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Mass Media and Reconciliation

A Report to the Advisory Board and Staff

The President's Initiative on Race

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March 4, 1998

Mass Media and Reconciliation

Executive Summary

Robert M. Entman

It is culture that largely determines what individuals think and feel when they see “outsiders.” That truth places the mass media, primary fabricators and conveyors of the culture, at the center of any concern with race in America. This report explores media images of the major racial or ethnic groups in the U.S. The implicit and explicit messages transmitted by the media help to shape the attitudes, assumptions, anxieties, and hopes that people in each group have about themselves and those belonging to other groups. This is not to deny the importance of personal experience and contacts, with peers, teachers, parents, with life. It is to suggest that media, as key transmitters of culture, influence all those individuals—even as the media reflect what the individuals think, feel, know, and don’t know.

Chapter One summarizes existing knowledge on race, media and public opinion. Evidence suggests there is a racial/ethnic hierarchy in the U.S. Whites are most highly regarded, Blacks least. Latinos occupy a status closer to African Americans, while Asian Americans are closer to Whites. Whites’ sentiments about Blacks have changed dramatically since the 1960s, with much greater acceptance of racial equality as both a fact and a guiding principle for public policy. However, White opinions are complicated and ambivalent. Many Whites’ attitudes toward specific public policy issues still seem shaped by misunderstanding or outright animosity toward Blacks as a group. We advance the proposition that media, unintentionally and without plan, contribute to this unresolved ambivalence. By failing to provide contextual knowledge about African Americans’ current experience with racial discrimination, they make it difficult for many Whites to resolve their ambivalence in a positive, trusting and empathetic manner. Perhaps because the Black-White tension is so deep-rooted and politically potent, we found much less research on media and public opinion with respect to Latinos and Asians. But there is reason to think that majority group attitudes, though less harsh, are also colored by misunderstanding and suspicion.

Especially in this chapter and in the concluding chapter we also lay out some of the complexities both within media messages, and in the task facing the media as they consider changing their practices to enhance racial and ethnic harmony. We recognize that continuing racial and ethnic prejudice and tension are not the media’s fault or responsibility alone. There are no easy answers, and the media certainly deserve credit for much movement in the right direction in the 30 years since the Kerner Commission Report. The present report seeks to contribute to an open dialogue that might propel the movement further along toward an environment of *racial comity*. The specific goal is promoting media content that *allows audience members themselves to challenge their own misguided assumptions and stereotypes. The ideal is genuine autonomous thinking*

by a citizenry that is not, as now, unknowingly bound into one frame of reference and prevented from thinking through another.

Chapter Two explores the portrayals of the four major ethnic groups in television news, the primary source of news for most Americans. Part I reviews research with a special emphasis on coverage of crime and politics in local news. The literature suggests local news, with its well-documented tendency to sensationalize violence, crime, conflict and disaster, may tend to reinforce negative stereotypes and generalized anxiety among Whites toward Blacks. Local news in such major urban areas as Chicago, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia has been studied intensively, and broader studies across the nation have also been carried out. They indicate that Black suspects and victims of crime receive different treatment from Whites in the same categories. Local news may also cultivate an exaggerated sense of conflict between Blacks and Whites in the political arena, deepening mutual suspicion. Both local and network news seem to cultivate also mistaken perceptions about Blacks' level of poverty, with Whites thinking far more Blacks are poor than is actually the case. Such misperceptions appear to feed racial resentment. Again information on other ethnic groups is sparse.

Part II of Chapter 2 presents a new study of network news images of all four groups during 1997. Here the racial hierarchy is somewhat scrambled, in that African Americans obtain considerably more visibility than Asians or Latinos. The latter group is particularly under-represented considering its size and rate of growth. Among other findings, the data indicate that all three non-White groups are under-represented in roles as experts; that minority voices as measured by soundbites are half as prevalent as they would be if they matched U.S. population percentages; that very few stories are devoted exclusively to minority group experiences or perspectives; and that Whites are significantly over-represented as on-air reporters. In this chapter as in those that follow, we offer specific recommendations for enhancement of media practice. We also provide caveats about the findings and about the possibilities for change; we recognize that some of the media images that contribute to inter-group animosity may reflect aspects of reality not easily overcome.

Chapter 3 offers case studies of news about a recent public policy issue with major racial overtones involving Supreme Court decisions that reflected and generated conflict around representing minorities in elections. The study examines coverage in major newspapers, newsmagazines, and television networks in response to the *Shaw vs. Reno* and *Miller vs. Johnson* cases, which curtailed racially-conscious Congressional districts. It finds that the media's performance was mixed, balanced in some ways but in others favoring the Court's majority opinion. Although such a skew may be understandable and typical in coverage of all Supreme Court decisions—and therefore not racially motivated—the reporting nonetheless illustrates how non-racial factors may produce racially-relevant messages. In this case, the coverage arguably made it difficult for the majority group to understand legitimate concerns of minority groups about the mathematics and processes of majority rule. A more contextual and fully balanced news presentation might have helped educate the public to the continuing perplexities of democracy in a society of growing ethnic diversity.

Chapter Four changes gears to look at ethnic images conveyed by the entertainment industry through careful study of the top Hollywood films in 1996. In Part I, we analyze the top ten actors in each film according to the official listing of the casts. We probed each film by cast rank order, determining the race and gender of each character. The idea of measuring minorities' cast rank was to see if the experiences of their characters provide a central focus of the movies, or rather if their presence is largely tokenism. In Part II we report the results of a detailed quantitative content analysis of several kinds of behavior that might differentiate White and non-White characters. The story we shall tell is mixed: evidence of heartening progress combined with indications of continued subtle stereotyping and distancing or exclusion of African Americans, patterns compounded when it comes to Latinos and Asians by sheer neglect. Although Black actors (especially males) now achieve wide visibility, their characters (especially females) still seem overly identified with behaviors that set them apart from mainstream values, including excessive cursing, ungrammatical language, and sexuality. Part III provides a qualitative analysis of the complex ethnic messages in the three films of 1996 that earned the most while featuring a majority-White cast *and* a Black actor as a chief protagonist. These were *Independence Day*, *A Time to Kill*, and *Jerry Maguire*.

Chapter Five offers our conclusion. Our focus on the media—and our recommendations for altering media practices—notwithstanding, we fully recognize the profound difficulty of making change in this area. We understand the ease with which human beings' perceptions sort themselves into disparaging generalizations about other groups—and thus the difficulty of maintaining racial comity no matter what the media do. In conclusion we confront these problems head on before offering some final meditations on better practices that the media might consider. The ideas can be summarized in two basic notions. First, journalists and even entertainment media personnel should become aware of the cumulative effect their individual products have on race relations. They should make links explicitly in their minds, then in their texts, between yesterday and today, between visuals and verbal messages. The goal is *comprehensive and mindful narration* to replace the wholly unplanned hodge-podge of positive images, negative images, stereotypes, over-representation (e.g., in crime and poverty news) and under-representation (e.g., in romantic films) that accumulate over time without anyone's conscious awareness. This may require new types of news editors and entertainment producers who look for patterns in the totality of media messages as they build across the years, scouting for exclusions, inaccurate connotations and misleading juxtapositions.

Second and more immediately, we urge that structural policies (to enhance minority employment in media) be accompanied by an *awareness campaign designed to make the media's racial images and their impacts an important object of public attention and discourse*. To this end we urge that the federal government, in cooperation with media and other private and public organizations, promote ongoing efforts to monitor the media's racial and ethnic images and their effects. The model here is the longstanding government and public concern with the contribution of mass mediated violence to real world aggression. As in that area, the government can encourage continuing,

empirically-based public understanding and policy dialogue without threatening free expression.

Acknowledgements

This report emerged from a course on "Race and the Media" taught at the Kennedy School of Government during the Fall, 1997 semester by Robert M. Entman, who was then the Lombard Visiting Professor at Harvard. Professor Entman suggested research topics and provided preliminary instructions for analysis and continuing supervision to several groups of graduate students enrolled in the seminar (and to one group taking a course from Professor Christopher Edley at Harvard Law School). Going beyond the normal call of student duty, the co-authors of this document ably helped to design and competently executed the complicated, data-intensive research projects written up here. Two other Kennedy School students, Judith Gaddie and Shawn Rife, provided help on the design and coding for the network news study and the electoral districting project, respectively. Rose Ann Miller entered most of the data for computer analysis and cheerfully assisted in other ways. The report also benefited from the exhilarating intellectual atmosphere cultivated at the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy by its director, Professor Marvin Kalb, and by Professors Thomas Patterson and Pippa Norris. The encouragement they offered, and the support of the Center's Edie Holway, were indispensable and much appreciated. We also thank Professor Edley, who drew all of us into this endeavor and helped greatly along the way. Finally, Professor Entman records his gratitude to the Chicago Human Relations Foundation and its Director, Clarence Wood, and to the Markle Foundation, for supporting his research on media and race.

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Chapter One

Race, Public Opinion, and Media

Robert M. Entman

Although forming group identities may be a natural human proclivity, there's nothing inevitable about doing so on the basis of visually identifiable physical traits. Thus, race possesses no objective essence apart from its cultural meaning. What individuals think and feel when they perceive those classified as outsiders is determined largely by culture. That truth places the mass media, primary fabricators and conveyors of the culture, at the center of any concern with race in America. This report explores media images of the major racial or ethnic groups in the U.S. The implicit and explicit messages transmitted by the media help to shape the attitudes, assumptions, anxieties, and hopes that people in each group have about themselves and those belonging to other groups. People categorized as Asian, Afro-American or Black, Latino, and White or Euro-American learn much about the meaning of those categories from the media, perhaps more than they learn from any other source. That is not to deny the importance of personal experience and contacts with peers, teachers, parents and others. It is to suggest that media, as key transmitters of culture, influence all those individuals—even as the media reflect what the individuals think, feel, know, and don't know.

Consider this colloquy during the first town meeting of the Initiative in Akron, Ohio on December 3, 1997:

MR. MORGAN: Yes, I do honestly think that there is still discrimination in this country to a point. There are a lot of prejudiced people out there that still remain.... And I think it has been ironed out in our generation.

THE PRESIDENT: Do you think it's because of personal experiences, do you think it's because you've had more direct personal experience with people from different age groups? Or do you think it's because you grew up in a different time where the climate, the legal and the political and the social climate, was different?

MR. MORGAN: I think it was because I grew up in a different time. We grew up watching television. The Cosby Show was my favorite show. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: So, therefore, if you worked at a bank and a Black person came in with a check you wouldn't necessarily think it ought to be held because you saw Bill Cosby and he was a good role model? (Laughter.) No, this is important. No, no, this is important.

MR. MORGAN: Yes, I don't think I would give him a hard time. But at the same time, I have my own prejudices, whereas if I'm walking downtown on a street and I see a Black man walking towards me that's not dressed as well, I may be a little bit scared. So, I mean, at the same time I have those prejudices.

THE PRESIDENT: Do you think that's because of television crime shows, or because of your personal experience?

MR. MORGAN: It would have nothing to do with my personal experience. Just from the media, television shows and things that I have heard.

We believe that this young man's experience is typical: that members of the current majority group in the U.S. obtain a large share of their perceptions of non-Whites from images in the media. To hasten the achievement of genuine reconciliation, we feel, requires high priority attention to mediated messages about races and ethnic groups in the U.S. This attention must include but transcend a study of media stereotyping. As much as overt media content, the absences in the media shape groups' understanding, and misunderstanding, of each other. The absence of context, the lack of deep, multidimensional portrayals of ethnic minorities in entertainment, tokenism in advertising—these do not convey stereotypes, but they do allow misunderstandings to arise and persist.

Although the Initiative encompasses relations among all racial or ethnic groups, the focus of this report is somewhat narrower. Our primary focus is on African Americans and Whites, though we give considerable attention, where possible, to Latinos and East Asians. There are three reasons for this emphasis. First, Blacks now enjoy high and growing visibility in the media. This contrasts with the sporadic or scarce media presence of Latinos, Asians and other minorities. Although there is some variation among these groups, the main conclusion has to be that they exist on the margin of popular culture; beyond a few stereotyped roles, they are barely visible in the media. Second, the centrality of Black-White relations and anti-Black racism or animosity to politics and public policy means there is much more research on Afro-Americans in the media than on the other groups. Our own new research can summarize and build upon past studies that say much more about Blacks than the other groups, again because members of that group appear frequently enough to generate patterns that allow useful comparisons to images of the ubiquitous Whites.

The final reason is the ambiguity of racial and ethnic categorization. Assignment to the "Black" category is relatively straightforward; researchers can look at those pictured on the screen or page and infer their racial category as Black (or White) with a high degree of reliability. In the same way, audience members can generally tell if the person they're viewing in the media is a Black. This is not the case with the other groups. Asians encompass, literally, people with roots in countries from Syria to India, Mongolia, and Japan. The category "Asian" itself is deeply problematic; not only do these billions of people not share physically identifying traits, they have little in common culturally. Given

these problems, we decided to use the category "East Asian," to denote those with the characteristic eyelid folds of those from Japan, China, Korea and the rest of the Asian East. Using this criterion allows research to proceed, although it also eliminates many ethnic groups with geographic roots on that continent.

Similar problems hinder attempts to study images of Latinos and Native Americans: physical markers are ambiguous, cultural identities widely varied. Researchers can sometimes classify Latinos and Native Americans as such because of explicit verbal identifications, but in other cases there is simply no way to tell if a person falls into this category, without resorting to the highly unreliable and undesirable group stereotyping that itself stymies reconciliation. In any case, Latinos comprise a "race" by no current understanding of the term, and indeed we are uncomfortable with the very concept of race, which virtually all scholars agree is purely a social and political construction (Appiah and Gutmann 1996). We wound up counting persons as Latinos if the narrative explicitly identified them as such or if they had a last name that a Latina in our research group, born in Mexico, believed indicates Latino heritage. No doubt our analysis missed some Latinos, and counted some as such who are not. We could find no way around this problem, and indeed it reflects the reality that ordinary audience members frequently have no idea that actors or characters (in fiction) or participants in news stories are Latinos. Native Americans so rarely appear and are so difficult to identify that we combined them with others not clearly Euro-American, Black, East Asian or Latino in the category "Other." If this seems somehow arbitrary or disrespectful we can only reiterate that it

reflects actual patterns in the culture, along with the difficulty that typical audience members would have in recognizing that they are seeing representatives of this group.

In addition, at times we refer to groups other than Whites as “non-White” or “minority.” These terms too are problematic. There is no escape from the prison of language. We realize many Latinos consider themselves White, and that census categories often provide a choice like “Hispanic, non-White” to help distinguish race among those who identify as Latino/Hispanic. We use the term non-White in the cultural sense, to mean those who do not belong to the culturally dominant Euro-American ethnic group (see Patterson 1997 and Appiah and Gutmann 1996 on racial identity and labels). As for “minority,” we recognize the negative connotation attached to the word—and the changing demographics that make the term even more problematic in the U.S. We can only apologize for our inability to solve these semantic problems here.

A final caveat: we cannot cover every permutation of intergroup relations. We recognize, for example, that Black-Latino and Black-Korean relationships are strained in some places and that media practices may contribute to this situation. Nonetheless, we emphasize media impacts upon Whites’ perceptions and sentiments, not out of White chauvinism (in fact a majority of this research group is Black, East Asian, or Latino), but because Whites hold by far the dominant share of cultural, social, economic, and political power in the U.S. When Whites exhibit racism, hostility or misunderstanding toward other groups, they are uniquely able to implement their negative views in ways that harm the interests of the other groups—and indeed their own interests in an efficient, effective, and just national community.

Media and White public opinion

Some observers believe White racism continues to suffuse politics and social relations (e.g., Morrison and Lacour 1997; Feagin and Vera 1995; Hacker 1992; Edsall and Edsall 1991). Others insist that a remarkable decline of anti-Black stereotyping and reduction in desired social distance is the real story (Patterson 1997; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997; Sniderman and Piazza 1993). We believe both are correct. Whites are ambivalent in their thoughts and sentiments toward Afro-Americans. Ambivalence is in fact the typical trait of political thinking among ordinary citizens, who do not possess comprehensive ideological philosophies. With respect to race, this marks a major improvement over the traditional racism that characterized a majority of Whites until the 1960s, but it does not mean racism has become a trivial or rare problem in the individual lives of Blacks or in politics and economics. This version of race relations helps account for the puzzling and seemingly irreconcilable manifestations of racial sentiments: the stark differences in Whites' and Blacks' reactions to the O.J. Simpson verdict yet the extraordinary White admiration for such Black figures as Bill Cosby, Michael Jordan, and Colin Powell, for example.

Howard Schuman, Charlotte Steeh, Lawrence Bobo and Maria Krysan (1998:7), in their comprehensive review of public opinion on race, decide that ambivalence is the best way to conceive whites' attitudes, that this state is "probably closer to the truth than arguments over degrees of overt and covert prejudice." As an example they cite research showing whites more positive toward highly successful blacks than equally successful

whites—but the opposite for relatively unsuccessful blacks and whites. And they observe that “thirty percent of those who attribute most black disadvantage to less in born ability also claim that the differences are mainly due to discrimination!” (see also pp 112-13, 154, 306-7). They conclude (p. 307): “most whites (and most blacks) in America—including no doubt the present writers and the experimenters themselves—are not without ambivalent feelings on matters of race.”

Our concern is the role of the mass media. We believe the media both reflect and reinforce ambivalence. By undermining traditional racism, we believe, media images promote tolerance, the limited acceptance by Whites of Blacks and other non-Whites—bolstering what might be called “Civil Rights justice.” That form of justice, encoded in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, stresses the moral imperative of securing equal opportunity by ending government-sanctioned discrimination. At the same time, media messages generally impair development of the empathy and trust necessary to Whites’ overcoming racial animosity. Many Whites who don’t subscribe to racist canards about others’ inferiority, who may even accept the idea of living near or socializing with non-Whites, may nonetheless feel resentful of those groups’ political claims and demands. The animosity attenuates support for government attention to the problems of realizing fully the goal of equal opportunity (Kinder and Sanders 1996), rendering Whites receptive to coded political appeals designed to mobilize coalitions of traditional racists with the ambivalent majority. In other words, we hypothesize, the patterns of media images most often encourage Whites to reject the vicious slanders of traditional racism while discouraging them from feeling or practicing what used to be called “brotherhood.”

A more modern concept that captures the sentiments we are describing is a condition of **racial comity**. We define this condition as the existence of widespread empathy and trust across group lines that allows members to see common interests and values and thus to cooperate in good faith to achieve mutually beneficial objectives (cf. Putnam 1993 on social capital; Fukuyama 1995, on trust). Enjoying an environment of empathy and trust illustrates more concretely what might be meant by racial and ethnic “reconciliation,” and it connotes a more expansive and inclusive version of justice.

For Whites consistently to support such a goal, they need to have a nuanced, contextualized understanding that Blacks and other non-Whites are simultaneously “just like” them and yet profoundly different because of their group experiences. The absence of such an empathetic understanding, the frequent White ignorance and obliviousness to the larger vision of racial justice variously disappoints or enrages many minority members, further compounding mutual alienation, the opposite of racial comity. With some important regional or local exceptions, the resentments and misunderstandings among Whites toward other minorities are generally not as thoroughgoing or politically powerful as those in regard to Blacks. Nonetheless, the general ideas apply: White ambivalence—goodwill and support of fairness on the one hand, combining frequently with misunderstanding, ignorance, stereotyping, resentment, and hostility. The goal, again, should be to build more empathy and trust, more sense of belonging to a single albeit diverse community with many values in common.

The Schuman et al. (1998) study best summarizes what research tells us about the basic status of White attitudes toward Blacks. They find that on matters of principle there

is clear positive movement since the 1950s toward more tolerance, whether on intermarriage, residential segregation, or voting for Black presidential candidates. Social distance has diminished: there's wide acceptance for "a few" Blacks in neighborhood or school; survey evidence suggests most Whites would accept proportional representation (10-12%) of Blacks, or perhaps up to 25% Blacks, in their own school or neighborhood. But discomfort over equal Black numbers or Black majority is much higher, e.g. only half say they'd accept a majority Black school (Schuman et al., 1998: 120, 139-53; cf. Farley et al. 1994). Young persons are a harbinger of the future, and one encouraging survey found in 1997 that 57% claimed to date persons of another race, a marked increase from 17% in 1980 (*Time*, November 16, 1997). Other studies, however, suggest younger Whites are actually less progressive racially compared to older generations than they used to be (Dowden and Robinson, 1993).

Traditional racists who believe in Black inferiority and favor discrimination probably number about 20% of the White public; though this represents a significant decrease since the 1960s, it also means there remain about 3 White racists for every two African Americans. Moreover, survey evidence involving race is notoriously unreliable; many Whites tend to disguise their true feelings, knowing the social undesirability of appearing to be racist. Therefore, Whites' sentiments toward Blacks are probably more negative than surveys indicate (see especially Feagin and Vera, 1995).

Perhaps more important, on all dimensions there is less White support for implementing policies than for the non-racist principles. Thus we see lower support for

government spending or affirmative action policies than for abstractions about equality.

According to Schuman et al. (1998: 327),

Beyond the enforcement of norms of equal treatment, such as non-discrimination in public accommodations and housing sales, there seems to be little public support for any but remedial forms of special training to help disadvantaged African Americans, or perhaps broader programs that can be described in ways that do not emphasize race.... There is no real sign that the larger White public is prepared to see norms of equal treatment reconceptualized to support substantial steps toward drastically reducing economic and social inequality in this country.

Of course many observers would argue that the path toward true equality does not encompass costly government programs or affirmative action, and that failing to support such remedies is not a sign that Whites lack empathy (Sniderman and Piazza 1993). We cannot settle that dispute here.

What we can suggest is that the pattern of White responses may be traceable in significant measure to the most widely-held explanations for Black disadvantage. The most common explanation was low motivation: 52% of respondents cited this, compared with 45% citing no chance for education, 10% low ability, 34% discrimination (Schuman et al., 1998: 156-57). The authors go on to document that the large majority of Whites deny racial discrimination persists as a major impediment to African Americans (p.166): "Thus an emphasis on past oppression of blacks as a basic source of racial inequality has lost support over the past two decades...[this]probably reflects the fading of reports of obvious racial oppression from the media and their replacement by stories about forms of

affirmative action intended to benefit blacks.” From the late 1970s, about 75% of whites reject idea that blacks as a group face important barriers in jobs or housing (p. 167). The authors note that blacks emphasize present discrimination more than past while whites do the reverse: 81% of blacks but 36% whites agree with the idea that blacks have worse jobs income and housing “mainly due to discrimination.” (p. 276). Schuman et al. (1998: 46-47) cite several studies proving empirically that discrimination does persist as a daily reality in Blacks’ lives when dealing with landlords and realtors, lenders, and employers (cf. Feagin and Sikes, 1994; Cose, 1993).

Is this White ignorance and denial of what Blacks face itself racism? Again we cannot get into the complicated issue of what constitutes racism in this brief monograph. We agree with Schuman et al (1998: 315) that the desires of Whites to be in the majority in schools, neighborhoods, and legislatures (see Reeves 1997) “are at least as much a matter of power and control and of fear of being controlled by others as they are of ‘prejudice’ as a separate and self-contained psychological state.”

And here’s where the media come in: Promoting in subtle ways the very perception by Whites of Blacks or other groups as “others”—this may be the media’s most profound contribution. A second and equally important impact of the media lay in their failure to provide contextual knowledge that would offer more thorough and more empathetic and sympathetic explanations of differences between Blacks or other groups and Whites. Most important of the contextual facts is probably the persistence of serious, systematic discrimination.

It might be surprising to note that, although the media may fairly be characterized as concerned if not obsessed with race, they are not so interested in *racism*. Thus Joe Feagin (1995) of the University of Florida found only 28 articles using the words “white racism” in the title, from a search of the Nexis database between 1978-1995 that includes, he writes, millions of articles. He does not report whether these stories concerned the U.S. or other nations. Entman (1994a) found that the term “racism” was reserved almost exclusively for South Africa on ABC’s nightly “World News” program over a one-year period encompassing 1990-91. For the year 1997, “World News” never used the term “white racism.” However, the word “racism” did appear 24 times. (Both of these observations are based on analyses of full-text transcripts of every nightly “World News” program during the sample years, included in the Nexis database.) These references appeared in the following story contexts:

- Ten in stories about President Clinton’s Initiative on Race.
- Six in coverage of beatings of black persons.
- Three in biographical pieces, two on Black entertainment figures and one on a benevolent white businessman.
- One in a story about the O.J. Simpson civil trial.
- One in a very brief report on a lawsuit against Eddie Bauer clothing stores.
- One in coverage of the Christian men’s group Promise Keepers.
- One in a story about a museum that teaches children about racism.
- One in a story on “environmental racism,” the siting of polluting or hazardous facilities in poor minority neighborhoods.

With the exception of the few seconds on settlement of the Bauer lawsuit and the longer piece on environmental racism, each of the other stories invoking the term either alluded to it as a thing of the past; mentioned it passingly as an agenda issue without probing its meaning or effects; or treated it as an individual incident of maltreatment. Notions of present-day, systemic patterns of discrimination were virtually absent from this network's nightly news show. None of the stories mentioned racism in the context of non-Black minorities. However, it should be noted that the same network's "Nightline" program has engaged in a serious and sophisticated series on race relations, as has NBC's "Nightly News;" over the years each of the networks has certainly devoted considerable attention to anti-minority racism among the White majority in the U.S. Still, it seems telling that so many Whites view racial discrimination as either isolated to a few bigots or a relic of the past.

