The Media: Good, Bad, or Both?

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Research Essay

Introduction

Psychologists Janine Willis and Alexander Todorov state in their research article *First Impressions: Making up your mind after a 100- Ms. Exposure to a face* “It takes a tenth of a second to form a first impression, and longer exposures don’t significantly alter those impressions” (Willis and Todorov 2006 pg. 592) This study was done on 245 students in Princeton University in 2006 where they were presented with a face of a variety of races to form first impressions. Overall, the ending results were based on attractiveness and the facial expressions the contestants were making. Therefore, proving the role perception had in the reactions of the students at Princeton. The perceptions painted throughout the media of Black people are what allow individuals to create biases against People of Color (POC) The media is not primarily the reason for bias against Black people; however, it does play a role. In this paper, I will be discussing how the media plays with personal biases against people of color. I will also be highlighting the stereotypical roles POC usually are cast in movies and theater and showing the progression the entertainment field has made in allowing people of color not to play stereotypical roles.
The News and Black people

The media and how specific stories are told can have an impact on the public's perception. Certain news reporters can highlight aspects of stories that are either good or bad over others and even treat involved parties with either respect or disrespect. An example of this would be CNN News and Fox News channels. Throughout his presidency, Donald Trump's actions were reported endlessly by CNN; the channel had made their own personal biases against him and decided to mostly bash/mock all his actions and policies whenever their journalist was on the air. FOX News, on the other hand, seemed to support his actions and policies. The network did not bash nor mock his policies or actions and seemed to defend his actions.

Another example of this was the events that happened with Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Ahmaud Arbery. Some news channels focused primarily on the protesting and the rioting rather than the message that protestors were trying to get across. Media bias is obvious, especially in the ways they cover stories about anti-Blackness in the country. The protests for George Floyd’s death during the COVID-19 pandemic caused protests across the country and the world. Some broadcasting networks would focus on the destruction or “looting” done by protestors rather than the peaceful protesting occurring. In the article Riot or resistance? The way the media frames the unrest in Minneapolis will shape the public’s view of the protest by Danielle Kilgo illustrates how biased the media’s coverage was during the protest against George Floyd’s death. In her research, she finds that “protests about anti-Black racism and Indigenous people’s
rights receive the least legitimate coverage”. The research done by Professor Danielle Kilgo proves that journalists do not pay attention to protests that are not dramatic or unconventional.

Footage of Protests looting stores May 26, 2020

During the protest, news stations stirred away from the overall issue, which was that an innocent Black man was killed. Instead, they used the issues as leverage for why Donald Trump should be impeached even though America was built on racism and police brutality was occurring long before he became president. Danielle’s research focused mainly on how local and metropolitan newspapers cover protests. “We found that narratives about the Women’s March and anti-Trump protests gave voice to protesters and significantly explored their grievances. On the other end of the spectrum, protests about anti-Black racism and Indigenous people’s rights received the least legitimizing coverage, with them more often seen as threatening and violent”. The media thrive off the violence and destruction that comes with violent protest because it brings the news channels viewers and allows the journalist to have a story to report daily. Eventually, causing the public who are watching or reading about these events to form their own opinions based on what they are seeing or hearing.
**Depicting Black People through Reality TV Shows**

For decades, the media has portrayed Black people in a negative light, and Reality TV is one of the reasons Black people are depicted in this negative frame. Reality TV shows have increased within the last decades because reality shows are much cheaper to produce than regular television shows. Shows such as the Oxygen network reality show *Bad Girls Club* and the VH1 network’s *Love and Hip-Hop* series, and many more can alter an individual's perception of Black people. Reality TV shows have been one of the most popular streams throughout the world because of their entertainment content. However, many reality shows continue to reinforce stereotypical racial and gender-based agendas. The portrayal of overt racism, misogyny, and subconscious racial stereotypes has allowed the VH1 network to receive the highest views of their shows and has made millions of dollars off it. The shows create an image of the roles of Black people in society so damaging that it illustrates their anti-Blackness.

