

# Representation of African Americans in media

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The **representation of African Americans in media** has been a major concern in [mainstream American culture](#), and is a component of [media bias in the United States](#). [Representation](#), in itself, refers to the construction in any medium of aspects of "reality" such as people, places, objects, events, cultural identities and other abstract concepts. Such representations may be in speech or writing as well as still or moving pictures.<sup>[1]</sup>

Media representation of minorities is not always seen in a positive light; representation of [African Americans](#) in particular propagates somewhat controversial and misconstrued images of what African American represent. "Research on the portrayal of African Americans in prime-time television from 1955 to 1986 found that only 6 percent of the characters were African-Americans, while 89 percent of the TV population was white. Among these African-American characters, 19 percent lacked a high school diploma and 47 percent were low in economic status."<sup>[2]</sup>

Since local news media may be the primary source of learning for many adults, it plays a vital role in policy debates regarding [civil rights](#), the public's general knowledge regarding minority communities, and a broader and more comprehensive worldview.<sup>[3]</sup> The debate of ownership diversity affecting content diversity also contributes to the idea that in order for African Americans to be well represented in the media, there needs to be African-American ownership in the media.

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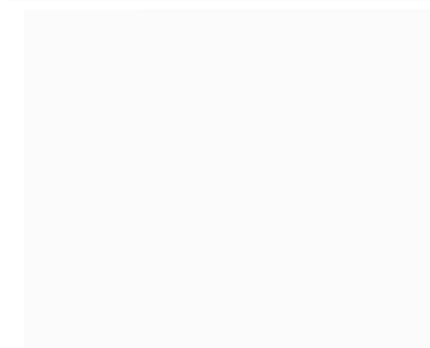
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## Examples of misrepresentation of African Americans<sup>[edit]</sup>

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*Little Black Sambo* is an 1899 children's book in which the protagonist is a South Indian boy who encounters four hungry tigers, and he surrenders his colourful new clothes, shoes, and umbrella so they will not eat him. The tigers chase each other around a tree until they are reduced to a pool of melted butter; Sambo recovers his clothes, and his mother makes pancakes with the butter.<sup>[4]</sup> It was said that *Little Black Sambo*:

"demonstrates rigid, reductive [stereotyping](#). But back in 1935 it was seen as harmless entertainment. If nothing else, this clip helps show the tremendous cultural shift that has occurred, as this kind of representation is no longer acceptable. Sambo was depicted as a perpetual child, not capable of living as an independent adult"<sup>[5]</sup>

"The [coon](#) caricature is one of the most insulting of all anti-Black caricatures. The name itself, an abbreviation of raccoon, is dehumanizing. As with Sambo, the coon was portrayed as a lazy, easily frightened, chronically idle, inarticulate buffoon. The coon acted childish, but he was an adult; albeit a good-for-little adult."<sup>[6]</sup>

[Amos 'n' Andy](#) was a radio-show-turned-television-show from the 1920s through the 1950s about two lower-class African-American men who moved to [Chicago](#), hoping to start a better life. The first sustained protest against the program found its inspiration in the December 1930 issue of *Abbott's Monthly*, when Bishop W.J. Walls of the [African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church](#) wrote an article sharply denouncing *Amos 'n' Andy*, singling out the lower-class characterizations and the "crude, repetitious, and moronic" dialogue. The [Pittsburgh Courier](#) was the nation's second largest African-American newspaper at the time, and publisher Robert Vann expanded Walls's criticism into a full-fledged crusade during a six-month period in 1931.<sup>[7]</sup>

[Al Jolson](#), a Lithuanian-born [vaudeville](#) comedian and [blackface](#) "[Mammy](#)" singer, lived "The American Dream."<sup>[8]</sup> In a Caucasian comedy, Jolson played a "fumbling idiot" stereotypical African-American. Although he did bring African-American culture to the spotlight, another blackface performer at the time, Bert Williams, found the performance both vulgar and repressive.<sup>[9]</sup>

Negative portrayals of black men on TV, the internet, newspaper articles, and video games can be shown to be in part from being linked with lower life expectancies. This was found in a study done in 2011 done by the Opportunity Agenda. Another study done shows just how many under representations of black men there actually are. It relates African-Americans to drug related crimes which was very exaggerated.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Representation of African American Women<sup>[edit]</sup>

<figure class="mw-default-size" data-ve-attributes="{\"typeof\":\"mw:Image/Thumb\"}>[11]</sup> The Mammy archetype manifested mostly in literary works and films during the mid-1900s and was reimagined during the 1980s.<sup>[11]</sup> One of the most popular manifestation of this archetype is [Aunt Jemina](#).