Public Opinion Toward Other Groups

Several surveys taken in recent years allow a comparison of sentiments toward Blacks, Latinos, Asians and Whites. In the authoritative University of Michigan survey for 1996, respondents were asked to rate Whites, Blacks, and "Hispanic-Americans" on three 7-point scales: hard-working/lazy; intelligent/unintelligent; and trustworthy/not trustworthy, from the most positive to least, with "4" the midpoint on the scale. Another authoritative academic survey, the General Social Survey from the University of Chicago, queried similarly about laziness and intelligence in a 1990 poll, along with asking about the groups preferring to "live off welfare" rather than be self-supporting and tending to be violent. The GSS included ratings of "Asians." The key finding is of a clear social

hierarchy among the groups with Whites at the top. Combining the three least favorable responses (past the neutral, toward the negative end of the scale), we get the following percentages of respondents attributing undesirable traits to each group:

	Black 1996	Black 1990	Hisp. 1996	Hisp. 1990	Asian 1990	White 1996	White 1990
Lazy	27.8%	43.1%	18.1%	35.8%	15.0%	7.0%	7.4%
Unintelligent	19.1	28.8	20.8	30.7	15.4	4.2	7.3
Untrustworthy	22.0	--	19.3	--	--	7.2	--
Violent	--	52.8	--	42.8	21.3	--	18.8
Prefer welfare	--	57.1	--	45.6	19.1	--	4.6

The contrasts are clear. Respondents (who included representatives of all ethnic backgrounds) rated Whites least unfavorably, Blacks most. Hispanics more or less tied with Blacks for putative laziness and lack of intelligence but fared better on violence and preferring welfare. Asians rated noticeably better than Blacks and Hispanics but not as high as Whites. The gap between ratings of Whites and Blacks is the most striking. However, between the 1990 and 1996 surveys ratings of Blacks and Hispanics as lazy and unintelligent declined markedly. Another encouraging indicator: in 1996, great majorities of Blacks and Hispanics rated a "4" or better: neutral or toward the more desirable end of the scales. Nonetheless, a truly "color-blind" society would not give answers that so consistently rated the majority group highest and established a hierarchy among non-Whites.

General Impact of the Media

Any generalization about the media's role in establishing, reinforcing, or changing these sentiments, immediately succumbs to complexity. At times the media may promote or at least open the door to empathy, while at other junctures they do reinforce or allow for old habits of traditional racist or prejudiced thought and feeling to emerge. Quite often all of these threads are present in a single television show, news report, or film. Texts can do double and triple duty, and audience members can react in surprising or conflicted ways to their contents. That said, however, a complex text often has one critical and overarching political message despite its potential for multiple, idiosyncratic readings. This is because mass audiences often react similarly to the most manifest media content—and to the equally important voids, the absences of what otherwise might be crucial information. Underinformed, lacking analytical training or much inclination toward active critique, the mass audience, unless prompted to pay careful attention (such as when scholars probe for their reactions to a media product) typically do not process beyond the superficially dominant messages.

To preview an example, consider the pervasive presence of African Americans in local television news, with its relentless emphasis on crime and disaster. For Whites who see local TV news, the most representative or prototypical of the category of “Black people” are suffering or threatening ghetto folk. Most Blacks appear in local news because they are accused of or were victimized by crime or other calamity. They become prototypes of African Americans because in the sample of Black people the White viewers see, they seemingly typify the category, they occupy the overwhelming majority.

Importantly, research on prototype theory has found that new information on an unrepresentative category member tends not to be generalized to representative members (Lakoff 1987). Thus Whites do not generalize from their information on Colin Powell or Bill Cosby, who are taken as unrepresentative, to the larger category of African Americans in ways that alter the prototypical expectations. Nor does having genuine affection and respect for such exceptional figures in any way prevent Whites from exhibiting strong racial resentments or even out and out racism. Indeed, many Whites appear to view such figures as the exceptions that prove the rule (on Cosby, see Jhally and Lewis 1992).

Sources of media messages

Having introduced the possible impacts of the media images that we document in this report, we want to clarify an important point: Bad intentions are generally not the problem. Media produce their messages not because their executives or other personnel seek to promote racial antipathy; few media organizations operate according to any kind of conscious ideological plan. Rather the problematic messages have two interrelated sources.

First, the persons operating media organizations are steeped in the unthinking assumptions of a dominant culture that retains vestiges of prejudiced or racist thinking—as is the largest portion of the audience, the White or Euro-Americans. Racist ideas assume or promote the notions that human beings fall into natural racial categories akin to species, that races are ordered in a hierarchy of inherent ability and desirability, and/or that distributing valued resources in accordance with a person's race is justifiable. We don't see the most overt racist ideas openly expressed in American society much any more,

reflecting a genuine decrease in traditional racism (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Schuman et al., 1998). But assumptions of essential racial difference and hierarchy remain embedded in the culture, and their presence sets up a vicious reinforcement circle. We suggest that media personnel operate according to unconsciously evolved decision rules and unthinkingly applied assumptions that, while not overtly racial, influence images in prejudicial ways. These are expressed in myriad forms, from differential treatment of White and minority crime victims and perpetrators in the news, to the absence of Black or interracial couples in sexy advertising scenarios (Entman and Rojecki 1997), to the paucity of major Hollywood productions featuring a Black or Asian man as the lead in a love story, serious drama or romantic comedy.

The second explanation arises in part from the first. Both the audiences the media compete for and the personnel who craft the media's products are socialized into this same dominant culture, with its decidedly mixed messages and problematic traditions of thinking about race and ethnicity. The media's primary (though not exclusive) goal, quite literally their bottom line, is to make money by pleasing audiences and advertisers. They shape their messages with this objective in mind. Thus the racial patterns of media messages and media voids that we identify are what economists call externalities; they are the pollution effects of profit seeking behavior by media organizations simply trying to attract and satisfy mass audiences. With rare exceptions, media are not grinding ideological axes: they are not consciously shaping their racial messages or other politically influential content with political goals in mind. The implications of this point are profound: For example, putting more Blacks and other minority group members in newsrooms, ad

agencies or even boardrooms, while a valid goal, cannot be our primary goal. Market economics and professional norms constrain the options of minority members in the media, just as they do all other media personnel. We shall have more to say on solutions as we continue.

We close by reiterating that our critique arises precisely from our admiration for what the media have accomplished in enhancing representation of minorities since the mid-1960s and our faith in the good will of those who own, manage, and otherwise toil for media organizations. We recognize the glass is at least half full. In mapping the contours of the remaining portion of that metaphorical glass, we demonstrate our belief that the media have as much interest in improving their contributions to racial reconciliation as the rest of American society. We are all in this together.

Chapter Two

Television News

Part I. Racial Threat in the News

Robert M. Entman

We turn first to news programming. Research suggests differences in media treatment of the three main minorities. We emphasize African Americans in Part I because scholars have studied them most thoroughly and, as suggested in the opinion data reported above, that group seems to occupy the bottom of the U.S. status and trust hierarchies (Hacker, 1992; Feagin and Vera, 1995). TV news, especially local news, paints a picture of Blacks as violent and threatening toward Whites, self-interested and demanding toward the body politic -- continually causing or being victimized by problems that seem endless.¹ Network news distinctly differs from the typical local newscast, but some images of African Americans presented by the networks appear equally problematic. Latinos and Asians appear substantially less than Blacks, making it more difficult to draw clear conclusions as to their general nature; we shall have more to say on these other groups in Part II, a new study of network television news.

Crime and Politics in News

Crime is a dominant theme on local television news, and portrayals of Blacks and Whites in crime stories consistently differ. Research revealed that for the three dominant

¹ Our own studies focus on Chicago; others suggest that patterns there are typical: Campbell 1995; Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon and Wright 1996; Romer et al., 1997; and Jamieson 1992.

network affiliates in Chicago, out of about 14 minutes given to news on an average half-hour local broadcast, eight or nine concern the threat of violence to humans (Entman, 1994c). A steady drumbeat of frightening information dominates local news. And there is a racial skew to this scary stuff. For example, compared with White defendants, Blacks accused of crimes were more likely to be shown in mug shots, in the physical custody of police officers, and without their names appearing on-screen. This finding remained statistically significant after controlling for violent vs. non-violent crime (Entman, 1992, 1994c). The symbolic message of seeing Blacks physically restrained twice as often as White defendants is that -- even when accused of similar crimes -- Blacks are more dangerous than Whites. Such subtle visual differences may contribute to White perceptions of Blacks as members of an undifferentiated and dangerous group, while Whites retain an individual identity. Exposing Whites to this pattern of images may over the years reinforce negative stereotypes and the sense that Blacks are fundamentally different. Black and Latino crime victims also receive significantly less attention than Whites (Entman, 1994c), creating a vivid index of the racial hierarchy in the dominant culture.

Additional analysis probed the image of Blacks in political news, and findings were no more positive. Direct quotes or sound bites about public policy from Black activists, politicians, or officials often included demands for government assistance specifically to African Americans, whereas White politicians seemed to advance the broader public interest. In one study, 33 percent of all policy assertions made by Blacks were based on ethnic self-interest, compared with about five percent of assertions by Whites (Entman,

1992). The contrast suggests White activists are about 6.5 times more altruistic and inclusively public spirited.

Explanations

The images of Black defendants and politicians are not wholly a creation of journalists. And they may have little or nothing to do with racism in local television newsrooms, where Blacks often occupy positions of responsibility and visibility. For example, the reasons more Black than White defendants appear under restraint on TV appear to include: White-dominated police forces treating Blacks more strictly; police officials being less protective of privacy rights for Black than White prisoners and thus inviting cameras into police stations to film more African Americans in "perpetrator walks"; and White defendants being more likely to make bail. In a similar way, the unfavorable political messages reflect real structural characteristics of the system more than racial bias among news personnel. Having been shut out of the power structure for so long, African American leaders may indeed speak up largely for Black interests. But it is highly unlikely that White political actors are as purely civic-minded as they appear in the news. Since White politicians already dominate, they do not have to use an overt rhetoric of White power. To protect the status quo and their group's position in it, they need only speak of the public interest or non-racial values such as meritocracy or low taxes.

Even though the networks focus less on crime, negative images of Blacks in politics are not restricted to local TV news. Network news actually conflates the two subjects: In one year of network news coverage, more than one-third of the stories mentioning Black leaders included a criminal accusation against them (Entman, 1994a), versus a small fraction for Whites. Vastly more Whites than Blacks hold the kind of high

official positions that are considered automatically newsworthy. They do not have to be involved in controversy to achieve prolonged network attention, but Blacks typically do. The result is a comparatively more positive picture of White leadership in network news.

Thus, in the sample year (1990-91), D.C. Mayor Marion Barry was the second most commonly-mentioned Black leader (number one was Clarence Thomas; Entman, 1994a). The coverage of Barry's drug arrest accurately reflected the experience of a scurrilous politician who happened to be Black. But there are hundreds of effective, conscientious Black mayors toiling around the U.S. That the Barry stories comprised a high proportion of network images of Black politicians is due to news standards that emphasize unusual controversy and drama, and to the extraordinary videotape of Barry handling illicit drugs, not to a reality that the typical Black mayor uses cocaine. Nonetheless, given how prejudiced people process information, we can predict that accurate reports of Barry's crimes, arrest, and conviction promoted inaccurate stereotypes among many Whites, undermining racial comity. Here, networks' general neglect of "good news" (for instance, honest, effective city governments) and thirst for the televisual -- practices not directly related to race -- may yield images that diminish racial harmony; networks' commitment to serial rather than comprehensive accuracy may promote inferences that are just plain wrong (cf. Goshorn and Gandy, 1995; Iyengar, 1991).

In a related way, Gilens (1996) documents how individual network news reports on poverty that are not in themselves inaccurate nonetheless accumulate to leave glaringly inaccurate impressions among Whites. The average White believes Blacks comprise perhaps twice as much of the poverty population as they actually do, and this perception seems linked to overrepresentation of Blacks in network news of poverty. African

Americans are disproportionately used to illustrate stories about poverty-related subjects. Indeed, Entman (1995) found that TV news uses scenes of Black persons as symbols in lieu of any explicit verbal indication that a report touches on poverty.

And this brings us to the crux of the problem journalists face: Is their responsibility limited to creating an accurate verbal and visual record in each individual news *text*, or does it include stimulating an accurate mental representation in the audience's *mind*? Presumably making the audience understand truth is what justifies professional news standards and practices. Textual accuracy for its own sake seems an unlikely candidate for journalism's ultimate goal. It's not enough, certainly as an ideal to strive for, that journalists simply "get the story right." They must also get the right stories. Failing this, they may contribute to inter-ethnic misunderstanding.

Impacts of Racial Stereotypes in the News

Scientific surveys designed to measure prejudice suggest a connection between exposure to television news and the extent of anti-Black sentiments among Whites. While these findings are far from definitive, they do indicate that the images of Blacks in the news contribute to the perpetuation of anti-Black stereotypes. Our analysis of survey data on Chicago-area residents found that Whites who rely on television for their news were more likely than those who rely on print or radio to deny that Blacks are discriminated against. National surveys showed that heavy television viewers were more likely than light viewers to stereotype Blacks as being unskilled and lazy. (This even controlling for education and other demographic traits; Entman, 1994b; cf. Pan and Kosicki 1996.) Experimental work by Peffley, Shields and Williams (1996) and Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon and Wright (1996) strongly supports the proposition that viewing stereotyping stimuli in

TV news reports activates prejudicial judgments. Thus Gilliam *et al.* find that White subjects who viewed a crime news report featuring a White-skinned defendant were less concerned about crime and less likely to trace crime to flaws in the prisoner's ethnic community than those who viewed the same report altered to make the defendant appear Black-skinned. Beyond such experimental studies is the evidence in surveys of persistent White prejudice and ignorance. To cite another example to go with those mentioned earlier, Feagin and Vera (1995: 137-38) report that 60% or more of Whites deny that discrimination impedes African Americans and blame Blacks for their own economic status. While anti-Black prejudice has clearly declined since the 1950s, in part due to changes in media images, the persistence of such sentiments among White majorities demonstrates at the minimum the media's failure more recently to offer sufficient information to boost the majority group's knowledge and understanding.

News images of Latinos and Asian Americans

Research on other ethnic groups is limited. Subervi-Velez's comprehensive literature review mentions no study of Latino images in TV news (or advertising), though it did find evidence of neglect and of negative stereotyping in newspaper coverage (1994: 306-307). Full of clichés like "steamy barrios" and "blaring music," mainstream print news emphasizes crime, poverty and other bad news when it covers Latinos (also see Greenberg and Brand, 1994: 286-287). Martindale (1997: 92) found that by far the most frequent topic of news about Latinos (38% of it) in the *New York Times* has been crime. Exceptions to this pattern are found in some locales with large Latino populations. There is also a large Spanish language and/or Latino-owned media industry, broadcast and print; these media provide substantially more varied, detailed, realistic news coverage (Subervi-

Velez, 1994: 317-326). Yet a minority media market, however well served, cannot challenge negative sentiments among the dominant group.

Research on Asians is sparse. A comprehensive, 640-page anthology on gender and ethnicity in the media contains only two brief mentions of "Asian Americans," one citing a *Penthouse* pictorial featuring stereotyped Asian women, another noting that soap operas lack Asian characters (Dines and Humez, 1995; Greenberg and Brand's (1994) literature review also fails to explore images of Asians). The only systematic news study that could be found (Martindale, 1997: 93; cf. Hamamoto, 1992) revealed that the *New York Times* devotes little space to Asian Americans. Although there are frequent allusions in the popular press to Asian Americans being portrayed inaccurately as the "ideal minority," based on our review of news, entertainment, and advertising, the main thing we can say is that Asian Americans have little media presence of any sort. Yet some Blacks and Latinos might prefer Asian-style near invisibility to the negativity that pervades so much of their media imagery.

To help fill in the gap especially on Latinos and Asians and to provide a comparative baseline for these groups along with Blacks and Whites, we undertook a new study of ethnic representations in network news.

Part II. Looking For Ethnic Minorities: Where Are They?

A Content Analysis of Network News Broadcasts

Debra Burns-Melican and Irma Munoz*

Introduction

Television news coverage provides the primary source of information for 70 % of the American public (Gilens, 1996). It therefore seemed appropriate to analyze how Blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans are featured in the news in comparison to Whites. The concern is that through an unconscious – but very real – filtering process, because the average viewer is White, and the dominant culture of the United States is White, the news presents an incomplete view of contemporary American society.

Additionally, the thirtieth anniversary of the report by the United States Commission on Civil Unrest occurs this spring. The Kerner Commission Report grew out of the series of riots that occurred in the mid- and late- sixties in numerous major urban centers. One chapter in that report focused on the role of the news media in the disturbances. Specifically, President Johnson charged the Commission to determine, “What effect do the mass media have on the riots?” (Kerner Commission Report, 362)

The report concluded:

“The Commission’s major concern with the news media is not in riot reporting as such, but in the failure to report adequately on race relations and ghetto problems and to bring more Negroes into journalism... In defining, explaining, and reporting this broader, more complex and ultimately far more fundamental subject [race relations], the communications media, ironically, have failed to communicate... They have not communicated to the majority of their audience – which is White – a sense of the degradation, misery and hopelessness of living in the ghetto... *The*

• Thanks to Judith Gaddie for coding news broadcasts.

world that television and newspapers offer to their Black audience is almost totally White, in both appearance and attitude.” (Emphasis added) (382-383)

Quite clearly things have changed for the better since 1968. Minority faces, voices and perspectives now appear with some frequency. And the media do provide a frequent—on local TV news perhaps almost daily—“sense of” bad conditions in the ghetto. However, shorn of context, such a “sense” can undermine rather than augment racial comity. This seemed an appropriate time to determine just how much less the world is portrayed as “almost totally White,” and what images of the non-White world look like.

The analysis of network news by Robert Entman provides a view of the state of Black coverage in 1990-91. In his study, Entman concluded that: 1) there were more stereotyped impressions for Blacks than for Whites; 2) representations of Whites were more varied and positive than representations of Blacks not due to conscious bias but as a result of the way conventional journalistic norms and practices work with political and social reality; and 3) the data raised questions about journalists’ ability to represent the reality of Black America while adhering to current professional practices (Entman, 1994a). This study updates Entman’s research to determine its continued validity with respect to current network television news, and to include coverage of other minority groups – or lack thereof—especially Latinos and Asian Americans.

The research for this study consisted of a content analysis of four randomly chosen weeks of network news - ABC, NBC and CBS. The most striking finding was the overall lack of minority visibility in network news. The dearth of coverage was true for all three ethnic minority groups, though Latinos and Asian Americans received far less attention than Blacks. Thirty years after the racial unrest of the sixties, and despite

recommendations for improvement, network news remains overwhelmingly, if no longer “almost totally,” White.

The following sections of this chapter will set forth the specific hypotheses examined, the relevant academic literature on the subject, the data and the implications of the findings. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and suggested policy changes.

Hypotheses

The overarching question for the study related to the basic visibility of minorities on network news. Considering the basic premise, six specific hypotheses were developed and tested:

1. ***Ethnic minority groups are underrepresented in coverage.*** This hypothesis represents the key to the study. It specifically updates the Kerner Commission contention about an almost White world in terms of what viewers see on the evening news. If 70 % of Americans use television as primary information source, then it will affect their view of reality.
2. ***Minorities are rarely asked for their opinions in sound bites.*** Soundbites are often used to make a story more interesting. Thus, who speaks helps to create the reality of the situation for the television viewer. If White faces and voices dominate the soundbites, then the impression may be given to the viewer that it is primarily Whites who have the opinions worth hearing. In other words, Whites would appear as the most genuine representatives of social opinion, symbolically, the embodiment of American society.
3. ***When expert advice is offered, minorities are rarely seen.*** The premise for this hypothesis involves the stereotypes associated with the roles of the different races in the United States. Whites are considered the prototypical “experts,” so minorities in such roles are rare.
4. ***Images of ethnic minorities are more likely in blue collar versus professional roles.*** The hypothesis seeks to clarify the way in which minorities may be linked to stereotypically-limited roles.
5. ***When ethnic minorities are covered, they are predominantly featured in stories about affirmative action, crime, welfare, immigration or political***

unrest. The idea here is that minorities appear in stories assumed to be most relevant to minorities. They are then set apart from White Americans who appear in the stories about business, elective politics or other conventional areas of activity.

6. *Networks do not vary in terms of coverage.* Past research suggests little variation across networks in their major themes and practices (Bennett, 1996; Cook, 1997).

Literature Review

The key to understanding the importance of what is being broadcast on the evening news goes back to Walter Lippmann in 1922:

“Our opinions cover a bigger space, a longer reach of time, a greater number of things than we can directly observe. They have, therefore to be pieced together out of what others have reported.” (Lippmann in Gilens, 1996).

While people’s understanding is shaped by their personal perceptions of things, at the same time these perceptions may be formed on the basis of the reports of others. Both the content of media messages and the visual aspect of that media content have been studied and found to have an effect on the viewer. (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Graber, 1990). In his 1996 work, Gilens summarizes:

Thus past research has shown that the mass media can exert a powerful influence on public perceptions and attitudes, that news pictures convey important information that viewers are comparatively likely to remember, and that the race of the people pictured in news stories is a salient aspect of the story for many viewers.” (Gilens, 528).

Yet, that portrayals in the media have an effect is not to assume intentionality. It is recognized that “accuracy” and “objectivity” remain primary goals among news professionals. (Fishman, 1980; Gitlin, 1980; Gilens, 1996: 534) However, Gans argued

that journalists have their own set of perceptions, which affect how they see a story.

(Gans, 1979). Referring to Gans' work, Gilens explains:

While journalists' understandings of society derive in part from their professional work, they inevitably share as well the popular understandings – and misunderstandings – held by the larger society in which they live. (534)

Thus, despite efforts to present accurate and objective news stories, they will be at least somewhat affected by the journalist's perceptions of the world. The critical point is that inaccurate perceptions can creep in – not that journalists are intentionally biased. Even within the realm of accuracy, journalists inevitably select and highlight certain elements of reality while neglecting others. These framing choices, while not necessarily inaccurate, may nonetheless shape audiences' perceptions and sentiments.

The use of stereotypes offers a similar danger to perceiving an accurate sense of an event or person. Walter Lippmann offered an early definition by describing them as “pictures in our heads.” (Berg, 1990: 287.) Stereotypes provide an attempt to categorize and clarify the enormous amount of information, which must be processed to make sense of society; thus, they may not necessarily be negative descriptions, but they are generalizations, which deny or ignore individual differences. Frequently, stereotypes are “used by one group (the in-group, *Us*) about members of another group (the out-group, *Them*), and the generalization is not a flattering one.” (Berg, 288) The categorization by the in-group may co-opt the out-group into believing the stereotype; “the in-group defines the out-group for both the in-group and out-groups.” (Berg, 299)

Another concern is that a single story may be factually accurate, but that it represents only part of a more complex scenario. Working together, these two problems can coalesce to distort reality, or possibly even to create a false reality. For example,

Gilens' work examines race and poverty. He demonstrates that although African Americans represent only 29 % of the poor in the United States, the perception is that they represent a much higher percentage, up to 50 – 55 % in some instances. (Gilens, 1996: 518-519) For purposes of this chapter, the point is not that any one picture of an African American poor person is false, but that instead, it may contribute to an overall inaccurate picture, such as the great discrepancy in the percentages noted above.

On a worst case basis, the danger is that news images may contribute to what some scholars call "modern racism" (Entman, 1992) or "symbolic racism" (Sears, 1988). The concept of modern racism is premised on the idea that many White Americans no longer believe that Blacks are inherently inferior or that discrimination should be legal. Additionally, they may now feel that it is, at least, socially undesirable to use certain language in reference to members of other races. However, many White Americans also continue to feel consciously "some amalgam of negative affect (especially fear and resentment), rejection of the political agenda commonly endorsed by Black leaders, and denial that racism is still a problem." (Entman, 1992: 342) To the extent that the news media contribute to such understandings of reality, they are contributing to racial alienation rather than positive race relations in the United States.

Notably, the preceding discussion has focused on aspects of communication and understanding generally and in some cases to research regarding African Americans or Black/White relations. Unfortunately, not as much has been written about either Latinos or Asian Americans. For Latinos, the Berg study looked at stereotypes with particular emphasis on Hispanics in films. (The words Latino and Hispanic are being used interchangeably in this instance, although the authors understand that the words can

technically have different meanings.) His work examined six different Hispanic images. However, an examination of Hispanics in network news does not exist. The previous work by Entman determined that it was too difficult to find a reliable means for classifying Latinos. It is believed that the work in this study may begin to provide a benchmark for measuring Latinos in news coverage.

Methodology

Four weeks were randomly selected of the three major networks' – ABC, CBS and NBC – nightly news programs. Although four weeks literally suggests 28 broadcasts per network for a total of 84, not every network had a broadcast every night. Accordingly, a total of 75 news broadcasts were watched and coded. (Appendix A contains a specific list of broadcasts viewed for each network.)

The coding sheets, which were used to capture data while viewing the news, were developed in conjunction with "Coding Criteria and Definitions" instructions. (See Appendix B.) One of the first elements to be determined was the definition of a story because the coding was set-up to look at individual stories. The decision was made to define a story as a "coherent segment by a reporter or anchor that lasted for at least 20 seconds." Although a basic theme might link several stories, each piece by an individual reporter was coded as a story. In situations where the anchor spoke for more than 20 seconds as an introduction to a reporter's segment, the anchor's part was coded as an individual story due to the length of time. Less than 20-second introductions were not coded, and promotional segments were not coded.

The coding sheets also categorized stories by topic. Fifteen different topic codes were utilized to be able to determine the topical focus of stories in which Whites and

minorities were portrayed; these codes included such things as “human interest,” “affirmative action,” and “sports/entertainment.” A catchall category of “other” was included for stories that did not match the suggested categories. A story was also coded to be foreign or domestic or a mix of both; United States foreign policy was considered to be a mix.

A key part of the content analysis of the story involved determining ethnic representation. We coded ethnic groups as “represented” for the purposes of this variable if one or more persons clearly identifiable as a member: *1) caused or clearly helped to cause the newsworthy event; or 2) were centrally involved in the story by being shown in three or more medium or close-up shots; or 3) had at least one soundbite.* For example, a story featuring African Americans might be coded as “Blacks only,” “mixed – Black and White,” or “mixed – White and more than 1 minority,” depending on who actually appeared on the screen in medium or close-up shots and who caused the reported event. Thirteen different combinations were listed as coding possibilities.

Determining the appropriate definitions for Latinos and Asians was particularly difficult. For Latinos it was agreed that explicit verbal identification as Latino by the reporter or by recognized surname (as established by one of the researchers, who was born in Mexico) would determine ethnicity. Due to the difficulty in ascertaining Latino ethnicity a category for “Possible Latino” was included, but was combined with Latino for data display and analysis. For Asians, the conclusion was that it was only possible to classify people with East Asian features, meaning those with eyelid folds characteristic of people from Japan, China and other nations of East Asia. The problem, of course, is that the category excluded large portions of the Asian population; for purposes of the coding,

however, no clearer definition was available. This difficulty illustrates the ultimate folly of classifying people in such broad and inevitably misleading categories as "race."

Reporters were coded for gender and ethnicity. People uttering soundbites were coded for gender, ethnicity and their role. A soundbite was defined as a continuous on screen appearance of a person whose voice simultaneously could be heard and included at least five words. Only English speaking was coded, and translations were not coded.

