when the agency's enforcement arm ruled that U2 lead singer Bono's casual use of a curse word during an NBC awards-show broadcast in January 2003 did not rise to the level of a decency violation.

With additional reporting by Managing Editor Ken Camp.

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