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Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids

Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids is an American animated series created, produced, and hosted (in live action bookends) by comedian Bill Cosby, who also lent his voice to a number of characters, including Fat Albert himself. Filmation was the production company for the series. The show premiered in 1972^[1] and ran until 1985 (with new episodes being produced sporadically during that time frame). The show, based on Cosby's remembrances of his childhood gang, centered on Fat Albert (known for his catchphrase "Hey hey hey!"), and his friends.^[2]

The show features an educational lesson in each episode, emphasized by Cosby's live-action segments. In addition, at the end of the early episodes, the gang typically gathers in their North Philadelphia junkyard to play a song on their cobbled-together instruments, summarizing the show's lesson.^[2]

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Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids



L to R: Cluck, Bill, Rudy, Dumb Donald, Mushmouth, Fat Albert, Bucky, Russell, Weird Harold

Also known as	<i>The New Fat Albert Show</i> <i>The Adventures of Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids</i>
Genre	Comedy-drama Educational
Created by	Bill Cosby
Directed by	Hal Sutherland
Creative director(s)	Don Christensen
Presented by	Bill Cosby
Voices of	Bill Cosby Lou Scheimer Jan Crawford Gerald Edwards Eric Suter Demetra McHenry Erika Carroll Lane Vaux

Origins

The character Fat Albert first appeared in Cosby's stand-up comedy routine "Buck Buck," as recorded on his 1967 album *Revenge*.^[3] The stories were based upon Cosby's tales about growing up in inner city North Philadelphia.^[4] In 1969, Cosby and veteran animator Ken Mundie brought Fat Albert to animation in a prime-time special entitled *Hey, Hey, Hey, It's Fat Albert*.

The special, which aired on NBC, was a hybrid of live action and animation. The music for the special was written and performed by jazz pianist/keyboardist Herbie Hancock in 1969,^[5] and was released on the Warner Bros. album *Fat Albert Rotunda*. For the animated portion of the special, it was necessary to develop the actual appearance of each of the Fat Albert Gang's characters. For this, Ken Mundie relied on animator Amby Paliwoda, a former Disney artist. Paliwoda not only created all the Gang's characters, but painted a "group portrait" which was eventually shown on the front page of *TV Guide* magazine shortly before the showing of the special.

The producers wanted NBC to bring Fat Albert to Saturday mornings, but the network programming managers refused because the series was too educational.^[6] Bill Cosby and a new production company, Filmation Associates, then took the property to CBS. The Fat Albert gang's character images were primarily created by the artist Randy Hollar with the assistance of one-time Disney animator Michelle McKinney, under the direction of Ken Brown.

Retitled *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids*, the series premiered on September 9, 1972, on CBS. Production lasted for 12, though not continuous, years. It also spent another season in first-run syndication (1984–85). Three prime-time holiday specials (Halloween, Christmas, and Easter) featuring the characters were also produced. Like most Saturday morning cartoons of the era, *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* contained an adult laugh track, which was eliminated during the final season. The series was rerun on NBC Saturday mornings and on the USA Network in 1989.

Theme music composer	Ricky Sheldon Edward Fournier
Opening theme	Performed by Michael Gray
Country of origin	United States
Original language(s)	English
No. of seasons	8
No. of episodes	110 + 4 specials (list of episodes)
Production	
Executive producer(s)	Bill Cosby
Producer(s)	Lou Scheimer Norm Prescott (1972–84)
Location(s)	United States
Production company(s)	Filmation
Distributor	Group W Productions (syndicated) NBCUniversal Television Distribution
Release	
Original network	CBS (1972–84) first-run syndication (1984–85)
Picture format	480i (SDTV) 1080i (HDTV)
Audio format	Mono
Original release	September 9, 1972 – August 10, 1985
Chronology	
Preceded by	<i>Hey, Hey, Hey, It's Fat Albert</i> (1969)

On January 15, 2013, Bill Cosby posted the following on his [Facebook](#) page: "I'm telling you there are people at work who, I think, will make Fat Albert happen again. And it will be loved by all generations to come", hinting that the series might be brought back once again. No further word has been given yet.^[7]

