TELEVISION

Television, as one of several forms of media, continues to be a central part of life for many people in the world. In *Watching Race*, Herman Gray describes television as a medium used to “engage, understand, negotiate, and make sense of the material circumstances of everyday life” (1995, p. 43). Among the many factors that influence a person’s worldview, television is a significant force in shaping public perceptions of race and racial differences. The mediated images create standards and expectations that either unfairly represent racial and ethnic groups or relegate them to the role of the “invisible other.”

The expression of racial ideologies in the media is a topic of interest for social scientists and media analysts throughout the world. The United States, however, has been of particular interest, given its role as the major force in the globalization of the media. Most American commercial television presents programming in which racial and ethnic groups are either absent or marginalized.

AFRICAN AMERICANS

Racist ideologies in US television programs are evidenced in images of African Americans. *The Cosby Show* (1984–1992) was hailed as a tremendous success in its positive portrayal of the African American family. It aired on network television throughout the world but received some resistance in South Africa. Timothy Havens explains that within South Africa “*The Cosby Show* was so incendiary that a member of parliament publicly criticized it for its “ANC [African National Congress] messages” (Havens 2000, p. 375, quoting BBC 1988). The show’s positive images of the African American family have also been viewed as problematic. For some, *The Cosby Show* offered counterimages of a microcultural group that had been historically viewed as dysfunctional; thus, these atypical, “newer” images created the illusion of a racialized community that had overcome the social and political barriers of oppression that were in fact still a part of everyday life. The Cosby family remains a prime example of how counterimages of microcultural groups (e.g., African Americans) can reflect traces of problematic images of the past that are difficult to erase from collective cultural ideologies about races.

The Stereotypes of Early Television

In early television programming, African American performers were given stereotypical, unflattering roles. These actors gradually became a part of mainstream society at the expense of self-degradation, and the visual images of blacks on network television created a false impression of African American identity. Such controlling images as the Jezebel, mammy, servant, matriarch, buffoon, minstrel, and slave presented a distorted reality of racial identity for African Americans. Shows such as *Amos ’n’ Andy* (1951–1953), *Beulah* (1950–1953), and *Jack Benny* (1950–1965) portrayed African Americans as lacking intellect and seemingly enjoying their subservient and less powerful positions in the world. *Beulah*, for example, typified the “good old-fashioned minstrel show” (Haggin 2001, p. 250). The lead character, Beulah, was the stereotypical domestic servant who was “happy” with her lot in life serving her boss. A supporting character, Oriole, was Beulah’s queen-sized “childlike idiot friend,” perpetuating the “pickaninny” stereotype of the bulging-eyed child with thick lips and unkempt hair, eating a slice of watermelon. A third character, Beulah’s boyfriend Bill, typified the “Uncle Tom” and “coon” stereotype. Bill embodied what it allegedly meant to be a black man: in the presence of whites, he was hardworking, dependable, and content; in his “real” state, however, he was lazy and avoided work and responsibilities.

Although later televisual depictions were not as blatantly racist, shows such as *Beulah* paved the way for controlling images to be constructed, transformed, and perpetuated in all forms of media. Unfortunately, these images continue to create an illusion of African Americans as subservient and of less value, in addition to being criminal, predatory, and a threat to European Americans.
Television

These negative portrayals are a result of slavery and the objectification of African slaves as sexual creatures and servants to the whites who colonized North America, a stigma that remains in place in the twenty-first century.

Neo-minstrelsy Television portrayals have, to some degree, begun to challenge many of the long-standing controlling images associated with African Americans. Although such images may not be as overtly racist as they were in the past, networks, reporters, and television writers still perpetuate a subtle form of media racism that Robin R. Means Coleman (1988) has dubbed neominstrelsy. According to Coleman, neominstrelsy refers to contemporary versions of the minstrel images of African Americans that were pervasive in early television programming.

Modern-day minstrels have materialized in situation comedies and reality television. The TBS situation comedy Meet the Browns, created by Tyler Perry, premiered in January 2009 and became one of the top-two prime-time series on television—not just cable—among adults. In this show, the lead character, Mr. Brown, known for his outlandish wardrobe and unsophisticated dialogue, is frequently corrected by the other characters. Zeze and Sapphires are prominently displayed on reality shows like Basketball Wives (2010–), Flavor of Love (2006–2008), and The Real Housewives of Atlanta (2008–).

