

Role of media on african americans assignment



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There has always been a lot of discussion about the perception of African Americans in the media and how it affects their self-identity. It is easy to find examples of bias in portraying African Americans in the media. So what exactly is it that the media does to bring out these stereotypes, biases, and images that tend to stick with a lot of African Americans? The goal of this paper is to explore the different perceptions African Americans have gone through, how it has given them a sense of double consciousness on life, where the media image of African Americans that has stuck with them for so long can, and will go from here.

According to the United States Census Bureau (2001), 12.3% of all people reporting as one race reported they were "Black or African American". This ethnic identity is now the second biggest minority group in the United States. It also refers to a group of people that has been in the United States for as long as it has existed. However, through the persecution of slavery, the austerity of segregation, and the continuing underlying prejudice, African Americans are still searching for their true identity.

Just as children that were adopted tend to long for a true identity most of their lives, so are the circumstances of the African American. Stolen from their homeland and forced into slavery in a new country, African Americans were basically victims of identity theft. Although a lot of progress has been made in the way of an American identity for African Americans, a true identity has not yet been found. According to W. E. B DuBois (1903) "The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife??? this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self" (p. 8). Many African Americans feel the same as W. E. B. Du Bois

when he says, " After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world ??? a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. " He also states, " One ever feels his twoness ??? an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled arrives; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. A quick look at American history makes it easy to understand where this split identity stems from because Du Bois claims that African Americans were always forced to see things through " white" eyes only and not have a vision of their own. In an effort to rephrase Du Bois' comment above, the terminology of " twoness" is really him trying to define double consciousness as a few different things: 1 the power that white stereotypes have on African American's lives and also having that internal conflict between labeling themselves as African and American simultaneously. it is a sense of awareness of one's self along with the awareness of how others may perceive one. This in turn leads to conforming based on level of power, which is basically what occurred. PBS' African American World Timeline (2004) says that there is a large history of not granting African Americans an identity. Before 1787, of course, African Americans were slaves and only thought of as property. In 1787 the U. S. Constitution was approved. It allowed for the continuation of the slave trade for another 20 years and claimed that a slave counted as three-fifths of a man for representation by the government.

In 1865 some progress was gained when the Thirteenth Amendment was passed, outlawing slavery and creating a Freedmen's Bureau to help out former slaves. Also in 1865 Union General, William Sherman issued a field order setting up 40-acre plots of land in Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida for African Americans to settle. But, in 1866, some all-white legislatures in the former Confederate states passed what were known as, "Black Codes" harshly cutting the freedom of African Americans and practically re-enslaving them.

Since that time there has been some progression and also some difficulty for African Americans. Based on the history of the United States' treatment of African Americans, it is easy to understand how they could struggle for their true identity. James Jones (1991) might say it best when he states, "Black personality is in part an adaptation to the political contours of racism. The conflict between the freedoms and rights of United States citizens is connected to the denial of freedom and rights that is the history of the African American presence in this country.

If we view personality as the resultant of coping pattern and socialization directives, then black personality is, in part, the cumulative representation of the effects of racism over four centuries. It reflects over time, the effects of the form and structure racism takes, and comes to signal the nature of race relations at any point in time (p. 305). " This would lead to accepting of the fact that African Americans do, of course, have an identity, but a lot of the time it is dependent on the identity of White race at that time.

Alain Locke (1925) explains the upward moving and upbeat side of African American identity: " In the last decade something beyond the watch and guard of statistics has happened in the life of the American Negro and the three norms who have traditionally presided over the Negro problem have a changeling in their laps. The Sociologist, The Philanthropist, the Race-leader are not unaware of the New Negro but they are at a loss to account for him. He simply cannot be swathed in their formulae.

For the younger generation is vibrant with a new psychology; the new spirit is awake in the masses, and under the very eyes of the professional observers is transforming what has been a perennial problem into the progressive phases of contemporary Negro life. Could such a metamorphosis have taken place as suddenly as it has appeared to? The answer is no, not because the New Negro is not here, but because the Old Negro had long become more of a myth than a man. The Old Negro, we must remember, was a creature of moral debate and historical controversy.

His has been a stock figure perpetuated as a historical fiction partly in innocent sentimentalism, partly in deliberate reactions. The Negro himself has contributed his share to this through a sort of protective social mimicry forced upon him by the adverse circumstances of dependence. So for generations in the mind of America, the Negro has been more of a formula than a human being -a something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be " kept down," or " in his place," or " helped up," to be worried with or worried over, harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden.