Reliability

Twenty five percent of the broadcasts were double-coded in order to determine coder reliability. Using the Brennan-Prediger (1981) formula (correcting for chance coder agreements), it was determined that the average reliability figure was 89%. All but one of the reliability figures was over 82%; five were over 90 %; the low figure was 79% for ethnic representation. The 79% figure reflects the difficulty encountered in applying the ethnic representation definition developed for the project. The concept had been to code stories for ethnic involvement based on a several criteria – primarily who was centrally involved and who appeared in medium or close-up shots at least three times and/or who was assigned a soundbite. In retrospect and as reflected in this particular reliability figure, the definition was more difficult to apply than anticipated. However, presumably the same subjective ambiguities would likely be experienced by actual viewing audiences. Where one coder missed the brief appearance of, say, an African American which the other caught, the likelihood is that many in the actual audience also did not notice that appearance. In the main, the disparities between White and non-White percentages discovered are large enough that this amount of error is tolerable. In addition, there is no reason to think the errors are anything but random.

The Data

STORIES

The total number of stories coded was 900, with 36% on ABC, 36% on CBS and 28% on NBC. The stories were 79 % domestic and 14 % combined domestic and foreign, with the remaining 7 % foreign. (Table 1)

Table 1
Story by Type

TYPE	# OF STORIES
International	59 (7%)
Domestic	714 (79%)
Combined: International/Domestic	127 (14%)
TOTAL	900

- **International:** A story taking place in a foreign country without any US involvement
- **Domestic:** Story taking place s in the US
- **Combined:** Story taking place in or outside the US with foreign and US involvement

The following table sets forth the breakdown of the story topics included in the broadcasts. No one category was predominant, although crime and “other “ stories were the highest by one percent at 16 % followed by human interest with 15%.

Table 2
Story by Topic

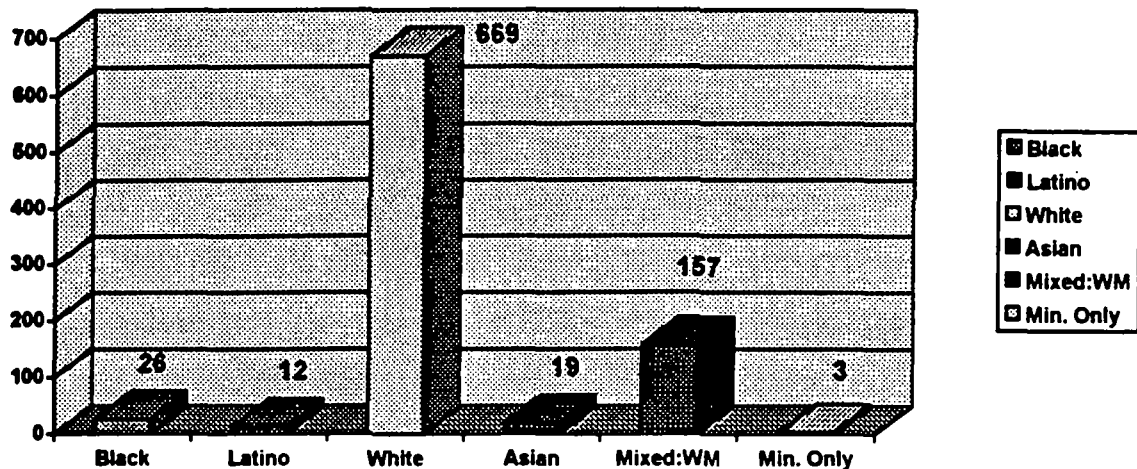
TOPIC CODE	# OF STORIES (%)
Crime	148 (16%)
Other	140 (16%)
Human Interest	138 (15%)
Court/Gov. Proceedings	107 (12%)
Natural Disasters	78 (9%)
Health	73 (8%)
Elective Politics	45 (5%)
Technology/Science	44 (5%)
Economics	40 (4%)
War/Terrorism	38 (4%)
Affirmative Action/Sex.Disc.	25 (3%)
Sports/Entertainment	15 (2%)
Protests	4 (.4%)
Welfare	3 (.3%)
Immigration	2 (.2%)
Total	900

ETHNIC REPRESENTATION

Measuring ethnic representation is intended to gauge what ethnic images the average viewer sees. Specifically, ethnic representation measures the ethnic identity of the people who caused or clearly helped to cause the newsworthy event, or who are centrally involved in the story as determined by appearance in close-up or medium shots or by having soundbites. Approximately 75.5% of the ethnic representation focused exclusively on Whites. That is, three quarters of the stories did not contain any clearly identifiable members of non-White groups in anything but peripheral roles (such as people in a crowd scene). If the "mixed" stories—Whites with a minority group—are counted, then the

percentage of stories that included Whites rises to 93.2%. Table 3 below includes all stories—foreign, domestic and foreign-domestic combination stories.

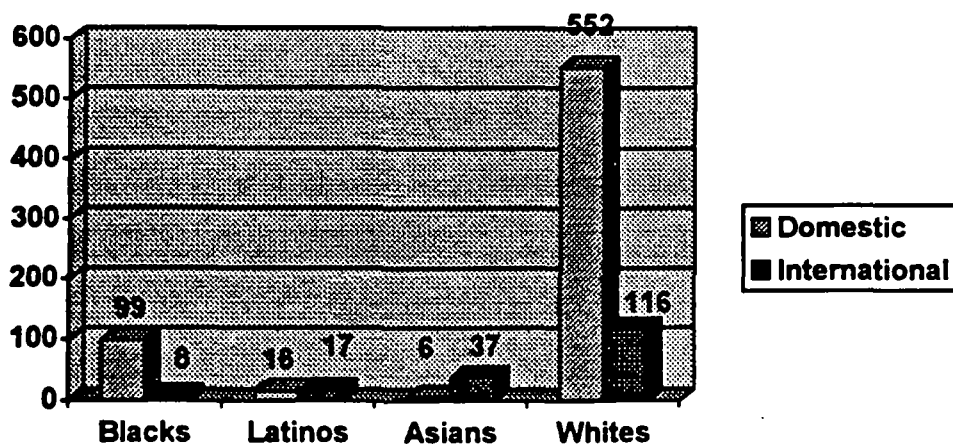
Table 3
Ethnic Representation



- Figures listed above represent numbers of stories. Not represented in the above graph are 14 stories where the ethnic representation was not determinable. "Min. only" refers to three stories that showed more than one minority group and no Whites. "Mixed: WM" refers to stories that showed Whites and at least one minority group.

Table 4 shows the breakdown between foreign and domestic stories.

Table 4
Ethnic Representation by Story Type (Numbers of stories)



(Not included in this graph are all-minority stories, mixed White and unknown.) As the table shows, stories about Blacks and Whites were primarily domestic, while Asian stories were overwhelmingly foreign. This may partially be the result of one sample week happening to coincide with the death of the Chinese leader, Deng Xiaping. For Latinos, the stories are more evenly split. In either case, it is important to note that for Latinos and Asians, the American viewer sees a picture of these two ethnic minorities that is heavily based on foreign people. This portrayal could perpetuate the sense that Latinos and Asian-Americans are foreigners in their own country and therefore not truly Americans.

REPORTERS

The data for reporter ethnicity reveals that Whites report 92 % of the stories. Reporting by Blacks occurs in 4 % of the broadcasts, by Latinos 2 % and Asians 1 %, with less than 1% unclassified. Reporters were also coded in terms of gender. Women reported 18 % of the stories and men 82 %. Of that 18 % reported by women, White women covered 76 %; Black women reported 13 %, Latinas 2 % and Asians 4 %. Of the stories reported by men, White men covered 95 %; Black men reported 2 %, Latino men 2% of the stories and Asian American men reported less than one percent of the total stories. The gender disparity for Blacks is larger than for the other two minority groups.

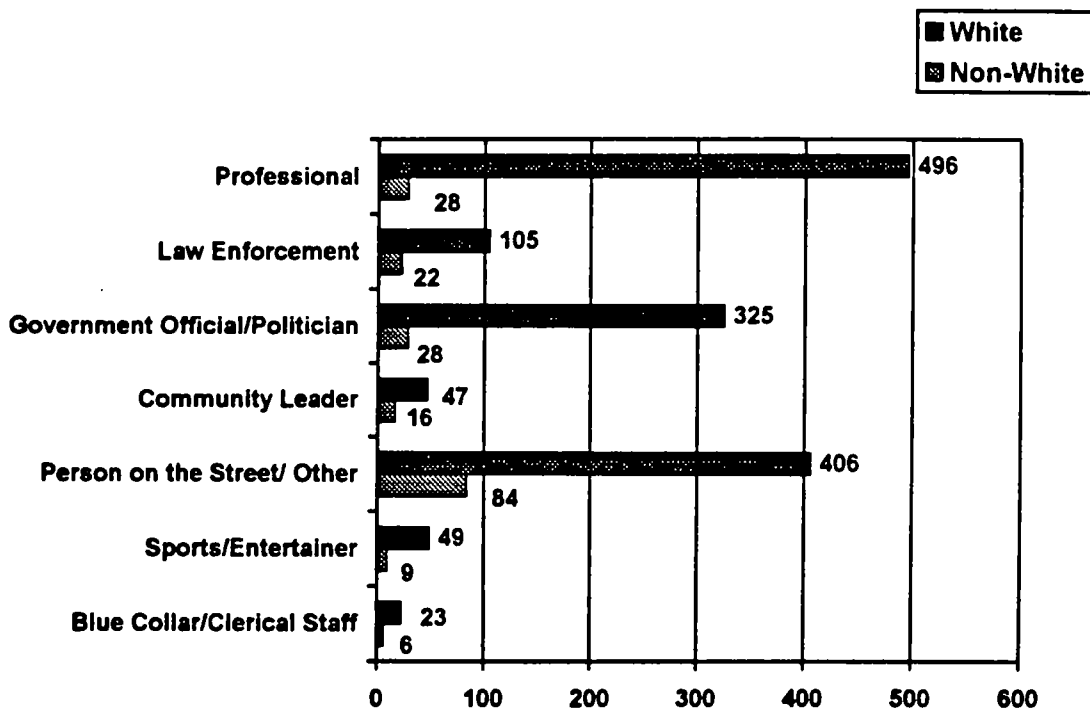
SOUNDBITES

Of the 1,691 soundbites that occurred during the sample weeks, 88 % came from White sources. Blacks had 6% of the soundbites, Latinos 3 % and Asians 2 %. Similar to the data with respect to reporting by gender, men predominated in soundbites with 1,218 of the 1,691 speaking parts. Within the gender breakdowns for soundbites, both White

women and White men predominated, each garnering more than 84% of the soundbites. Interestingly, Black women had 10% of the soundbites uttered by their gender, whereas Black men only had 5% of those spoken by males—repeating the gender disparity found above in looking at reporters' ethnicity.

Soundbite analysis also examined the role of the speakers in addition to gender and ethnicity (Table 5).

Table 5
SOUNDBITES BY ETHNICITY AND ROLE*



*Not included are soundbites by foreign government officials and by persons of undetermined ethnicity.

Whites clearly predominated in all roles. However, their largest numbers occurred in the most authoritative, prestigious or powerful roles of the professionals – doctors, lawyers, and business executives. Whites were selected for basic “person on the street” roles in 83% of the stories, but this category also was the largest single category for minorities.

The second largest for minorities was “community leaders” which encompassed activists, interest group lobbyists, and nonprofit workers.

THE NETWORKS

Finally, we explored the data by network for reporter ethnicity (Table 6) and ethnic representation. With respect to reporter ethnicity, the networks did not vary much.

Minority reporters covered roughly 8% of stories on ABC and 6 % on CBS and NBC.

Stories by Black reporters varied, however, among the networks; ABC had 6%; CBS had 4 % while NBC had only 2 %. Appearances by Latinos were few, and Asian American reporters were virtually non-existent. Regarding ethnic representation the data (not displayed) also reveal little difference among the networks. For example, African Americans were represented in 10% of the stories on ABC, 11% on CBS, and 14% on NBC.

Table 6
REPORTER ETHNICITY BY NETWORK*

Network	Blacks	Latinos	Asians	White
ABC	6%	3%	2%	90%
CBS	4%	2.5%	0	92%
NBC	2%	4%	0	93%

*Numbers do not add up to 100% because these figures do not include reporters whose ethnicity was unknown or other.

Discussion

The first hypothesis predicted that ethnic minorities were underrepresented in network news. According to the 1990 US Census, Blacks, Latinos and Asian Americans comprise roughly 27% of the United States population (Blacks - 12%, Latinos - 11 % and Asians – 4%). In fact, for the four week sample analyzed in this study, non-White ethnic

groups as we defined them were represented in 24.5% of the network news stories in our sample. However, stated in these simple terms the 24.5% figure on network news is misleading because it fails to reflect the precise nature of the representation.

One clarification is that these aggregate percentages include both foreign and domestic stories. As noted in Table 4, 52% of the coverage (i.e., 17 stories) involving Latinos related to international events and 48% (16 stories) were domestic. For Asians the coverage was largely international—86% (n=37) with only 14% (n=6) domestic. In other words, most of the stories that featured Asians and half with Latinos came in coverage of foreign affairs, not of Asian or Latino persons in the U.S. If we consider domestic stories only, the breakdown involving ethnic groups is Asian Americans, 6; Latinos in the U.S., 16; Blacks, 99; and Whites, 552. Using these numbers on domestic stories alone, then, Whites are represented in 82% of stories, minorities in 18% (as opposed to the 75.5% vs. 24.5% when including all stories).

A second point that contextualizes the 24.5% ethnic representation figure is that whereas Whites appeared *alone* as the central characters in 75.5% of the stories, most of the minority appearances were in conjunction with Whites. As shown in Table 3, 6.3% of the stories (Blacks 2.9 %, Latinos 1.3% and Asians 2.1%) had exclusively minority ethnic representation; that means the other 18.2% of the total number of stories that registered a minority presence did so accompanied by Whites. In other words, Whites were 12 times more likely to have a network news story to themselves than were all minorities combined (75.5% vs. 6.3%). And again, for Asians and Latinos, most of these exclusive appearances came in foreign stories, not ones about these groups in the U.S., whereas the bulk of stories featuring Whites alone concerned domestic matters.

In sum, based on the “ethnic representation” variable, the first hypothesis, that ethnic minority groups are underrepresented in news coverage relative to their demographic presence in the US received confirmation for Asians and Latinos but not for Blacks. If we disregard the distinction between foreign and domestic stories, Blacks and Asians were represented in news coverage in about the same proportion to their actual population, while Latinos were greatly underrepresented. However, when international stories are excluded, Asian Americans are also underrepresented in network news coverage in comparison to the U.S. population and the disparity for Latinos becomes severe.

Small numbers of stories are involved, however, and the findings could conceivably be a function of the news events that happened to fall within our four-week sample. However, with respect to Latinos, Entman and Rojecki (forthcoming) found evidence supporting the findings herein. They studied three randomly chosen sample months in 1997 from ABC’s *World News* (April 4-May 2; July 21-August 18; and November 14-December 14). Analyzing full-text verbal transcripts of every broadcast stored in the comprehensive Nexis database, they found that the word “Latino” appeared just two times and the word “Hispanic” 12 times, all in relation to U.S. events. One of the two mentions of “Latino” came in a story on school segregation, the other in a report on diplomatic training where a man described as “Latino” played a terrorist in a simulation. The mentions of Hispanics were in stories as follows:

- 1 on school segregation
- 1 on alleged vote fraud by Hispanics
- 5 on the increase in Hispanic baseball stars

- 2 on police brutality against Haitian immigrant Abner Louima
- 1 on the looks of the unidentified missing suspect in the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building
- 1 on school dropouts
- 1 on illegal immigration

From this analysis of about 25% of the ABC evening news broadcasts for 1997, even the word “Latino” is generally eschewed, despite its being preferred by many Americans of this group. And though the word “Hispanic” appears much more frequently, the range of topics is narrow and arguably, dominated by stereotypical topics.

In describing the coverage as under-representing minorities, we do not mean to imply that there is some “correct” percentage. Clearly if no Asian American ever did anything at all newsworthy, we would not expect news to include members of that group. If few Latinos occupy positions of government influence, given journalists’ heavy reliance upon public officials as news sources, we would not expect to see very many Latinos in the news. We are not suggesting that the ethnic representation data here are functions of deliberate bias and exclusion; we recognize that standard news definitions and journalistic practices shape the results we found. But even if there is no definitive standard for matching percentage of minority representation in news stories with percentages in the population, a more inclusive approach might be no less “correct” while encouraging more accurate inferences about America among audiences. Since the average White believes African Americans comprise two or three times the proportion of the U.S. population they actually do, information on this score (from some combination of personal observation and media images) could stand improvement (Nadeau, Niemi, and Levine, 1993).

The second hypothesis was that minorities are rarely asked for their opinions in soundbites and it was strongly supported by the data. Of the 1,691 soundbites 88 % (1,488) were by Whites and 11 % (193) by ethnic minorities. (The remaining 10 came from persons of undetermined ethnicity.) The discrepancy portrays Whites as an even more predominant majority group than they are in fact, and conversely, minority groups as smaller and accordingly less significant than they are in reality. Additionally, it is interesting to compare the figures from the ethnic representation variable, of 24.5% (Table 3), to the soundbites that amount to just 11% for minorities. It would be reasonable to expect that these figures might match more closely. Speaking in a soundbite conveys a sense of authority, importance and representation that the data indicate is not accorded to ethnic minorities in the evening news. This finding also backs up the inference that the overall ethnic representation of 24.5% masks the fact that many minority appearances are in stories where White voices predominate.

Soundbite analysis also assessed the role of the person speaking. The data supported the third hypothesis that when expert advice is offered through a soundbite, minorities are rarely seen. As indicated in Table 5, the largest role for minority speakers was as a person-on-the street, where about 17% of the quotes were from minority members. However, if a professional person, such as a doctor or lawyer, or an expert, such as a research scientist, economist or professor, spoke, then 95% of the time the speaker was White. Other figures of authority, including government officials and law enforcement officers, have a similar dominance with 92% of the government officials providing quotes being White. On the one hand, it would be unreasonable to argue that a story about Cabinet Secretaries must include Asian Americans if there are none serving in

those positions. On the other hand, having person-on-the-street be the one role where ethnic minorities appear at a rate closer to their actual population percentage is probably not optimum either. (It is important to note that with respect to soundbites, unlike the ethnic representation variable, the foreign stories did not distort the role figures because foreign leaders were coded separately.)

Another idea tested in this research was that images of ethnic minorities were more likely in blue collar versus professional roles (Hypothesis 4). While the data revealed that non-Whites were three times more likely to be representing blue collar or other support positions than professional roles, we believe that the numbers were too small to yield definitive results. Perhaps the most interesting conclusion here is how rare it is for network news to feature identifiable blue collar Americans, even though a large proportion of the working population, both White and non-White is blue collar. Since minorities are somewhat more likely to be in blue collar positions, one reason for non-White underrepresentation could be the networks' lack of interest in portraying blue collar people of any ethnicity.

Hypothesis five predicted that in instances where ethnic minorities are covered, they are predominantly featured in stories about affirmative action, crime, welfare, immigration or political unrest. The idea was that minorities are thus portrayed in a less than favorable light and generally in stories not reflective of mainstream society. Again, the numbers were far too small to draw any conclusions. (However, on affirmative action alone, see Entman 1997, which finds a media emphasis on African Americans to the exclusion of other minority groups and women of all ethnicities.)

Hypothesis 6 suggested that ABC, CBS and NBC would not differ in their treatment of minorities. This conclusion held true. With respect to the ethnicity of the reporter, the White cast of the news was similar on all networks. As noted previously, Whites reported over 90% of the stories. It is noteworthy that a full thirty years after Kerner, minority reporters still cover less than 10 % of network news stories. One possible explanation is a "glass ceiling effect" preventing minority reporters from moving into the major network's evening news from cable or local stations. Another is that minority members either enter or remain in the television news profession at lower rates than Whites. These questions require further investigation.

Future Research

We believe that our data represent interesting trends but that a much larger sample needs to be taken in order to obtain statistically significant conclusions. Four weeks represents only 8 % of the year. Therefore, the first recommendation for future research is to conduct a similar yearlong content analysis of network news coverage. Conceivably, the results could be different – or not. It is important to know. We also recommend that an in-depth analysis examine the coverage of specific stories from one network to another. For example, topics from our four week sample might include: the Oklahoma City Bombing and subsequent trials; the JonBenet Ramsey murder story; and the Dallas Cowboy sexual assault allegations. Such stories may contain telling images of minority members, or in some cases such as Oklahoma City, a revealing paucity of such images.

Policy Recommendations

Having determined a series of problems with network news coverage, the next step is to suggest viable means of remedying the situation. However, it is critically important to emphasize that these recommendations are premised on complete belief in the freedom of the press and respect for the guarantees of the First Amendment. We concur with what was stated in 1968 in the Kerner Commission Report, "Freedom of the press is not the issue. A free press is indispensable to the preservation of the other freedoms this nation cherishes." (Kerner Commission Report, 362) Explaining further, the Report goes on to emphasize that change must come from within the media: "A society that values and relies on a free press as intensely as ours, is entitled to demand in return responsibility from the press and conscientious attention by the press to its own deficiencies." (367)

Accordingly, we present the following seven suggestions for the three major networks to improve their news broadcasts.

1. ***Compile lists of minority experts and continually update them*** for use in soundbites and as basic sources. The Kerner Commission also suggested this recommendation. If this type of recommendation has been implemented in some way, our findings suggest that it needs to be re-examined and improved.

We recognize that time constraints exist in the actual production of the news, which may not always permit searching quickly for new sources. However, stories constructed the same day are not the entire news broadcast; many stories are produced over time. Particularly in these instances, efforts to diversify the pool of sources to include more minority experts should be aggressively pursued.

One way obtain this information is to reach out to ethnic professional group associations. While compiling and updating such lists require effort and will incur costs, the benefit to race relations in the United States outweighs the potential costs.

2. ***Develop a means to present more representative broadcasts.*** News decision-makers need to be highly cognizant of the fact that current news broadcast

participants are predominantly White males. This recommendation is not to present rigid formulas for balance in areas of gender and race, which could be interpreted as editorializing; instead, the recommendation is to develop awareness and sensitivity to presenting more representative broadcasts.

3. ***Determine why minority reporters are not more visible in the broadcasts.*** If this reflects low employment figures, then improve efforts to recruit and train. On the other hand, if the employment figures are not low, then determine how to increase stories by minority reporters.
4. ***Increase the number of human interest stories focusing on people of color.*** Our data revealed that all three networks had a human interest type story, probably as an effort not to present only negative images. (For example, some such segments were "Eye on America," "Person of the Week," and "The Best Among Us.") Although the number of stories was not great, the overall tendency was to highlight White people. In several instances, the stories focused on White people helping people of color. Our concern is that this image perpetuates the old view of White superiority and minority inferiority or helplessness if not balanced with other images, which our study did not find. For example, it would be interesting to see Blacks helping Whites or Latinos helping Asians. This effort would present a more representative view of American life and would not be illegitimate editorializing nor would it hurt ratings. After all, UNIVISION and Telemundo, which specifically target the Latino population, receive higher ratings than the major networks in markets such as Los Angeles, Miami, Houston, and Chicago.
5. ***Provide more factual and historical context in presenting stories.***
6. ***Establish an internal self-monitoring unit at each network with the power to make changes or at least have direct reporting authority to top level decision-makers.*** The goal of the unit would be to track the kind of data found in this study on an on-going basis. If such a function currently exists within the networks, then it needs to be re-examined and improved because our data make it appear ineffectual. Clearly, substantial costs will be incurred in adding a new unit, but it is our belief that ideally this type of monitoring belongs in-house in a self-monitoring form as opposed to a potentially regulatory form in an outside monitoring agency. In other words, the cost of the new unit would be outweighed by the benefit of retaining control over the process. Such a unit would promote responsible journalism but be in keeping with the First Amendment guarantees.
7. ***Improve working relationships among the minority journalists' organizations and the networks.***

Although each of these recommendations involves varying degrees of cost, whatever monetary outlays incurred could potentially be offset by an improved racial climate in the United States.

Conclusion

This study assessed the visibility of minorities in the evening news broadcasts of the three major networks in the United States – ABC, CBS, and NBC. The interest in such coverage arose from the President's Advisory Panel on Race and the anniversary of the Kerner Commission Report. Four weeks of news coverage was coded, which translates into 75 news broadcasts, 32.5 hours of news, 900 stories and 1,691 soundbites. Thirty years after the racial unrest of the sixties, and despite improvements, network news remains largely White, though not nearly so White as before.

According to the *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy America* (1997) there will be a minority-majority population by the year 2050. This change will result from the fact that Latinos and Asian Americans are the fastest growing minority populations in the US. Although much progress has occurred on many fronts—including a great increase of minority visibility in network news—there remains much room for improvement.

The recommendations set forth in this chapter are premised on a deeply held belief in the freedom of the press. Equally strong, however, is the belief that much needs to change in order to achieve the country's highest aspirations. Between these two positions lay much room for debate about serious normative questions. For example, what are the principles and values that will drive decisions about ethnic representation in the evening news? Do we want to portray a picture of America as it is? Or do we want to begin

recognizing the changing face of America and begin dispelling the myths and stereotypes at times exacerbated by the media?

Presenting the news in a more realistic and contextualized way is a step in a positive direction for the racial climate in America. Thirty years after the Kerner Commission it remains necessary to repeat recommendations that on the one hand, do not seem impossible to implement, while on the other could do so much to improve race relations.

Appendix A

ABC	CBS	NBC
WEEK ONE	WEEK ONE	WEEK ONE
1/8	1/8	
1/9	1/9	1/8
1/10	1/10	1/9
1/11	1/11	1/10
1/12	1/12	---
1/13	1/13	---
1/14	1/14	1/13
		1/14
WEEK TWO	WEEK TWO	WEEK TWO
5/28	5/28	5/28
5/29	5/29	5/29
5/30	5/30	5/30
5/31	---	5/31
6/1	6/1	---
6/2	6/2	6/2
6/3	6/3	6/3
WEEK THREE	WEEK THREE	WEEK THREE
2/19	2/19	2/19
2/20	2/20	2/20
2/21	2/21	2/21
2/22	2/22	2/22
2/23	2/23	2/23
2/24	2/24	2/24
2/25	2/25	2/25
WEEK FOUR	WEEK FOUR	WEEK FOUR
10/15	10/15	10/15
10/16	10/16	10/16
10/17	10/17	10/17
---	---	---
10/19	10/19	---
10/20	10/20	---
---	10/21	10/20
		10/21

APPENDIX B

Race and Media

Network News Content Analysis Project: Coding Criteria and Definitions (in order as appears on coding sheet)

Story/Description: A coherent segment by a reporter or anchor. There may be overarching themes linking different pieces, but it is the individual piece as reported by different individual reporters who are each coded as a story.