According to the media researcher Robert Entman, "images of blacks are produced by network news [programs that] reinforce whites' antagonism toward blacks," and these images perpetuate stereotypical depictions and contribute to the cycle of television racism (1994, p. 516). A prime example was the television coverage of New Orleans during and after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Breaches in the levees caused water to flood the city, leaving thousands of residents stranded near the city's convention center and Superdome. Television news images of the aftermath showed thousands of black New Orleansians stranded. "But as those images roll by, we're bombarded with language about lawlessness, chaos, snipers, looters, thugs, races, carjackings" (Campbell and LeDuff 2012, p. 206). Although incidents of "lawlessness" dominated the news coverage, they were never confirmed. Stranded New Orleansians, regardless of race, faced the same challenges in order to survive, yet the news media presented very different images, one realistic and the other grossly distorted.

Close examination of television shows featuring African American experiences reveals a trend in shows where the majority of the cast is African American. These include, but are not limited to, Good Times (1974–1979), The Jeffersons (1975–1985), The Cosby Show (1984–1992), A Different World (1987–1993), Moesha (1996–2001), Sister, Sister (1994–1999), Girlfriends (2000–2008), The Bernie Mac Show (2001–2006), Half & Half (2002–), and Everybody Hates Chris (2005–2009). These shows have portrayed the diversity that exists within the African American community, yet they are criticized for being imitations of successful sitcom formulas. These shows represent marginalized experiences that intersect with mainstream approaches to creating television shows with certain appeal; however, this approach runs the risk of perpetuating the stereotypes of many shows were attempting to debunk or dispel. This narrow representation of African Americans in a comedic format also presents a false assumption that their experiences are one-dimensional and cannot be reflected in dramas or other genres of television programming. Thus, reliance on the comedy genre further limits African Americans to the role of the minstrel, buffoon, or comic relief, and fails to capitalize on and highlight the in-group diversity that exists but is rarely displayed. It must also be noted that the self-deprecating humor embedded within these forms of media becomes problematic when it is presented to the masses as the rule rather than the exception.

This is further complicated by the failure of television and film executives to cast African Americans in other genres, such as drama, science fiction, psychological thrillers, and action programs that would counter the long-standing images that have evolved into contemporary interpretations of the minstrel. Casting African American actors in other types of roles would serve to debunk the image of the minstrel that has evolved into the norm of blackness in television and film. Although television has at times shown different kinds of relationships and life experiences, African American actors are generally confined to shows that have a neominstrelsy theme, which perpetuates the history of typecasting in television and film.

Although The Cosby Show is not to the lone exception to neominstrelsy, few shows about African Americans have matched its huge commercial success, resulting in an eight-year original run on prime-time television and a consistent syndication run for more than twenty years. Other television series of the 1980s and 1990s, such as Frank's Place (1987–1988) and Under One Roof (1995), were not as successful commercially and aired for less than a year. In twenty-two episodes on CBS, Frank's Place presented "Blacks not as stereotypes, but as a diverse group of hardworking people" (Garfinkel 1988). The Emmy-nominated Under One Roof was a midseason replacement and aired only six episodes before cancellation.

In the twenty-first century, two actors were cast in roles of power in the US government, in some ways challenging preexisting stereotypes of African Americans. On the FOX show 24 (2001–2010), Dennis Haysbert played Senator David Palmer, who is eventually elected the first African American president of the United States. Haysbert also portrayed the head of a top-secret military
unit in the CBS drama *The Unit* (2006–2009). In 2012, Kerry Washington played the lead character Olivia Pope, a former communications director for the White House and founder of a crisis management firm, on *Scandal*. The HBO drama *The Wire* (2002–2008) was notable for the diversity of its main roles. These images reflect a notion of power and success that transcends race, a refreshing and affirming change; however, such programs have the monumental task of combating a history of negative depictions that remain present in the media.

**Tyler Perry and Spike Lee** By the early years of the twenty-first century, there were more opportunities for African Americans in television, and many of the programs portraying controlling images of African Americans were produced or created by African Americans. For example, though many argue that Tyler Perry has created employment opportunities for African Americans in the entertainment industry, he has received a great deal of criticism for perpetuating stereotypes. One of Perry’s strongest critics is director Spike Lee. Although much of Lee’s work is controversial, his critically acclaimed body of work explores race relations, social concerns, and political issues. Perry, on the other hand, uses comedy and stereotypes to convey his message. Perry’s films featuring the character Madea, a large, outspoken woman played by Perry himself, have been major box-office hits, often grossing in excess of $25 million on opening weekend, yet his other films have not had the same following. In 2010, Perry collaborated with Oprah Winfrey on an adaptation of Ntozake Shange’s 1975 choreopoem *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, but the film grossed only $37 million worldwide during its entire run.