The thinking Negro even has been induced to share this same general attitude, to focus his attention on controversial issues, to see himself, in the distorted perspective of a social problem. His shadow, so to speak, has been more real to him than his personality. Through having had to appeal from the unjust stereotypes of his oppressors and Traducers to those of his liberators, friends and benefactors he has subscribed to the traditional positions from which his case has been viewed.

Little true social or self-understanding has or could come from such a situation... ..Until recently, lacking self-understanding, we have been almost as much of a problem to ourselves as we still are to others. But the decade that found us with a problem has left us with only a task. The multitude perhaps feels as yet only a strange relief and a new vague urge, but the thinking few know that in the reaction the vital inner grip of prejudice has been broken. It does not follow that if the Negro were better known he would be better liked or better treated.

But mutual understanding is basic for any subsequent cooperation and adjustment. The effort toward this will at least have the effect of remedying in large part what has been the most unsatisfactory feature of our present stage of race relationships in America, namely the fact that the more intelligent and representative elements of the two race groups have at so many points got quite out of vital touch with one another (p. 631). " Even in the premier times of African American identity there were still questions to be answered.

Now those questions lead to progressive thinking like Locke's, "middle of the road" thinking and "extremist" thinking. An example of the term "middle-of-the-road" thinking can be seen in a post by Malcolm Frierson (2004) to a discussion board using the topic of what label to give African Americans. He says: "It is the right of the individual to be self-defining. Black is a color, not a term for a race of people in this millennium. The word was made beautiful and strong in the 60s and beyond for obvious reasons. That effort was admirable and effective, but now fairly done.

It is time to move forward." The term African American linguistically puts the race on more comfortable ground. It doesn't seem right or fair to look at four men and call one Italian, one Native American, one Chinese, and the other "black." "Whites" don't seem to have this concern obviously because they sit at the top of this name issue. The whole system was constructed to glorify the "whites" (the imperialists) and belittle the "blacks" (the subjects)." Also, many "whites" and "blacks" together, beg for an end to this issue because they claim, "we're all Americans. But if we are actually honest with each other, nobody while in contemporary American society, when asked for their race or ethnicity, will never be able to simply label them self as simply "American." There will always have to be a distinguishing label put upon everyone. Why is it that "blacks" have to go through this labeling issue more than any other American subgroup? Asian Americans, Italian Americans, and Filipino Americans often become Asians, Italians, and simply Filipino without ridicule or persecution (Asians further become Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, and others).

A possible answer to this would be that we all identify with our most dominant ancestral line or native country ??? German, Spanish, Portuguese, Jamaican, what have you. It should come before the understood " American" part. But again, we should respect an individual's rights to be self-defining. One " black" problem could be that a lot of people really haven't been to Africa and are in a sense kind of ashamed about or tend to disregard that fact possibly feeling a sense of ignorance in that area.

The term African should be proudly used along with the term American just as other foreign groups use their places of origin along with their American status. Unfortunately this viewpoint is just a common middle-ground between the two poles. The other pole is a belief best supported by the All African People's Revolutionary Party. They say, " African People born and living in over 113 countries around the world are [one group of] people, with one identity, one history, one culture, one nation and one destiny. We have one common enemy. We suffer from disunity, disorganization and ideological confusion.

And we have only one scientific and correct solution, Pan-Africanism: the total liberation and unification of Africa under scientific socialism. " They feel that African people that have been born or are living outside of Africa are intentionally kept from the knowledge of Africa and her achievements through European capitalism. They also feel that people inside of Africa are tricked into living in separate countries because of the " divide and rule" tactic used by Europeans which basically means it forces large concentrations of power (people) into smaller units of power to constrain them from gaining more power as the larger unit.

It is this pole that receives the most voice in the media and also probably this pole which leads to the bias media outlets against African Americans. Perhaps the earliest example of media bias against African Americans, whether intentional or not, came from 19th Century naturalists that divided mankind into Caucasians, Mongolians, Malaysians, Ethiopians and (native) American races. The Caucasians were defined as wise, the Mongolians crafty, and the Ethiopians/negro unintelligent. This bias is blunt and disrespectful, but possibly not hateful in intent back in the day.