*Bad Girls Club, Oxygen Network 2012*

The Oxygen network show, *Bad Girls Club*” (BGC; 2006- 2017), is a combination of both documentary drama or “docudrama” and a social experiment. A social experiment is defined as psychological or sociological research done to see how people behave towards policies or programs in certain situations. The show is a social experiment to see how a group of
women would act around one another in a house for an extended period. The women are there to resolve personal conflicts with added dramatics for entertainment purposes. The show was obvious in its misogynistic approaches and anti-Blackness. Since the show was run by white producers, it is no surprise that anti-Blackness is at the forefront. While the experiences of these women are real, the editing of the episodes for dramatic purposes has altered the experiences of each woman. The show was canceled permanently in 2017, and after the show, there have been many past participants that said their experiences on the show were not how they transpired. They were told by producers to have specific conversations and shared a false persona on the show that may not have been their own. These women were being paid for their time in the Bad Girls Club, and all expenses were paid for such as transportation with car services driving them to their desired locations and housing in a luxurious mansion. The episodes were filled with drama, emotions, physical fights, and much more. In season 8, the destination of their stay was Cabo, Mexico, which saw one of the most infamous fights. In episode 10 of season 8, two African American participants that were twins were brutally jumped by other participants who were also people of color who were having conflicts. This act caused the twins and some of the other participants to be kicked out of the house and off the show because of how violent the fight was. When the experiment was over, they had a reunion where the ladies from the show would come back after the show. They hashed out their issues and went over the events that transpired in the house. This was usually done on a stage with a host and audience members who were there to witness what would occur. However, these “reunions” were usually the worst part of the entire series because hardly any resolution occurred.
The VH1 franchise, *Love and Hip-Hop*, also portrays the angry Black woman stereotype. The show is known for the exposure of breakout American rapper Cardi B and other musicians. The show is a docudrama that follows the lives of aspiring and professional hip hop artists, performers, R&B musicians, managers, and producers. However, it shows less about their artistic lifestyle and more about their personal lives. The show contains many violent fights and discussions. According to the Washington Post Blog (2015), five hundred Black and white women were surveyed earlier this year, and a follow-up survey included another 500 women of other races. All were between the ages of 18 and 24. The survey followed a 2015 white paper and watch parties that explored the state of Black images in the media. The results of the survey were announced during the recent Legislative Conference of the Congressional Black Caucus in Washington. The survey explored viewership of specific reality TV shows, including *Love & Hip Hop: Atlanta*, *Basketball Wives*, and *The Real Housewives*. Of those surveyed, Black women were watching more of the shows in question than white women, so beyond influencing how other women might view Black women, seeing these images can affect Black women's
self-images. There have been instances where the series has been called a *Modern-day Minstrel Show*.

As has been shown, Minstrel Shows were a form of American entertainment that included impersonations of enslaved Black people that had white actors costumed to exaggerate features of African Americans. Costumes included Black face paint, wigs, and big red lips. In Robert C. Toll’s *Blacking Out* he states, “Unfortunately, once African Americans established themselves in minstrelsy (many falsely claiming to be ex-slaves to appear even more authentic), the humiliating mischaracterizations of Black became even more potent.” Because Black actors “inherited the White-created stereotypes and could make only minor modifications in them, Black minstrels in effect added credibility to these images by making it seem that Negroes behaved like minstrelsy’s Black caricatures.” (Toll 1974 p.196) The performances became widely popular between 1850 and 1870 throughout America and in films and were the primary source of knowledge of Black culture. Therefore, for those who never had any real interaction with the African American community, that was all they knew. Minstrel shows were the beginning of the misconceptions formed about the Black community that continues to this day. The comparison between minstrel shows and reality shows is uncanny.
History of Minstrel Shows