Both Perry and Lee use dramatic tools to convey social issues to their audiences. Perry approaches the subject matter from a southern cultural perspective. His television shows, *Meet the Browns* (2009–), *House of Payne* (2006–), and *For Better or Worse* (2011–), which air on the TBS cable network, are situation comedies or dramedies that aim to entertain audiences. In contrast, the documentaries that Spike Lee has produced and directed for HBO, including *4 Little Girls* (1997), about the 1963 bombing of a church in Birmingham that killed four young black girls, and *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* (2006), about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, explore racial, political, and economic inequities and present many voices and perspectives on tragic events that have left an indelible mark on American history.

**Star Trek** During the 1960s, Gene Roddenberry’s science fiction series *Star Trek* (1966–1969) was groundbreaking in its representation and portrayal of African Americans. The show featured African American actress Nichelle Nichols as Lieutenant Uhura, a communications officer aboard the USS *Enterprise*. Near the end of the first season, Nichols decided to resign after becoming dismayed that much of her fan mail had been withheld from her, along with the fact that she worked on the show without a contract. She was encouraged to stay on the show by one of her biggest fans, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who told her how important her presence and character were: “Men and women of all races going forth in peaceful exploration, living as equals . . . this is not a Black role, and this is not a female role. You have the first nonstereotypical role on television, male or female. You have broken ground . . . you changed the face of television forever” (Nichols 1994, p. 164). In November 1968, Nichols and costar William Shatner shared in the first interracial kiss on American television on an episode titled “Plato’s Stepchildren.”

*Star Trek* was canceled in 1969 due to low Nielsen ratings, but it became a success in syndication, which resulted in a multinational fan base and crossover into other popular culture forms, including “novels, comics, computer games, toys and merchandise conventions, collectibles and memorabilia” (Geraghty 2010, p. 131). By 2012, there had been eleven *Star Trek* motion pictures and five television series, in addition to the original series. African American characters have featured prominently in many of the series, including Lieutenant Commander Geordi La Forge (portrayed by LeVar Burton) and Guinan (portrayed by Whoopi Goldberg) in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994); Captain Benjamin Sisko (portrayed by Avery Brooks) in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993–1990); Lieutenant Tuvok (portrayed by Tim Russ) in *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995–2001); and Ensign Travis Mayweather (portrayed by Anthony Montgomery) in *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001–2005).

**Contemporary Sitcoms** In the 2006–2007 television season, there were fewer than seven programs with a predominantly African American cast. A number of other successful shows with predominantly black casts have premiered since then, including but not limited to *Meet the Browns* (2009), *The Game* (2006), *Tyler Perry’s House of Payne* (2006), *Reed Between the Lines* (2011), *Let’s Stay Together* (2011), and *For Better or Worse* (2011). Each show follows the traditional sitcom format but continues to confront a double standard regarding representations of nonwhites in the media. Although these shows may offer some nonstereotypical characterizations and glimpses of “normalcy,” they do little to deconstruct societal beliefs about African Americans. The storylines and characters are often one-dimensional and confine blacks...
Television

This portrayal originates from characterizations of American Indians in movies and television westerns. According to the sociologist Steve Mizrach, "Indians are shown as blood-thirsty savages, obstacles to progress, predators on peaceful settlers, enemy 'hostiles' of the US Cavalry, etc... the political context of the Indian Wars completely disappears" (Mizrach 1998).

Duane Champagne of the Native Nations Law and Policy Center at the University of California, Los Angeles, notes that "Hollywood prefers to isolate its Indians safely within the romantic past, rather than take a close look at Native American issues in the contemporary world" (1994, p. 719). These archaic, inaccurate portrayals are compounded by "images in which the linguistic behaviors of others are simplified and seen as deriving from those persons' essences" (Meek 2006, p. 95), images that "remind us of an oppressive past" (Merskin 2001, p. 160). Through these depictions, First Nations people are presented as "nonnative, incompetent speaker[s] of English" (Meek 2006, p. 96). This strategy emphasized "Indian civilized otherness by having the character speak English in monosyllables" (Taylor 2000, p. 375).