Characters

The Cosby Kids

- **Fat Albert** (voiced by [Bill Cosby](#); singing by [Michael Gray](#))^[8] is based on Cosby's childhood friend [Albert Robertson](#). The main character in the series, he is usually the conscience of the Junkyard Gang. Though very obese, he is athletic and enjoys playing sports. He always wears a red shirt and blue pants. Civic-minded and wise beyond his years, Fat Albert works hard to maintain integrity in the gang and with others, and is the lead singer as well as [bagpipe](#)-[accordion](#) (made from a funnel, radiator and an airbag) player in the Junkyard Band and on occasion, plays the [bedspring](#).
- **James "Mushmouth" Mush** (voiced by Bill Cosby) is a slack-jawed simpleton with big lips. He always wears a red knit hat and a blue scarf who always speaks in virtual [Ubbi Dubbi](#), tantamount to an overdose of novocaine in the mouth, which Cosby would later use in the "Dentist" monologue from his 1983 film, *Himself*. He plays a homemade [bass guitar](#) in the Junkyard Band.
- **"Dumb" Donald** (voiced by Lou Scheimer) is a lanky, dimwitted fellow. He is Rudy's best friend. He always wears a green long-sleeved jersey three sizes too big, and a pink stocking knit cap covering his entire face except his eyes and mouth. In the Junkyard Band, he plays a [trombone](#) made out of plumbers' pipe and a morning glory horn from an old [phonograph](#).
- **William "Bill" Cosby** (voiced by Bill Cosby) is a character based on Cosby himself. Like the others, Bill is a good athlete and enjoys playing sports. However he spends most of his time trying, often unsuccessfully, to keep his little brother Russell out of trouble. Like Fat Albert, Bill is often a voice of reason in the gang, although at times a little more stubborn. In the Junkyard Band, he plays homemade drums made from a discarded foot-pedal trash can using spoons for sticks.
- **Russell Cosby** (voiced by [Jan Crawford](#)) is Bill's younger brother (based on his real-life brother—whom he often talked about in his routines) and the smallest and youngest of the Junkyard Gang. He always wears a heavy blue jacket, a yellow scarf, red boots, and a dark blue [Ushanka](#) winter hat regardless of the weather. Russell has a penchant for making snide remarks and blunt observations (much to his older brother's consternation). Russell frequently criticizes Rudy, reserving his most withering insults for when Rudy is being especially cocky. His catchphrase is "no class." He plays the [xylophone](#) in the Junkyard Band (made out of empty cans and a discarded coat rack).
- **Weird Harold** (voiced by [Gerald Edwards](#)) is a tall, skinny, beady-eyed kid who is the tallest one of the Junkyard Gang and always wears a gold dress blazer, a brown sock on one foot and a red sock on the other, and is clumsy. In the Junkyard Band, he plays a [harp](#) made from bedsprings, and on occasion plays a "dressmaker dummy" in the [percussion](#) section. In the [film adaptation](#), he is called "Old Weird" Harold, like he was in Cosby's stand-up routines.
- **Rudy Davis** (voiced by [Eric Suter](#)) is a sharp-dressed, smooth talking, cocky [huckster](#) whose smart-aleck attitude frequently gets him into trouble. He is Dumb Donald's best friend. Rudy's cocky attitude and dismissive demeanor are often the catalyst for a typical plot's conflict. But inside he has a good heart and usually learns lessons from his mistakes. In the Junkyard Band, he plays a makeshift [banjo](#), whose parts include a broomstick handle and sewing-thread spool to hold the strings. However, when shown playing apart from the others, Rudy plays an [electric guitar](#) (personalized with a big "R"). He always wears an orange [flat cap](#), a fuchsia vest, a pink turtleneck, purple [bell-bottom jeans](#), and boots. Rudy's personality in the *Fat Albert* movie is much different as he is portrayed as a kind and chivalrous gentleman who falls in love with the female lead Doris ([Kyla Pratt](#)).
- **Bucky Miller** (voiced by Jan Crawford), as his name indicates, has a large [overbite](#). He is a quick and flexible athlete. Bucky plays a stovepipe [organ](#) in the Junkyard Band.