In situations where the anchor does "report" for at least 20 seconds, the intro segment would be treated as a story, regardless of whether or not another reporter follows.

For example, on ABC's "World News Tonight," the anchor, Peter Jennings, recently talked about the topic: pressure on Iraq. Thereafter, Jennings went to three different correspondents, which would be coded as three separate stories. In this instance the Jennings intro would not be treated as a separate item because he did not speak for 20 seconds. If he had spoken for 20 seconds before going to the reporter, the segment would be coded as a story.

Topic Code: All stories were categorized into one of the following codes:

1. Human Interest
2. Economic Situation (stock market, GNP, business success or problems)
3. Crime and criminal process, including court proceedings(all forms, drugs, violent, White collar)
4. Welfare
5. Immigration
6. Court proceedings, civil and Supreme Court, government hearings.
7. Science/technology
8. Elective Politics
9. Political demonstration, mass movement, community organizing
10. War (or threats of), "peacekeeping" operations, terrorism, other international violence.
11. Sports, entertainment
12. Health
13. Affirmative Action, racial and sexual discrimination, sexual harassment

14. Disasters, man-made or weather related, including events like oil spills.
15. Other. Note under comments. Includes weather (non-disaster), environment, government spending generally, mixed stories that cannot be clearly coded.

Story type: Some stories will clearly be foreign - earthquake in Chile; others will be domestic - UPS strikers picket; and others will be foreign with domestic connections – including US foreign policy stories.. These are coded:

1. Foreign - defined as events in other countries with no direct impact on the US.
2. Domestic - clearly US focused.
3. Mixed - stories with both foreign and domestic aspects; defined to include stories about US foreign policy

Ethnic Representation: Describes the ethnic identity of the people who caused or clearly helped to cause the newsworthy event, or where they are centrally involved in the story.

"Centrally involved" means that the person/people (excluding reporters/anchors) who appeared on the screen at least three times in medium or close-up shots and/or were assigned at least one soundbite.

Specific ethnic groups' involvement in an event or issue is coded as follows:

1. Blacks only
2. Latinos only - as determined by explicit verbal identification of person or reporter as Latino or by surname. A person specifically identified as Spanish is not coded as Latino.
3. Whites only
4. Non-Whites only; more than one group. Specify which groups under comments.
5. None - no one other than reporter is pictured
6. Asians only – people with East Asian features, defined as people “with eyelid folds characteristic of people from Japan, China and other nations of East Asia.”
7. Mixed - Black and White
8. Mixed - Latino and White
9. Mixed - Asian and White
10. Mixed - White and unknown
11. Mixed - White and more than 1 minority. Specify in comments.
12. Possible Latino – the circumstances and the name suggest that the person is Latino. Note name(s) under comments.

13. Unknown

Gender: 1. Female
2. Male

Ethnicity: Perceived background of reporter and others were coded according to the following:

1. Black
2. Latino (same description as for ethnic involvement)
3. White (includes Arabs and Israelis)
4. Asian (same description as for ethnic involvement)
5. Other (such as Native American). Specify under comments.
6. Unknown
7. Possible Latino – same description as under visuals, # 12.

Sound bite: Defined as:

- Every continuous appearance of a person with voice coming out of mouth, which included singing.
Exception: in the situation where there is a voice but the speaker's mouth cannot be seen (or the face is otherwise blocked), if there is a verbal announcement or on-screen label as to who is speaking, that situation will be coded as a sound bite; (i.e., in courtroom scene could have statement "voice of xxxx, prosecuting attorney" with voice-over effect); this exception does not include a reporter reading a quote from a speaker.
- May start or continue off-screen but must include on-screen appearance, with the exception noted above;
- Must be a complete thought as indicated by at least five words, though need not be a complete sentence because people frequently speak in grammatical fragments;
- Does not include "grunts" or other one syllable responses to questions
- Every sound bite will be coded; turn to page two if needed.

Role: Refers to the speaker's occupation or reason for selection. In cases of retired persons it represents the past occupation:

1. Doctor/lawyer/other White collar professional not described by other codes listed below.
2. Law enforcement (police, judges, military, firefighter)
3. Scientist, Economist, Academics, and spokespersons from "think tanks," and research institutes.
4. Student
5. US government official (either bureaucrat or appointed)
6. US politician (elected or party officials)
7. Foreign government official or politician

8. Support staff, (clerical, administrative, nurses, paralegals, teaching assistants, etc.)
9. Blue-collar worker (factory, construction, etc.)
10. Entertainer (includes working in the entertainment field) and Sports Figures (including coaches)
11. Unemployed
12. Community leader /interest groups/ lobbyist/nonprofit executive directors
13. Person-on-the street; witness; person reacting to event or situation..
14. Homemaker (with or without children)
15. Other. (Roles not listed above. Clergy, housekeepers, shopkeepers. Explain in comments. Try not to use.)

Comments:

Noteworthy items not captured by coding. Also for explanatory comments for ethnicity or role. Any other questions or things to remember.

Chapter 3

Minority Groups and Public Policy: Electoral Representation

Barbara Hanson Langford¹

In this chapter we offer a case study of coverage of Supreme Court cases on racially-targeted Congressional districting. We believe that the coverage of policy issues involving minority groups, even where in some ways “balanced,” nonetheless may stimulate conflict between racial groupings. In this case we find a paucity of the historical context and philosophical openness that might allow for greater understanding of American democracy’s shortcomings. Especially troubling is a tendency to equate minorities with anti-democratic “special interests.”

Minority electoral representation as a policy issue

Minorities continue to be underrepresented in elective institutions at the federal, state, and local levels. After the 1990 Census, during the reapportionment process, the Justice Department urged the creation of majority-minority districts in several states, particularly in the South, in order to enhance the electoral representation of both African Americans and Latinos.

The creation of majority-minority districts did result in the election of unprecedented numbers of minorities to Congress. After the 1990 reapportionment process, the number of African American Congressional Representatives doubled. The evidence for the need for intervention was clear: between 1900 and 1992, no African

¹ Shawn Rife contributed significantly to the coding for this research and his paper on Lani Guinier (1998) offers a useful supplement to the findings herein.

Americans were elected to Congress from Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, or Virginia, despite substantial Black populations in those states.

Efforts to increase minority electoral representation, through alternative voting systems or race-conscious districts, have met with controversy. Recent Supreme Court decisions calling into question the constitutionality of race-conscious districts have added to this debate. Discussions regarding mechanisms to increase minority electoral representation raise important questions about the very nature of our democratic system. This debate calls into question the understanding of America as a democracy of pure form, one that has long been established as a fair system and therefore needs no alteration. This discussion also raises issues about the distribution of power between groups and the legitimacy of the current structure of white authority.

This is also a discussion that remains vitally important for racial reconciliation in this country. Electoral representation is an important means of conveying group and/or individual interests to government. Without fair representation of groups and individuals through elected officials, those interests likely do not receive adequate consideration. Unfair and unequal electoral structures that result in an unfair distribution of electoral power will likely produce unfair results. Meaningful discussions about the fairness of the current system, as well as the nature of democratic representation, remain vitally important for true racial reconciliation to occur.

This study attempts to analyze the media's depiction of the debate over the use of race-conscious districts to increase minority electoral representation. Media coverage of two important Supreme Court districting cases illustrates the media's failure to provide thoughtful and balanced coverage of one mechanism designed to increase minority

representation. Coverage reinforced notions that the current system is somehow inherently superior and that alternative voting systems need little consideration. Both print and network coverage of the decisions gave great deference to arguments opposing race-conscious districts, while providing little foundation for the consideration of reasons in support of alternative electoral mechanisms. Insofar as the media impede open discussion over the fairness and nature of current electoral structures through skewed coverage, they also undermine racial comity. In making these observations we are not endorsing any particular representational scheme. This is a deeply complicated question with no easy answers—but it is precisely that complexity to which media evinced insufficient sensitivity.

Theoretical Background

Several studies have documented the paucity of positive images of African Americans in the media (Entman 1994a) as well as the negative stereotypes of African Americans that the media sometimes reinforce (Entman 1992). Recent coverage of policy issues such as poverty and affirmative action have also demonstrated the media's tendency to draw on existing stereotypes in simplifying and misrepresenting policy debates (Entman 1997; Entman 1995). Considering that alternative voting systems also raise issues about the legitimacy of white authority and the nature of democratic representation, we might not expect favorable media coverage of mechanisms designed to increase minority representation. This is especially true considering that the theory behind such mechanisms is unfamiliar, even arcane. This particular policy issue is without doubt a tough one for the mass media to handle.

That this discussion occurs within the confines of Supreme Court opinion further compounds difficulties of reporting issues of minority representation fairly and accurately. Even though public understanding of the Supreme Court's opinions remains vital to a democratic society, media coverage of the Court has been found to be "inadequate, passive, and part-time" (Grey 1968). Research has suggested that the public receives "only the most superficial, and sometimes distorted, accounts" of Supreme Court decisions (Shaw 1981). The majority of decisions are either not covered at all or covered very poorly (Tarpley 1984; Solimine 1980; Ericson 1977). Recent research found that coverage gave heavy emphasis to decisions with First Amendment implications and that in recent years, coverage has tended to include more about judicial personalities along with the decisions (Davis 1993; Bowles 1992).

The Cases:

Two Supreme Court cases, *Miller v. Johnson*, which was decided in 1995, and *Shaw v. Reno*, which was decided in 1993, were utilized for this analysis. Because both *Miller* and *Shaw* resulted in significant changes in voting rights law and because they both received widespread media coverage, these two cases will be the focus of this analysis. In *Shaw v. Reno*, the Court considered a case brought by white plaintiffs who contended that a majority Black district in North Carolina violated their right to equal protection under the law. The Court created what was interpreted as a "bizarreness" test, arguing that the shape of the district is an important indication of efforts to engage in unconstitutional "racial gerrymandering." The case was sent back to a lower court for reconsideration.

The Court expanded its ruling under *Miller v. Johnson*, stating that race could not be the predominant factor in drawing district lines, regardless of the district's shape. The ruling struck down Georgia's 11th Congressional district claiming that it violated the white plaintiffs' equal protection rights. While the Court did not rule that all majority-minority districts were unconstitutional, it did increase the standard for the use of race in drawing district lines.

Data

Data were collected from a computer search of the 12 newspapers with the largest daily circulation as of September 30, 1997 which were available in computer searchable form,² as well as the newsmagazines *Time* and *Newsweek*. The *Wall Street Journal* was also included given that it ranks first in circulation totals. Data were also collected from CBS, ABC, and NBC evening news programs. The computer search was conducted for all items that mentioned "Supreme Court and redistricting." Both print and network news were sampled during the week in which the decisions were announced. The sample was then filtered to exclude articles with only passing references to these cases.³

Quantitative analysis coded every assertion in the newspaper articles and network news coverage that expressed an evaluation or explanation of the Supreme Court cases. A total of 1,502 assertions were for coded for both cases. Coding was performed by the author and a graduate student with average intercoder reliability of .91.

²Newspapers included were USA Today, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, Newsday, Houston Chronicle, Chicago Sun-Times, Dallas Morning News, Boston Globe, and Cleveland Plain-Dealer.

³Articles excluded were those with less than five assertions explaining or evaluating the decision.

BIAS TOWARD THE MAJORITY

Print Coverage

Overall, for coverage of *Miller*, the ratio between assertions in support of the decision and those against was essentially balanced at 1: 1.2. The coverage of *Shaw* was not as balanced however, with nearly twice as many assertions in support of the decision than those against (1.8:1). *Note that assertions supporting the decision are those opposing race-conscious districts.* Assertions that opposed the decision are those that argue for the legitimacy of race-conscious districts. Table 1 breaks down the data.

News stories were consistently biased toward the majority opinion in *Shaw*. Every newspaper in the sample reported more assertions in favor of the decision than those against (see Appendix 1). In the coverage of *Miller*, however, all newspapers were not consistently biased toward the majority opinion: four of the eleven newspapers were biased toward the dissent. The range of imbalance among newspapers in the coverage of *Miller* was narrower compared to the range of imbalance in the coverage of *Shaw* (see Appendix 1).

Table 1: Balance in Print News and Editorial Coverage

	Total			<i>Miller</i>			<i>Shaw</i>		
	Support	Oppose	Ratio	Support	Oppose	Ratio	Support	Oppose	Ratio
News Stories	297	214	1.4 : 1	134	150	1 : 1.1	163	64	2.5 : 1
Editorials	145	157	1 : 1.1	55	80	1 : 1.5	90	77	1.2 : 1
Total	442	371	1.2 : 1	189	230	1 : 1.2	253	141	1.8 : 1

Entries are numbers of assertions.

Balance did differ somewhat between news stories and editorials in the print coverage of the *Miller* decision. While news stories had a ratio of support to oppose of

roughly 1:1, editorials were generally opposed to the decision, with a ratio of support to oppose of 1:1.5.⁴ In the coverage of the *Shaw* decision, balance differed significantly between news stories and editorials.⁵ In news stories, the ratio of assertions supporting the decision to those opposing was 2.5:1; in editorials, the ratio was 1.2:1. Thus—contrary to what we might expect—editorial assertions overall were more balanced than news coverage.

In general, editorials were more opposed to the *Miller* decision than the *Shaw* decision. This may have been due in part to the scope of the decisions themselves. The *Shaw* decision was interpreted to apply to those majority-minority districts with “strange” shapes. The *Miller* decision went beyond that appearance standard to apply to all districts, regardless of shape, in which “race was the predominant” factor in drawing district lines. Therefore, editorial writers may have been more interested in a decision with an immediate and measurable impact—the striking down of a congressional district, than in a continuing legal battle with consequences that had not yet been made clear.

A difference in balance in news stories between the two decisions was also likely affected by the mobilization and organization of groups opposing the decision. The response of the Congressional Black Caucus was covered more in opposition to *Miller* than to *Shaw* for instance. This analysis did not identify whether opposition groups were more organized in their response or if the media reported their response more frequently. Likely, it is a combination of the two factors that contributed to a greater level of balance in *Miller*.

⁴A chi-squared test of independence between editorials and news stories and the type of assertion was not significant at the .05 level.

⁵Chi-squared test significant at the .001 level.

Network Coverage

Overall, television coverage was more biased toward the majority opinion than was the print coverage with a ratio of support to oppose of 1.6:1 (see Table 2). Similarly to print coverage, networks presented more balanced coverage of the *Miller* decision, with a ratio of 1.4:1, than the *Shaw* decision, in which the networks reported assertions that supported the decision twice as often as those opposing it. However, the numbers of assertions were low, especially for *Shaw*.

Table 2: Balance in Network Coverage

	Total			Miller			Shaw		
	Support	Oppose	Ratio	Support	Oppose	Ratio	Support	Oppose	Ratio
ABC	19	9	2.1 : 1	12	7	1.7 : 1	7	2	3.5 : 1
CBS	10	7	1.4 : 1	3	3	1 : 1	7	4	1.8 : 1
NBC	10	9	1.1 : 1	7	6	1.2 : 1	3	3	1 : 1
Total	39	25	1.6 : 1	22	16	1.4 : 1	17	9	1.9 : 1

Entries are numbers of assertions.

ASSIGNING VALUE: EXPLAINING OR EVALUATING THE DECISION

Print Coverage

The coverage of the decisions was more frequently concerned with the decision's political effect, for instance, reducing the number of minority office holders, creating the potential for many lawsuits, or predicting the impact on political parties, than in explaining substantive arguments for or against the decision (see Table 3; see also Appendix 2). The focus on effect over substance was quite striking in the print coverage of *Miller*, where assertions detailing the political effect of the decision were used far more often than assertions analyzing the philosophical arguments, either for or against

the decision. Again, note that assertions providing philosophical reasoning in support of the decisions are arguments against race-conscious districts.

While the coverage of *Miller* was balanced between the number of assertions providing philosophical reasoning in support of and in opposition to the decision, that balance was not present in the coverage of *Shaw*. While print coverage of *Shaw* focused less on the political effects than *Miller*, the number of assertions simply describing the components of the Court's decision, for instance, stating that race could not be used as the predominant factor or that the case would now go back to lower courts, were also less. Most striking was that assertions providing philosophical reasoning in support of *Shaw* outnumbered any other type by almost a two to one ratio (see also Appendix 3).

Table 3. Types of Assertions Used in Print Coverage to Explain or Evaluate the Decisions

	Political Effect	Description of Decision	Philosophical Reasoning: Support	Philosophical Reasoning: Oppose
<i>Miller</i>	262	120	141	161
<i>Shaw</i>	124	78	237	125
Total	386	198	378	286

Entries are numbers of assertions

The most often used reason arguing in support of the *Miller* decision was that race-conscious districts violate whites' equal protection rights, followed closely by the argument that notions of color-blindness are violated (See Table 4). All of the top five reasons are legal arguments in nature that were directly quoted or influenced by the majority opinion.

Table 4: Most Often Used Philosophical Reasons Supporting *Miller*

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Number</u>
1. Violation of whites' equal protection	33
2. Violates notions of colorblindness	32
3. Demands of the Dept. of Justice were invalid	29
4. Districts stereotype Black voters	27
5. Cannot abandon traditional districting principles	19
N=141	

The most often used reason opposing the *Miller* decision was that the voting rights of African Americans are not protected (see Table 5). The second most often used reason was an emotional response to the decision, that it was unfair or racist. Less often used were legal arguments pertaining to the constitutionality of the bizarreness standard. Little refutation was made of the argument that race-conscious districts stereotype Black voters. Nor was much attention paid in news coverage to the other minority groups, especially Latinos, affected by the decision.

Table 5: Most Often Used Philosophical Reasons Opposing *Miller*

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Number</u>
1. Fundamental rights of African Americans are not protected	32
2. Unfair and racist	29
3. Political realities require you to take race into account	27
4. No constitutional requirement for compact or contiguous districts	14
5. Remedy for past discrimination	12
6. White Plaintiff did not show injury	12
7. Increased the role of courts; law was settled	12
N=161	

The bias toward the majority opinion in *Shaw* was present not only in the number of assertions reported, but also in the types of reasons used to explain or evaluate the

decision. The most often used reason in evaluating *Shaw* was that race-conscious districts stereotype Black voters (see Table 6), followed by the arguments that these districts violate whites' equal protection rights and that they can only be understood as efforts to segregate voters. Assertions made in support of the *Shaw* decision, as in the *Miller* decision, were highly legal in nature and highly influenced by the majority opinion.

Table 6: Most Often Used Philosophical Reasons Supporting *Shaw*

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Number</u>
1. Stereotypes Black voters	71
2. Violates whites' equal protection rights	56
3. Shape so bizarre that it had to be an effort to segregate voters	48
4. Cannot abandon traditional districting principles	23
5. Violates notions of colorblindness	22
N=237	

While the most often used response opposing *Miller* was that the rights of African Americans are not protected as a result of the decision, the response to *Shaw* was not framed as a rights-based argument (see Table 7). Most of the *Shaw* arguments opposing the decision came out of the dissenting opinion, but again, the opposing arguments presented in the coverage did not provide a legal refutation of the decision or a philosophical justification for race-conscious districts. By omitting a balanced legal rebuttal of majority arguments, the media not only granted the majority opinion more weight, but obscured an essential side of the discussion over democratic representation.

Table 7: Most Often Used Philosophical Reasons Opposing *Shaw*

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Number</u>
1. Political realities require you to take race into account	27
2. No constitutional mandate for compact or contiguous districts	27
3. White plaintiffs did not show injury	25

- | | |
|--|----|
| 4. Increased the role of courts; law was settled | 12 |
| 5. Districts provide important opportunities for minority candidates | 11 |
- N=125

Network News Coverage

Overall, network coverage was similar in the breakdown of types of reasons used to the print coverage (see Table 8). In *Miller*, network coverage was relatively balanced between philosophical reasons given in support or in opposition to the decision, but was not as focused on the political effect as was print coverage. The coverage of *Shaw* again focused less on the effect of the decision, but more on arguments supporting the decision. Philosophical reasons in support of the decision were used more than twice as often as any other type of reason. Similar to the print coverage, opposing arguments chosen did not provide a legal refutation of the decision or a philosophical justification for race-conscious districts. Bias toward the majority in *Shaw*, a focus on political impact from *Miller*, and the lack of reported philosophical arguments from the opposition replicated the flaws in print coverage.

Table 8: Assertions Used in Network Coverage to Explain or Evaluate the Decisions

	Political Effect	Description of Decision	Philosophical Reasoning: Support	Philosophical Reasoning: Oppose
<i>Miller</i>	17	7	18	15
<i>Shaw</i>	6	4	16	7
Total	23	11	34	22

Entries are numbers of assertions.

STORY PLACEMENT: FRONT PAGE VS. INSIDE PAGE

Overall, front page coverage was more supportive of the decisions than news stories on inside pages, resulting in a significant relationship between story placement and assertion type⁶ (see Table 9). In the *Miller* decision, 37% of all assertions reported in front page stories supported the decision, compared with only 17% of assertions reported in inside page stories. The percentage of opposing assertions was equal between front page and inside page news stories (31% and 30% respectively). However, inside page stories tended to contain more neutral assertions: while over half (53%) of all assertions reported in inside articles were neutral, only one-third (32%) of assertions were neutral in front page articles.

Similar proportions existed in coverage of the *Shaw* decision that also yielded a significant relationship between assertion type and story placement.⁷ Front page articles were more supportive of the decision, while inside page stories tended to contain a greater number of neutral assertions. Despite the increase in the percentage of neutral assertions, bias toward the majority opinion was still present: inside page stories still contained twice as many supportive assertions than opposing assertions. Almost half (49%) of all assertions in front page articles supported the decision, compared to 38% of assertions in inside page articles. The percentage of neutral assertions also differed significantly between front and inside pages, but not opposing assertions.

Overall, readers were presented with biased coverage on the front pages of newspapers, quite biased in the case of *Shaw*. Since these front page articles were likely

⁶.Chi-squared test significant at the .001 level.

⁷.Chi-squared test significant at the .047 level.

read by far more readers and given more weight by them, the tilt in these articles was particularly influential in shaping public understanding.

Table 9. Front Page vs. Inside Page Coverage

	<i>Miller</i>				<i>Shaw</i>		
	Support	Neutral	Oppose		Support	Neutral	Oppose
Front Page	37%	32%	31%		49%	33%	18%
Inside Page	17%	53%	30%		38%	45%	16%

Miller: Assertion n=60; *Shaw*: Assertion n=37.

STORY PLACEMENT: LEAD VS. FOLLOW-UP STORIES

In network coverage of the *Miller* decision, two networks, ABC and NBC, ran a lead story followed immediately by a second story. In both cases, the lead stories were highly unbalanced. Over half of all assertions in the lead story were supportive of the decision: 63% for ABC and 50% for NBC. Within those stories, ABC ran 5 times as many supportive assertions as opposing the decision. NBC ran more than twice as many assertions supporting versus those opposing the decision. CBS ran only one story that was quite balanced.

The follow-up stories were more focused on the opposition to the decision, with twice to three times as many assertions opposing *Miller* than supporting it. However, in both cases, lead stories contained almost twice as many assertions as follow-up stories. Even if the networks attempted to create balance by running a second story, efforts were less successful since the first story was much more substantial in scope.

FRAMING: LANGUAGE USE

Print Coverage

Just as important as the amount of coverage supporters of and opposition to the decision received is the language choice that was employed within that coverage. Supporters of the decision, most notably the majority justices themselves, choose to employ evocative, symbolic language that helped to frame the decisions as a rights issue (see Table 10). In *Miller*, supporters utilized language such catch-phrases as “equal protection” and “color-blind” and likened race-conscious districts to efforts to “segregate” and “stereotype” Black voters. In this way, supporters of the decision co-opted much of the rhetoric upon which civil rights activists had traditionally relied. By framing the issue as a rights argument—the equal protection rights of white voters—the opposition had little philosophical ground left to provide them equal footing in this debate.

Also notable was the use of affirmative action, as many reporters compared race-conscious districts with other “racial preference” programs. The word “resegregate” was part of a sound-bite from an ACLU spokesperson which was often quoted. “Proportional representation” was also mentioned as an alternative to race-conscious districts.

Table 10: Language Use: Keywords in *Miller*

<u>Keyword</u>	<u>Number of Times Used</u>
1. Racial redistricting; race-based districting	26
2. Equal protection	23
3. Gerrymandering	21
4. Affirmative Action	17
5. Color-blind	13
6. Bizarre	12
7. Segregate	7
8. Resegregate	7
9. Proportional representation	7
10. Stereotyping	6

Supporters of the *Shaw* decision also chose to frame the issue as one of rights, employing the same phrases such as “equal protection,” “color-blind,” “segregate,” and “stereotyping” (see Table 11). Also often reported was Justice O’Connor’s description of the district as “political apartheid.” Coverage also included value judgements concerning the shape of the district that was often described as “bizarre,” “irregular” or “serpentine.” Lani Guinier was referred to frequently, as the decision occurred just weeks after President Clinton withdrew her nomination for a position in the Department of Justice, to illustrate that even an African American voting rights scholar opposed race-conscious districts. Interestingly, however, a separate study of the Guinier nomination itself by Shawn Rife (1998; cf. Coleman, 1993) revealed that initial coverage strongly slanted against her, with most criticism assuming she favored “quotas” and other unfair special arrangements to give minorities power. This suggests that minority electoral power may be something of a sore point in American political culture, exposing as it does possible flaws in the system. Perhaps this helps explain why none of the opposition’s language choices ranked in the top ten keywords used, and why coverage contained little refutation of the rights-based claims of those favoring the Court’s position.

The use of vivid language was attributed to opponents of race-conscious districts far more frequently than supporters. The covert bias presented in language use in the coverage of these decisions compounded other biases created in the quantity and quality of coverage. Value judgements inherent in much of the language choices, describing the districts in such a negative and immoral light, result in the production of yet another set of media images that remain problematic for race relations.