US companies have long used images of American Indians for product promotions, mainly to "build an association with an idealized and romanticized notion of the past" (Merskin 2001, p. 160). Such products as Land O’ Lakes butter, Sue Bee honey, Big Chief sugar, and Crazy Horse malt liquor include stereotypic caricatures on their labels that are supposed to reflect Native American ethnicity, but which are actually "dehumanizing, one-dimensional images based on a tragic past" (Merskin 2000, p. 167).

NATIVE AMERICANS

Native Americans are rarely portrayed in movies or on television. When they are shown, they are often wearing stereotypical attire (e.g., a headdress) or are armed with antiquated weapons (e.g., a bow and arrow), ready to fill the familiar role of the "noble savage." For example, in the otherwise racially progressive Star Trek series, Commander Chakotay (portrayed by Mexican–Native American actor Robert Beltran), a character on Star Trek: Voyager, is identified as a Mayan Indian descendant. He is adorned with a facial tattoo instead of Indian dress and is presented as a highly noble person. Such characterizations perpetuate a negative image of racial/ethnic identity for First Nations people and instill the belief that being Native American is a "thing of the past." Because of globalization, television viewers in other countries who are exposed to these images are led to believe that they are representative of a microcultural group with a strong presence in the United States. Furthermore, the paucity of roles open to Native Americans suggests that they either do not exist or are too small in number to be fairly represented. Even when the story is set in the present or the future, "contemporary portrayals [of First Nations persons] are typically presented in an historic context" (Merskin 1998, p. 335).

This depiction is a visual image that has become accepted as an accurate representation of First Nations people. Such images of American Indians are generally restricted to their being a member of a homogenous group (e.g., a tribe) lacking any distinctive qualities or heterogeneity. The most pervasive and troubling is the "conventionalized imagery [that] depicts Indians as wild, savage, heathen, silent, noble, childlike, uncivilized, pre-modern, immature, ignorant, bloodthirsty, and historical or timeless, all in juxtaposition to the white civilized, mature, modern (usually) Christian American man" (Meek 2006, p. 119). Native Americans are also often portrayed as drunkards, gamblers, and wards of the government, and these images are too often perceived as accurate representations of the original inhabitants of North America.


NORTH AFRICAN AND WESTERN ASIAN AMERICANS

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Americans were "no longer absolutely secure in the belief that they were safe" (Pal 2005, p. 119). Racial profiling of individuals who "looked" Middle Eastern—that is, Muslim or Arab Americans with cultural backgrounds in the countries of Northern Africa and Western Asia—perpetuated the existing ethnic divide and exposed the complexities associated with life in a world consumed by questions of race and ethnicity. "Americans who looked Middle Eastern were harassed, assaulted and their property vandalized in a wave of misplaced retaliation" (Weston 2003, p. 92).

The months and years following the attacks led to repeated media coverage of the event. Television, newspapers, and the Internet bombarded viewers and readers with detailed stories of the Middle Eastern attackers and their religious beliefs. The general message being communicated was that all people who were dark-skinned (read Middle
Television

The media disseminates both general cultural stereotypes and gender-specific stereotypes of Asian Americans. Cultural stereotypes include assumptions that Asian Americans are: (1) the model minority; (2) perpetual foreigners; (3) inherently and passively predatory immigrants who never give back; (4) restricted to clichéd occupations (e.g., restaurant workers, laundry workers, martial artists); and (5) inherently comical or sinister. Controlling, gender-specific images of Asian American identity include Charlie Chan, Fu Manchu, dragon lady, and China doll.

Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu are emasculated stereotypes of Asian men as eunuchs or asexual. Charlie Chan, a detective character, was "effeminate, wimpy," and "dainty" (Sun 2003, p. 658), as well as "a mysterious man, possessing awesome powers of deduction" (Shah 2003, p. 4). He was also deferential to whites, "non-threatening, and revealed his 'Asian wisdom' in snippets of 'fortune-cookie' observations." Fu Manchu, in contrast, is "a cruel, cunning, diabolical representative of the 'yellow peril'" (Sun 2003, p. 658).