The second archetype of African American women to be created is the Sapphire woman. The Sapphire woman, also known as the angry black woman, was hostile and emasculated Black men through various insults.<sup>[12]</sup> This archetype was popular during the 1940s and 1950s, created by the [Amos and Andy radio show](#).<sup>[12]</sup>

The Jezebel archetype was also created as the opposite of the ideals of the Mammy woman. The Jezebel was a slave woman that satisfied the sexual needs of their white slave masters, and was used to justify the rape of Black slave women.<sup>[13]</sup> Women who fit this archetype were depicted with European standards of beauty.<sup>[12]</sup>

### **Hip-hop Music**[\[edit\]](#)

The representation of African American women has spread to various forms of media. One form of media where African American women have represented is the music industry, specifically the hip-hop genre. The number of [Black women in the music industry](#) have increased throughout the years, despite the industry mostly focusing on African American men.<sup>[14]</sup> African American women have used the hip-hop genre to increase their representation and reconstruct what their identity means to them.<sup>[14]</sup>

### **Beauty Industry**[\[edit\]](#)

The beauty industry has been known to focus White and European standards of beauty, and African American women have had to navigate this through their hair and body image.<sup>[15]</sup> African slave women were compared to white women, often obtaining better treatment if they had lighter skin or a

body type that was similar to their white counterparts.<sup>[15]</sup> African American women have to change the appearance of their hair in order to fit European standards of beauty, even from a young age.<sup>[16]</sup> The beauty salon has become a way for African American Women to organize for empowerment and health education in their communities.<sup>[16]</sup>

## Reality Television<sup>[edit]</sup>

see main article [reality television](#)

Reality Television such such as [Bad Girls Club](#), [The Real Housewives of Atlanta](#), and [Love & Hip Hop](#), has been consistently features in discussions for their portrayal of Black women. Black women in these TV shows are often portrayed in a manner that echoes the archetypes that have been mentioned above, allowing for the argument that Reality Television shows are now a new site for those archetypes to thrive.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Representation of Black/African American LGBTQ Characters<sup>[edit]</sup>

The 1990s had an increased representation of [queer](#) characters in film and TV. Since this period of time, there has also been an increase in representations of queer characters of color.<sup>[18]</sup> But the majority of queer characters are still [gay](#) white males.<sup>[19]</sup>

[GLAAD](#), which is an organization that focuses on queer discrimination in the US media, has tracked the appearances of queer characters and people in television and film over the last several years.<sup>[20]</sup>

They have published an annual “Studio Responsibility Index (SRI)” and “Where We Are On TV (WWAT)” which reports on [LGBTQ](#) representation in film and television, respectively. The 2013 SRI report found that of the 101 films released by major studios in 2012, only 14 films had queer characters and, in those films, only 31 different characters could be identified as LBGTQ. Of these 31 characters, only 4 were Black/African American (12.9%) in comparison to 26 white characters making up 83.9% of queer representation in films for this year.<sup>[20]</sup> In 2016, there were 125 films released with only 23 containing LGBTQ characters. Of the 70 LGBTQ characters, 9 were Black/African American (13%) in comparison to 48 white characters (69%).<sup>[21]</sup> According to the 2013 GLAAD’s “Where We Are on TV” annual report, there were 112 LGBTQ characters that were announced for broadcast and cable. Of these 112 characters, 15 of them were Black making a 13%

representation compared to 71% representation of white queer characters.<sup>[22]</sup> The 2017 report found that there were 329 LGBTQ characters on television. Black LGBTQ characters made up 12% of this representation with 40 characters compared to 65% for white characters.<sup>[23]</sup>

Throughout media history, representations of black [lesbian](#), gay, [bisexual](#) and [transgender](#) characters have been portrayed within a Caucasian lens. While white queer characters have been represented by different story lines and personalities, black queer representations seem to only portray a singular stereotypical perception.<sup>[24]</sup> Media outlets rely on one-dimensional, stereotypical images of Black characters rather than providing dynamic and complex portrayals that reflect the complexity and authenticity of Black people's lives around the country.<sup>[25]</sup> Usually, black characters are incorporated within "hegemonic white worlds void of any hint of African American traditions, social struggle, racial conflicts, and cultural difference."<sup>[26]</sup>