Table 11: Language Use: Keywords in *Shaw*

<u>Keyword</u>	<u>Number of Times Used</u>
1. Gerrymandering	91
2. Bizarre	32
3. Equal protection	23
4. Snakes or Serpentine	21
5. Apartheid	20
6. Color-blind	18
7. Segregate	12
8. Lani Guinier	8
9. Stereotyping	7
10. Irregular	7
Network Coverage	

In network coverage of the *Miller* decision, two of the three networks used the words gerrymandering and color-blind. In coverage of the *Shaw* decision, all three networks used the words bizarre and snakes (as a verb) in describing the district; two used gerrymandering. While the range of biased language was less in network coverage than in print coverage, language bias was present nevertheless.

QUOTATIONS FROM THE DECISION: BIAS TOWARD THE MAJORITY

The quantity, as well as the quality, of the quotations chosen from the majority opinions exceeded that of quotations reported from the dissenting opinions. In print coverage of the *Miller* decision, the majority opinion was directly quoted twice as often (66 times) as the dissenting opinion (36 times). In the coverage of the *Shaw* decision, the majority opinion was directly quoted nearly four times as often (83 times) as the dissenting opinion (22 times).

The quality of quotations selected also differed. The majority opinion was used to illustrate the legal reasoning, as well as philosophical foundation, behind the decision. The majority quotations were *substantive*. The quotations reported from the dissenting opinion tended to focus on the impact of the decision on future litigation and on state

legislatures, not on rebutting legal arguments presented in the majority opinion. They gave no substantive support for the notion that racially-conscious districts might have legitimacy. The result was a one-sided argument in the coverage, with strong quotations comprised of legal justification supporting the decision set alongside little corresponding debate or refutation from the dissenting justices (see Tables 12 and 13).

In the coverage of *Miller*, quotations from the majority opinion argued that carving racial blocs doesn't serve to end discrimination, that legislatures cannot segregate voters on the basis of race, and that this district subordinated race-neutral principles. The most often quoted statements from the dissenting opinion again were not substantive; these were that "this is not the court's final word" and that the decision "renders districting perilous work for state legislatures."

In the coverage of *Shaw*, quotations chosen from the majority opinion compared the district to political apartheid, stated that the district was an effort to segregate voters, and argued that majority-minority districts carry us away from the goal of a colorblind system and result in lasting harm to minority voters. The dissent was not often quoted.

The problem was not that the dissent lacked the sound-bite quality of the majority opinion. Indeed, Justice Ginsberg argued in her dissent in *Miller* that "apportionment schemes, by their very nature, assemble people in groups. That ethnicity defines some of these groups is a political reality." Justice Stevens argued that "I do not see how a districting plan that favors the politically weak can violate equal protection. The Constitution does not mandate any form of proportional representation, but it certainly permits a State to adopt a policy that promotes fair representation of different groups." Similarly, Justice Stevens argued in *Shaw*, that "the duty to govern impartially . . . is not

violated when the majority acts to facilitate the election of a member of a group that lacks such power.” None of these statements were quoted more than twice. Reporters chose quotations less philosophical and less substantive.

Table 12: Supreme Court Quotations from *Miller*

1. “Race was the predominant factor motivating the drawing of the 11th district.” (Majority) (14)
2. “The goal of eradication of invidious discrimination . . . is never assured nor well served. . . by carving electorates into racial blocs.” (Majority) (10)
3. “Legal attacks will succeed when [plaintiffs] show that legislatures have subordinated traditional race-neutral districting principles to racial considerations.” (Majority) (6)
4. “Just as the State may not . . . segregate citizens on the basis of race in its public parks, buses, golf courses, beaches and schools, . . . it may not separate its citizens into different voting districts on the basis of race.” (Majority) (4)
5. “This is not the court’s final word.” (Dissenting) (4)

Table 13: Supreme Court Quotations from *Shaw*

1. “A plan that includes in one districts individuals . . . who may have little in common with one another but the color of their skin, bears an uncomfortable resemblance to political apartheid.” (Majority) (16)
2. “So highly irregular that, on its face, it rationally cannot be understood as anything other than an effort to segregat(e) . . . voters on the basis of race.” (Majority) (16)
3. “Racial gerrymandering, even for remedial purposes, may balkanize us further into competing racial factions; it threatens to carry us further from the goal of a political system in which race no longer matters.” (Majority) (15)
4. “Racial classifications of any sort pose the risk of lasting harm to our society. They reinforce the belief . . . that individuals should be judged by the color of their skin.” (Majority) (11)
5. “It is unsettling how closely the North Carolina plan resembles the most egregious racial gerrymanders of the past.” (Majority) (9)

ACCURACY: HISTORY OF RACE-CONSCIOUS DISTRICTING

The use of majority-minority districts remains problematic for many in the civil rights community due in part to the political consequences that it creates. Concentrating minority voters into one or two districts has resulted in the election of unprecedented numbers of minority Congressional representatives. But it also has created adjacent

conservative districts, resulting in the election of several new Republicans members. Some political analysts argue that Democrats lost control of the US House of Representatives in 1994 due largely to the creation of majority-minority districts. There were more minorities in Congress, but as Democrats lost majority status, they had less power.

Given the implications for changes in political control, it is not surprising that state legislative coalitions have developed between Republicans and minority members around such redistricting plans. It was the Justice Department under the Bush Administration that pushed aggressively for more majority-minority districts, particularly in the South.

The print coverage of these decisions largely chose to characterize majority-minority districts as an extremist, liberal idea which has now been corrected by conservative reasoning, ignoring the fact that the conservative Bush Administration played an important role in the creation of the districts in the first place. The print coverage rarely mentioned the alliance between Republicans and minorities in crafting these districts. In the coverage of both the *Miller* and *Shaw* decisions, only 1% of assertions mentioned this alliance (Miller: N=7; Shaw: N=7). Virtually no mention was offered of the Bush Administration's involvement in pushing states to draw such districts. When mention was made regarding the Justice Department's insistence for majority-minority districts, it was rarely identified as the *Bush Administration's* Justice Department. While 6% of assertions in the print coverage of *Miller* and 5% of the assertions in the coverage of *Shaw* referred to the involvement of the Justice Department, less than 1 in 4 of these assertions referenced the fact that this involvement occurred

under the Bush Administration (*Miller*: N=46; *Shaw*: N=36). Given that the Court decisions were rendered during the subsequent (Democratic) administration, one that has been more aggressive and public in promoting voting rights, the inference that the critique of the Justice Department referred to the current administration was likely made quite frequently.

Television coverage was similar to that in newspapers. Six assertions (10% of total assertions) in the *Miller* decision referenced the involvement of the Justice Department in creating these districts. No mention was made of the Bush Administration however. Only one assertion was made of the alliance between Republicans and minorities. In coverage of *Shaw*, only one assertion mentioned the Justice Department's involvement; no mention was made of the Bush Administration.

Moreover, little reference was made to this country's 200-year history of gerrymandering. Districts have been created along lines of all types of interests for the purpose of gaining political influence. Districts have been drawn to favor agricultural interests, the interests of labor, as well as many ethnic interests—not to mention partisan interests. Yet coverage of districts drawn along racial interests seems to portray race as an unjustifiable interest, singled out as a violation of our democratic principles. In both decisions, less than 2% of assertions in print coverage made any mention of the long history of gerrymandering over two centuries. Television coverage did not mention any history of gerrymandering.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Media

Review Process for Balance. Given that coverage of the Supreme Court tends to focus more heavily on the majority opinion than the dissenting, bias already exists despite the most objective of media intentions. This bias naturally grows out of the media's interest in power and results rather than philosophical discourse; the minority opinion becomes largely a curiosity whereas the majority opinion determines policy. But the disinclination to look at news for its potential to encourage civic deliberation meant, particularly for the *Shaw* decision, that coverage was not truly balanced. An additional step is needed, either through a formal editing process or an informal review, to reexamine articles for fairness and balance in light of the need to genuinely inform a democratic citizenry.

2. *Provide Training for Supreme Court Correspondents.* Linda Greenhouse, a Supreme Court correspondent for the *New York Times*, has stated that "inattentiveness or lack of sophistication on the part of those who cover the Court. . . is surely an obstacle to good journalism about the Court."⁸ Court decisions are complex and difficult to interpret. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that opinions are released, but not packaged by the Court. This lack of "spin control" by the Court in issuing opinions leaves the reporter free to frame the story as they wish. Unlike other political institutions, the Court does not discern for the reporter where the news value lies in issuing its opinions. Given the technical and complex nature of the subject matter, as well as the enhanced framing and

⁸.Greenhouse, Linda. 1996. "Telling the Court's Story: Justice and Journalism at the Supreme Court." *The Yale Law Journal* Vol. 105(6): 1537-1561.

interpreting role of the Supreme Court reporter, an informed and trained news staff is essential to accurate and balanced coverage of Supreme Court decisions.

The Supreme Court

The Supreme Court has made initial efforts to accommodate the press. Project Hermes, the electronic transmission of opinions, is one such accommodation. However, other reforms would assist in improving the coverage of the Court.

1. *Release transcripts of arguments in a timely fashion.* Deadlines become even more constraining when transcripts are not released early enough in the day. Giving reporters more time to digest complex information may improve their accuracy and understanding.
2. *Space Out Opinions During a Given Week.* Releasing multiple decisions in one or two days reduces the quality of reporting. Allowing correspondents needed time between decisions will enable them to better report all decisions.
3. *Expand the Role of the Court Information Officer.* The Information Officer could be better utilized to create and maintain relations with the press, advise and inform reporters of Court activities, and to provide a mechanism for feedback for reporters' questions.

Advocates for Increased Minority Representation

1. *Organized Press Strategy.* Given the media's record on covering race issues, coupled with the inherent shortcomings of Supreme Court coverage, advocates for increased minority representation must be prepared with an organized press strategy. As demonstrated by this analysis, the media tend to focus more heavily on effect than substance, as well as on the majority opinion over the dissenting opinion. Given this bias, advocates should formulate a press strategy aimed at responding to legal arguments

for which refutations are not likely to be included in coverage of the dissent, as well as establishing a philosophical foundation for efforts to increase minority representation.

CONCLUSION

Media coverage of districting cases indicate that reticence, if not hostility, characterizes sentiments toward mechanisms designed to increase minority representation. Again, we do not mean to issue any judgment ourselves about the best way to enhance representation of geographically dispersed minority groups. We only mean to suggest the implicit ways such news coverage discourages rational, open-minded deliberation about the issue. Coverage of these cases illustrate biases of the media toward the majority opinion, as well as a lack of effort on the part of reporters to create true balance in their stories. Front page and lead stories, in particular, tended to be more supportive of the announced decision, at least in these cases.

This analysis also demonstrates the success of supporters of the decision in framing electoral representation issues as rights-based arguments in terms of protecting the rights of whites, not of underrepresented minority groups. Future efforts of advocates for increased minority representation would need to recapture and redefine rights-based rhetoric in order to be successful in advocacy efforts. At the same time, in a subtle but profound way, the slant of the coverage reinforces the lesson that ethnic minorities are “special interests,” implying that attempts to secure fair representation for them are somehow efforts to rig the game unfairly against the majority. In this sense the coverage contributes to inter-group alienation and distrust. If our democracy is to be a representative one, we must be able to engage in productive public discourse regarding

mechanisms to provide fair minority representation. Balanced media coverage of such mechanisms is a critical step in encouraging that discussion.

APPENDICES TO CHAPTER 3

APPENDIX 1: BALANCE

Balance in News Coverage of *Miller*

<u>Newspaper*</u>	<u>Ratio of Support to Oppose</u>
Wall Street Journal	2 : 1
LA Times	1 : 2
Chicago Sun Times	2 : 1
Houston Chronicle	1 : 1.8
Dallas Morning News	1 : 1.7
USA Today	1 : 1.7
Newsday	1.3 : 1
Washington Post	1.3 : 1
New York Times	1.2 : 1
Chicago Tribune	1.1 : 1
Boston Globe	1 : 1

*Note: Editorials were excluded from the calculation of the support-oppose ratio. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and the *San Diego Union Tribune* carried only editorials.

<u>News magazine</u>	<u>Ratio of Support to Oppose</u>
Time	1.3 : 1
Newsweek	1 : 1.3

Balance in News Coverage of *Shaw*

<u>Newspaper*</u>	<u>Ratio of Support to Oppose</u>
Cleveland Plain Dealer	6 : 1
Wall Street Journal	4 : 1
Boston Globe	3.6 : 1
Chicago Sun Times	3.5 : 1
Houston Chronicle	3.2 : 1
New York Times	3.1 : 1
San Diego Union Tribune	3 : 1
Chicago Tribune	2.5 : 1
Dallas Morning News	1.6 : 1
Washington Post	1.3 : 1
USA Today	1.2 : 1

*Note Editorials were excluded from the calculation of the support-oppose ratio. The *LA Times* carried only editorials. *Newsday* was unavailable for the *Shaw* sample.

<u>Newsmagazine</u>	<u>Ratio of Support to Oppose</u>
Newsweek	4 : 1
Time	2.4 : 1

APPENDIX 2: Most Often Used Reasons for Explaining/Evaluating *Miller*

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Type of assertion</u>
1. Will result in many lawsuits	83	Political Effect
2. Will help Republicans/Democrats	66	Political Effect
3. Prohibited use of race as predominant factor	66	Description
4. Will result in fewer minorities in Congress	62	Political Effect
5. Violation of equal protection for whites	33	Philosophical: Pro
6. Violates notion of colorblindness	32	Philosophical: Pro
7. Fundamental rights of African-Americans not protected	32	Philosophical: Anti
8. Demands of the Dept. of Justice were invalid	29	Philosophical: Pro
9. Decision was unfair and racist	29	Philosophical: Anti
10. Increased the standard for the use of race	28	Description

APPENDIX 3: Most Often Used Reasons Explaining/Evaluating *Shaw*

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Type of Assertion</u>
1. Stereotypes Black voters	71	Philosophical: Pro
2. Violation of whites' equal protection	56	Philosophical: Pro
3. Shape so bizarre that it had to be an effort to segregate voters	48	Philosophical: Pro
4. Will result in many lawsuits	41	Political Effect
5. Suit will go back to lower court	30	Description
6. Reflects America's uncertainty about using racial preferences	27	Political Effect
7. Political realities require you to take race into account	27	Philosophical: Anti
8. No constitutional requirement for compact or contiguous districts	27	Philosophical: Anti
9. White plaintiffs did not show injury	25	Philosophical: Anti
10. Still allows use of race to redress a proven harm	24	Description
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Chapter 4

Race and Ethnicity at the Movies

Part I: Ethnic Representation in Hollywood Film Casts

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INTRODUCTION

We began with the hypothesis that Hollywood's depictions would provide a more generally positive or at least varied representation of race and ethnicity in comparison to other media outlets, such as television news. However, pilot studies also indicated that we would find continued problems in minority representations. The specific uses of minority actors, we theorized, could contribute to continued stereotyping. Exclusion of minority actors from certain social roles or behaviors could promote, especially among White audiences, a sense of non-Whites as fundamentally different and perhaps in some regards inferior. This could hold despite the great progress the film industry has made in accepting Blacks (if not other minorities) in starring roles over the past decade or so.

In order to explore this thesis, we probed the top earning films of 1996, those that earned \$25 million or more at the box office in the United States, excluding animated and animal films.¹ In Part I, we analyze the top ten actors in each film as determined by the official listing of the casts.² We probed each film by cast rank order, and the race and

¹ Thus, of the top 70 grossing films (over \$25 million U.S. box office), we analyzed 63. The films we excluded from our study were: *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (#13); *Toy Story* (#31); *Beavis and Butt-head Do America* (#32); *Muppet Treasure Island* (#43); *Homeward Bound II* (#50); *James and the Giant Peach* (#57); and *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (#59).

² In a few cases we could not determine ethnicity and in a few others we could not find a full

gender of each character.³ The idea was to see if minorities consistently attain high cast rank, which would mean the experiences of the characters they play would form a central concern of the movies. We conceived this as a relatively objective test of the equality of treatment for minority actors and characters within mainstream Hollywood film. In Part II we report the results of a detailed quantitative content analysis of several kinds of behavior that preliminary study suggested might differentiate White and non-White characters. Part III offers a brief qualitative analysis of race in the two highest-earning films with White-dominated casts in which a Black man was one of the top two protagonists: *Independence Day* and *Jerry Maguire*. The story we shall tell is mixed: evidence of heartening progress combined with indications of continued subtle stereotyping and distancing or exclusion of African Americans, patterns compounded when it comes to Latinos and Asians by sheer neglect.

Part I Introduction

The chief method of Part I of our study was to analyze the race or ethnicity of the top 10 cast members, as determined by official cast listings, in the 63 films grossing more than \$25 million in 1996. The idea was to see whether people of color are obtaining not

listing of ten cast members. As a result, the final number of actors in our sample of top-ten cast members in 63 movies is not 630 but 609.

³ Our original analysis included a breakdown of whether each character fell into criminal and non-criminal categories as well as each character's occupational status in the respective films. Unfortunately, we had difficulty interpreting what constituted criminality. The notion of criminal status, except where blatantly obvious, is difficult to categorize. We decided not to include an analysis of this category because open-ended and inconclusive issues remained. For example, we were faced with questions such as whether a character's past criminal acts should be discounted; and whether a character was the hero of the film even though or because he or she partook in criminal acts. We encountered a somewhat different problem with occupational status. In some movies, occupational status could not be determined, particularly where a character was identified as simply a "mother" or a "father." While we have seen some patterns in terms of racial/ethnic

merely visibility but also centrality in the influential characterizations of Hollywood. This analysis is a tougher undertaking than may at first appear. Many films center their action on four or five speaking parts. Even an actor listed sixth or seventh in the credits may appear on screen for just a few minutes and have only a handful of lines; in some cases this made it difficult for us even to determine who an actor was in a film, let alone what ethnicity he/she is (or represented in the film). At the same time, this very problem demonstrates why mere visibility in films cannot be equated with having a noticeable or memorable role that might influence audience perceptions. We collected our data using two primary methods: 1) we viewed some movies firsthand, and 2) we referred to on-line databases.⁴

We recognize that this look at one year of top Hollywood films has its limitations, but we believe that even such a limited study offers some evidence of the current trends in Hollywood film making. To our knowledge this is the first study of its type; it is, we hope, a useful new approach, not a definitive final chapter, in the systematic study of ethnic representation in mainstream movies. For example, our study shows that the pigeonholing of Blacks in certain types of roles, usually as subordinate to their White counterparts, is still apparent in mainstream Hollywood film. While the film industry is clearly opening up more roles for Black actors, including some prominent starring positions, many are still typecast in ways that echo the historical stereotypes of Blacks in previous epochs of America film. Although there are more major roles for Black actors, a fairly small group of actors fill them. Many of these actors are what we identify as

status and a character's role (which are included in our analysis), for the most part we were unable to fill in sufficient information to complete a statistical analysis of this category.

⁴The internet movie databases used were as follows: <<http://us.imdb.com/search>>, <<http://cinemania.msn.com/Default/Entry?theurl=http%3A//cinemania.msn.com/Movie/Index>>.

multi-modal⁵ stars, having entered the Hollywood scene after successful careers in other arenas, including prime time television, music, and sports; industry executives may feel that familiarity from these former careers helps generate acceptability to majority group audiences.

Another trend we note is that the Black female remains barely visible in most mainstream⁶ films to the extent that where a movie does not have a majority Black cast (and presumably is not catering to a majority Black audience)⁷, Black women are rarely seen. In no case did a Black woman receive top billing in a non-majority Black film.

Equally problematic, it remains difficult even to study trends about the treatment of other ethnicities in the film industry, such as Asians and Latinos. That is because these minority groups remain virtually invisible in Hollywood, having much less representation than their Black (or White) counterparts.⁸ Where Latinos and Asians are present, their roles perpetuate societal stereotypes, casting them largely as maids and karate heroes.⁹

Our study does not address minority film making per se, or Black film making in particular, insofar as these films are not listed among the top 70 more “mainstream”

<<http://www.tvguide.com/movies/database/>>, and <<http://moviepeople.hollywood.com/>>.

⁵ Multi-modal stars are those actors or actresses who were either top musicians, television actors, comedians, athletes and/or dancers prior to/or concurrent with their entry into Hollywood.

⁶ For the purposes of this paper, mainstream films are the top 70 films which grossed the most in 1996—our sample pool.

⁷ We define movies with majority Black casts as those with five or more Black actors listed among the top ten cast ranked characters. We realize, however, that some films that do not have a majority Black cast may still have a large Black audience.

⁸ No film in our study included a majority Latino cast and only one film was majority Asian. We note that only one Latino actor received top billing in our sample (Joseph Melito in *12 Monkeys*). We also note that the only majority Asian film, which was in fact one of the five films in which there were any Asian actors/characters at all, was a karate film (*Rumble in the Bronx*) starring the very popular multi-modal actor/martial artist Jackie Chan. This is of course the prototypical role for Asian male stars.

⁹ *Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, and *Rumble in the Bronx*.

films.¹⁰ We believe that an inclusion of these films would have enhanced our study and would have provided important insights on the evolving trends in film making. However, in keeping with the basic emphasis of this report on the impacts of media upon the majority group, we decided to focus on those films mostly likely to reach White Americans. In addition, it would be useful to trace the portrayals of African Americans and other minorities over the past 30 or 40 years, through the 1960's Civil Rights Movement, 1970's Blaxploitation films, 1980's Black comedy films (including Black/White partner or "Buddy" films)¹¹ and the rise of films by the 1990's young Black directors. However, we hope that our accounts of the few popular majority-Black films such as *Nutty Professor*, *Set It Off*, *The Preacher's Wife* and *Waiting to Exhale* which do appear in the 1996 shed some light on these issues.

While we have no specific data about the demographic composition of the audiences who watch these top 70 films, we are confident that their messages reach a significant number in our society. Films that gross \$100 million at the box office are seen by tens of millions of Americans on the big screen alone; millions more see the videotape and broadcast versions. While we found limited minority representation in our

¹⁰ Of the films in our sample pool, Black writer, director and star Martin Lawrence created *A Thin Line Between Love and Hate*. Outside of our sample, *Don't Be A Menace* (#91 of the top 100 grossing films of 1996), was a majority Black film whose two Black stars, Marlon and Shawn Wayans, co-wrote the screenplay. The film was produced by their brother, Keenan Ivory Wayans. Also appearing within our sample is *Rumble in the Bronx*, the only Asian made film, with Asian screenwriters, producers and an Asian director. John Woo is another Asian director of one of our mainstream films *Broken Arrow*.

¹¹ One commentator points out that the Buddy pictures of the 1980s and early 1990s translated into the most significant number of roles for Black male actors since Blaxploitation. Jones, Jacquie. *The Construction of Black Sexuality from Black American Cinema*. Ed. by Manthia Diawara. 1993, Routledge & Keegan Paul, Ltd. at 251. These buddy films, which on a more limited basis, still exist, seemingly follow the same trend we see today: the roles were available to a limited number of prominent Black actors such as Richard Pryor in *Stir Crazy* and notably Eddie Murphy in the *48 Hours* and *Beverly Hills Cop* films. Donald Bogle's *Toms, Coons,*

film sample, we note that there is not a corresponding lag in minority representation as theatergoers. In fact, one commentator asserts that half of the movie-goers are under the age of eighteen, and a disproportionate number of them are African Americans.¹² Recent surveys indicate that Blacks and Latinos make up about one-third of the movie-going audience.¹³

A probe of the social and/or psychological impact of these films on the audience is beyond the scope of this study, but we take as our starting point the notion that Hollywood makes up a large part of American popular culture and as such helps shape the notions, ideas and values that we have about ourselves and about each other.¹⁴

In analyzing these issues, we note that understanding "race" and/or racial and/or ethnic representation in the media is complex. However, to the extent that film images allegedly represent reality, society appears to be influenced by them.¹⁵ Some observers note that "the media's tendency [...] towards simplification, means that sophisticated discussions which contextualize complicated ideas, histories and events are routinely

Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks (New York: Continuum, 1989) offers a useful historical analysis of Blacks in mainstream Hollywood productions; also Ed Guerrero's *Framing Blackness*, cited below.

¹² Jones, Jacquie. *The Construction of Black Sexuality* at 248.

¹³ Braxton, Greg. "Minority Leaders See Little to Celebrate in Oscar Nominations," L.A. Times Entertainment, February 13, 1997.

¹⁴ Although commenting on the British media in particular, one observer suggests that institutions like the media are "part of the dominant means of *ideological* production. What they 'produce' is, precisely, representations of the social world, images, descriptions, explanations and frames for understanding how the world is and why it works as it is said and shown to work...the media construct for us is a definition of what *race* is, what meaning the imagery of race carries, and what the 'problem of race' is understood to be." Hall, Stuart. *The Whites of their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media in The Media Reader*, Alvarado, Manuel and Thompson, John O., eds. London: BFI Publishing, 1990 at 11.

¹⁵ One observer suggests that Hollywood films are arguably the premiere socializing agency of American society. They "prescribe behavior, establish values, and impart grave societal information." Jones, Jacquie. *The Construction of Black Sexuality* at 248.

ignored in favor of reductionist explanations which the imagined mass audience will easily understand.”¹⁶

Thus, while we recognize that this sample is only a snapshot of a dynamic industry, we analyze it in an effort to understand how the film media’s imagery might well be digested by the mass audience, especially the majority White group. We note that it may be impossible to have film images that are truly “race neutral,” however this does not mean perpetuation of societal stereotypes should go unremarked. One observer notes, “...distorted pictures attack our very being. They go for the jugular emotionally. Stereotypes shrivel our humanity...[H]igh-level worrying about images that injure is not marginal to media studies, but central to them.”¹⁷

Part I of this chapter is divided into the following sub-parts: Sub-Part 1.1 discusses *Recurring Trends in Hollywood Film*; Sub-Part 1.2 addresses *Typical Occupations of Minority Actors*; Sub-Part 1.3 considers *Inter-Racial Relationships*; Sub-Part 1.4 focuses on *Recommendations for Change*; and we conclude in Sub-Part 1.5.

1.1: Recurring Trends in Hollywood Film

There have been important advances in Hollywood’s presentation of race and gender since the 1960’s, although many problems remain, some subtle, others glaring. As we approach the 21st century, the following trends still appear to be true: Whites (both males and females) remain predominant in mainstream films; Black males star in

¹⁶ Ross, Karen. *Black and White Media: Black Images in Popular Film and Television*, Cambridge: Polity Press/Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996 at 4.

¹⁷ Lester, Paul Martin, ed. *Images That Injure: Pictorial Images in the Media*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996 at 237.

films mainly about sports, violence, crime, and/or sex;¹⁸ Black females are practically invisible outside of movies that are specifically about them and which presumably cater to majority Black audiences¹⁹; and Asians and Latinos are marginalized altogether.

