

Images of african americans in the media



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The mass media is a powerful force today in American pop culture. A lot of the images seen on television, magazines, billboards, and on television have lasting impressions. Sometimes these impressions create a negative impact. The media can be very destructive to society. Many different ethnic groups and cultures are negatively affected by the content and images in the media. African Americans seem to be on the very top of that list.

For some people in society, the only time they get to see another race is from the images portrayed through the media. America is populated with many different cultures and races, often considered as the world's largest melting pot. Learned ignorance with a combination of limited exposure and negative images being the only depiction seen in different areas of the media lead to stereotyping of an entire race. Since the infancy of television and newspaper, exposure of African Americans has been scarce or even non-existent. In the early times black culture in television and film were limited to demeaning and cruel depictions of black people as being submissive, docile, and unintelligent. Many black actors were only assigned to domestic roles, portrayed as savages, and other images that added to the stereotypes of black people in that time in history. Blacks were rarely seen in news shows, newspapers, but it seemed to only be shown if they were committing crimes. The negative stereotypes of blacks in the media were a result of the lack of African Americans holding management positions in the media. Therefore a lot of the images being shown blacks had no control over. Even though there are so many negative images of blacks in the media, black entrepreneurs began showing positive images of their race and culture. In 1945, John H. Johnson, founder of Johnson Publishing Company, created Ebony Magazine.

This is where he put an effort into displaying positive role models in the black community. In 1951, he created Jet magazine to discuss the news in the black community that mainstream media ignored. People that read Jet and Ebony said they believed their dreams could come true after reading the stories of success of other African Americans, despite what they saw in the media. Newspapers that were written and organized by African Americans had a major influence in overcoming racial stereotypes in the media. In the 1980s, television started portraying positive images of blacks. Successful sitcoms like "The Cosby Show", developed by Bill Cosby showed that African Americans can be educated parents and raise successful families in New York. At least a decade before that, Norman Lear developed a successful family show called "Good Times" that showed African Americans struggling to make ends meet by staying away from the danger that is associated with living in public housing. Even though black people do successful things they are still criticized. Those shows were successful as far as ratings but were still criticized about the characters in "Good Times" depicting blacks as poverty stricken. The success of the Cosby show and other positive black shows has changed drastically over the years.

The negative and racial preferences in the media even influence our younger generation. All children in our society become aware of racial prejudice that is directed against their own race or others. Social comparison starts from early school years. They normally focus on characteristics like skin color, to make social comparisons. It has been proven through several tests on adolescents in grade school their preferences on a particular race based on what they see in the media. One of the researches was based on baby dolls. This

test indicated that children prefer white baby dolls because it was more popular on television commercials. Black baby dolls were rarely seen on TV or non-existent.

Colorism is another major aspect that has been brought upon by the mass media. Colorism involves light skinned African Americans rejecting blacks who are darker skin toned. Colorism encompasses that dark -skinned African Americans discriminating against lighter skinned blacks for not being dark enough. This also includes issues involving hair texture, eye color, and hair texture. It also involves discrimination among their own race on a person's complexion and physical characteristics. In the media, whether it be on television or in newspapers, it has been said that those with lighter complexions, are treated differently that darker African Americans. African American women in the mass media portray women as stereotypical, mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and jezebels. These images have been controlling images for a long time. The media displays demeaning characteristics of black women being lazy and promiscuous. Today in society the images in women, especially black women, are disgusting. In music videos derogatory lyrics and compromising photos forces the community to believe that this is all what African women are all about. Black women are given the most sexual and demeaning roles to promote and advertise products and albums for record labels. These types of images only send out negative images that this is the only thing black women know how to do. Black men are seen as drug users, violent and dead beat fathers in the mass media. Music videos portray them also as thugs and uneducated. If convicted of a crime the news will often show a mug shot of a black male but will show

a less offensive picture of a white male. Crime shows and movies will tend to show black males as the offender, being disrespectful, running from the police, and involved in hostile situations. The media tends to show this type of behavior over and over in the news or published in the newspaper more often than you would see a black male doing something positive for his community. This is why other black males are influenced by what they see because this is all they see and they believe this is what they are supposed to do. When society is seeing the same behaviors being shown continuously then this creates the stereotypes of that race. They believe this is how the race acts based on what they see on television and what they read. On the other hand, the same negative images by the media are turned around when it comes to white females and males. White females are portrayed as victims of crimes and innocent. Forensic files television shows or cold case shows seem to show crimes that involved a white female as a victim, cases with black victims are not shown as much. Another example of the media influencing or promoting racial stereotypes is in the movies. A lot of the movies that are about gang violence or living in urban areas focus on black males being angry and committing crimes. For example, A film called "Menace to Society, was produced by black men, and was a totally negative display of African American Men. This movie focused only on the street life and made it seem like there is something good and honorable about being a thug and being involved in criminal activity. A lot of the movies portray black men as being nothing more than animals that have no brains and only engage in criminal activity. With these types of movies being on the market, it is only expected that society including other African Americans will believe and act out on what they see. The media constantly bombards us with

negative images of African American males and females, and this is what encourages racial stereotypes. Unfortunately, people tend to believe what they see on TV. They believe that what they see on TV is the truth about the world and everybody in it. Those who believe what they see on television have no other reference or personal life experience which to compare or contrast to make decisions about they see. Younger children tend to look at the media to explore new things and see if they can relate to other things in the world. Television and the media has a way of stereotyping people, races, and cultures based on standardized roles and behaviors. This provides people with a broad idea and assumptions. The absence of minorities in the media may leave children with the sense of not being worthy, worthy of attention, or respect.

Despite the negative depictions in the media, African Americans have come a long way and have become very successful and powerful in society. African Americans have succeeded in becoming athletes, movie stars, and musical artist. They have succeeded in becoming police officers, nurses, and other professions. They have excelled in being outstanding mother and fathers and marriages are lasting. There is still the high statistics that show that African Americans are above all other races when it comes to being single parents and having broken homes, but not everyone in that race is classed under those stereotypes. They are a lot of positive African American role models that we can look up to now.

One African American family that everyone can look up to know as positive reinforcement is the Obama family. They have shown that black they are positive black families that can stick together and be successful. They have

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given American another way to view black families. They stereotypical views that blacks families always end destruction and broken homes and the children become useless in society have come to end. There are a lot of black families that consist of the mother and father and both are successful in life. They media unfortunately don't show the positive side. He media tends to focus on the broken homes and terrible behaviors of kids that are split between the broken homes. Sadly, this is true but the black family is not the only ones going through broken homes and having single parents. The Cosby Show was one of the first positive depictions of black families, but it was only a television show. Now the Obama's shows a real life portrayal of a happy successful African American family.

Positive images of black fathers in the media are virtually non-existent. Black fathers are normally depicted has leaving their families and not supporting their children. They are mostly seen as worthless individuals who do not work and avoid taking responsibility for their kids. There are a lot of black fathers who are active in their children's lives but the media neglects to show that to America. Even on day time talk shows you will always see more than any other race black fathers denying their kids and going through paternity test on national television. America loves nothing more but to find enjoyment in watching them demean their race. This display on television only adds fuel to the fire when we are watching black men deny their children. This only makes other races believe that black men are dead beat dads.

Contrary to what is being shown on television, there are shows that show how many black men are being involved in their children's lives. Many rap

stars constantly show how much they love and cherish their children. Most of the time you will see them with their families on red carpet events and now they are even making sitcoms that show their everyday lives with their families. With this new change in the media it is a refreshing look at how things are slowly changing.