Examples of Minstrel Shows

The degrading acts of blackface Minstrel began around the nineteenth century when a group of about seventeen Black men would sit in a half-circle and perform comedic acts, sing, dance, and act with a dark face intended to depict specific people of African descent. The black performers would have a range of skin colors and put on darker makeup to make themselves look darker. The father of the blackface shows was Thomas Dartmouth Rice, also known as “daddy rice” and “Jim Crow.” “Black face minstrelsy underestimated and misrepresented the American Negro in the much same way that the English drama treated the stage Irishman” (Black Drama, 32). Minstrel was inhumane, and it was somehow entertaining to white people. It was the only way Black people could ever perform to get paid by making fun of themselves. Although there is a difference in performances and theater in 2020, it is similarly seen in most TV shows or movies where blacks play roles such as “a gangster, drug dealer or a drug addict.”
In the 1977 film *Minstrel Man* directed by William A. Graham, and produced by Producers Releasing Corporation (PRC). It was a vehicle for Broadway and vaudeville headliner Benny Fields. Starring Glyn Truman, S. Pearl Sharp, and Earl Billings, we see the struggle between being a minstrel and surviving. The main characters, who are siblings, are traveling minstrel men who perform shows for white people dressed in black faces to make a living. The younger brother does not want to do it anymore because he knows it denounces their culture. In the “white face” scene, we see the minstrels trying a different act; however, the white audience members did not like it, so they had to go back and apply their black face makeup. The younger brother was displeased by it, so he went on with white paint over his face making fun of the white race. This act eventually caused his death by being lynched. The scene broke my heart, although because they were being controlled, they could not voice their opinions without being killed. Minstrel was also a way for Black people to be suppressed in the performing arts because they were being limited and controlled by the white audience on what to do or not to do. Additionally, if they stepped out of line or tried to voice their opinions they were lynched. In the film, we also saw how hard it was for a black performer to receive a job. When the younger brother was looking for a job as a performer, he was put in a cage being used as a prop, dressed as an animal. He states in the scene, “Go on, I need this job,” initiating that he’ll instead do that than minstrel because he is getting paid. Minstrel is also like today's society’s “cultural appropriation” because in today’s era whites want to emulate Black culture; however, in the nineteenth century, it was comedic. In modern society, cultural appropriation is modeled astronomically by celebrities' clothing, hairstyles, television shows, movies, and especially through their music.
In the Spring 2020 semester in Black American Drama class with the late Imani Douglas, we were given the opportunity to speak to S.Pearl Sharp who played Jessamine. She explained to us that the movie was based on the experiences of Minstrel Men. She also explained how she was hindered from performing for about two years after the movie. She also had twice the amount of work to do in order to get that role in *Minstrel Man*.

Comparing *Love and Hip Hop* to Minstrel Shows is not a far reach because the show adds to the misconceptions about the Black community that white America has. As mentioned earlier, one stereotype or theme that the reality show portrays is “the angry Black woman.” In the reality TV show *Love and Hip Hop: New York*, each female participant is portrayed as angry. In season 7, Yandy Smith, Samantha Wallace, and Erika Deshazo are all women who have children with the same man. The women have bitterness and anger towards one another because of the man and pretend to have a cordial relationship for the sake of their children. The women struggle to put their issues aside, which affects their children's relationships with each other. In episode 10 of season 7, each woman decides to meet with one another to discuss their futures which instantly turns into an intense physical fight between them. The stereotypical themes and violent conflicts are what attract viewers each week. The events that transpire in the show seem to be improvised and pressured to happen for entertainment purposes, as in the Bad Girls Club.

Both television shows were examples of how the media inaccurately depicts Black men and women and exploits them for entertainment purposes. Reality TV shows tend to focus
primarily on exploiting women of color for petty drama juxtaposed to men who would fight to prove their masculinity. The women on the show have now gained a bad reputation and are shown by the white producers to the world in a fictional way. If they are just produced with such stereotypical values in a spirit of anti-Blackness, Reality TV shows will never be able to tell the experiences Black women face daily. At the end of it all, we must make direct connections with African Americans and educate ourselves to understand the Black experiences.

The shows may also leave a long-lasting impression on how other Black women are introduced to their non-Black viewers, which leads to racial profiling and other racial biases that may come about. In addition, Love and Hip-Hop show executive producer Mona Scott Young in an interview believes that the show is the “Representation of what occurs within the Black entertainment industry and should be brought to light.” “There are tons of shows that people can watch that depict different backdrops and different lifestyles. Love & Hip Hop is one.” “Leave them alone,” she said. "This is, you know, the world that they know, the way that they navigate their world. They have every right to be here as you and I do.” (Mona Scott Young). To argue, the show is simply exploiting Black individuals who want to make it in the industry because, if the show was only about their rise to fame, then it would not go in-depth into their personal lives. The executive producer being a Black woman -- a part of a White production team -- does not withdraw the overall issues with the show. It is completely pointless to this day and because it brings in views and makes money to the VH1 network it will still be aired.
Realistic Portrayal of Black art in American Society

The portrayal of African Americans in the film between the 1920s through the 1950s was different. In the 1940s and 50s specifically, Black characters started being written differently in mainstream Hollywood films. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) played a crucial role in advocating for the stereotypical norms of Black people to stop on film. In addition to advocating for opportunities for Black people to work backstage in theatrical and film productions. The Civil Rights Movement also assisted with the growth of black performers during the 1950s. With the exposure of stars such as the late Sidney Poitier, Dorothy Dandridge, Nat King Cole, and so forth, Black actors and Black films became popular in the 1950s.