Despite these negative trends, our study revealed some important positive ones. A Black male was ranked first in the cast credits in 7 of the films in our sample. Three of these films had mostly-White casts: Will Smith in *Independence Day*, Denzel Washington in *Courage Under Fire*, and Sinbad in *First Kid*. The other films where Black males received top billing had majority Black casts, featuring: Eddie Murphy in *Nutty Professor*, Denzel Washington in the *Preacher's Wife*, Martin Lawrence in *A Thin Line Between Love and Hate* and Michael Jordan in *Space Jam*. Four of the six Black males appearing as lead actor in a film also appear in other mass entertainment media, such as music, sports and television. We refer to them as multi-modal stars.²⁰ As such, they are faces that are more familiar in American homes and presumably, the larger audience is more comfortable with them. Thus, often, Black actors and actresses who make it onto Hollywood screens have already entered mainstream culture by other means. For example, of the nine Black actors and actresses who received top billing in

¹⁸ Examples of these movies include: *Space Jam*, *Set It Off*, and *A Thin Line Between Love and Hate*.

¹⁹ There are only 17 movies in which Black females appear, 6 of which consist of majority Black casts.

²⁰ Of the eighty-eight Black actors cast in 102 different roles listed in the top 70 films, twenty-one or approximately 24% of them are what we would call multi-modal stars. We note, however, that there are film stars of all races and ethnicities who are multi-modal, and who use their name recognition to get a start in the competitive world of Hollywood films. For instance, White actress Helen Hunt starred in *Twister* but gained fame on the television program *Mad About You*, and White actor Robin Williams who played in *The Birdcage*, and *Jack*, also starred in the television hit *Mork & Mindy*. However, it is possible that there is a larger group of minority multi-modal stars simply because it may be harder for minorities to gain access to Hollywood filmmakers, and there is a scarcity of minority roles.

our sample,²¹ seven of them attained their initial fame outside of the Hollywood film industry,²² many achieving success with “cross-over” audiences in television comedies. This trend also appears among many of the other Black actors and actresses who did not receive the number one billing in our sample but are present within the top ten cast ranks.

Whites are still most prominent in mainstream film. In our study, 32% of films overall had an all-White cast (within the top ten cast rank). In 55% of these films, at least 90% of the top ten actors were White, and in 70% of these films, at least eight of the top ten actors and actresses were White. White male actors totalled 324, comprising 53.2% of the total actors in our sample. The 155 White females formed 25.4% of the actor pool, Black males 11.8% (n=72), and Black females 5.1% (n=31). Latinos and Asians were barely visible, comprising 2.1% and 1.8% of the total.

It is true that “A-list actors” such as Morgan Freeman and Denzel Washington consistently find work, but even beyond the scope of this study, recent statistics released by the Screens Actors Guild support the view that opportunities for many minority actors may be limited. Employment of Black actors is currently 14% of the Guild’s total,²³ a rise of 3 percentage points from the beginning of the decade. Latino employment accounts for 4% of the Guild’s total, and all minorities overall account for 19%.²⁴ This

²¹ Because Denzel Washington received top billing twice, there are actually ten movies in which Black actors received top billing.

²² These actors are: Will Smith, a rap singer and former star of the long-running television comedy, *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*; Eddie Murphy, one of the most famous former cast members of *Saturday Night Live*; Michael Jordan, NBA all star and member of the champion Chicago Bulls; Martin Lawrence, former star of the long-running television comedy *Martin*; Jada Pinkett, former cast member of the *Cosby Show* spin-off, *A Different World*; Whitney Houston, Grammy award winning singer; Sinbad, former cast member of *A Different World* and current late night talk show host of *Vibe*; and Denzel Washington formerly starred on *St. Elsewhere*.

²³ We note that this is comparable with the percentage of Blacks in the population, and our guess is that the same is not true of many other occupations.

²⁴ “Year Protest, Race Still Counts in Hollywood,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 26, 1997.

means that over 80% of the members of the Screen Actor's Guild are Whites.²⁵ This distribution actually parallels our own findings based on the 1996 sample, in which 78% of the top-ten casts were White.

When we calculated the average cast rank of each group (which could theoretically run from 1, the highest-billed actor, to 10), we found that Blacks and Whites were not as far apart as one might expect. Here are the average ranks:

	Avg. rank	Std. Dev.	Number
Black male	6.0000	2.7782	72
Black female	4.5806	2.5920	31
White male	5.2531	2.8672	324
White female	5.3548	2.8779	155
Latino male	7.1000	2.5144	10
Latino female	6.0000	2.0000	3
Asian male	6.3333	2.5495	9
Asian female	2.5000	.7071	2
Other	9.3333	1.1547	3

One could read these numbers optimistically as showing that the average Black male actor attains a cast rank not far from the average White; and indeed the average female Black actor actually ranks slightly higher than the average female White.

These numbers do not tell the whole story, however. White actors, unlike Blacks, Latinos, and Asians, played a myriad of roles; they do not appear to be stereotyped into certain roles or precluded from others. White actors in the top grossing films played characters ranging from the President of the United States to a crazed kidnapper and everything in between.²⁶ When Blacks appeared among the top ten cast members, they were most often among the bottom seven characters. In twenty of the movies overall, they were among the bottom seven of the top ten billed characters. Blacks appeared

²⁵ It is 81% because only 19% is done by non-Whites.

among the top three of the top ten billed characters in seventeen movies. Five of these had majority Black casts and were presumably aimed heavily if not primarily at minority audiences. Still, this means that in 12 of the 63 top movies of 1996, at least one Black person had a starring (i.e. top-3 billing) role. And Black males were represented somewhere in the top ten cast ranking for slightly over half of all the films.²⁷ Black women in comparison appeared somewhere within the top-ten ranks in only 27% of these films. For the most part, in the films where at least 80% of the top billed actors were White, the remainder of the top billed actors were Black males.

There were some exceptions to this general trend.²⁸ Vanessa Williams²⁹ appeared on the top ten list in *Eraser*, Alfre Woodard in *Primal Fear*, LaTanya Fisher in *The Truth About Cats and Dogs*, Eartha Kitt in *Harriet the Spy*, Vanessa Bell Calloway in *Daylight*, and Regina King in *Jerry Maguire*. But more so than for Black males, Black women were most prominent in films that involved Blacks and other minorities.³⁰ Whereas they comprised 27% of the top ten billed actors/actresses overall, 41% of the time, the films they appeared in were "minority" films.³¹ Examples of these films are *Preacher's Wife*, *A Thin Line Between Love and Hate*, and *Waiting to Exhale*. In addition to sharing a

²⁶ White actors played the President of the United States in *Independence Day* and *First Kid*, and a kidnapper in *Ransom*.

²⁷ Only 1/5 of the time were these films with majority minority actors, whereas for Black females, 2/5 of the time, their appearances were in majority minority films. The general point is that Black females have had a harder time breaking into starring roles than Black males.

²⁸ Outside of the Black/White dichotomy, these exceptions included four Latino/a actors: Raymond Cruz in *Up Close and Personal*, Renoly Santiago in *Daylight*, Jennifer Lopez in *Jack*, and E.J. De La Pena in *Jingle All the Way*.

²⁹ Vanessa Williams is another example of a multi-modal actress. She not only was the first Black woman to be crowned Miss America, she also was a successful singer before appearing on screen.

³⁰ These films include: *Set it Off*; *Waiting to Exhale*; *The Preacher's Wife*; and *Eddie*. They also include Jada Pinkett's role in *The Nutty Professor*, Regina King in *Jerry Maguire*, and Regina Taylor in *Courage Under Fire*, all of which depict these women as the love interests or wives of their higher cast ranked Black male counterparts.

predominantly Black cast, these films share a theme, as well. All three films are stories about love in some form or other. The films focus on the difficulty Black women have in finding love, particularly with eligible Black men. For example, *Waiting to Exhale* is a story of four upper-class Black women, who, while successful in other aspects of their lives, are not successful in love. They have “less than ideal” love relationships with Black men. The topic of Black sexuality in films has been explored before. One commentator recognizes a trend in which Black male characters in film are portrayed as unable to create or maintain intimate relationships.³² This inability may fuel societal stereotypes about Black males.³³ This theme is present in three of the majority Black movies—notably, in the only three with all Black casts.³⁴

However, Black women played other roles outside of the Black male/female love theme. Black women were portrayed in other stereotypical “Black” roles in *Eddie* and *Set It Off* (the other two films where Black women were the top billed actresses). Ironically, these characters are more related to stereotypes of Black men than of Black women. In *Eddie*, Whoopi Goldberg portrays an obsessed New York Knicks fan who impresses the owner of the NBA team so much that she becomes the coach. Here, the historical “Black male as athlete” theme shines through, yet it is embodied in a Black female, who is not shown as possessing any particular athletic prowess. In *Set It Off*, Jada Pinkett, Queen Latifah, Vivica Fox and Kimberly Elise portray four poor Black women living in South Central Los Angeles. The women become bank robbers in order to find their way out of

³¹ We define minority films as those films with majority Black casts.

³² Jones, Jacquie. *The Construction of Black Sexuality* at 247.

³³ *Id.* at 250.

³⁴ These movies are: *A Thin Line Between Love and Hate* in which Martin Lawrence portrays a stereotypical young Black “player;” *The Preacher’s Wife* where Whitney Houston plays a

the ghetto. Much like the recently successful films that portray Black male “gangsta” life (including *Menace to Society*, *Boyz ‘N the Hood*—products of Black filmmakers), this film portrays the “Black male as gangster” theme, except the tables are slightly turned. The Black women in the film are the gun-toters and the story is further complicated by their webs of relationships with their families and loved ones. Thus, while these two films portray Blacks in a stereotypical manner, their twists may in fact represent Hollywood’s attempt to dispel certain gender myths and transcend gender-related stereotypes. As such they provide fruitful examples of the complexity of Hollywood’s representations of African Americans. By no means entirely negative or one-dimensional, some of these films are arguably conveying a more nuanced and complex portrait of African American life than any other mass medium. However, adding to the complexity, this does not mean those films are themselves free of stereotyping or other negative images. We consider the complex melding of stereotype and counter-stereotype further in Part III.

Asians were the least visible and most under represented minority group in the Hollywood industry (excluding our “other” category). Besides B.D. Wong’s appearances in *Executive Decision* and in *Father of the Bride*, Ernest Liu in *From Dust Till Dawn*, and Jeff Imada in *Escape from L.A.*, Asians were not among the top billed actors in Hollywood. Even in the films where they did appear in the top 10 cast rank, the Asian actors played cursory roles, often as assistants appearing on screen only briefly.³⁵ There was one mainstream film that featured predominantly Asian characters----*Rumble*

preacher’s wife who does not receive enough attention from her husband; and, as discussed above, *Waiting to Exhale* is indicative of this same trend.

³⁵ B.D. Wong in *Father of the Bride* and Jeff Imada in *Escape from L.A.* had such secondary roles.

in the Bronx, which was of the popular yet stereotypical kung fu movie genre. In this film, Jackie Chan visits the Bronx, New York, to attend his uncle's wedding. Interestingly, and surprisingly for Chan's character, his uncle marries a Black woman (this actress does not rank among the top ten actors in the cast credit). While his uncle is on his honeymoon, Chan helps the new owner of his uncle's corner store fight the primarily White and Asian gangsters who terrorize the neighborhood. He is the stereotypical "Asian" karate hero who defeats the gang members that run rampant in the Asian neighborhood.

The low numbers of Latinos and Asians in the top 70 grossing Hollywood films is disturbing. By virtually excluding these two groups, Hollywood presents a false picture of American society, for these groups represent a visible and rapidly growing segment of the population. Latinos currently comprise approximately 10% of the national population and by the year 2000, that number is expected to rise to 11.4%. Based on current immigration levels, Latinos are expected to become the largest non-White group by 2005, numbering more than 36 million.³⁶ In the top 70 grossing films of 1996, however, Latinos filled roughly 2% of the roles--a far cry from reality.³⁷ Between 1980 and 1990, the Asian population in the United States increased by 108% to 3.5% and it, too, is expected to continue its rapid ascension.³⁸ Current estimates predict that by the century's

³⁶ Population projections for Latinos predict that they will account for 13.8% of the United States' population in 2010 and 16.3% of the population in 2020. United States Department of Commerce-Bureau of Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States (1997)*, October, 1997 at 9.

³⁷ Latinos had 14 roles of the top 10 characters of the 63 non-animated films we studied, which is 2.3%.

³⁸ By the year 2010, Asians are expected to comprise approximately 4.8% of this country's population, an increase of over 36% in ten years. *Statistical Abstract (1997)* at 9.

end in less than two years, non-Whites will comprise one-third of the total population of the United States. Hollywood films do not reflect this reality.

1.2: Typical Occupations of Minority Actors

When minorities were represented in mainstream films, they were shown in rather “stereotypical” roles, usually as athletes, policemen, or criminals. Are these images simply entertaining?³⁹ One commentator notes that perhaps “too much questionable activity is admissible under the guise of entertainment for us to be entirely comfortable with that role...[W]e need to be careful, [especially in the pictorial area], that in our effort to entertain we do not perpetuate stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.”⁴⁰ In the 1996 version of *Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, two of the top ten minority billed actors were Harold Perrineau, a Black man who was portrayed a drag queen, and Vondie Curtis Hall, a Black actor starring as a policeman. Similarly, in *Leaving Las Vegas*, a film with very few appearances by Black actors, Lou Rawls appeared as a cab driver. In *Jingle All the Way*, Sinbad was the second top billed character, a mailman.

There were numerous appearances by Black athletes and Black criminals. Michael Jordan and Charles Barkley played basketball in *Space Jam*; Cuba Gooding Jr. was a football player in *Jerry Maguire*; Terrence D. Howard was a soccer player in *Mr. Holland's Opus*; John Benjamin Hickey, John Salley, Rick Fox and Malik Sealy were all basketball players in *Eddie*; and, Carl Weathers was a former professional golfer in

³⁹ We note the impact that the media has on shaping culture. One commentator admits that the “entertainment media not only project Black culture as it is, but they also reconstruct Black culture; in so doing, the media *alter* the culture, providing opportunities for truly novel versions of American identity.” Merelman, Richard M. *Representing Black Culture: Racial Contact and Cultural Politics in the United States*, New York: Routledge, 1995 at 93.

⁴⁰ Lester, Paul Martin, ed. *Images That Injure* at 13.

Happy Gilmore. Blacks appeared as gangsters and criminals in *Set It Off* and *Mission Impossible*.

There were some exceptions to the generally stereotypical Black roles, and in fact, Hollywood has done fairly well in portraying the complexities of some of the stereotypical “characters” within these films. For example, Ving Rhames appeared as a clever scientist in *Mission Impossible*, but he was also heavily involved in the criminal aspects of the film. In another of the top grossing films, *Striptease*, Rhames portrayed a bouncer at a strip club, muscling his way to protect the film’s lead character, Demi Moore. Delroy Lindo was an FBI agent in *Ransom*, but like Rhames in *Striptease*, he was not the hero. He was portrayed as an inflexible and ineffective agent wedded to the rules. Ultimately, Mel Gibson spearheaded his own attack against his enemies to recover his kidnapped child. In the same film, a Latina maid is used basically for stereotypical comic relief as she is heard muttering in rapid-fire Spanish about the disruption to the household caused by the presence of the FBI. In *A Time to Kill*, Samuel L. Jackson plays a poor vengeful Black father who murders two young White men who brutally rape his ten-year old daughter. The audience sympathizes with him because this is a very “human” response. On the other hand, the Klan-associated White brutes are so exaggerated, so foaming-at-the-mouth evil, that arguably the film functions to obscure systemic racial discrimination by focusing on a few exceptionally bigoted individuals.

Denzel Washington was a lieutenant colonel in *Courage Under Fire*. Washington’s role in this film is perhaps the most complete and complex treatment of a “human” character who happened to be a minority member that appeared in the 1996 sample. Washington was cast as very professional and competent, but he was certainly

not flawless. Unable to cope with the stresses of his job, he was slightly short tempered and he repeatedly turned to alcohol rather than his family for support. Despite the presence of a strong wife and cute young children, he seemed somewhat removed from their lives. A more positive look at his character sees it as a portrayal of a complex man, a person with troubles like any of us, but one who triumphs over adversity, shows brains and moral courage—even if there is also some affirmation of stereotypical Black male traits (detachment from family responsibilities, alcoholic). As Hollywood film progresses, one can hope that minority actors will be depicted as more complex, garnering more “human” traits, rather than more simplistic and one-dimensional “racial” traits that tend to perpetuate racial stereotypes. On balance, “Courage Under Fire” represents a very positive step in that direction.

1.3: Inter-Racial Relationships

An important element missing from the vast majority of the films in our sample was a basic camaraderie among Black and White characters absent some occupational relationship. Many movies reflect this trend. For instance, Matthew McConaughey is Samuel Jackson’s attorney in *A Time To Kill*, while Charles Dutton plays the sheriff; Jackson also plays a Private-eye helping to protect Geena Davis in *The Long Kiss Goodnight*; Tom Cruise is Cuba Gooding Jr.’s sports manager in *Jerry Maguire*; Mykelti Williams and Wes Studi are police officers in *Heat*; Ving Rhames is the bouncer in *Striptease*; Delroy Lindo is the FBI agent in *Ransom*; Will Smith is the pilot who saves planet earth in *Independence Day*; and Arnold Schwarzenegger protects Vanessa Williams in *Eraser*. Even in films with a more prominent showing by Black actors, such as the *Nutty Professor*, the relationship between the Black and White characters are confined to

their various occupations within a university. Thus, what is most often lacking in the majority of these movies, and of course what is not shown to the viewing audience, for the most part, are close ties between characters of different races simply because such characters choose to be friends.

One notable exception was the movie *The Truth About Cats and Dogs*, where Ben Chaplin and Jamie Foxx (the third and fourth ranked actors in the film, respectively) are portrayed as close friends, if not best friends, in the film. Similarly, in *Happy Gilmore*, Carl Weathers is a mentor to Adam Sandler.⁴¹ *Independence Day* shows a close friendship between Will Smith and a character who dies early, played by Harry Connick, Jr.

Other types of Black/White relationships are rare, especially romantic relations. Not only are Black/White love relationships absent, other interracial love relationships are also missing from among this sample's films. Does this suggest that the dominant White audience or larger culture is not ready to identify with interracial couples? Perhaps, as representations of interracial relationships are a rarity among the mass media in general. This absence could in fact be a remnant of the Hays Office Code of the 1930s, a Code by which Hollywood policed itself. A key feature of that Code was the prohibition of scenes and subjects which even suggested miscegenation as desirable. Although it is no longer in use, the de facto result still exists.⁴²

⁴¹ We can point to other examples of past exceptions to this general rule. In particular, in *White Men Can't Jump* (1993), Woody Harrelson and Wesley Snipes develop a friendship. These two actors later reach a more ideal interracial bond in *Money Train* (1995).

⁴² Guerrere, Ed. *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993 at 40.

As with any general trend, there are some exceptions.⁴³ In *Waiting to Exhale*, Angela Basset's husband starts an affair with his White bookkeeper. In *The Bodyguard* (1992), Whitney Houston and Kevin Costner share intimate relations. Before this film, however, Houston already held a secure place in popular culture due to her successful music career. She is somewhat de-racialized in popular imagination, and therefore allowing her character to have a relationship with a White male was probably more acceptable to the majority of the viewing audience. However, this is a self-fulfilling prophecy because as early as the 1930's, the movie culture "became the dominant culture for many Americans, providing new values and social ideals to replace shattered old traditions." In a sense Hollywood starts trends and defines reality.⁴⁴

1.4: Recommendations for Change

What can the Hollywood film industry do to help shape more perceptive and sensitive images? Recognizing that much of Hollywood's audience and therefore its revenue, is derived from racial and ethnic minorities, Hollywood has an obligation to own up to its stereotypical depiction of them. Beyond this, it has an obligation to White Americans to provide realistic images even as it entertains and makes profits. While Hollywood may be among the media's leaders in providing a forum for minority actors and portraying minorities in more human and complex ways, it still has a long way to go. One commentator has suggested that a racist "common sense" is pervasive in the images that we see. He notes that the media "sometimes deliberately, sometimes unconsciously-

⁴³ Interracial dating has been portrayed in the past in a few notable Hollywood films including Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* (1992), *Jungle Fever* (1991). Interracial dating was also portrayed in *Mississippi Masala* (1991), and in the very popular *Wayne's World* (1992) where Native Hawaiian actress Tia Carrera portrays the Asian girlfriend of the White leading actor.

⁴⁴Guerreire, Ed. *Framing Blackness* at 35.

define and construct the question of race in such a way as to reproduce the ideologies of racism.”⁴⁵ We believe this is still true in Hollywood films despite laudable progress.

We can identify several areas where Hollywood can improve. One improvement would be to increase the number of movies created by and about minorities. As one observer suggests, “there are discourses developed by Whites in White culture and by Blacks in Black culture which ma[ke] . . . different sense of the same phenomena.”⁴⁶ Thus, by increasing the number of minority filmmakers, Hollywood can offer a more complete view of the complex web of minorities’ realities thereby informing its audiences views on racial issues. As this same observer notes, a Black filmmaker’s work may not necessarily provide a more realistic expression of Black experience, “however it is likely to be couched in specifically Black . . . subcultural discourses”⁴⁷ which in turn, likely portrays a more real life depiction.

For some viewers, “realistic” Black characters are those who do not deny the “Black perspective.” In a recent study, one daytime soap opera viewer said that knowledge and expression of ethnic differences is essential. To him, “the differences between the dominant culture and African Americans -- physical and psychological -- exist, and the denial of those differences by Whitewashing situations and roles is worthy

⁴⁵ Hall, Stuart. *The Whites of Their Eyes* at 8.

⁴⁶ Dyer, Richard. *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, London: MacMillan Education Ltd., 1986 at 70.

⁴⁷ *Id.* at 109.

of criticism.”⁴⁸ If Hollywood is to express racial and ethnic differences however, more minorities must be involved in the film making process to provide this perspective.⁴⁹

Hollywood is in the unique position to enhance the situation of minority directors in the production of mainstream films by offering minority filmmakers contracts which are equally lucrative as those of White counterparts. While there are some prominent Black directors, notably Spike Lee, John Singleton, and the Hughes brothers, the movies they produce primarily cater to Black audiences. As such, these movies are not in the mainstream; they do not receive the same type of financial backing, publicity, or studio support as those made by non-minority directors. This is evidenced, as an observer points out, by the difficulties director Spike Lee had in completing his highly acclaimed film *Malcolm X* (not among our sample pool). Lee enjoys more control over the creation of his films than most Black filmmakers because he owns a production company, Forty Acres and a Mule. Nevertheless, he was forced to independently raise revenue above and beyond that which his distributor, Warner Brothers, had earmarked for his film.⁵⁰ We believe that if the Hollywood industry makes more funds available for independent Black directors, they will have a stronger showing among the films grossing over \$25 million.⁵¹

Of our sample study, few movies were made by minority directors. John Woo was one of two Asian directors in the group, for the movie *Broken Arrow*. Our

⁴⁸ Abernathy-Lear, Gloria. *African Americans' Criticisms Concerning African American Representation on DayTime Serials*, *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No.4, Winter 1994 at 833.

⁴⁹ The 1996 film *Mississippi Burning* received criticism for this. Ostensibly the story of the trial of the murderers of Medgar Evers, the film focused almost exclusively on the White lawyer, played by Alec Baldwin. The Blacks' story and perspective were lost.

⁵⁰ Merelman, Richard D. *Representing Black Culture* at 113.

⁵¹ In a December 1997 Nightline discussion about the recently released movie *Amistad*, between Lee, Debbie Allen, producer of *Amistad* and director Ed Zwick, Lee candidly said he “could not have gone to the studios and gotten this film made with the budget they had to make the film; it’s just not the reality today.” His point was that Steven Spielberg, the White director, was a

conclusions find support from the Directors Guild of America, whose statistics show that minorities are consistently bypassed in directorial hiring. According to the most recent figures (1995), non-Whites, including Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians received less than 4% of directing work. Thus, there is room for industry improvement.⁵²

Hollywood can also improve on the representation of minority film writers. The most recent statistics from the Writers Guild of America show that a scant 2.6% of its members are Black, 1% are Latino, and just 0.5% are Asian. Minority screenwriters can bring not only their distinct stories, but also their different perspectives to Hollywood films, both of which are currently sparse. Establishing programs within the studios to encourage minority writers is an excellent area for improvement.⁵³

Finally, Hollywood needs to employ minority actors outside of minority films. An example of a step in the right direction is Denzel's Washington's complex character in *Courage Under Fire*.⁵⁴ While Black audiences in particular would like to see the scope of Washington's roles continue to expand, they would also like to see new Black actors (and not just multi-modal stars) emerge out of both minority and mainstream films. Seeing Black females in more nuanced starring roles would be an important point of progress. Hollywood's treatment of Asian and Latino characters is more problematic. Latino and Asian actors need increased representation in Hollywood films. Furthermore, since only one of the films in our sample was majority Asian and none were majority

necessary element in getting the film made, which is exemplified by the fact that Debbie Allen had struggled unsuccessfully for years trying to raise the money.

⁵² "Year After Protest, Race Still Counts in Hollywood," Los Angeles Sentinel, March 26, 1997.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ *Courage Under Fire* is a unique example; its theme is not based on race, and it is about a complicated and identifiable lead character portrayed by a Black actor.

Latino, Hollywood needs to address its failure to make movies aimed at non-Black minority audiences.

1.5: Conclusion

Films are not produced in a vacuum. There is a political and social context surrounding every one, but those in the film industry often avoid the political and ideological significance of their work with the rationalization that the film industry simply produces “harmless entertainment.”⁵⁵ On any given weekend, millions of Americans watch new release movies or rent older movies to view. Given this tremendous audience, Hollywood wields real social and political power. It has the ideological clout to shape the audience’s conceptions of race and can mediate the racial and social attitudes of its audience.

