African american stereotypes in the media

History, African American

African American Stereotypes in the Media

When I first heard someone say, " All African American people are Ghetto," I was very offended that someone would make this type of assumption about myculture, and I thought how ignorant this person must be; but then I stopped and wondered why other people would think this about us. I asked her why she would say something like this, and she instantly listed shows like Tosh. O and Chelsea Lately, which highlight my culture in a negative view. It was clear to me that she had made up her mind about black people through watching the media and seeing African Americans fulfill that stereotype in person. This led me to question: Where exactly do these stereotypes come from? Are African American stereotypes still apparent in the media? What shows, movies, etc have made others portray our race as " Ghetto" or other lists of stereotypes? Are there any solutions to stop African American stereotypes? When we subscribe to the belief that groups of members are expected to possess certain characteristics, we are engaging stereotypes.

When these groups are evaluated based on what the perceiver believes the target ought to be, judgments are made. These judgments concerning these individuals, based on their membership in a group or judgments made about people are not particularly based on facts. Stereotypes about our race date all the way back to slavery. The beliefs that we were dishonest, promiscuous, and violent were evident during the slavery of our black race. More recently the media sets the tone for morals, values, info about our culture; leading people to believe everything they see on TV including black stereotypes. It is

a fact that one out of three people are said to have more than one TV in their house, which shows that media is a source for how people form perceptions about people. Perception thus becomes a reality to people, and once people perceive it, stereotyping is born. Stereotyping of African Americans in the media has stemmed from how the media has presented African Americans to the world. There is a theory by George Gerbner that states, " Individuals who frequently watch high contents of television will begin to believe that they are living in a world similar to what is portrayed on the screen. It is the idea that whether something is being portrayed as negative or positive on television, most people will believe it. There is a fact which says that about six percent of African Americans are seen in comedies and dramas. Within that category, they are mostly illustrated as being lazy, loud, uneducated, and poor. For example, in movies like The Color Purple and shows like Good Times demonstrates negative perceptions of our race. On the other hand, shows like The Cosby Show and Fresh Prince of Bel Aire try and broaden the viewer's idea of a typical " black" family.

These shows highlight black people living a very high class, educated, wealthy lifestyle. And so, as we see, the media ultimately controls how our race as they perceived, whether it is negative or positive. Since the media has a strong influence on the people's perceptions of each other, they are the real deciding factor on how to solve the problem of stereotyping. We could possibly find solutions by matching every negative stereotype with a positive one so that the good and bad cancel each other out. This is just a start; we want it so that when other cultures look at us, degrading stereotypes pertaining to our race will not come to mind. I believewe as

individuals also have the power to choose not to conform to our own stereotypes. Bordewich once said, " Only by abandoning many long-held, lovingly-held, myths and fantasies; we will become able to shape a healthy rational policy for people whose real-life s far more complex and interesting, than our persistent fantasies. " So although the entertainment in the media may be interesting, we as a culture need to lead and be as a catalyst in ending these demeaning stereotypes.

Stereotypes can be good or bad, but given the evidence from my research on this topic, I can conclude that most African American stereotypes are negative. The way entertainment in the media portrays us has greatly affected how others identify us. Movies and shows like; Madea's Family Reunion, Bringing down the House, Love and Hip Hop, and Basketball Wives all portray us in a degrading way. People sometimes find it comical of course, but the fact that it is comical does not justify it being debasing. This image of us has evolved from things in the media, and its' power to shape people's ideas of us. We as a race must stop living up to our stereotypes. As soon as we take action in not succumbing to our own stereotype, people will not think we are " Ghetto" or any other undignified term they think of us; therefore in the media, we won't be perceived in that way. As Colin Powell once said, " Fit no stereotypes. Don't chase the latest management fads. The situation dictates which approach best accomplishes the team's mission. " Although African American stereotyping is prevalent in the media now because of its' entertaining quality; it perpetuates a cycle of harmful stereotypes.

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