Theatrical Work

*A Raisin in the Sun*, a play written by Lorraine Hansberry, and later adapted into a film directed by Daniel Petrie a White director, directed in 1961 illustrates a story about an African American family, the Youngers. The family is receiving a life insurance check after their father's death and is indecisive about what to do with the money. The main character, Walter, is set on using his father’s money to open a liquor business, believing it will solve all his family’s financial hardship. The mother wants to use the money to buy a home, which Ruth, Walter's wife, agrees with, and Beneatha, the sister who is an aspiring doctor, wants to use the money for her medical school expenses. The play eventually debuted on Broadway, making Lorraine Hansberry the first Black female playwright to be produced on a Broadway stage. Later, it was made into a film. The cast included notable pioneers of black Hollywood Sidney Poitier who was
later replaced by Ossie Davis, Claudia McNeil, and Ruby Dee. The play was more of a personal reminiscence for Hansberry because she too grew up in the Southside of Chicago. Shortly after, her father, Carl Hansberry, purchased a home in a segregated area of Chicago where she and her family were threatened by white mobsters occasionally. The attacks were so brutal that the mobsters eventually threw bricks through the window of their house. Hansberry was inspired by her characters within the play by specific members of her family. In the Lorraine Hansberry documentary, she claims Walter was influenced by her father because of how ambitious he was and claims there were many similarities between her and Beneatha.

Racial discrimination was one of the main themes presented within the play and during the 1950s. Walter Lee Younger believed that the life insurance check would solve all the families’ financial issues. With the money, he will start a business that he believes would lead to socioeconomic improvement. However, Lena Younger, on the other hand, believed they should buy a home, which is what they did. Unfortunately for them, their dream of owning a home came to a halt in Act II, Scene III; when a representative of “Clybourne Park” arrived at the Younger’s home to stop them from buying their home in the neighborhood. “It is a matter of the people of Clybourne Park believing, rightly or wrongly, as I say, that for the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities.” (Hansberry 73) says Karl Lindner. This excerpt from the play illustrates the representative notifying the family that it is better for them to stay in their communities in a subtle way. This was his effort to keep Black and white neighborhoods divided and continue Jim Crow laws that authorize “separate but equal” living to still exist. The Youngers go against the odds and obstacles and decide to move
out of their apartment into their home, demonstrating that African Americans are going out to live their dreams despite racism and segregation.

Hansberry incorporates the ideologies of Civil rights leaders Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey within the characters Asagai and George. Both are interested in Beneatha; however, it was evident she liked Asagai more because he was intelligent and proud of his African heritage. George had different views about women, which she disagreed with. George believes in Assimilation, which is what Booker T. Washington argued for African Americans to integrate into society. In contrast, Asagai believed in being prideful of one's African heritage. Asagai asks Beneatha to move to Africa with him for her to explore her African roots; however, she refuses his offer.

Lorraine Hansberry uses Langston Hughes’s poem Harlem as an illusion and inspiration for her play. "What happens to a dream deferred? /Does it dry up/like a raisin in the sun? This excerpt illustrates the significance of the title of the play as a question of what happens if your dream fails and what you do to overcome it. A great title to this piece of work because it corresponds to The Younger's dream of never giving up on what they wanted, although faced with obstacles. It also connects to African Americans being unable to fulfill their dreams because of racism and segregation. Hansberry too felt that her dreams were impacted by racial discrimination and thought her dreams were going to dry up like a raisin in the sun. Hansberry allowed a shift from the stereotypical drama that African Americans were playing and allowed Black actors to play characters who had ambitions, dreams, and a purpose.
August Wilson’s *The Piano Lesson* was another work written that portrayed African Americans positively. He explores the Black experience during the Great Depression of 1929. *The Piano Lesson* was not only captivating, but it also has a truth. The piano represents acceptance of who you are as an individual and where you are from. It also conveys to Black people the importance of legacies and how they should live on and break generational curses. The most important message the play presents is that your past does not define your future; however, accepting the past and moving on is what makes a great future. The Great Depression of 1930 was the downturn of the United States economy from 1929 to 1933. As a result, the Great Depression caused a third of all banks to fail, homelessness increased, and a rise in the unemployment rate. African Americans were affected the most during the depression because they were always the first to be laid off from jobs, and they suffered from an unemployment rate two to three times that of whites.