The Chinese American actor Bruce Lee countered this nonthreatening, emasculated stereotype and redefined the media’s image of the Asian male body as tough, aggressive, and competitive in his role as Kato on The Green Hornet (1966–1967). Lee moved from television to film with The Big Boss (1971), Fist of Fury (1972), The Way of the Dragon (1972), and Enter the Dragon (1973), in which he infused American popular culture with Asian traditions, sparking an interest in the study of martial arts that spread throughout the United States among males of all ages and racial and ethnic backgrounds. Although Lee focused on Chinese nationalism in his kung fu films, Hong Kong actor Jackie Chan revitalized the genre with a comedic perspective, situating kung fu in a multicultural context (Shu 2003). Chinese American actor B. D. Wong further transcended the traditional stereotyped image of Asian males in his roles as Father Ray Mukada, a Catholic priest, in the series Oz (1997–2003), set in a maximum-security prison, and as FBI agent and forensic psychiatrist Dr. George Huang in Law and Order: Special Victims Unit (1999–).

Asian American women are often portrayed as hypersexual, or as the opposite of “asexual” Asian men (Sun 2003). The lotus blossom stereotype—also known as the China doll, geisha girl, and shy Polynesian beauty—is “a sexual-romantic object,” utterly feminine, and delicate. As such, she is a welcome respite from her often loud, independent American female counterparts (Sun 2003, p. 659). The dragon lady is the opposite of the lotus blossom. She is “cunning, manipulative, and evil,” aggressive, and “exudes exotic danger” (Sun 2003, p. 659). Television and film images of Asian and Asian American women also include...

ASIANS

Asian Americans, specifically East Asians, are generally represented on American television as a homogenous group of people whose ethnicity is either Chinese, Korean, or Japanese. The globalization of this worldview of a population that is, in reality, very ethnically diverse is both problematic and restricting. Stereotypes of Asian Americans emerged from efforts by whites to oppress racial groups deemed inferior, and from a nineteenth-century fear of Asian expansion into white occupations and communities, often referred to as the “yellow peril.” These controlling images reduce Asian American men and women to caricatures based on how the dominant society perceived their racial and gendered identities.

As previously noted, prior to 9/11, Middle Easterners were a relatively invisible racial/ethnic group on American television. It was after this national tragedy that these television shows focused on the glorification of the military and war began to incorporate characters that many believed would inflame the stereotypes associated with Middle Easterners. The 2005–2006 season of 24 was “replete with scenes of torture administered to various suspected terrorists or their associates by US government operatives” (Watson 2006), and included Iranian-born actress Shohreh Aghdashloo as a “stay-at-home terrorist mom . . . and wife of a terrorist” (Watson 2005) who murders her son’s American girlfriend. The character was depicted as heartless, with no conscience, implying that “Middle Eastern” was synonymous with “terrorist.” Aghdashloo defended the characterization and implying that “Middle Eastern” was synonymous with “terrorist.” Aghdashloo defended the characterization and discouraged viewers’ protests. She felt that the show accurately depicted terrorists who happened to be Muslims. The show’s cowriter and producer, Robert Cochran, observed that “we have a legitimate interest in telling stories that are grounded in reality, at least to a considerable extent grounded in reality” (Watson 2005). Nevertheless, 24 received criticism for depicting immigrant families as members of terror cells ready to attack the United States.

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the “added characteristics of being sexually alluring and sophisticated and determined to seduce and corrupt white men” (Shah 2003, p. 9).


Ling Woo, an attorney played by Chinese American actress Lucy Liu, was “tough, rude, candid, aggressive, sharp tongued, and manipulative,” as well as hyperssexualized (Sun 2003, p. 661). She was also a feminist, in contrast with past portrayals of Asian women. Although some Asian Americans believed Liu’s character was a stereotype breaker, Ling Woo perpetuated the dragon lady stereotype, especially when she “growl[ed] like an animal, breathing fire at Ally, walking into the office to the music of Wicked Witch of the West from The Wizard of Oz” (Sun 2003, p. 661). Miss Swan is an Asian American character who appeared on FOX’s sketch-comedy show *Mad TV*. Played by the Jewish comedian Alex Borstein, this character was “a babbling nail salon owner with a weak grasp of the English language” (Armstrong 2000) and served as an example of a “yellow face” performance, which is the Asian equivalent of blackface and refers to a non-Asian person “performing” an Asian identity. This depiction is problematic in that an actor from a historically marginalized group is contributing to the cycle of racism by objectifying another racial/ethnic group. (One might wonder if she would find this character humorous if she were Jewish and embodied the negative stereotypes held of them.) To that end, she reinforced the negative depiction of Asians as the perpetual foreigner, inherently predatory and restricted to a stereotypical occupation.

