



Wide reach: 'There aren't a lot of shows about us, so people feel you have to tell all the stories, and if you don't you're failing us'

to cultivate exciting new talent and empower independent artists. Whatever the industry, shining a light on black talent is imperative. "Because I'm a fan and because I love to see us win", she explains. "Because I recognise how much it has shaped me throughout the years. Why would you not? Why would I not?"

These community wins appear to slowly be becoming more frequent. In July, 34.3% of the acting nominees for the Emmys were black, and *Insecure* was nominated for eight, including Rae's nomination for lead actress. If she wins, she'll make history as only the second black woman to win in the category since 1981. A shadow is cast on the achievement by the fact that so many who came before her have been historically overlooked, however. It isn't bittersweet for her, she says. "I don't even see the sweet in it, really. I'm not gonna be proud of being the second person, by any means," she continues. "I was thinking about how so much of the canon of my childhood were black shows and how few of them, even in the best comedy category, have been recognised. I can't believe *Fresh Prince* hasn't won anything or even *Family Matters* – those shows have shaped, regardless of race, so

## 'It really is astounding that our talent hasn't been recognised'

many US youths and even the world youth. It's astonishing that our talent hasn't been recognised in that way, but not surprising."

While diversity within Hollywood increases, it remains a complicated conversation. Increasingly, black, non-American actors such as Cynthia Erivo and Daniel Kaluuya have been condemned for depicting African Americans in films (there was a backlash at British Kaluuya being cast as US revolutionary Fred Hampton in *Judas and the Black Messiah*). It's a criticism that has been levelled at Rae herself, as well as her co-star Yvonne Orji, despite being raised in the US, since Orji's

parents are Nigerian and Rae is half-Senegalese. What does she make of the growing debate?

"It's just another way to divide us, unfortunately," she sighs. "Seeing Daniel Kaluuya in that Fred Hampton trailer, I was like, go the fuck ahead! You transformed, you're an actor! Sometimes I'm pleasantly surprised when I'm watching white shit and I'm like, 'Oh! The bitch is Australian? That's so dope! I would have never known.'"

It's these intracommunity battles that affect her most. In 2017 an off-the-cuff remark she made at the Emmys

during a red carpet interview went viral after she said she was "rooting for everybody black" at the ceremony. I suggest that it cannot feel particularly good when it seems that everybody black isn't always rooting for you.

"There's probably nothing that hurts me more than that," she says. "You don't want to be a disappointment. I know what it's like to see Kanye and just be like, 'Bro what happened?' Or you know, Stacey Dash [a Trump supporter] like, 'Girl, I loved you in *Clueless* – where did we go wrong?' I want to make us proud and I think that goes to the Denzel of it – there's just something special about him. He feels like ours, our movie star and he has done right by us."

Perhaps, I suggest, Denzel Washington's spotless reign comes from the fact his status was cemented in a time before Twitter. "True," she muses. "I mean, him being in that Julia Roberts movie [*The Pelican Brief*]? she laughs. "He would be dragged!"

As we gush about Denzel, she speaks about how much she admires his legacy, something that she feels is crucial in a world where 15 minutes of fame is now a near birth-right. Sure, her impact is undeniable. But she maintains she hasn't even scratched the surface of what she hopes her legacy will achieve.

"As far as legacy is concerned, I have so much to do," she says. "And I'm fine with that, but it definitely keeps me up at night. My feet aren't firmly planted just yet. I'm still walking. I'm still paying my dues, in a way that I'm not mad at. I want to earn being here."

*Insecure* series 1-4 are available to watch now on digital

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