The play begins with the main character Boy Willie and his friend Lymon showing up at his sister Bernice’s house hoping to sell their family piano. His intent is to use the money to buy land, on the other hand, Beatrice doesn't want him to sell the family piano because of the long history it possesses. The two have a love and hate relationship. The question of keeping the legacy going or creating your own is an ongoing theme throughout the play because it is the reason for Beatrice and Boy Willie’s collision throughout the play. Boy Willie believes that selling the piano will avenge his ancestor’s demanding work and allow him to succeed in buying the land. The theme of this text concerns keeping family legacy alive or creating your own is
what the play revolves around. Until, at the end of the play, Willie realizes that keeping the family legacy alive is what is more important than creating his own. The piano is more than just a piano to Beatrice; however, Willie just sees it as a deception of the past and believes they need to move on to make money to survive during the depression.

*Blues For an Alabama Sky* by Pearl Cleage investigates the lives of five Harlem friends during The Great Depression and The Harlem Renaissance. Pearl explores what it meant to be a struggling African-American artist or designer during the Harlem Renaissance and Great Depression. The themes presented within the play are homophobia, birthrights, Prohibition, economic struggle, artistic struggle, and depression. Pearl Cleage gives an insight into how Harlem, New York, was in the 1930s. Setting her play in Harlem was a smart choice because of the historical significance of the town. In the 19th century, African Americans began moving from the South to the Northern and Western states. Harlem specifically experienced a high surge of African-American residents. The play begins with Angel, the main character, being drunk and fired from her job at the Cotton Club. She is living with her best friend, Guy, who is homosexual and is also a struggling designer, with a next-door neighbor who is a social worker, their friend Sam who is a doctor at Harlem Hospital, and Leland, a man from Alabama who is interested in Angel.

One main theme of *Blues for An Alabama Sky* was an economic struggle. As Black artists and writers rose within the Harlem Renaissance; a cultural revival of African American art throughout Harlem soon came to a halt when the Great Depression hit. The effect of the
Depression caused the United States economy to fall drastically, leaving performers out of jobs due to the discretion of productions being made and the audience. Angel’s dream of being a blues singer was delayed when she was fired from her job at the Cotton Club. She is struggling financially and must move in with her best friend, Guy. Angel eventually meets Leland, who she uses for financial help even though she does not love him. Prohibition is also a historical event that occurred during the play. Prohibition, which lasted for 13 years, stopped the production of alcoholic beverages. Angel drinks a lot during the play, although it is illegal. Angel is going through mental depression because her dreams feel so far-fetched. In the scene where she goes for an interview for a gig and does not receive the job, she goes back to drinking to calm herself.

Homophobia within the play is another theme. In the 1930s, homosexuality was not a societal norm, so it was extremely hard to be gay at this time. Therefore, the character Guy was not accepted by society; however, he was accepted by his close friends. He would get attacked for being who he is, and there would be no repercussions for it. Guy is an aspiring costume designer who dreams of being Josephine Baker’s costume designer. His dreams finally come through when Josephine requests him to go to Paris to meet her because she loves his designs. The character Leland is a deeply religious man from Alabama who moved to Harlem after losing his wife and baby. He is romantically involved with Angel and is very homophobic. When Leland discovers that Guy is gay, he starts an argument with him about his sexuality. This resulted in Guy kicking Leland out of his apartment for being homophobic.
During the Great Depression, women had limited functions. The falling economy affected families, women were getting pregnant, and many were having abortions because they did not have the funds to take care of a child. Abortions were illegal at the time until the United States supreme court case “Roe v Wade” in 1973 legalized abortions. Delia, the next-door neighbor, and a social worker is trying to organize an abortion clinic in Harlem. She was inspired by Margaret Sanger, who believed every woman should have access to birth control. Marcus Garvey, who is mentioned in the play, was in opposition to abortion rights. The Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA) was the largest pan Africanist movement in the twentieth century created by Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey to improve the conditions in which they lived. Garvey believed that Black people should all go back to Africa instead of assimilating into American society. In the play, Delia’s abortion clinic is illegal and is where Sam performs Angel’s abortion. This led to Leland finding out and eventually shooting Sam and killing him.