The practice of mixed casting of Asian actors in television shows was also a problem with the short-lived sitcom *All-American Girl*, which portrayed a Korean family but cast only one Korean actor (the comedian Margaret Cho). All the other actors were either Japanese American or Chinese American, thus perpetuating the assumption that Asians are interchangeable. This also suggests that the actors/characters, and the groups they represent, are devoid of unique racial, ethnic, and cultural qualities that make them distinct and unique. The controlling images of Asian Americans distort what it means to belong to this very heterogeneous ethnic group. *All-American Girl* represented an attempt to diversify television programming, but much more work is needed to accurately represent Asian Americans. Both *Lost* and *Grey’s Anatomy* had strong and visible Asian American actors as part of the regular cast. As the journalist Donal Brown (2006) noted, UCLA researchers believed these shows and characters were complex and had great appeal across racial and ethnic groups, but they were “concerned that the Asian American characters on television [are] portrayed in high status occupations perpetuating the ‘model minority’ stereotype.”

**LATINO AMERICANS**

As Suzanne Stevens has noted, “Latino representation in Hollywood is not keeping pace with the explosion of the US Hispanic population, and depictions of Latinos in television and film too often reinforce stereotypes” (Stevens 2004). Television shows purport to reflect reality in their programs, but they rarely do so when casting characters. According to the 2010 US census, Latinos make up approximately 16 percent of the US population, yet, as of 2004, only 2 percent of characters on television were Latino (Stevens 2004), not including Latino actors who portrayed white (nonethnic) characters.

One genre of television that has greatly influenced globalization and international perceptions of Latin American culture is the *telenovela*, “a form of melodramatic serialized fiction produced and aired in most Latin American countries” (LaPastina). These programs usually focus on a pair of lovers and the obstacles and issues that plague their relationship. Telenovelas are “consumed in over 130 countries,” making them “media products particularly suitable for the examination of the dialogue between media, culture and society” (Acosta-Alzuru 2010, p. 185). Unlike soap operas, telenovelas are short stories based on novels that have a predetermined lifespan. According to Roland Soong (1999), telenovelas are “100-hour movies shown in 1 hour segments” that “may be the pinnacle of the career of a Latin American entertainer.” Soong also reports that “there is a huge export market for telenovelas, not only in the Americas, but also in western Europe, eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia,” which supports a multimillion-dollar industry with worldwide distribution. Telenovelas aired in Latin American countries often encompass “themes, cultures, characters, historical and contemporary events and glossy on-location scenery” (Soong 2000) that is reflective of the culture but holds true to the television genre.

Mauro Porto explains that, in Brazil, telenovelas have successfully built “compelling visions of the nation through ‘microcosms,’ the imagined locations in which the stories take place.” He further observes that “broader processes of political, economic and social change have
been reflected in television fiction’s localized representations of the nation even as telenovelas shape these same processes and endow them with new meanings” (2011, p. 56). Thus, exposure to telenovelas has the potential to both entertain and educate audiences about Latin American culture, which functions to challenge the US-constructed images associated with homogeneity and stereotype perpetuation.

In many Latin American countries, lighter skin is viewed as more attractive, and individuals with lighter skin tend to be more powerful, attain more education, and earn a higher income. This discrimination based on skin color is known as colorism and developed as a result of the slave trade. When African slaves and white colonists had children together, an array of skin tones emerged, which has resulted in more than a hundred categories that people use to describe their color. According to Wlamyra Albuquerque, a professor at the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil had to become “whitened” before it could become a civilized country. The Brazilian government paid for more than four million Europeans to migrate to the country with the hopes of “whitening” the face of Brazil (Gates 2011). Colorism is prevalent in telenovelas, where “affluent women are almost always white in their physical appearance (light skin, blonde hair, light eyes), while poor women or daughters of maids are darker-skinned” (Hunter 2005, p. 85).