Others

- **Miss Berry** is the kids' first teacher and mentor. She is later replaced by **Mrs. Breyfogle**. In later seasons, the kids went to a different school where their teacher and mentor was **Miss Wucher**. All three characters were voiced by Jay Scheimer, wife of executive producer Lou Scheimer.
- **Mudfoot Brown** (voiced by Bill Cosby) is a wise old man and unemployed vagrant who gives advice to the gang, often using reverse psychology to get his point across. (He makes a minor appearance in the film adaptation, at the beginning and end of the film, voiced by Earl Billings—however, he is never referred to by name in the film.)
- The **Brown Hornet** (voiced by Bill Cosby) is the title character of a show about an African-American superhero whose cartoons were watched regularly by the gang. He is a parody of the Green Hornet.
 - **Stinger** (voiced by Lou Scheimer) is the Brown Hornet's beefy sidekick whose gruff exterior masks a soft heart.
 - **Tweeterbell** (voiced by Erika Scheimer) is a female robot assistant to the Brown Hornet and Stinger.
- **Cluck** – A duck that followed the gang regularly in early episodes, but stopped appearing after season 1.
- **Legal Eagle** (voiced by Lou Scheimer) is another show-within-a-show, involving a crime-fighting cartoon eagle.
 - **Moe and Gabby** (voiced by Jan Crawford & Gerald Edwards) Two lazy, klutzy squirrel underlings that work with Legal Eagle as police officers.
- **Margene** (voiced by Erika Scheimer) classmate/ good friend of Fat Albert's. In one episode she and Albert ran for co-president of the Student Council and beat out two other candidates, both of whom were running on platforms of racism. A straight-A student, Margene occasionally got in with the wrong people but always managed to rebound; in a different episode she got hooked on drugs, and in another she got innocently involved in a violent cult.
- **3 River Blockbusters** – The Junkyard Gang's main rival when it comes to competing in sports such as baseball and football. The Blockbusters stole the title of being champions in a competition called "buck buck" in the episode "Moving". One of them was voiced by Gerald Edwards who voiced Weird Harold and one of them was voiced by Eric Suter who voiced Rudy. They make an appearance in the film adaptation featuring totally different members and the leader, dubbed as Crips, voiced by Catero Colbert credited as Lead Teen.
- **Pee Wee** is a small boy who looks up to Fat Albert and the gang. While being small in stature, his best athletic skill is kicking a football at a long distance. When the bigger kids could not get anything out of a small van, Pee Wee is there to retrieve it.

Lou Scheimer, Erika Scheimer, Keith Allen, Lane Vaux, Pepe Brown, Dementra McHenry, Eric Suter, and Gerald Edwards provided additional voices.

Episodes

Educational lessons and songs

Fat Albert was honored and noted for its educational content, which included Cosby earning a Doctorate in Education. In every show's opening Cosby would playfully warn:

“ This is Bill Cosby comin' at you with music and fun, and if you're not careful you may learn something before it's done.

So let's get ready, OK? (*Fat Albert voice*) Hey, hey, hey!

”

During each episode, Fat Albert and his friends (aka The Junkyard Gang), dealt with an issue or problem commonly faced by young urban children, ranging from stage fright, first loves, medical operations, and personal hygiene to more serious themes (though toned down for younger children) including vandalism, stealing, racism, smoking, being scammed by con artists, sexually transmitted diseases, child abuse, kidnapping, drug use, gun violence and death.

At the end of most episodes (with some exceptions in the case of particularly serious themes), the gang would sing a song about the theme of the day. This sequence, similar to those seen in other Filmation shows including *The Archie Show*, has often been parodied. The musical sequence was dropped during the *Brown Hornet*/*Legal Eagle* years.

The series would enjoy one of the longest runs in the history of the Saturday morning cartoons.

Revamps and renames

In 1979, the show was re-titled ***The New Fat Albert Show*** and featured a new segment titled "The Brown Hornet" detailing the adventures of an African-American crime fighter in outer space whose design resembled a caricature of Bill Cosby, who also performed vocal talents on the character.

In 1984, the show was syndicated and renamed ***The Adventures of Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids***. The lack of network restrictions allowed the producer to delve into more mature subject matter. A notable episode ("Busted") featured the kids having an inadvertent brush with the law and given a *Scared Straight!*-style tour of an occupied maximum security prison, even contained utterances (by the jail's inmates) of the words "damn" and "bastard" (Cosby had appeared in the beginning of the episode advising viewers that those words would be used as part of the story's dialogue to realistically depict jail life). Another notable episode, "Gang Wars", featured a child being shot and killed. Another segment was added: "Legal Eagle", a crime-fighting eagle with a pair of bumbling police squirrels. Production of new episodes ceased in 1985.

Theme song

The theme song "Gonna Have A Good Time" was composed by Ricky Sheldon and Edward Fournier^[9] and performed by Michael Gray (vocals), Kim Carnes (background vocals) and Edward Fournier (background vocals).^{[8][10]}

A cover of the show's theme song, performed by Dig, is included on the 1995 tribute album *Saturday Morning: Cartoons' Greatest Hits*, produced by Ralph Sall for MCA Records. The song's chorus ("Na-na-na, gonna have a good time!") was also sampled for Fatboy Slim's 1998 hit single "Praise You".

Reception

Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids was named the 82nd best animated series by IGN.^[11]

Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids received an Emmy nomination in 1974. Production of the final season of the series overlapped with the start of production of Cosby's live-action sitcom, *The Cosby Show*, which began airing in the fall of 1984.

