

## RACISM, CONFLICT, HYPERSEXUALITY, AND...PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT? LESSONS FROM VH1'S "CHARM SCHOOL"

by *Racialicious* special correspondent [Latoya Peterson](#)



If Flavor Flav is the modern day "Steppin Fetchit," Mo'Nique seems determined to end the minstrelsy.

In her new show, [Flavor of Love Girls: Charm School](#) Mo'Nique desires to reverse the damage done to the girls while they were contestants on Flavor of Love by forcing them to reform. She employs the assistance of Mikki Taylor, the beauty & cover editor for Essence magazine, and Keith Lewis, director of two California

beauty pageants and the director of a talent agency.

Now, initially, I was skeptical of the show's concept. Mo'Nique was going on VH1 to teach the girls about etiquette? I love Mo'Nique - but I felt like it would quickly descend into the stereotypical "black woman telling it like it is" with her squawking outdated "sistah-isms" and her keeping it real in the neck popping, eye rolling kind of way.

[Note: This is not a reflection on Mo'Nique's personality. Reality TV, as "unscripted" as it may be, still encourages everyone to act like they have lost their minds in order to create "good TV." And if the characters fail to act up to their roles, creative editing is employed.]

However, I was happily surprised to find that this is not the case. (I still watched two full episodes before deciding to blog though.)

Already, the show has piqued my interest. The show seems invested in changing the girl's attitudes about life and fame. In stark contrast to Flavor of Love, where the girls were encouraged to confront each other, Charm School intends to make the girls confront themselves. By forcing the girls through challenges that require both team building and competition, VH1 has managed to reveal some very interesting personality quirks in the contestants that were not revealed on Flavor of Love.

### **Race Watch!**

During multiple points in the show, I almost choked to death on my sparkling water. There are *major* race issues in that household - and you almost don't see them coming. Standouts from the first two episodes:

- Larissa (aka Bootz) gets confrontational from the jump, saying that she thinks Brooke (Pumpkin) was racist for spitting on New York. She quickly gets Shay (Buckeey - why the hell can't Flav spell? He could spell alright the first season!) to join in on a thinly veiled reason to exert their dominance over Brooke. Brooke ends up in the bathroom in tears, with both Larissa and Shay holding on tight to their justification.

- Becky (Buckwild) dissolves into tears on Mo'Nique's couch while discussing how hard she has to defend who she is, and wondering why people think she is putting on an act when she is just trying to be herself - blaccent and all. (Note: At the name tag removal ceremony, Mo'Nique made a point of calling Becky out for having the whitest name and acting the way she does. Interesting.)

- Leilene (Smiley) is automatically tagged as "weak" by the other girls in the household from the very beginning. Though this is a most likely a testament to Leilene's thin skin and penchant for tears, I wonder about the consistent application of the term "weak."

- In the second episode, Courtney (Goldie) competes with Leilene for a date with Andrew Firestone, loses, and then makes a comment about Leilene looking like she "could love him long time."

Say it with me, [Angry Asian Man style](#): *That's racist!* Jacked up Goldie!

- When Becky competes for the date with Andrew Firestone, she refers to "turning the Becky on," stepping outside of herself, softening her speech patterns, tightening her diction and pretending to know about wine. Draw your own conclusions from that one.

### **Other Items of Note:**

-I really hope Larissa learns something from this experience. Besides spouting things like "[Schatar is] a wack ass bitch who has a wack ass weave and I can't stand her wack ass ass," she is also quick to live up to negative stereotypes about black women. Her intro shot (where they flash back to her naming ceremony on Flavor of Love) was her turning around and shaking her ass for Flav, earning her name Bootz (Flav says: "Cause I want to knock 'em!). Then later, she uses sexuality to try to score the date with Andrew Firestone - which Mikki Taylor later chastises her for. After she is eliminated from the date, she says "I should just bend over and shake my ass in his face." All this after publicly proclaiming her virginity on Flavor of Love.

Great...thanks Larissa.

- All the girls seemed relieved to be rid of their Flav-given names (except for Saaphyri, Becky, and Heather, for all different reasons). However, some of them quickly regressed into their same patterns of behavior. Take Cristal (Serious) for example. There are no men on the show, and sexuality is not how you get ahead...yet, she works that angle every chance she gets. She aspires to be a model, but is all

exposure good exposure? She indicated she was looking toward the catwalk...but her actions are pointing toward the video model world.

- Is Schatar certifiably crazy? The girl is diabolical, but there are definitely seem to be some screws loose. Then again, all these girls could be playing up a character...

- The girls are encouraged by Mo'Nique to be strong. I wonder what she intends by that. I don't think there is anything wrong with cultivating inner strength, but I am concerned that we may be playing a little into the Strong Black Woman mindset that so many women have bought into.

That covers it for now...I am interested to see how things progress next week.