Today our media comes from less than ten gigantic media conglomerates in the United States. Salim Muwakkil (1999) mentions that, " Virtually all of our information, our cultural narratives, and our global images derive from institutions whose major goal is to pay handsome dividends to stockholders (p. 2). " Which in other words the media doesn't really care what they say even if it sounds hateful. If it sells and gets publicity, it's a hit. He also points out that black-owned media operations are becoming increasingly rare as much larger corporations continue to buy out more places and more property.

Muwakkil's fear is that the mainstream will continue to alter the image of African Americans without challenge to the point that their " anti-black" tendencies will be encouraged and sustained. Muwakkil makes a very strong point when he states the Kerner Commission's findings: " The Kerner Commission (formally known as the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders), which was charged with finding the reasons for the long-hot-summer rebellions, had concluded that the United States was headed dangerously toward ' two societies, one black, and one white, separate and

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unequal. It blamed the urban unrest on persistent racial discrimination and a historical legacy of disadvantage, but it also singled out the nation's news media for censure. The media treated African Americans as invisible, the commission concluded, and failed to communicate to white audiences " a feeling for the difficulties and frustrations of being a Negro in the United States (p. 1). " In the book, *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America*, Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki (2000) point out some surprising statistics from studies done on American television.

While Black actors are now more frequently appearing in films, it's a debatable question as to how well they're being represented. In the top movies of 1996 representation of African American Females and Caucasian females was drastically different where statistics from differences in using profanity, to physical violence were very often a difference of 70% or more between the 2 races with African Americans being in the higher percentage of the two for those certain areas. Television ads now show, hidden patterns of differentiation and distance pertaining to African Americans.

Not surprisingly, for instance, Blacks do not touch Whites in the majority of television ads, but as opposed to Whites, they rarely even touch each other, expressing a slight message assuming that Black skin would be taboo. A ranking of racial preference is implanted within the casting of commercials. Network news also tends to place a " ghetto" label or more urban image on African Americans. Increasingly, African Americans appear mostly in crime, sports and entertainment stories. Rarely are Blacks shown making an important contribution to the serious business of the nation.

The exception of blacks rarely being shown in a positive fashion contributing to the nation would be President Obama, which will hopefully turn the stage for this image stereotype. Unfortunately however, that negative image is not the only blunt indication of a media stereotype. It is noticed by a lot of different people that African American athletes tend to receive a bad representation by the media, pointing out that when they get into any level of trouble, it is reported significantly more and also perceived in a much different way than when White athletes behave in the same manner or worse.

It also is sometimes apparent that sportscasters tend to point out solely the athletic abilities of African American athletes in contrast to their tendency to point out the intelligence and savvy of White athletes. It is a known stereotype for quarterbacks on football teams for example, people perceive this position to demand a much more mental capacity and take a much more conscious effort as opposed to other positions on the team. Therefore the stereotype has often been viewed as teams primarily consisting of white quarterbacks.

This tends to lead people to believe that black athletes achieve greatness by some coincidence or by simply their natural physical makeup instead of just assuming they are talented and hard working. There are several more examples of media bias against African Americans and there are far too many to speak on individually. Ultimately the point that is trying to be made is that there is a high level of publicity and strong case for media bias against African Americans.

Any actor or famous person for that matter will almost always tell you that no publicity means bad publicity. It is logical then, to see the media (whether its biased or not) as a great tool for providing a voice to the African American community. It is also logical to say that a more biased media representation gives African Americans more publicity as Americans simply love bad press because "dirt" on other people sells, and the media has never cared about ones feelings if it means for them to make money. Ultimately, where I see this issue going from here has everything to do with President Obama. With the world-wide publicity he received for his changing of history for our country, I really feel this will open up many doors into the media for African Americans to have their voice, and create and defend a sense of identity that is much more positive than any other that has been labeled upon them.

Obama is the best thing that has happened to African American media and just them as humans because he is what America needs to not only fix the economic and other issues in this country but most importantly bring the people of different colors together even closer than ever before to becoming one country where everyone is separate in color, but equal in representation and voice. Works Cited Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co. ; [Cambridge]: University Press John Wilson and Son, Cambridge, U. S. A. 1903; Bartleby. com, 1999. P. 68. Entman, R. M. and Andrew R.. (2000). *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America*. University of Chicago Press. Frierson, M. (2004) Black, black, or African American? Feedback Poynter Online Retrieved May 10, 2009 from http://www.poynter.org/article_feedback/article_feedback_list.asp?id=51320 Fudjud, D. (2003) Black, black, or African American? Feedback

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