In 1993, *TV Guide* named *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* the best cartoon series of the 1970s in its issue celebrating 40 years of television.^[12]

In 2002, Fat Albert was placed at number 12 on *TV Guide*'s list of the 50 Greatest Cartoon Characters of All Time.^[13]

Availability

Syndication

As of 2013, *Fat Albert* was seen Saturday mornings on *Retro Television Network* (RTV), *TheCoolTV*, and weekdays and Saturdays and Sundays on *Bounce TV*, both of which are digital networks. It can also be seen weekdays on *Angel Two* (ANGL2), *Kids & Teens TV* (KTV), and *World Harvest Television*. *Fat Albert* is also available streaming online from [www.HallmarkSpiritClips.com](http://www.hallmarkspiritclips.com) (<http://www.hallmarkspiritclips.com/tv/fat-albert-and-the-cosby-kids>). As of July 2015, *Fat Albert* was no longer on Bounce TV's lineup.^[14] Bounce TV had previously pulled the comedy series *Cosby* from their lineup in the wake of the *Bill Cosby sexual assault allegations*,^[15] but it is unclear if the cancellation of the Fat Albert episodes was related to these allegations. However, several months after bringing back reruns of *The Cosby Show* in November 2016, Bounce TV quietly re-added *Fat Albert* to its schedule in March 2017.

Home video releases

During the mid-1980s, *Thorn EMI* Video released several volumes of *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* on VHS as part of their "Children's Matinee" line of animated programs, with each cassette typically containing three episodes. Additional volumes were released later in the decade by *Video Treasures*, including the three holiday specials.

In 2004, Urban Works acquired the rights to the series, subsequently releasing several *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* DVDs including a two-volume collection featuring 24 episodes, as well as all specials to coincide with the theatrical release of the *feature film* adaptation. Volume 1 contains two DVDs with episodes 1–12 (airdates 9/9–11/25/1972), along with a CD containing the opening theme, the closing theme, and 12 songs from each of the 12 episodes shown in vol. 1.^[16] Volume 2 contains two discs with episodes 13–24 (airdates 12/2/1972–9/13/1975), along with a CD containing the opening theme, the closing theme, and 12 songs from each of the 12 episodes shown in vol. 2.^{[17][18][19][20]} In addition, Urban Works released a Greatest Hits four-disc box set and a five-best episodes set via *Ventura Distribution*.^{[21][22]} In 2008, Urban Works lost the distribution rights and as a result all of Urban Works' DVD releases are now out of print.

In 2008, *Classic Media* acquired the rights to the series and stated at the time that they intended to release the entire series on DVD.^[23] Unfortunately this never happened as they only re-released *The Fat Albert Halloween Special* and *The Fat Albert Easter Special* on DVD via distribution partner *Genius Products*.^{[24][25]}

On April 6, 2012, it was announced that Shout! Factory had acquired the rights to the series (under license from Classic Media) and planned to release a complete series box set on DVD. The DVD set was released on June 25, 2013.^[26]

On September 4, 2012, Classic Media re-released all three holiday specials together in one collection entitled *The Hey Hey Hey Holiday Collection* on DVD in Region 1.^[27]

Other media

Gold Key Comics did a comic book adaptation of *Fat Albert*, which ran for 29 issues, from 1974 to 1979.

Film adaptation

In 2004, 20th Century Fox released a film adaptation of the series titled *Fat Albert*. The film stars Kenan Thompson as Fat Albert, Kyla Pratt, and Bill Cosby. The film acts as a sequel to the series where Fat Albert and the boys journey into the real world after jumping out of a television in order to help a lonely girl named Doris (Kyla Pratt) with her social anxiety. The boys enjoy being in the real world but after a meeting with their creator, Cosby, Fat Albert is informed that if he and the others do not return to the television world immediately, they will turn into celluloid dust.

See also

- *Little Bill*

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External links

- *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0068072/>) on IMDb

- *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* (<http://www.tv.com/shows/the-adventures-of-fat-albert-and-the-cosby-kids/>) at TV.com
- *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* (http://www.bcdb.com/cartoons/Filmation_Associates/A-G/Fat_Albert_and_the_Cosby_Kids/index.html) at the Big Cartoon DataBase
- *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* (<http://toonopedia.com/fatalbrt.htm>) at Don Markstein's Toonopedia. Archived (<https://www.webcitation.org/6iaUJckqo?url=http://toonopedia.com/fatalbrt.htm>) from the original on June 27, 2016.

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