Black gay men are usually portrayed in the media as "[swishy queens](#)" or overly aggressive.<sup>[27]</sup> One example of this is the character [Keith Charles](#) in [Six Feet Under](#). Keith, a gay black man in the show, is portrayed as overly masculine, aggressive, and powerful which reinforces stereotypical characteristics of African American men. This is in comparison to his partner, [David Fisher](#), a white gay man, who is portrayed as more feminine as he is in charge of household duties.<sup>[28]</sup> [Lafayette Reynolds](#) of [True Blood](#) is another black, gay man who is very flamboyant in presentation. Additionally, even with the "swishy queen" personality, he still has an athletic, muscular build and can be very aggressive.<sup>[27]</sup> Another example includes [The Wire's Omar Little](#) who has a very masculine and intimidating personality.<sup>[27]</sup> [Moonlight](#), breaks from the stereotype of the over-masculinity of black queer characters, as the main character, Chiron Harris, is physically abused for being gay and not fitting into the ideal definitions of masculinity.<sup>[18]</sup>

Black lesbians are typically associated with aggression, eroticism, extreme attractiveness/desirability ([femme](#)), and occasionally [butch](#). In [Set It Off](#), Ursula, a black lesbian character is represented by only being an erotic object. Most of her scenes are her sexual interactions with her girlfriend Cleo. Cleopatra "Cleo" Sims, also a black lesbian, is seen as being aggressive and butch.<sup>[24]</sup> In [The Wire](#), [Shakima Greggs](#) is portrayed as overly masculine and part of the Baltimore police department's "old boys club." [Felicia Pearson](#) is seen as extremely masculine/butch to the point where her gender presentation is blurred between female and male.<sup>[18]</sup>

Transgender women are typically portrayed as passing as women making them seem artificial or fake.<sup>[29]</sup> Transgender women of color are also disproportionately represented as victims of hate crimes.<sup>[30]</sup> The character, [Sophia Burset](#), from the Netflix series, [Orange is the New Black](#) is a black transwoman, who reinforces these stereotypes since she has used medical surgery and hormones to appear more as a woman. Other characters in this show constantly make comments indicating they view Sophia as not a real woman. Moreover, Sophia plays into the stereotypical hyperfeminization of transwomen in the media through her role of the hairdresser in the prison salon and knowledge of hair, fashion, and makeup.<sup>[29]</sup>

Additionally, drugs, violence and low socioeconomic status are usually part of the identity of black LGBTQ characters. These stereotypical representations of black queer characters reinforce the cultural stereotypes in the United States that all black people are poor, extremely violent, and/or drug abusers.<sup>[18]</sup>

## Television<sup>[edit]</sup>

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The portrayals of African Americans in movies and television shows in America reinforce negative stereotypes. Professor Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter, from the department of Communications Studies at Texas Tech, found many facts in her research paper, *The Perceived Realism of African American Portrayals on Television*, “After reviewing numerous television shows, Segger and Wheeler (1973) found that African Americans on these programs were generally depicted in service or blue-collar occupations, such as a house cleaner or a postal worker”<sup>[31]</sup>. This is in contrast to their white counter-parts who are business executives and business owners. “In contrast to White characters, research indicates that that African Americans have lower socioeconomic status (SES) roles on television than Anglo Americans” (Segger & Wheeler, 1973) (pp243)

She also found that “the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1977) found that African American television portrayals typically depicted the following stereotypic personality characteristics: inferior, stupid, comical, immoral, and dishonest”(pp243). Seeing negative images on television, and film of African Americans can be seen as a covert propaganda that transitively affects the subconscious mind, and negatively shapes the psychology of the observer. Carter also echoed this by illustrating what she found in another research study. She said, “Fujioka’s study illustrated that when firsthand knowledge is not present, television images have a huge effect on viewers’ perceptions. In addition, this study found cultural differences in responses to positive images of Blacks among Japanese and