In the 1950’s and 1960’s the film industry targeted a rapidly growing young White audience, who could afford the price of movie tickets, and who had enough leisure time to attend movies. By the late 1960’s, the demographics of American cities had changed and the people living closest to the majority of the movie theaters were Blacks.⁵⁶ In anticipation of substantial box office profits, Hollywood, at least for a time (1969-1974), specifically targeted this Black youth audience with “Blaxploitation” films: Black narratives, featuring Black casts playing out various action-adventures in the ghetto.⁵⁷ While these films were produced for only five or so years and accounted for about sixty films, they provide important lessons for the future. It is generally believed that these Blaxploitation films were made possible by the convergence of three factors: the rising

⁵⁵ Guerrere, Ed. *Framing Blackness* at 6.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

political and social consciousness of Blacks in the late 1960's, which helped to create a large Black audience "thirsting to see their full humanity depicted on the commercial cinema screen;"⁵⁸ public, outspoken criticism of Hollywood's continual degradation of Blacks in films by Black leaders, entertainers, and intellectuals; and lastly and probably most importantly, the near economic collapse of the film industry in the late 1960's.⁵⁹ Although context specific, this background informs our understanding of the operation of the film industry and how we may induce change today.

The profit motive remains a driving force in the film industry. As *Courage Under Fire* director Ed Zwick said, "all of us, White or Black, as filmmakers are laboring under an economic imperative."⁶⁰ There are currently millions of minority youth in America and if Hollywood believes that it will substantially increase its profits by tapping into this market, it will likely act. It is our premise that the decision makers in Hollywood are not overtly or deliberately racist, by and large. Rather, they are risk-averse. Film studios are reluctant to spend millions of dollars producing a film without some assurance that they will, at a minimum, break even. This is why certain formulas repeatedly appear in films in a given time period. If they worked once, the thinking is that they will work again.⁶¹

We assume that if it can be shown that there is not only a market, but also a formula for ensuring the popularity of "minority films," Hollywood studios will produce more minority films. Just as important, they will showcase minority actors in a wider

⁵⁷ Examples include *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970), *Shaft* (1972) and *Superfly* (1972).

⁵⁸ Guerrero, Ed. *Framing Blackness* at 69.

⁵⁹ Id. at 69-72 (discussing the emergence of Blaxploitation films and their close connection with the Black Nationalist movement of the late 1960's).

⁶⁰ Zwick, the director of *Glory*, (speaking on Nightline in a discussion with Spike Lee and Debbie Allen about the movie *Amistad* and, more broadly, about whether the race of the director should affect the subject matter of the film).

range of important roles, and they will incorporate minority perspectives in films of all types. Director Francis Ford Coppola has said: "[Hollywood]'s a big business as much as any corporation. And in order to answer to a board of directors, they want the products to be similar so they can be assured of the revenues being consistent."⁶² There is at least a significant core audience for movies made by Black filmmakers, such as *Do the Right Thing*, *Boyz 'N the Hood* and *Higher Learning* and the industry has not yet fully tapped into this source.

Although not the ultimate goal, an important first step is for Hollywood studios to support more of the projects of minority filmmakers. Once this happens, and if the movies produced do reasonably well, the mainstream film industry will likely branch out, perhaps realizing that minority audiences are not the only people who attend "minority" movies and that minority filmmakers bring different perspectives and stories that may help the studios attract more people, expanding the audience as a whole.

Armed with this knowledge, the next step is for non-minority Hollywood filmmakers to cast minorities in a diversity of roles in their films. Currently, too much of Hollywood may feel that the American movie-going public is not ready to see minorities portrayed as integral parts of society outside of stereotypical roles. Although our sample shows some progress on this front, in order for the industry to progress further, it must change its view. White movie audiences may not *demand* an expansion of minority roles in producing, directing and acting in Hollywood films. Nevertheless, as minority representation in the film industry increases, and social progress occurs on other fronts, we assume White audiences will become more *accepting*.

⁶¹ Formulas include scripts such as the Black/White buddy films of the 1980's and the action movies without any love interest for the male hero in the early 1990's.

As noted earlier, by the year 2010, it is estimated that 33% of the population of the United States will be non-White, and at the projected growth rates, within less than thirty years, there will no longer be a majority racial or ethnic group in the United States.⁶³ If movie-going trends remain relatively fixed, *at least* one-third of all moviegoers will be members of minority groups. We assume Black, Latino, and Asian audiences will identify with actors representing their respective racial and ethnic groups. As such, if an increasing number of the movie-going public is non-White, they may more readily identify with non-White actors. Further, the population statistics suggest that it will be very difficult for anyone in this society not to interact with people of different races on a regular basis. If films begin to approximate the reality of its audience members, interracial interaction may grow.

Beyond this, a large portion of Hollywood's revenues, in some cases more than half, arises from *foreign* markets. The majority of the world is non-White, many nations' audiences are non-White, and ethnic and racial inclusiveness should only facilitate profitability in many overseas markets. Indeed, as foreign countries' movie and video production industries grow and become more competitive with the now-dominant American industry, it will make rational business sense for Hollywood to attend more carefully to non-White audiences.

To facilitate change in the depiction of Blacks and other minority groups in mainstream Hollywood films, a combination of education, motivation, and action is required. As previously mentioned, education involves demonstrating to major Hollywood filmmakers that they are ignoring a rapidly growing segment of the American

⁶² Gerstel, Judy. "Movie Film: World of Difference," The Toronto Star, January 10, 1997.

public with a strong economic base.⁶⁴ If Hollywood recognizes that some movies made by Black filmmakers have done relatively well with limited advertising resources, and that core audiences anticipate their productions, mainstream filmmakers would be foolish not to act. However, we recognize that Hollywood does not readily take big risks, that innovative work by filmmakers of every race or ethnicity can be found mostly in the so-called "independent" films made outside the major studio system on smaller budgets. Part of the reason for the patterns we discover, and for the relative neglect of minority perspectives is rooted in the "blockbuster"-oriented economics of the industry. This may not be easy to change.

Motivation involves using public pressure to promote change. All leaders in America, including the President, should include discussions of the film industry in any public discourse on media and race. American leaders have the power to motivate the public to act. Just as the Reverend Jesse Jackson rallied in protest of the Texaco Corporation's poor treatment of minorities, American leaders can broadcast the public's need for enhanced minority representation in film. This kind of public pressure will likely be effective in Hollywood because mainstream filmmakers are motivated by profit, not racism. If they believe that the American public is ready for greater minority inclusion in films and in film making, they are likely to respond.

Action is the third element required to effect change in the film industry. A positive first step is to initiate programs such as the creation of film school scholarships for young, minority filmmakers. Well funded and publicized film festivals might also

⁶³ Projected growth rates are: non-Whites as 33% of total population in 2010. *Statistical Abstract* (1997) at 9.

⁶⁴ Latinos in the United States spend \$228 billion per year and, therefore, comprise a strong economic block. Mitelstadt, Michelle. Austin-American Statesman, September 24, 1997.

provide a forum for minority filmmakers to showcase their work. Just as the Sundance Film Festival has helped independent films merge into the mainstream, the same could be done for minority filmmakers. Thus, film festivals afford invaluable exposure because they allow the work of unknown filmmakers to be seen by the major Hollywood studios. In many ways, Hollywood films present a more accurate "reality" than do the rest of the mass media. If much of the viewing public views Hollywood films as a mirror of society, film becomes a powerful tool which communicates messages both implicitly and explicitly. Armed with the power of film, Hollywood filmmakers have an obligation to act responsibly, and we believe they can do so while maintaining worldwide profitability.

Part II. Images and Behavior of Minority and White Characters in Film

Brian Kenner and Charles Merritt

2.1 Introduction

By conducting a detailed and precise content analysis of the top box office grossing films of 1996, we have attempted to inaugurate a more systematic approach to the appraisal of racial images in films. This work supplements that of Part I, which focused on roles and cast rankings. While we looked at the depiction of all minorities, our main focus was the depiction of African Americans since they are the most frequently present minorities in films. The paucity of Asian and Latino actors prevented the kind of detailed content analysis undertaken here in comparing Blacks and Whites. We looked for depictions likely to reinforce stereotypes of African Americans. Our findings mirror those of Part I: evidence shows a combination of progress on some fronts, continued exclusion or stereotyping of minorities on others.

2.2. Hypotheses

We recognize that any analysis of movies will be colored by certain subjectivity in measurement, and our initial expectations were admittedly based in part on anecdotal appraisals of movie imagery, as well as a reading of previous literature. Our hypotheses included:

H1: African Americans are disproportionately represented as violent and depicted in more violent situations or scenarios in which they are restrained from committing violence than are majority group members.

To measure this, we looked at the number of times different characters engaged in physical violence and how often characters were physically restrained, handcuffed, or in jail.

H2: African Americans are disproportionately represented as oversexed and sexually aggressive, while being underrepresented engaging in more fully rounded romantic relations.

We assessed instances of characters having sex in bed or without clothes and being otherwise sexualized versus instances of hugging/kissing, caressing, and uttering "I love you" not in bed or naked. The idea was to test whether Blacks, more than Whites, are pictured as purely sex-oriented rather than interested also in human relationship and nurturing intimacy in which sexuality is secondary.

H3: African American characters disproportionately use graphic and vulgar language.

In assessing this, we measured the occurrence and use of vulgar profanity (defined as graphically excessive; e.g. "f**k") by characters in movies. Language use is a potent cultural and social marker of status and acceptability, and it was our impression from pilot study that Black characters seemed disproportionately likely to utter street profanities, even when their characters' social class, education or occupation would normally predict otherwise.

H4: African Americans more often function in menial, secondary, and stereotypical roles in movies.

A simple way of introducing minority characters into main story arcs is as background characters who have specific but non-essential roles (i.e. maid, security guard, and other

service sector roles). We looked at the roles assigned to characters, specifically looking for the identification of Black characters' names and the presence of Blacks in entry guard or security agent positions.

2.3. Methodology

Based on box office receipts, the top 26 movies of 1996-97 (excluding animation films) were selected (see Appendix 1 for a list of these films) and the characters in those movies were coded for a variety of individual actions. It is our belief that by recording the frequency of the types of actions of Black and White movie characters we will be able to illustrate the manner and types of behavior that Hollywood associates with various ethnic groups. Obviously it was impossible to test every possible dimension of behavior, and we recognize that unmeasured aspects of behavior might not show racial differences, or might even show anti-White stereotyping rather than anti-minority. We submit this evidence as an initial effort to offer quantifiable and systematic evidence of Black-White behavioral differences in movies that might contribute to stereotyping or exclusion. We do not represent this study as definitive, but we do offer it as an exemplar of the kind of detailed content analysis necessary to penetrate to the deep, subtle level at which most media stereotyping and exclusion now exists. Indeed, it is the subtlety of the differences we find that is most in need of illumination. Hollywood avoids many of the blatant stereotypes of old (but not always, as we showed in Part I of this chapter). The kinds of images we explore here are essentially invisible *unless* one conducts the kind of systematic analysis attempted here. We hope that others will follow with larger samples yielding more definitive results.

Movie characters were divided into the following ethnic categories: Black, White, Latina/o, and Asian. Characters were coded by the ethnicity of the character they were portraying in the movie, which was determined by character name, ethnic associations in the movie, or skin color. We also separated the characters by sex into male and female roles. Single instances were recorded only if they were separated by a shot of a different movie character. For example, a kissing scene with multiple kisses was only recorded as a single kiss for the actors if there was no cut-away shot to a different character.

Eleven individual characteristics were selected to describe the characters in order to test our hypotheses and were defined as follows:

Named/LD. character/Full sentence. In order to distinguish between who were central to the development of the main story, movie characters' behavior was only coded if they uttered at least one full sentence, were named and identified in the movie, or were important in forwarding the storyline of the movie.

Commit Physical Violence. Physical violence was recorded if a character purposely and directly (action done by him or herself) injured another character. (Character physically hits another character is recorded, while a character who *orders* someone killed is only recorded for the person who performs the killing.)

Use Vulgar Profanity. Vulgar profanity is defined as the use of expletive words in a lewd or unusual manner, or where an expletive is not normally used. (E.g., in the film *Jerry Maguire*, when Regina King's character Marcee says that she is not a "f**king c**t.")

Ungrammatical. Ungrammatical speech was coded if characters spoke improper language (non-standard English, not merely occasional slang). (E.g. in *A Time To Kill*, Samuel Jackson's character makes profligate use of broken ungrammatical English.)

Sexualized. Sexualized is defined as characters that are scantily clothed or partially clothed such that the purpose of the character's wardrobe is to attract the viewer's attention. (E.g., in *Independence Day*, Vivica Fox's character is shown dancing in bikini underwear in a strip club, which does not further the main story.)

"I Love You". The number of different times "I love you" was mentioned was recorded.

Caressed. Being caressed in our coding scheme means that a character caressed another character when neither was in bed, naked, or in a situation, which was meant to connote a sexual advance. (E.g., in *A Time To Kill*, Matthew McConaughey's character strokes the cheek of Sandra Bullock's character when she is in the hospital, but they do not embrace.)

Hugged/Kissed. The number of times a character hugged or kissed another character was recorded if the act was not proposing or leading to a sexual encounter. (E.g. in *Courage Under Fire*, Denzel Washington's character embraces Regina Taylor's character upon his return home from his investigation.)

Sex. The number of times a character had sex notes the number of times a character either had sex on the screen, or was implied to have had sex.

Entry Guard/Security Agent. This role was defined as a character whose role was to solely provide some sort of protection or guardianship for another character or object. (E.g., the Black male characters in *The Rock*.)

Physically restrained, handcuffed, in jail. The number of distinct times a character was physically restrained by others, handcuffed or chained, or put in some sort of holding

facility was coded. (E.g., Samuel Jackson's character in *A Time To Kill* upon his arrest for murder.)

The movies were coded by the two graduate student authors who were trained to code in an exact and duplicative manner. A reliability test was performed by the two coders on three sample movies *Jerry Maguire*, *Courage Under Fire*, and *Ransom*. Overall, the three movies were coded with at least 80% reliability on all variables by both coders. A total of 88 characteristic and individual categories were coded for each movie. For a minimum of 80% reliability between coders, coding for a single movie must be the same for at least 71 of 88 coding categories. Overall, *Jerry Maguire* had 80 of 88 categories (91%) correspond, *Ransom* had 81 of 88 (92%) correspond, and *Courage Under Fire* had 84 of 88 (95%) correspond.

The remaining 23 movies were then split evenly between the two coders, with the results analyzed according to standard content analysis procedures. The summary tabulations of the coded variables are provided in Tables 1 and 2.

2.4. Findings

The findings listed in Table 1 below report the character percentage of the total number of times that the characteristic in question was recorded. For example, the Black male percentage for saying "I love you" is 11%, meaning, of the total times "I love you" was mentioned by all 288 named characters in the 26 movies, 11% of the time the phrase was uttered by Black males.

Comparisons across ethnic and gender groupings are facilitated by the presentation of the data in Table 2, which shows the percentages in terms of each group.

We can now test our hypotheses, starting with the following figures for violence and for being in physical custody of some sort.

I. Number and column percent	Black Male	White Male	Black Female	White Female	Latino	Latina
Violence n=	10 37%	78 46%	5 56%	8 11%	3 30%	0 0%
Restrained n=	5 18%	31 18%	5 55%	4 6%	1 10%	0 0%

These numbers help to test Hypothesis 1, that African Americans are more likely to be shown as violent. It turns out that this idea is disconfirmed in part and confirmed strongly in part. (Numbers are displayed for Latino/a actors, but the numbers are too small here and throughout for analysis.) For males, the difference is not significant, and indeed White males are more violent than Black: 46% of Whites (i.e., 78 of the 170 White males) compared with 37% of Blacks (i.e., 10 of the 27 Black males). As for portrayal as needing to be incarcerated or otherwise restrained, Black and White males were depicted equivalently. At least in the top 1996 Hollywood films, on average Black males did not seem more violently inclined than White.

However, Black females were markedly more violent than White, in percentage terms five times more so. And they were nine times more likely to be shown in conditions of restraint—55% of Black female characters vs. 6% of White females. This finding accords with our other results that suggest Black females are portrayed as less civilized than their White counterparts, less obedient to societal norms usually followed by women.

The second hypothesis postulated that Blacks would be disproportionately

associated with an implicitly animal or biological sexuality and not with more relational, tender versions of affection and intimacy. Again there is partial confirmation, again with special respect with Black females. Depictions in scenes showing partial nudity or otherwise emphasizing sexual stimulation of

Number/Column Percent	Black Male	White Male	Black Female	White Female	Latino	Latina
Sexualized	5 18%	26 15%	9 100%	41 59%	3 30%	2 100%
Sex	5 18%	5 3%	3 33%	5 7%	0 0%	0 0%
I Love You	6 22%	22 13%	5 56%	23 33%	0 0%	1 50%
Caressed	4 15%	14 8%	3 33%	16 23%	0 0%	1 50%
Hugged/ Kissed	8 30%	30 43%	7 78%	35 50%	0 0%	1 50%

other characters (and presumably the audience) are equivalent for Black and White males, but for Black females such depictions are universal. Every single one was sexualized in this way; although White women were far more likely to be sexualized than White men, they were far less sexualized than Black females. Thus arguably we see traditional gender roles, the use of women as sexual objects, continues in Hollywood's top films—but especially so for Black women.

When it comes to actually portraying sexual acts, both Black males and females were much more likely to have sex than their White counterparts. Does this contribute to age-old stereotypes of hypersexuality among Blacks? Does it *reflect* the unthinking, ready equation of Blacks with more intense sexual appetites among Hollywood filmmakers? We cannot answer these questions, but the differences are suggestive, especially since they are *consistently* in the direction of greater Black sexuality.

On the other hand, looking at depictions that show characters involved in less overtly sexual intimacy, measured by uttering the phrase "I love you," or engaging in non-sexual hugging, kissing, and caressing, differences between Blacks and Whites are not consistent. If anything, Blacks are shown to be more affectionate than Whites.

Obviously part of the explanation for such patterns lay in the specific movies sampled and roles occupied. In a year where, say, romantic comedies scored big at the box office, these data might look quite different, since such films likely feature non-sexual intimacy. And rarely does Hollywood produce romantic comedies starring Black actors (except those like *Waiting to Exhale* intended to appeal largely to Black audiences and therefore unlikely to crack the upper reaches of the box office gross). In another year, where action thrillers take most of the top spots, sexuality and romance might be less prevalent for both Blacks and Whites. Thus it would not be proper to generalize too broadly from these findings.

Turning now to Hypothesis 3, we suggested that Blacks would engage in significantly more profanity and ungrammatical speech than Whites. We came up with this hypothesis after pilot study revealed several films in which college-educated Black characters spoke in ways Whites with similar social status would not; Part III describes examples from *Jerry Maguire* and *Independence Day*. Here are the pertinent data from Table 2:

Number/Column Percent	Black Male	White Male	Black Female	White Female	Latino	Latina
Vulgar Profanity	19 70%	96 56%	8 89%	12 17%	10 100%	0 0%
Un- Grammatical	14 52%	11 6%	4 44%	3 4%	1 10%	2 100%

The contrasts in this case are the most striking of any we measured. Black males were more profane than White males, though a majority of both used profanity in this sample of movies. All but one of the Black females swore, 89%, compared with 17% of White females. The disparities in grammatical usage were even greater. Certainly part of this finding may be due to Blacks tending to portray on average less educated characters. Still, as noted, we found examples of Blacks with high education using ungrammatical, perhaps stereotypically “ghetto” speaking styles. And even if occupational differences partially explain the differences in language use, this pattern seems to us to promote perceptions of African Americans as occupying a different, quite separate cultural universe from Euro-Americans. It suggests an unconscious belief among Hollywood filmmakers, and may reinforce similar beliefs in White audiences, that, language, a key marker of culture, reveals fundamental racial difference. In addition it may be that filmmakers believe audiences, Black as well as White, expect Black characters to speak in certain ways and would not relate to them as typically, knowably “Black” in the absence of such communication behavior by those actors.

Our final hypothesis concerned the disproportionate depiction of Blacks in menial roles. This is a more difficult postulate to test than it might seem, since so many menial jobs are depicted in movies, but in such a fleeting manner that it would be almost impossible to content analyze. Movies show cab drivers, cashiers, clerks, street vendors, and so forth in profusion, but they are rarely given lines to speak, let alone a name. That is why we chose to look specifically at entry and security guards. We noticed in preliminary study that African Americans seemed omnipresent in those roles, which do often get to utter a line or two. Their filling of such roles also suggests a complicated

ideological message, because society depends upon security guards, trusts them, and thus there is a positive component to the image of a minority in that position. On the other hand, they could be viewed as easy tokens for filmmakers: they are rarely important characters, but by using a Black in that role the film obtains credit for ethnic diversity. In any case, the hypothesis was strongly confirmed: fully 15 of the 23 guards shown in the sampled films were Black.

Table 1: Variable and Character Group Percentages

	Black male	Black female	White male	White female	Latino	Latina	Total N
Named Character	9%	3%	59%	24%	3%	1%	
N=	27	9	170	70	10	2	288
Phys. Violence	10%	5%	75%	8%	3%	0%	
N=	10	5	78	8	3	0	104
Profanity	13%	6%	66%	8%	3%	0%	
N=	19	8	96	12	10	0	145
UnGrammatical	40%	11%	31%	9%	3%	6%	
N=	14	4	11	3	1	2	35
Sexualized	6%	11%	30%	47%	3%	6%	
N=	5	10	26	41	3	2	87
I Love You	11%	9%	39%	40%	0%	2%	
N=	6	5	22	23	0	1	59
Caressed	11%	8%	37%	42%	0%	2%	
N=	4	3	14	16	0	1	38
Hugged/ Kissed	10%	9%	37%	43%	0%	1%	
N=	8	7	30	35	0	1	81
Sex	28%	17%	28%	28%	0%	0%	
N=	5	3	5	5	0	0	18
Entry Guard	52%	13%	35%	0%	0%	0%	
N=	12	3	8	0	0	0	23
Restrained	11%	11%	67%	9%	2%	0%	
N=	5	5	31	4	1	0	46

(Percentages read across; for example, 27 of the 288 total named characters are Black males, which equals 9% of all named characters.) Table 2 breaks down the figures within groups.

Table 2: Percentages of Each Ethnic/Gender Category Shown in Specified Ways

Number/Column Percent*	Black Male	White Male	Black Female	White Female	Latino	Latina
Total Named Characters	27 100%	170 100%	9 100%	70 100%	10 100%	2 100%
Physical Violence	10 37%	78 46%	5 56%	8 11%	3 30%	0 0%
Vulgar Profanity	19 70%	96 56%	8 89%	12 17%	10 100%	0 0%
Un-Grammatical	14 52%	11 6%	4 44%	3 4%	1 10%	2 100%
Sexualized	5 18%	26 15%	9 100%	41 59%	3 30%	2 100%
I Love You	6 22%	22 13%	5 56%	23 33%	0 0%	1 50%
Caressed	4 15%	14 8%	3 33%	16 23%	0 0%	1 50%
Hugged/ Kissed	8 30%	30 43%	7 78%	35 50%	0 0%	1 50%
Sex	5 18%	5 3%	3 33%	5 7%	0 0%	0 0%
Entry Guard	12 44%	8 5%	3 33%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
Restrained	5 18%	31 18%	5 55%	4 6%	1 10%	0 0%

*The percentages should be interpreted as the proportion of the ethnic/gender group shown in the specified guise. Thus under Black male, for "physical violence" the number 10 and 37% appear. This means 10 of the 27 named Black Male characters committed physical violence, which represents 37% of those 27 characters. By comparison, 78 or 46% of the 170 named White male characters acted violently.

2.5. Discussion

Based upon our findings we have concluded that although much progress has occurred for minority, especially Black, characters, stereotypes and exclusions still exist within many of the top-earning movies. In particular, we found that: 1) Black females are overrepresented as being violent and having to be physically restrained; 2) Blacks are seen in highly sexual terms; 3) Blacks violate speaking conventions far more frequently than Whites; and 4) Blacks are typecast as security or entry guards and seemingly excluded from a larger range of occupational roles. In addition to the findings among Blacks in Hollywood movies, our analysis also found among Latino and Latina characters (although their numbers were extremely low): overrepresentation in the use of vulgar profanity and being ungrammatical, respectively. But the chief finding for Latino and Asian actors was near invisibility.

In addition to our quantitative findings, it is worth noting that judging from this sample, race and racial problems are not the subject of discourse in major Hollywood films. This may have particular importance since recent emphasis, most notably the President's Race Initiative whose charge is to assess the frankness with which race is discussed, has been placed on dealing with the myriad of issues surrounding racial and ethnic relations in this country.

2.6. Caveats

A number of different factors have influenced our results and could color the interpretations and conclusions we drew from our findings. We selected 1996 because it was the most recent year for which we could obtain complete results. It is possible that 1996 was an unusual or non-representative year for films and therefore could provide

results which are atypical and not generalizable. It is essential that this type of research be done for a large number of years, and that trend data be gathered and analyzed over time. Also, the films selected could have had a particular disproportionate representation in certain categories (*Courage Under Fire* as a war film has extreme physical violence, while *The Birdcage* has no minority characters), thereby skewing results. Consequently, our sample is too limited to draw definitive conclusions for the ethnic groups coded. Finally, efforts to code the movies in our report were ultimately based on subjective decisions and personal interpretations of the categories, and as such are always subject to critique and improvement.

2.7. Policy Options

Any attempts to impose government regulation on the film industry with regards to racial imagery in films is likely to face criticism for violating the First Amendment. It is our suggestion that the President use his office as the bully pulpit from which to begin a more frank and honest discussion of the meaning of the racial images Hollywood employs in movies. Through speeches and open forum discussions following screenings of films, the President and other leaders can demonstrate the type awareness citizens should have when they view representations of minorities—and for that matter, the White majority—in films.

President Clinton has already demonstrated that he can bring Hollywood and government together for frank discussions, in the case of violence on television. We suggest a similar conference with the film industry, which should lead to the adoption of voluntary standards of racial sensitivity in films. The Motion Picture Association of America, for example, should be encouraged to integrate measures of racial stereotyping

into the criteria it uses to award films ratings. Finally, the President should urge Congress to continue funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and to support the NEA's efforts to assist filmmakers who portray minority perspectives in films likely to offer non-stereotypical representations. Hollywood films can show the nation how to look at itself in a more honest and constructive way.

Part III

Independence Day, Jerry Maguire, and A Time to Kill:

Complexity in Ethnic Representations on Film

Robert M. Entman

In this final section we briefly consider three of the top hits of 1996, those that earned the most at the box office while employing majority-White casts *and* a Black as a top protagonist. Because they conveyed prominent and arguably quite positive images of Black persons, these films provide useful examples of the mixed racial messages that Hollywood produces.

