

Diversity, inclusion theme of this year's Super Bowl ads

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.
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Super Bowl Sunday was an awful day for some of America's so called "purists."

In a game that featured quarterback match-ups between southern-born white "traditional" pocket passer, Payton Manning and the Denver Broncos against the more mobile, less traditional African-American QB, Russell Wilson, of the Seattle Seahawks, the game was no contest. Seattle crushed Manning and the Broncos 43 – 8. Oh, yeah, and don't forget Seattle's defense was led by "thug" cornerback Richard Sherman. Keep in mind the man labeled a thug by many for his post-game rant following the NFC Championship game has a degree with honors from Stanford University.



But if the game was not bad enough, in addition, the "purists" (what others are calling racists) had to endure a couple of Super Bowl ads that challenged their "American" way of life.

In a follow-up to the Cheerios ad that set the Internet abuzz and caused General Mills, makers of Cheerios, to disable comments from its YouTube page, the cereal maker brought back an ethnically blended family in its spot called "Gracie."

The character Gracie is the biracial girl who initially appeared with her white mother in a scene asking about the health properties if the whole-grain cereal. Later, it's revealed that the father is African-American. The commercial ended with the word, "Love." The spot has nearly 5 million hits to date on YouTube and was the source of severe backlash for a vocal minority of whites. Support for the ad came from many other whites, African-Americans and other ethnicities.

In the ad that aired during the first quarter of the already lopsided Super Bowl game, Gracie was seen – this time with her father – talking about the addition of another child to the family. Gracie bargained for a puppy. Again, the spot ended with the word, "Love." And again, there were a

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few who took to Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms to protest their outrage.

But as Angela McClendon, a Super Bowl watcher from St. Louis said, Golden Valley based General Mills stood firm.

"I think that it (the commercial) was a direct message to society that (General Mills) was not going to be bullied into back peddling on its decision to use an interracial couple," said McClendon. "They felt the heat for the first commercial, but they stayed in the kitchen. I can respect that, because most companies will flip-flop when they are criticized. They stood their ground."

Camille Gibson, vice president of marketing for Cheerios said the 30-second spot is about celebrating the American family.

"Cheerios is about families and love and connections – and breakfast," said Gibson. "And our new Cheerios ad celebrates one of those special moments with a family that America fell in love with."

Tamala Nicholson of Minneapolis said for her, the commercial was less about race and more about father, daughter time.

"I thought it was cute. And honestly, I saw a little girl have 'daddy' time," said Nicholson. "That stood out to me because I'm a daddy's girl. As a byproduct of my life with (my father), I see through goggles of positivity. (I see a) family having breakfast together – that's it."

Believe it or not, the General Mills Cheerios spot was not the one that drew the most ire of the "purists."

Coca-Cola's "It's Beautiful" ad featuring people of varying ethnicities singing "America the Beautiful" caused an Internet firestorm with racist rants being found on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Published on Feb. 2, the YouTube video of the commercial has already logged more than 3.8 million views in addition to the worldwide Super Bowl audience.

Attorney Jeffrey Kass, who lives in Denver, enjoyed the spot.

"I loved the Coca-Cola commercial the best of the more serious ones, but the Cheerios commercial was still very good," said Kass, who is white. "It was not too long ago that corporate America and its advertisements perpetrated negative feelings so this is a breath of fresh air."

Not all was lost for the "purists." The number one rated commercial, as rated by the USA Today Ad Meter was Budweiser's "Puppy Love" spot. Beer is as American as it gets and Budweiser is "America's beer" – even if its parent company is now German.