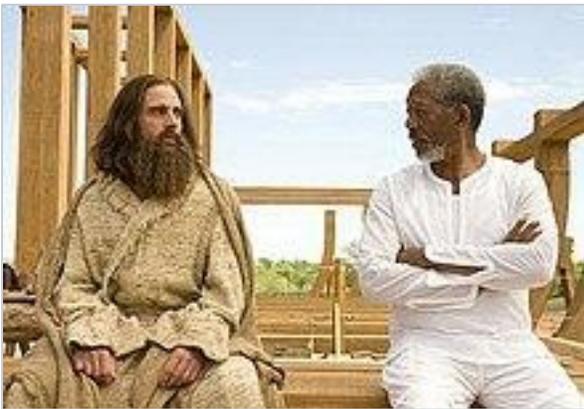
American students. American students tended to be more influenced by negative messages of Blacks than Japanese students. Fujioka's research affirmed that affective assessments of television portrayals of African Americans are highly related to the development of stereotypes" (pp244). All the negative imagery goes back to the Antebellum Era (before the fall of slavery) 1793-1861

## Horror Movies [\[edit\]](#)

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Throughout the presence of Horror Movies, there have been numerous instances of African Americans and People of color that are often subjected to consecutive criticism. One example in particular in which has been prominent throughout is that they are often the first ones in the movie to die. The Horror Movie genre has a particular form to it in which it is a White-dominated world and another representation of African Americans and People of color is that they are usually seen as violent and either as the monsters or villains within the movie.

## Magical negro [\[edit\]](#)



Morgan Freeman in Evan Almighty as an example of the "Magical Negro"

Another stereotype seen in Horror movies, is the stereotype of the "Magical Negro". "As a result of Black's liminal status, the magical Negro has emerged as a new version of traditional racist stereotypes because most Hollywood screenwriters do not know much about Black people other than what they see or hear in other media forms. Consequently, instead of having life histories or love interests, Black characters possess magical powers (Farley, 2000). Because Hollywood, screenwriters often remain oblivious about Black people, they incorporate images in films that comfort and appeal to the White viewers. <sup>[32]</sup>" The term "Magical Negro" is explained, "... as "the noble-good hearted black man or woman" whose good sense pulls the White character through a

crisis. Appiah labeled the helpful Black characters as "saints."<sup>[32]</sup> The three main purposes of the "Magical Negro" in relation to the White character in the film are given by Entman and Rojecki (2001) which they proclaim, "(a):to assist the character, (b) to help him or her spirituality, and (c) to offer a type of "folk wisdom" used to resolve the characters dilemma."<sup>[32]</sup>

## Blaxploitation<sup>[edit]</sup>



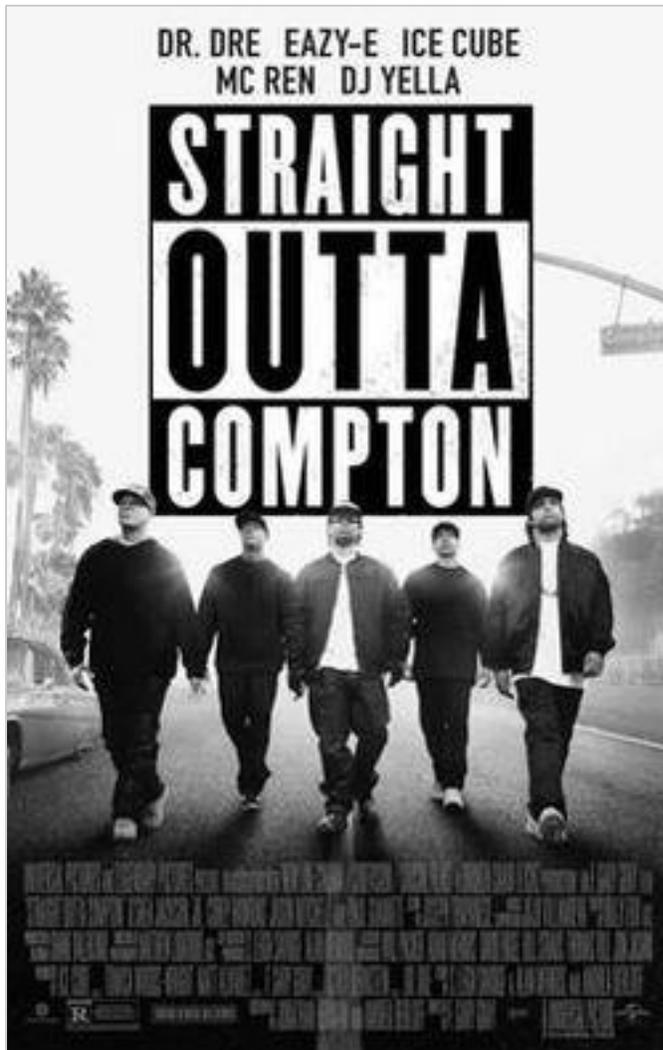
Richard Lawson in Black Fist as an example of a Blaxploitation movie