Our first example of multiple meanings can be found in *Independence Day*, the top-grossing film of 1996 and one of the biggest hits of all time. Will Smith was not only the top-ranked cast member, he was unambiguously heroic. This film takes frequent refuge in classic ethnic stereotypes in order to gain laughs or audience recognition. Thus Randy Quaid plays a drunken Latino pilot whose alcoholic stupor is supposed to be funny, although he later sobers up and redeems himself. A nerdy, brilliant Jewish scientist (Jeff Goldblum) is hectored for comic relief by his Yiddish-accented, over-protective father, though the scientist also becomes a hero. Minor characters shown reacting to the scary alien ship landings feature an array of ethnic stereotypes: chattering Arabs; a Black street person holding a liquor bottle (along with a White companion); a hysterical gay and apparently Jewish man with an intrusive mother ("Ma, head for Aunt Esther's," he screams over the phone); Black and apparently Latino kids playing basketball in an inner-city neighborhood with rap music blaring. In scene after scene we see Black faces in the background of busy scenes of war rooms, meeting rooms and the

like, while Whites occupy center stage. Despite scenes with dozens of professionals shown coping with the crisis at the White House, Pentagon and elsewhere, almost never does one Black professional appear talking to another Black professional, reflecting that one Black is usually allowed on screen at a time (except as background "extras"), thus almost always must talk to a White.

Perhaps most noticeable on close analysis is that although the film does endow Will Smith with many positive traits, he continues marked by stereotypically negative "Black" traits as well. Despite his presumed college education (as an Air Force officer) he still speaks in modified ghetto slang. Thus he says to an alien he captures: "You got me out here draggin' your heavy ass... with your dreadlocks stickin' out of my parachute. ... You come down here with a (sic) attitude." He (along with the Jewish scientist and the president) saves the world, but his contribution is physical skill and bravery; he carries out the plans devised by the various White authority figures. Although committed to a monogamous relationship, he lives with a woman to whom he's not married, and she has a child by another man. This woman is an exotic dancer. Even though involved with an Air Force officer in middle-class housing, she apparently has no occupational options beyond trading on her sexuality. Her intellectual capacity appears impaired: she fails to grasp the seriousness of the hostile alien ships landing all over the world, even within sight of her own house. After complaining about Will Smith's having to go on active duty, she continues on to her job. Later, however, like all the main characters, she transcends her limitations and becomes heroic in her own way.

Next, consider *Jerry Maguire*, starring Tom Cruise and Cuba Gooding, Jr. (who won an Oscar for best supporting actor). The nature of the main characters and

their relationships, the subtle blend of traditional stereotypes with a message apparently promoting inter-racial friendship, testify to the complexity of racial texts. On the one hand, the movie shows a burgeoning friendship between a White and a Black man, one in which each depends on the insights and understanding of the other. Theirs is not the merely professional relationship of polite distance that characterizes many of the interracial friendships on prime time television (Rojecki 1996). On the other, it is the eponymous White man, Jerry (Cruise), who does the intellectual heavy lifting. Although Rod Tidwell, his African American football playing client (Gooding) and Rod's Black wife Marcee both possess a college education (the wife having majored in business), they cannot succeed financially, they are powerless without Jerry's economic wisdom. The chief advice he gives Rod is to act less cynically egotistical about the game of football, and to submerge his anger at his inferior treatment by the White owner. Jerry instructs Rod to curb his selfish emotions and his barely-controlled instincts, shown in numerous scenes of Rod dancing, yelling, and browbeating Jerry. (One gave rise to a briefly famous catchphrase, "Show me the money," which Rod humiliatingly forces Jerry to chant responsively with him.)

Rod—who against stereotype shares a deeply committed monogamy and intimacy with his spouse—does teach Jerry how to relate better to his wife, Dorothy. Yet Rod and Marcee, despite their college degrees, speak in ungrammatical street slang, and she habitually uses profanity in ways a mainstream movie would rarely show a wealthy, educated White female character doing. The contrast between the aggressive, abrasive Marcee and Jerry's docile, worshipful Dorothy recapitulates a racial hierarchy of desirability, at least for White male audiences. Without going into more detail here, the

point is that the movie contests some stereotypes while revivifying others. Both are important functions, and arguably Hollywood has made enormous progress in representing African Americans, if not other people of color. But the deeper White fears, the sense of hierarchy and fundamental difference, remain embedded in this and many of Hollywood's productions.

A Time to Kill provides our third repository of complex images. This is a strongly anti-racist film, and it attempts to evoke White empathy with the Black experience of racism. Yet the heroics and the suffering that occupy the bulk of the film's time are those of the White stars, not the Black actors. And in its world, racism consists of flaws within individual bigots, and the cure is White paternalism, not Black organization or self-help.

The White racists who brutalize a young Black girl and animate the plot are wholly evil, snarling and stupid, unlike any human most of us would admit to knowing—but most of us recognize as the stereotyped rural, drunken, uneducated White Southern bigot. The father of the girl, Carl Lee Hailey, played by Samuel L. Jackson, kills the two criminals before they can come to trial, and the story revolves around his own trial for murder.

Matthew McConaughey plays attorney Jake Brigance, the White savior of the film who represents the defendant. After Carl Lee shoots the villains, we see a little blond girl, Jake's daughter, in tight closeup; this is apparently intended to arouse empathy in the White audience, to show how the majority of those implicitly addressed by the film would feel if their own little girl were attacked. Just to make the equation clear, Jake's

wife (Ashley Judd) says "Isn't she the sweetest thing," and Jake responds, "When I look at her I can't help thinking about Tonya" (the Black girl).

Although the plot emerges from the crime committed against Carl Lee's daughter and then by him, the movie spends the bulk of its time on the White protagonists. Carl Lee and his family have a small fraction of the dialogue that Jake and his family do. The audience spends far more time mulling the injuries and suffering of the White stars, who are repeatedly threatened and attacked for courageously standing up to White bigotry; they see far less about the difficulties experienced by the Black characters. Reinforcing this reading, in a pilot study we coded the close-up shots accorded the top-billed characters and found that costar Sandra Bullock, playing an apprentice lawyer, received almost twice as many as Jackson (and McConaughey, four times as many). Close ups are a mechanism for "focalization," for concentrating the audience's attention and identification.

Here we see how the political economy of mainstream movie production, built around the star system, affects the ideological message of character and dialogue. To have focalized the film through the Black family's experiences, to have expended the bulk of the dialogue and close-ups on Samuel L. Jackson and other (essentially unknown) Black actors, would have turned transformed this film's market position. It would have gone from being a potential (and actual) blockbuster to a niche-market movie appealing mainly to African Americans.

Perhaps as an unrecognized adjunct to this choice, the film takes a strong stance against organized political action by ethnic groups. It depicts a Black minister who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King and representing the NAACP, saying he wants to

provide Carl Lee with legal representation. The Reverend and his cronies are portrayed as corrupt self-seekers, trying to exploit a situation for their own benefit. The minister tells Carl Lee that he is only on trial because he's Black, and explains he needs a lawyer with sensitivity to the "needs of the movement." The NAACP even claims Carl's acquittal would do more for Blacks in the state than "anything since integration," apparently they want to subordinate Carl Lee's interest in avoiding the gas chamber to this larger mandate. The organizers raise funds ostensibly to support Carl Lee and his family. But the money they obtain from his congregation actually goes not to defend Carl Lee or help his destitute kin but to line the coffers of the NAACP and the corrupt local minister. Carl Lee refuses the NAACP's offer of help, condemns their political agenda, and chooses the White lawyer over affiliation with an organized effort by African Americans.

The film even suggests a partial equation between the organized NAACP and corrupt Black militancy on the one hand, and the venal White militants of the KKK on the other. Both are led by selfish bigots who manipulate followers to advance their personal power. Though the film rates the Klan higher on its villainy scale, it furthers this parallel by showing a young Black man firebomb the head of the Klan; we also see that the Black woman who starts the ensuing race riot is as full of hate as the White racists. The moral of this story is that individual cooperation, apolitical and *ad hoc*, provides the only real path to racial reconciliation. Collective organization and action are either corrupt or dangerous. We don't mean to contest this position's legitimacy, but rather to show that this entertainment vehicle does take a strong political stance.

CONCLUSION

All of these films provide a fascinating kaleidoscope of images to analyze, but further discussion is beyond our purposes here. As we said at the outset, film is an intricate site of cultural expression about race. By combining quantitative content analytical methods usually applied only to news with qualitative examples, this chapter attempts to capture the complicated flavor of messages about race and ethnicity in Hollywood's most popular movies. Hollywood has improved its contributions to race relations significantly over the past 30 years, although as we have suggested, there is always room for even more progress. But we recognize the complicated task that the film industry faces in responding to this challenge.

Part of the reason for the complexity of movie images lay in the way stereotypical representation combines with human perception. In a sense, each member of the ethnic group bears the burden of representing his or her entire category. For some film viewers, if a character conforms in any way to negative stereotypes, that's what they will notice and remember; they'll disregard any non-stereotypical qualities the same person demonstrates. Fearing such reactions, critical analysts often zero in on negative traits and denounce a movie for stereotyping even when the film contains many laudable characters and behaviors. Caught between the options of making their characters plaster saints (and getting lambasted for unrealistic narratives) or making them flawed but authentically human (and getting chastised for stereotyping), filmmakers can be forgiven for becoming exasperated with critics.

And there may be no easy solution to this conundrum. Market pressures loom even larger here in the realm of filmed entertainment than in that of journalism, which we

explored in the previous two chapters. It may be unrealistic to expect films aiming for the widest possible audience—the kind that fell into our sample of the top-earning movies—to be much different from what they are. Serious films with more complicated and varied representations of minorities do get made, but they generally don't break through the \$25 million ceiling set for the sample. Often marketed as if they will only appeal to a minority audience, such films can become victims of unimaginative, self-fulfilling marketing prophecy. But perhaps this kind of movie will only appeal to minority audiences. If so, the economics dictates a vicious circle: Low projected revenues from a limited audience dictates lower spending on production and marketing, which yields lower audience appeal—and lower revenues.

This relationship may be compounded by restricted demand for serious, nuanced movies among all ethnic groups. Just because a minority group faces serious problems in the U.S. does not mean its members will have more somber tastes at the box office than the majority group. In recent years, a series of thoughtful and provocative films about the African American experience, such as "Rosewood" and "Get on the Bus," have done poorly at the box office even among Blacks. At the same time, pure entertainment fare like "Boozy Call," and "Set It Off" generated major financial returns, largely from African Americans (Graham 1997). Whites too usually spend the largest share of their ticket money on less challenging entertainment. If indeed minority groups have similar entertainment preferences to the dominant group, then serious films may never attain the distribution and influence we might like.

So ironically, an element of cultural commonality between ethnic minority and majority groups may work to reinforce *perceptions* of cultural difference by creating

market pressures that discourage filmmakers from giving minorities wider-ranging roles in mass-appeal movies. But at least in the current environment, Black stars (though not Asians or Latinos) regularly win major starring roles in mass-oriented films. That marks a noteworthy positive change since the 1960s. Moreover, serious niche-market films featuring minority perspectives do get made and seen. To improve this situation will require interest and cooperation from audiences, not just from the film industry.

Chapter 4 Appendix 1

Top-Earning Movies During Calendar 1996*

Ranking	Film	Box Office Gross
1	Independence Day	\$306,155,579
2	Twister	\$241,721,524
3	Mission: Impossible	\$180,981,866
4	The Rock	\$134,069,511
5	The Nutty Professor	\$128,814,019
6	Ransom	\$125,810,051
7	The Birdcage	\$124,060,553
8	101 Dalmatians	\$109,686,111
9	A Time to Kill	\$108,766,007
10	Phenomenon	\$104,464,977
11	The First Wives Club	\$103,708,261
12	Eraser	\$101,295,562
13	The Hunchback of N.Dame	\$99,931,320
14	Star Trek: First Contact	\$86,249,815
15	Space Jam	\$83,038,821
16	Mr. Holland's Opus	\$82,569,971
17	Broken Arrow	\$70,770,147
18	Jerry Maguire	\$65,675,817
19	The Cable Guy	\$60,240,295
20	Courage Under Fire	\$59,031,057
21	Jack	\$58,478,604
22	12 Monkeys	\$56,988,975
23	Executive Decision	\$56,679,192
24	Primal Fear	\$56,116,183
25	Jingle All the Way	\$54,460,867
26	Tin Cup	\$53,888,896

*These figures are for films included in the analysis of Part II. They are not necessarily identical with total box office receipts since many films are in release during two different years. For example, *Jerry Maguire* earned over \$153 million during 1996-1997.

The other films that earned more than \$25 million in 1996 and are included in the Part I analysis are:

Sleepers

Dragonheart

Up Close and Personal

Jumanji

Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet

Grumpier Old Men

The Mirror Has Two Faces

Dead Man Walking
Sense and Sensibility
Happy Gilmore
The Ghost and the Darkness
Michael
The Truth About Cats and Dogs
A Thin Line Between Love and Hate
Set It Off
Waiting to Exhale
Matilda
Striptease
Heat
The Long Kiss Goodnight
Black Sheep
Rumble in the Bronx
Eddie
The Preacher's Wife
Sargent Bilko
Leaving Las Vegas
Mars Attacks!
Spy Hard
Eye for an Eye
Father of the Bride, Part II
Harriet the Spy
First Kid
Daylight
From Dusk Till Dawn
Down Periscope
That Thing You Do
Escape from L.A.
Kingpin

Chapter 5

Conclusion: What Can and Should Media Do?

Robert M. Entman

Our focus on the media—and our earlier recommendations for altering media practices—notwithstanding, we fully recognize the profound difficulty of making change in this area. We understand the ease with which human beings' perceptions sort themselves into disparaging generalizations about other groups—and thus the difficulty of enhancing racial comity no matter what the media do. In this conclusion we confront these problems head on before offering some final meditations on better practices that the media might nonetheless consider. We urge in particular that the matters explored in this report become objects of as much public scrutiny and debate as has long been devoted to the media-violence connection.

The psychology of group prejudice has been summarized by Myron Rothbart and Oliver P. John (1993). They describe how “minimal groups” have repeatedly formed in psychology labs, where experimenters can easily foment in-group/out-group animosity. For example, subjects in a classic series of experiments (discussed in Tajfel 1982) were told they belonged to one of two groups: those who overestimate the number of dots in a pattern projected on a screen, or those who underestimate dots. Subjects then developed identifications with their putative group: “In short, merely categorizing the subjects implicitly raised the expectation that ‘we’ are better than ‘they’ which resulted in subjects disproportionately remembering unfavorable behaviors associated with the outgroup (p. 38; cf. Wetherell and Potter 1992: 38). People seem to have a tendency to “maximize the difference between the boundaries of groups and often treat overlapping distributions of characteristics as if they were non-overlapping.” In consequence, “We tend to perceive groups other than our own as too homogeneous and monolithic in character.” (p. 40).

This makes stereotypes difficult to dislodge. Contact with an outgroup individual seems to cause more favorable attitudes toward that individual, but not to generalize to challenge the hostile stereotype: "[I]n effect, atypical category members are not category members at all." (p. 43). As a result:

[W]e give too much weight to those individuals who confirm the stereotype and not enough weight to those who disconfirm the stereotype. This in turn implies that only a few stereotype-confirming individuals, against the background of many stereotype disconfirming individuals, would nonetheless serve to maintain the stereotype. (p. 44; also see Pettigrew, 1979 on the "ultimate attribution error.")

Although this report critically analyzes media contributions to intergroup misunderstanding and hostility, we want to underscore that the depth and reach of those sentiments must not be laid exclusively at the media's door. And even if humans were not so prone to think stereotypically, it's not so clear exactly what we would have the media do. What if we could erase the market pressures that lead local TV news to emphasize easy-to-report and ratings-maximizing crime stories that often make minorities look bad? What if network news could redefine newsworthiness so as to produce more diverse ethnic representation? Could coverage of racially-charged court cases take a more philosophical, educational slant? What if we could alter box office calculations so that movies would not so often confirm the subordinate roles of minorities? In answering, in attempting to come up with models for enhancing media contributions to group relations, we must acknowledge that standards for judging media representations of minority members are unclear and difficult even to develop.

Consider the reporting of crime. If we want local news operations to stop showing so much crime among Blacks, exactly how much crime is the acceptable or proper amount? Should TV show Black criminals in proportion to the percentage that Blacks comprise of the metropolitan area's population? Or should the standard be the

percentage of those arrested who are Black? Or of those convicted? What if Blacks are disproportionately arrested and convicted, even though they actually commit a lower proportion of crimes—does that mean accuracy demands showing a greater proportion of White defendants than Whites comprise of all those arrested? But there's more: Should representation on TV reflect the proportions of defendants in each specific crime? If 31% of those arrested for drug-related crimes are Black, should 31% of news stories about drug crime feature Black defendants? If 58% of murders are committed by Whites should 58% of murder defendants depicted be White, no matter how spectacular the crime or heart-rending the victims of the murders committed by Blacks, Latinos, Asians and others might be? Whatever our answers, it is difficult to imagine how media could calibrate ethnic representation to any standard of this sort. Perhaps unfortunately, there is no clear quantitative standard for correct numerical representation of minority groups to which we could legitimately hold the media to account.

Beyond this, even if we could determine precepts for depicting minorities that media could reasonably follow, there remains the dilemma previously discussed: that people generally tend to disregard counter-stereotypical information (Sniderman, Tetlock, and Carmines 1993; Tajfel 1982; Iyengar and McGuire 1993). To take a concrete example, consider what might be called the "Cosby effect." The biggest TV hit of the 1980s, the *Cosby Show* intentionally conveyed positive images designed to counteract stereotypes and misconceptions. Nonetheless, research has found, many Whites who liked the show resolved the dissonance between its messages and their existing assumptions by remaining prejudiced. They regarded Cosby as an exception proving the rule. They asked: If Cosby (or rather, Dr. Huxtable, the fictional character), can prosper and fit comfortably into the mainstream, if his family can face and overcome problems common among all American families, why are so many Blacks on the news becoming criminals or taking welfare? Many White audience members reasoned that the answer must be low motivation among Blacks, or worse (Jhally and Lewis 1992). Therefore, we

submit, neither ensuring Blacks and other minority groups are shown in various positive or negative roles at some specified rate, nor providing consistent images, as *Cosby* did, of these groups acting “just like Whites” will undo generations of suspicion and misunderstanding.

Rather, we believe, the way for media to contribute significantly toward enhanced group relations is providing messages that construct a larger, empathetic context and understanding of minority group experiences in America. Such messages would *allow audience members themselves to challenge their own misguided assumptions and stereotypes. The ideal is genuine autonomous thinking by a citizenry that is not, as now, unknowingly bound into one frame of reference and prevented from thinking through another.*

Considering the news media first, they rarely provide this kind of actively interpretive contextual reporting, and they argue can't do much better. Economic pressures constrain them: they'd lose audiences and advertisers. Not to mention the problem of unclear normative principles, and thus perhaps the impossibility of meeting standards in any consistent way. But, we believe, this complexity doesn't entirely excuse the media from improving, even if perfection is unattainable.

Once admitting the business constraint, journalists can acknowledge that *telling stories* is precisely what they do. Little more than professional norms and some market pressures and expectations differentiate what they do from what “entertainment” media do. In this light, the goal of objectivity, to give audiences a chance to decide for themselves on the truth and implications of the reported matter might be better served by self consciously shaping news stories with what we call *editorial objectivity*. This would

involve making an explicit assessment of the whole reported matter and an intellectually honest argument for its substantive implications, from a variety of perspectives (cf. Gans, 1979).

Journalists and even entertainment media personnel should become comprehensively aware of the cumulative effect their individual products have on race relations. They should make links explicitly in their minds, then in their texts, between yesterday and today, between visuals and verbal messages. The goal is *comprehensive and mindful narration* to replace the wholly unplanned hodge-podge of positive images, negative images, stereotypes, over-representation (e.g., in crime and poverty news) and under-representation (e.g., in romantic films) that accumulate over time without anyone's conscious awareness. This may require new types of news editors and entertainment producers who look for patterns in the totality of media messages as they build across the years, scouting for exclusions, inaccurate connotations and misleading juxtapositions.

In the area of news, attaining this goal would encompass some of the following actions:

- Commitment to accurate and repeated presentation of knowable facts on racially-charged issues (like the size of the welfare budget and ethnicity of beneficiaries).
- Seeking to create audience understandings rooted in facts or at least consciously chosen and openly announced value commitments. That is, selecting frames for stories based on what we know, not what we fear or unconsciously assume.
- Producing messages that clarify their own sources and shortcomings. For example: local news might remind its viewers repeatedly that Black youth crime rates may be much higher than White, but that among *employed* Black and White adults the

difference vanishes. Network news could tell viewers that however problematic Washington, DC's Mayor Marion Barry might be, he is not a prototypical Black mayor. He received more network attention than all other Black mayors combined only because his behavior yielded good video and narrative interest (Entman, 1994a). Such information would convey to audiences self-reflexive insight into the inadequacies of mediated messages, their inevitable selectivity and partiality. Both journalists and audiences need to realize how much of conventional reporting practice violates the goals of hallowed norms like objectivity, balance and fairness when it neglects the context of the news event and the sources of its own images. By obscuring the larger story, journalists can mislead audiences despite producing superficially accurate reports.

- Rethinking and retooling of traditional journalistic norms and assumptions:
 - Heightened media (and thus audience) sensitivity to loaded language choices, such as symbolic buzzwords like “quota queen” (applied to Lani Guinier; Rife, 1998) or “angry White male” that can both misinform and unnecessarily inflame group relations (cf. Entman, 1997 on affirmative action).
 - More explicit appreciation for the power of visual images, now largely excluded from calculations of “balance” and “fairness” in the news.
 - Changing the cynical political schema that shapes news. Too often the news frames a minority as just another interest group playing for gain in a cynical game. A substantive focus on public policy could reveal common interests, and the way that empathy, understanding, and trust among ethnic groups would serve them.

In this way the media might contribute to a virtuous cycle that yields both material and spiritual gain for all groups, rather than, as they currently sometimes do, contributing to misapprehensions that actually diminish the nation's well-being.

Determining how to achieve these goals in practice is no easy chore. Providing context in the news, avoiding the reports of sensational crime news stories every night, or reducing use of file footage with poor Blacks or Latino immigrants, all require major changes in habits and norms. But these are the goals that fulfill journalism's loftiest ambitions. Serving them is what justifies the special treatment and status of journalism, and what distinguishes news from purely profit-driven entertainment.

That said, by our focus on the news we do not mean to exclude the entertainment industry. Entertainment producers too need to understand the significant potential impacts of their products on social and political relations in the U.S. We believe most personnel in the entertainment field also care about more than making money, and would care especially if they were to recognize the influence of the externality or pollution effects of their profit-maximizing. There is little reason to think that audiences heavily discount or disregard the impressions of ethnic groups conveyed by movies, television entertainment, advertisements, and recorded music merely because they come packaged as fiction (cf. Dines and Humez, 1995). It may be quixotic to urge social responsibility upon entertainment media, but we can think of no serious ethical rationale for totally excluding them from such obligations. In any case, the boundaries between news and entertainment are dissolving; with industry consolidation, the profit motive becomes more of a driving force in news production and information or "infotainment" become another vehicle for profit. We should therefore not limit our consideration of media

influence by emphasizing the increasingly problematic distinctions among media genres and outlets.

We believe government can promote positive movement in this area with due regard for the First Amendment and clear recognition of the limited powers that public policy can exert. Structural solutions such as encouraging minority ownership and employment would help, but by themselves have only marginal potential. Enhanced diversity in media ownership and employment cannot succeed in isolation. (And media ownership trends are so powerfully determined by market forces that government may have little influence in that regard.)

We recommend that structural policies be accompanied by an *awareness campaign designed to make the media's racial images and their impacts an important object of public attention and discourse*. To this end we urge that the federal government, in cooperation with media and other private and public organizations, promote ongoing efforts to monitor racial and ethnic images and determine their effects. The model here is the longstanding government and public concern with the contribution of mass mediated violence to real world aggression. As in that area, the government can encourage continuing, empirically-based public understanding and policy dialogue without threatening free expression.

Arguably, any positive media movement in this area could pay even larger social dividends than has the commitment to amassing data on media violence and its effects. We know the social, economic, psychological and other causes of violence are deep-rooted; however significant their effects, media can only play a secondary role in the cause or cure of violence. Although social and psychological forces also contribute to

ethnic disharmony, the media's impact on what people know or think they know—and therefore feel—about other groups may be greater. As suggested by the remarks of Mr. Morgan at the Akron Town Meeting (quoted in beginning this report), Americans rely heavily upon mass media for their impressions of other groups (cf. Entman and Rojecki, forthcoming; Gilens, 1996). Ethnic prejudice and misunderstanding may therefore be more susceptible than violence to education and correction via improved media practices. Beyond that, since violence and prejudice reinforce each other, reducing one would also help diminish the other.

In the end, mass media should recognize their compelling self-interest in reform. High social alienation in America threatens the media's long-term profitability. One concomitant of social distrust and blighted political hope is declining interest among audiences in keeping up with the news. Cynicism about society's collective ability to solve problems through democratic deliberation and political action reduce the size and attentiveness of news audiences. Even those who consume entertainment become less valuable to advertisers if in a sour frame of mind. The pressure on mass media for change is heightened by competition from cyberspace and other individually-customized news and entertainment vehicles that are about to jump into the communication market. As mass media search for ways to distinguish themselves and remain valuable advertising outlets and viable revenue generators, sensitivity to the racial and ethnic matters explored here will make good business sense.

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Acknowledgements

This report emerged from a course on "Race and the Media" taught at the Kennedy School of Government during the Fall, 1997 semester by Robert M. Entman, who was then the Lombard Visiting Professor at Harvard. Professor Entman suggested research topics and provided preliminary instructions for analysis and continuing supervision to several groups of graduate students enrolled in the seminar (and to one group taking a course from Professor Christopher Edley at Harvard Law School). Going beyond the normal call of student duty, the co-authors of this document ably helped to design and competently executed the complicated, data-intensive research projects written up here. Two other Kennedy School students, Judith Gaddie and Shawn Rife, provided help on the design and coding for the network news study and the electoral districting project, respectively. Rose Ann Miller entered most of the data for computer analysis and cheerfully assisted in other ways. The report also benefited from the exhilarating intellectual atmosphere cultivated at the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy by its director, Professor Marvin Kalb, and by Professors Thomas Patterson and Pippa Norris. The encouragement they offered, and the support of the Center's Edie Holway, were indispensable and much appreciated. We also thank Professor Edley, who drew all of us into this endeavor and helped greatly along the way. Finally, Professor Entman records his gratitude to the Chicago Human Relations Foundation and its Director, Clarence Wood, and to the Markle Foundation, for supporting his research on media and race.