

Tyler Perry's Have's and Have Nots Ethical

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Tyler Perry has become an American entertainment icon. His golden touch as an actor, writer, producer, and director has reached arenas in stage, television, and film. Perry continues to bring forth ethical and moral messages in the visual arts that are often overlooked or underestimated. It is no different with his first soap opera, *The Haves and the Have Nots*, broadcast on the OWN Channel. The racially diverse cast of characters portrays the lives of the rich (the Cryer and Harrington families) and the poor and destitute (the Young family) in the southern city of Savannah, Georgia. But beyond the surface of class difference, these families share common bioethical themes and challenges such as cancer, substance abuse, homosexuality, suicide, prostitution, poverty, rape, perpetual crime, abortion, mental illness, and life support.

One of the more salient themes of the show is the issue of life support and health care disparities based on class. Katheryn Cryer (the Haves) befriends and confides in Hanna, her maid (the Have Nots), during her treatment of cancer. Katheryn and Hanna share a bond as parents, but most significantly, as two cancer survivors. After Hanna aids Katheryn in her recovery efforts, Katheryn promotes Hanna as the head maid in the Cryer household. Hanna has a son, Benny, who lives with her and diligently operates a tow truck company. While working late one night, Benny is accidentally struck by a car driven by Katheryn Cryer's son, Wyatt, who was under the influence of heroin. Wyatt not only harms Benny, but subsequently kills a girl in the accident. As a result of this horrific turn of events, Benny is in a coma with very little hope of recovery. His mother, Hanna, constantly prays for her only son's recovery; while Wyatt, a young man of privilege, is being protected by his family's wealth and power. To make matters worse, Benny's father, Tony, who was not involved in his son's life as a young man, legally seeks to remove his son off life support in order to acquire a much-needed kidney.

This tale's tragedy is found in the victim of the accident, Benny. He cannot receive the treatment he deserves in a community hospital because he does not have health care insurance. The lack of access to medical resources is limited by Benny's status as a young person without medical capital. Tyler Perry creatively brought the issue of health care disparities to the forefront without preaching to the choir. His writing is so well crafted that you, as a viewer, are confronted with this issue without much notice. Perry's narrative from *The Haves and the Have Nots* highlights how the passing of the Affordable Care Act begins to bring justice and equality to health care. Opposition to the Act by those who seldom have read it in its entirety and oftentimes possess comprehensive health care insurance themselves simply brings to light subversive and undermining discriminatory practices against the poor and most vulnerable.

As Tyler Perry's television series demonstrates, the lack of comprehensive health insurance oftentimes results in the death of the poor. In this scenario, the poor and vulnerable are not the only victims. Their families and even the larger society are harmed because of a lack of compassion for the helpless. Rather than promoting further divide over disagreements about certain sections of the Affordable Care Act, we, as a nation, should seek to make health care a nationalistic fundamental right that benefits all society. Although the health care system in America seems fragile and even broken to some, it can be healed and repaired through a concerted effort of bipartisan political leadership and citizen support. Tyler Perry's television series reminds us that we have what it takes to bridge the divide between the Haves and the Have Nots if we are willing to work together for a common and necessary good.