



WHY HAS DISNEY ALLOWED ABC DAYTIME TO LOWER ITS STANDARDS?  
WHAT DOES SOAPNET'S CANCELLATION MEAN FOR ABC DAYTIME?

"I'm not gonna lower my standards," proclaimed successful businesswoman Kate Howard, who then proceeded to make out with Coleman at local dive bar, Jake's, in a recent scene on General Hospital (GH). Unfortunately, this hypocrisy seems to be the normal pattern of storytelling on GH and in the actions of management as well. Those at the helm state they are listening to fans and want to increase viewership, but proceed to do the opposite of what fans are saying as evidenced by what is being presented on-screen. Most recently, in an article announcing the return of Vanessa Marcil to GH, Brian Frons, President of ABC Daytime, stated, "General Hospital has always been dedicated to the strong history of our characters." If that were true, disgruntled, disappointed fans would not be leaving GH by the hundreds of thousands. There would not be constant comments about GH's lowering its standards, yet again, by writing stories that break the most important and basic tenets of soap writing by purposely writing characters out of character and rewriting the history of the characters and the show.

One example of lowering standards occurred during the early part of 2010 after fans noticed some effort had been made on the part of the writers to create interesting stories for lead character, Sonny Corinthos, which resulted in a short-lived upturn in ratings after Sonny's shooting of Dante. GH had the opportunity to create high drama with a compelling trial for Claudia's murder that could include much of the cast, but instead chose to write it as a farce. The credibility of the federal prosecutor and the attorney for the defense was lowered to a ridiculous level by unrealistically selecting Lisa, Alice, and Coleman as jurors. The shallowness of the trial, and the suspension of reality, did not fit the serious nature of the shooting of Michael and his subsequent killing of Claudia. Maurice Benard generated some serious, Emmy-worthy performances, however, it seemed he did not get the memo that this was supposed to be a farce, so many of the scenes felt out of place, and characters became "jokes" and totally unbelievable to the audience.

Putting a brain-damaged, teenage Michael in jail without counsel, and in the wink of an eye, was a totally unbelievable and irresponsible end to the storyline. What made it even more unbelievable was that Michael had actually confessed to killing Claudia, but was released because Mac, determined to convict Sonny of the crime, did not believe him. Viewers are still wondering if the jury found Sonny guilty after a nearly six week-long trial, why the Emmy nominated actor playing Michael was recast so suddenly, and why Michael was even thrown into jail in the first place. Nothing has made sense since the end of the trial and disgruntled viewers have turned off GH resulting in the lowest ratings of the year (tying the lowest ratings ever in the 18-49 demos) for the end of the May sweeps period. Given the dark direction of GH in recent weeks, one wonders if ABC Daytime is going for a Sopranos/Oz feel with a tone similar to the one-man play directed by Guza about Lenny Bruce, a troubled and dark comedian who committed suicide.

Also, many viewers complain that many of their favorite characters are not getting enough screen time, while other characters seem to be on virtually every day. Adding to the frustration, when past characters return, fans know that will mean even more reduced air time for their favorites and even less chance for more air time for those who already have little to no air time as it is. GH has a very talented cast, but too many of those actors/characters are significantly and tragically underused and, when on-screen, written totally out of character with no explanation, while others are almost unbearably over-utilized.

For several months, fans have complained about the stunts and stunt casting that has taken place on GH. While it has been shown that these have not worked in the past, they appear to still be the focus of the headwriter, Robert Guza, Jr. When asked in the March 8, 2010, ABC Soaps in Depth article "Guza's Plan to Save Soaps" if enlisting big-name stars to shoot limited arcs to create a buzz is the way to go, Guza stated that he certainly thinks so! He intimated that doing things like the carnival and bringing on actor James Franco are an effort to help the show. While many viewers enjoyed the carnival as an event, as usual the storyline possibilities were dropped right after. Viewers want to watch continuing, believable stories rather than stunts or events that are held together by weak threads.

Other recent 'guest stars' on GH have included Martha Byrne and, most recently, Michael Learned. While many soap opera viewers know of Martha Byrne, many showed little interest in her character and she was killed off despite several attempts to hype her story. Similarly, Michael Learned is very well known, however, her character has become simply a prop in an unpopular Liz, Lucky and Nik triangle. Viewers wonder if the upcoming return of actor James Franco will result in a compelling storyline for him and other actors on the canvas, or if GH is only interested in creating press releases and press stories, creating a lot of buzz with no substance and no increase in viewership, as happened during his last tenure. The November 2009 sweeps began with the killing of Claudia and maintained viewers' interest, achieving weekly ratings of 2.1 for three consecutive weeks (first time since February 2009). This, however, ended with 10% lower ratings in total viewers and a 15-20% decrease in the 18-49 demo from mid November to just before Christmas, which was the same time period as Mr. Franco's highly publicized storyline. The only time ratings moved upward during the Franco story was when he kidnapped Lulu and Sam. Once the two women were found by Jason and Dante just before Franco left town, the ratings returned to their lower numbers.

Throughout the last few weeks, ABC Daytime has been issuing press releases extolling the success of its Daytime soaps and The View vs. its competitors. In the most recent press release, GH was touted as "the only daytime drama to post growth over the May 2010 sweep period" and was "No. 1 in Women 18-34 for the May 2010 sweep period." The press release fails to mention that the only reason GH was the only drama to post growth over the May 2010 sweep period (sweeps) was due to an increase in male viewership, not in Total Viewers nor in the highly coveted Women 18-49 demographic. GH actually lost over 60,000 female viewers vs. the May 2009 sweeps. It was also not mentioned that during the last two ratings summaries, which covered the last two weeks of May sweeps, GH has lost over 300,000 viewers and had 12 consecutive days with a daily rating under 2.0.

In the May 31, 2010, issue of ABC Soaps in Depth, in the article "The Truth About Ratings," ABC Daytime President Brian Frons stated that things "aren't quite as bleak as some out there would have you believe." He continues by pointing out that traditional viewing habits have been tossed out the window, in turn making the Nielsen system somewhat obsolete. He says that he not only looks at the Nielsen number, but looks "at the network [airing], plus all the airings of the shows on SOAPnet, plus people that are watching their soaps either on ABC.com or Hulu.com." This is interesting considering that ABC/Disney has announced that SOAPnet will become Disney Junior, a Disney children's channel, in 2012. This leads many to wonder, "**What does the cancellation of SOAPnet mean for the three ABC soaps? Will ABC Daytime suddenly announce the cancellation of one of the shows after *As The World Turns (ATWT)* goes off the air?**"

Will the writers of GH continue on the current path of lowering their standards by writing characters out of character and changing character and storyline history simply to shove the characters into new storylines? Will those in charge at GH continue to proclaim they will listen to viewers and improve the show, but continually do the opposite of what works as suggested by what is presented on-screen and how it affects patterns in the ratings? Better yet, will those at the helm of GH *raise* their standards by listening to fans comments and concerns so they can stop spinning ratings data?

More fans and former viewers of GH are joining together with fans of Sonny and Kate, Jason and Elizabeth, Patrick and Robin, and Jax and Carly as part of the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital Campaign. All share in a common goal of asking ABC/Disney to listen to the viewers and make changes by using favorite characters that are already part of the canvas, delivering character-driven storylines and

being true to the characters while respecting the rich history of the show. For more information or to comment on the campaign, contact Dana L. Meyer or Kecia K. Picard at [saveoursoapgh@gmail.com](mailto:saveoursoapgh@gmail.com), visit the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital page on Facebook, follow on twitter @SOS\_GH or visit the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital website at [www.saveoursoapgh.com](http://www.saveoursoapgh.com).