Within the play, many Black renaissance leaders are mentioned and play a crucial role. Adam Clayton Powell Jr is mentioned throughout the play because he is the pastor of the famous Abyssinian Church located in Harlem. In the play, Delia is preparing to pitch her idea to Powell Jr to support her in opening the family clinic. In the end, he does support it; however, the clinic is burned down during the play. Langston Hughes is also mentioned within the play because he was a leading figure during the Harlem Renaissance.
For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/ When the Rainbow is Enuf by Ntozake Shange is a “choreo-poem” that tells the story of seven women who are named after colors who have “suffered from oppression in a racist and sexist society.” The play uses music and dance for women to cope with the trauma that they have faced throughout their lives. The themes within the play revolve around self-discovery and women’s empowerment. The biggest challenge within society is that it is instilled within. Has been for centuries, and it is difficult for a woman of color to learn to appreciate herself when society does not, in addition to the trauma that contributes to it.

For Colored Girls – Public Theater 2019

Each character in For Colored Girls found their own identity after being taken advantage of through this play. The poems told their stories, and, in the end, we can find peace within their trauma. Within the play, the characters struggle with finding themselves within a society that tries to not accept them. They struggle with skin color, their hair, their gender, and their place in
the world. After sharing their own subjective experiences, each character comes to the realization that they matter in the world, and to appreciate their appearance.

The play *For Colored Girls* was another big accomplishment on Broadway for People of Color. The play paid homage to women who have been psychically, emotionally, and mentally abused, neglected, and raped. Each woman had an assorted color and represented a different period within the playwright's life. Each woman was used and violated in some way. Lady in red discusses within her poem how hard it was to let a person she loved and thought loved her go. The poem describes Lady in Red finally having the courage to walk away from a relationship that serves her any purpose of “encouraging,” as she states. Lady in Red and Billie are similar in the aspects of being abused emotionally and mentally and learning to walk away from a relationship that serves no purpose. Lady in red says, “you can carry all the guilt & grime ya wanna just don't give it to me! you’re mean/ low-down/ trifling/ & no count straight out instead being’ sorry all the time enjoy being’ YOURSELF". Lady in red finally comes to the realization that the man she loves does not love her back and releases herself from his toxicity. Both plays revolve around the themes of women’s empowerment and self-discovery.

**The portrayal of Women in each Play**

Berneice is represented as the anchor in the family, level-headed and strong. However, her opinions were not respected; they were unfortunately not taken into consideration. She is also seen as independent because, fundamentally, she is providing for herself and her daughter. Berneice is used to being alone which is why when Avery insists on marrying her, she rejects him because she believes she does not need a man to provide for her. “You are trying to tell me a woman can’t be nothing without a man. But you alright, huh? You can just walk out of here
without me -without a woman- and still be a man.” (Wilson 67) Berniece is misunderstood in the
play by everyone. She was still very grieving for her husband, that passed away, and she had a
daughter to raise by herself during the Great Depression. She is stressed, and Boy Willie comes
to her home unexpectedly and invades her privacy. In addition, he does not listen to her wishes
of not selling the piano. Beatrice also has some unresolved animosity toward Boy Willie because
she blames him for the death of her husband, Crawley. In the play, she states, “You just as sure
killed Crawley just as sure you pulled the trigger” (Wilson 50). Beatrice hits her breaking point
with Willie when she gets Crawley’s gun to stop him from taking the piano. Her reason for not
wanting Boy Willie to sell the piano is because it represents her ancestor’s past of being
enslaved; however, she has not accepted it herself, making her hypocritical.

Berniece’s character is the representation of how hard it was for Black women during the
Great Depression. Black women were not able to stay at home during the time because Black
people and whites were not paid equally, so they had to work to make up for what their husbands
were not making. Unfortunately for Berniece, her husband passed away, so she was raising her
daughter Maretha by herself. Her character also illustrates the journey and struggles every single
parent goes through. Berniece must find the strength within her to stay strong for her daughter all
while grieving the loss of her husband. She is the representation of Black women within society,
always having to portray a “Superwoman” stigma for society. Numerous Black women believe
that portraying themselves as a superwoman, portraying as strong, self-sacrificing, and
emotionless to cope and avoid gender-race-based discrimination throughout society.