In US television, Latino Americans have been portrayed as subjugated and oppressed immigrants “invading” the country and its culture. Contemporary immigration issues notwithstanding, the prevailing stereotypes associated with Latin American males are the glorified drug dealer, the Latin lover, the greaser, and the bandito (Márquez 2004). Latina women are depicted as frilly señoritas or volcanic temptresses. Latino families, in general, are portrayed as unintelligent, passive, deviant, and dependent (Márquez 2004). These depictions may be rare, but they can have a significant impact on the perceptions and attitudes people develop about individuals of Latin descent. Images of Latino Americans do not reflect the “Latino explosion” in US culture, and they ultimately reinforce stereotypes that should be countered. These images may not be fully positive or fully negative, but their rarity makes it more problematic that these images are so restricting.


Latino American culture has had tremendous appeal in popular culture, yet members of the different ethnic groups within the Latino community remain marginalized in primetime television programming. One program that helped debunk these controlling images was Ugly Betty, starring the American actress America Ferrera, the daughter of Honduran immigrants. The show’s central character, Betty, aspired to succeed as an assistant at a fashion magazine but faced opposition because she did not fit the mainstream cultural standard of beauty, which is especially narrowly defined in the fashion and entertainment industries. The American version of Ugly Betty was adapted from a popular Colombian telenovela, Yo soy Betty, la fea (I Am Betty, the Ugly). The show’s main character, a young Latina in New York, aspired to succeed in the fashion industry but faced opposition because she did not fit the mainstream cultural standard of beauty. Despite this, she refused to succumb to societal expectations or to compromise her character, and remained committed to her integrity. Ugly Betty was based on a popular Colombian telenovela, Yo soy Betty, la fea (I Am Betty, the Ugly), which was very successful in Mexico, India,
Television

Russia, and Germany. Although the lead character defied conventional wisdom regarding television success, the show presaged an era in which issues concerning racial representation in television are dealt with onscreen as well as off.

CONCLUSION

Ideally, US television demographics should mirror the racial demographics of both the country and the cities within which the stories are set, but many analyses suggest they do not (see Márquez 2004). This becomes particularly salient for individuals who have had limited interpersonal contact with people from other racial groups. Diversifying television production teams and actors is an effective strategy for eradicating subtle and blatant racism, or “symbolic annihilation” (Meek 1998). Community activism is also a powerful tool. Through research and the creation of “diversity development” programs at networks like FOX, the national Children Now organization, for example, offers practical approaches to addressing racial representation in the media. Additional organizations committed to civil rights and ethnic advocacy include the NAACP, La Raza, and the nonprofit Pew Research Center, among others. Efforts by Children Now and other organizations committed to addressing issues of fair racial and ethnic representation in the media are critical in bringing about such change. It is only through education and formal efforts that programmers, scriptwriters, and other pivotal players can be made aware of the exclusionary nature of television. Awareness of such racism will ideally prompt the television community to become proactive in redefining their role in perpetuating controlling images that continue to plague twenty-first-century portrayals of racial groups.

SEE ALSO Hollywood, Racial Depictions in; Racism: Alternative Expressions; Stereotype; Winfrey, Oprah.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Texas Rangers

The Texas Rangers are a modern law enforcement agency that traces its origins to 1823, when Stephen F. Austin, the leader of the Anglo colonists in Texas, proposed the formation of a volunteer force to defend white settlements from Indian raids. Formally established twelve years later, the constabulary gradually evolved from a group of citizen soldiers into a professional, paramilitary organization that served the needs of the state’s political and business leaders. After 1870 the Rangers were invested with the responsibilities typical of peace officers. For much of the nineteenth century, however, Texas authorities used the constabulary to promote the state’s territorial and economic development. This mission involved the expulsion of Native peoples, the defense of cattle syndicates from aggrieved homesteaders, and the policing of industrial disputes. The force achieved its greatest notoriety, however, by subjugating ethnic Mexicans in South Texas between 1850 and 1920.

Ranger anti-Mexican vigilance must be understood in the context of intense white prejudice against Tejanos (Mexican Texans), which in the nineteenth century flowed from a host of sources. For one thing, notwithstanding the fact that a number of Mexicans had fought alongside Sam Houston and other white leaders during the struggle for Texas independence, bitter memories of the slaughters perpetrated by the Mexican Army in 1836 at the Alamo and Goliad, coupled with doubts about Tejano political loyalty to the new Republic of Texas, fostered a climate of white distrust. Moreover, the southern origins of most Anglo-Texans imbued many of them with the racist tenets of herrenvolk democracy, characterized by a low opinion of those not belonging to the supposed master race. Ranger atrocities committed against Mexicans during the Mexican-American War—actions for