Ruth in *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry is the heart of the play, and she is very
modest and patient. The play was set in the 1950s, post-Great Depression; therefore, Ruth was
fortunate to be a stay-at-home wife while her husband Walter went to work. Ruth is the peacekeeper throughout the family and knows how to make rational decisions rather than making emotional decisions. She deescalates arguments between Walter and Beneatha, who constantly bicker like children. Ruth is also a representation that a Black character can be written against stereotypical norms of Black women being loud and vulgar.

*Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, 1961

**Films /TV Shows**

*Netflix Original: The Harder They Fall 2021*
The 2021 Netflix film **The Harder They Fall**, directed by Jeysme Samuels was a story based upon historical figures. The cast includes Jonathan Majors, Idris Elba, Lakieth Stanfield, Zazie Beetz, and Delroy Lindo who each played cowboys/cowgirls in the 1800’s. The film was a success in regards to portraying black cowboys and cowgirls and also allowing black actors to not play stereotypical roles. Jeysme Samuels’s motivation for doing the film was that there had been thoughts that black people did not exist in the Old West, and he wanted to make that reality come to life. While it has been thought that there were no black cowboys and cowgirls, there were. The film explores the life of legendary cowboy Nat Love played by Idris Elba and his life. One in four cowboys of the American West were African Americans, and enslaved individuals of African descent worked with horses and cattle from their arrival in New Spain in the late 1500s up until Emancipation in the 1800s.

*Phoebe Dynevyr and Regé-Jean Page- Daphne Bridgerton and Duke Simon Hastings. Season 1 of Bridgerton*
The 2020 Netflix original series *Bridgerton*, executive produced by Shonda Rhimes is a prime example of the representation of people of color. It creates an ultimate fantasy of our world’s history where racism does not exist. This makes it safe for people of color to watch. It is safe because it is not set in our world. There are no hate crimes or stereotypical roles within the show; it is about the plot and storyline. The show is set in the Regency period of England in the year 1813. It follows the Bridgerton family, a wealthy family whose eldest daughter/sister Daphne Bridgerton is making her debut in the competitive marriage market. The cast is truly diverse; according to the New York Times “The show’s casting diversity is its most immediately striking quality, not just in Black aristocratic characters like the duke and Lady Danbury, but also in the entrepreneurial Madame Genevieve Delacroix (Kathryn Drysdale) and the working-class couple Will and Alice Mondrich (Martins Imhangbe and Emma Naomi). All of them are central to the complicated social caste system that makes up the show’s version of early 1800s London. (https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/05/arts/television/bridgerton-race-netflix.html) The show creators casting a Black woman as the Queen of England was also a bold choice being that it has been speculated by historians that Queen Charlotte was indeed black. In 1761 got married King George III and had 15 children. The Queen at the time was not considered Black or bi-racial, however, and she did have African ancestry in her family. The choice was a brave one, also showing the diversity within the casting and not limiting the world to only white actors on screen.
In Season 2, both main characters are of South Asian descent. The season follows yet again another family, the Sharmas. The family is from India and has fled to London in hopes of the youngest sister finding an English suitor. The eldest sister, Kate Sharma ends up falling for the viscountess, Daphne’s older brother, who her younger sister is fond of, which ultimately led
to a chaotic season. The South Asian representation was very great because the show essentially
told the story of Indians in regency Britain. The Shamra’s were of upper caste in India; however,
they didn’t really fit in a while in London. The family hated drinking tea as the British loved
doing and enjoyed having pets. The eldest had a dog. Their costumes were also traditional north
Indian pieces that complimented their ethnicity. Seeing brown girls on the screen as royalty in
non-stereotypical roles allowed the audience to suspend their disbelief that white people are the
only ones that could be royalty. The show completely goes against societal and casting norms
which “dabbles in feminism, antiracism, and classism”.

**Black People in Marvel**

Marvel Worldwide Inc., referred to as Marvel Comic, is an American media and
entertainment company originally founded as comic books in 1939 by Martin Goodman and later
became what we know today as Marvel Studios. The company has a reputation for creating
comics that focus primarily on characterization juxtaposed to other superhero comic books. Most
of the comics were created by Stan Lee, who was appointed Marvel Studios chair in 1997, Jack
Kirby, and others.

*Examples of the early Marvel Comics sketches done by Stan Lee.*
Marvel Studios changed the stereotype of Black superheroes with the release of *Black Panther* in 2018. The Black Panther character was originally created in 1966 by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby as Marvel’s first superhero of African descent. In addition to being the first black lead of a Marvel superhero film. The Black Panther film was long anticipated. An all-Black cast was featuring the late Chadwick Boseman starring as King T’Challa/Black Panther alongside Lupita Nyong’o, Danai Gurira, Michael B. Jordan, Angela Bassett, Forest Whitaker, Daniel Kaluuya, and Winston Duke. As of 2022, the movie is the 12th highest-grossing movie of all time. In addition to that, it is the highest-grossing superhero movie to ever exist. The Black Panther movie was an influential and empowering representation of Black people. Being able to witness Marvel’s first black superhero on the screen went against all stereotypical norms of Black actors because now we were able to see black performers in other roles instead of typical roles.

*Cover of Black Panther with the late Chadwick Boseman as Black Panther*

*Black Panther*, directed by Ryan Coogler, who is well known for *Creed* (2013), *Fruitvale Station* (2015) and producer of *Judas, and the Black Messiah* (2021), exhibits the fictional highly advanced secret nation of Wakanda. This society has only Black people living there and has no
connection with the outside world. The society is located inside the African Continent and is viewed by the outside world as a third-world country; however, it is one of the richest nations in the world. The country is unique for its natural resources, such as “Vibranium,” a fictional metal in the marvel universe that has extraordinary abilities to absorb, store and release substantial amounts of kinetic energy. The representation of placing Vibranium in Wakanda because, like today and years ago, Africa was known to have substantial resources that colonizers wanted, such as gold, rubber, land., etc. The movie shows what Africa could have been without the ugly history. Vibranium is essentially a metaphor for the most powerful stone in the world which are diamonds. The movie showed if Africa was to separate itself from the world, the nation would have been a true superpower nation.

Some of the cast of Black Panther.

The film covers many central themes such as absent fathers, leadership, isolationism, Afrofuturism, and much more. King T’Challa and Killmonger played by Michael B. Jordan; both lost their fathers. However, the conditions in which they lost them were contrasting. Killmonger lost his father at an early age and was forced to grow up in Oakland, California, without a father figure in his life. T’Challa was born in a security and a promised throne with his father’s guidance and love into his adult years until he was killed in Captain America: Civil War by a
suicide bomber. The significance of both characters is crucial to the story because Killmonger becomes the antagonist of the movie, eventually stealing the throne from King T’Challa. The juxtaposition of how each character grew up allowed us as audience members to realize how childhood traumas can affect us into our adult years, especially in African American communities where absent fathers are more common than any other race due to premature death or incarceration.

The fictional country of Wakanda

**Conclusion**

As I wrap up, I wanted to illustrate the talents Black performers have. I wanted to prove that everything is not what it seems to be. The media can sometimes spread false narratives and overdramatize certain situations to have the public fearful. The media can sometimes be the case of racism or stereotypical prejudice. However, while there are cons to the media, there are also pros. Social media specifically has proven to be effective in allowing individuals to voice their opinions, expose the cruelty of our world and country, allow people to develop great business opportunities, and much more. Without social media, we would not have known about what
happened in history. Some of the biggest movements to this day have been filmed and posted on social media for the world to see. The walk led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr and others across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, that led to the Voting Rights Act was filmed and aired on television. We are able to watch clips of it and reflect on how far People of Color have come in receiving equal rights.

In addition, the media has somewhat of a positive influence on Black/POC because without it we would not have known what happened to George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and so on. Without broadcasting our movies, TV shows, and plays will not be able to be appreciated by others. Social media specifically has allowed Black entrepreneurs and Black businesses to flourish, in addition to Black, artists. Although we are still living in trying times we are able to perform on stage and voice our opinions unlike the characters in *Minstrel Man*. Our ancestors can triumph in knowing that there has been a little change within the entertainment field, however, there is still more work to be done.
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