There is a movie genre which is known as "Blaxploitation" and that can be most seen through the influence of the movie "Shaft". "After Shaft was released in 1971, the streets of New York would never be the same. Every Black adolescent and wannabee bad asses adopted the walk, the style, the swagger, the indifference to traffic, and the rather stated lingo (added over writer Ernest Tidyman's objections) of that baaaaaad mother--shut yo mouth!"<sup>[33]</sup> Basically, the point that Briggs is making is that the movie Shaft had made an impact on the African American culture as a lot of people would mimic and try to be the character of Shaft because of the type of role in which he had. Something worth mentioning about the character of Shaft is that within the movie he is known as the anti-hero, however in the book the character of Shaft depicts an entirely different type of narrative. Shaft in the book is portrayed as, "Having no civil-rights views at all; he dislikes black people as much as white ones. He doesn't actually take on the Establishment he takes on the safer white institution of the Mafia." (*Briggs 25*). It seems as though Shaft doesn't embody the African-American identity and seems to be in a way ashamed of being a person of color. Later on in the article, Briggs describes the way in which Shaft interacts with the people around him, "Throughout the story, he has a love-hate relationship with a white police detective who enables Shaft to do things like withhold

evidence and kill people and then walk free--because supposedly the NYPD needs Shaft on the streets, where he can go places they can't." (25). After drawing from the type of interactions that Shaft goes through in the text, one can note that it brings up the point that WEB Du Bois terms as "Double-Consciousness." He describes the term as the feeling of "looking through one's self from the eyes of another." Shaft uses his double-consciousness to navigate through the racist white society.

## Reasons for misrepresentation<sup>[edit]</sup>

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[Straight Outta Compton](#) (2015) film poster.

## Working in the media<sup>[edit]</sup>

Historically, the participation in media production by minorities in the US has been low. Despite recent gains especially in television, significant racial disparities remain. In 1971, three years after the [Federal Communications Commission](#) adopted rules to foster more diverse programming, only nine percent of full-time employees in radio and television were visible minorities.<sup>[34]</sup> In 1978, [American Society of News Editors](#) set a goal to have their sector mirror the diversity of the American population in general.<sup>[35]</sup>

As the years progressed, the percentage of minorities in the workplace began to grow; in 1997, visible minorities made up 20 percent of the broadcasting work force.<sup>[36]</sup> Yet the trend towards inclusiveness, while generally growing, has been uneven. For example, a 2007 report showed that blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans made up only 13.65% of American newsrooms.<sup>[35]</sup> The numbers dwindle still further at the upper levels of media management: during the 2013-2014 season only 5.5% of executive-level television producers were people of color.<sup>[37]</sup>

## **Ownership**<sup>[edit]</sup>

Ownership in the media helps control what media is being broadcast, which also helps define who and how people are being portrayed. There is a significant under representation of African Americans when it comes to the ownership of media. A report by the [Free Press](#) entitled "Off The Dial" reports of all commercial broadcast radio stations, African Americans own only 3.4%.<sup>[38]</sup> Interestingly, in populations with large African-American markets, the number of black-owned stations are not correlated with the large market. Difficulty with capital access along with other barriers to entry may be the cause.<sup>[39]</sup> African-American owners may be purchasing broadcast stations in the only place they can – small midwestern markets, due to racism in small southern communities where the black population exists in the majority.<sup>[clarification needed][citation needed]</sup> Therefore, a valuable media perspective is lost in these communities.

## **Stereotypes**<sup>[edit]</sup>

*Main article:* [Stereotypes of African Americans](#)

Communication and media research suggest that the mass media is an important source of information about African Americans and their image. This public image influences public perception, and is capable of reinforcing opinions about African Americans.<sup>[40]</sup>

Typically, these opinions are unfavorable and highlight negative stereotypes associated with African Americans. Oftentimes the portrayals' very medium, such as television, is the origin of such stereotypes. Television has been cited for broadcasting material that displays an overrepresentation of African Americans as lawbreakers. A study of TV crime newscasts indicated that newscast content displayed far more counts of African-Americans' crimes than that of any other racial classification.<sup>[41]</sup>

The representation of African Americans in media has remained the same for a while, almost since the representation of African Americans in television ads exceeded in 1991. It has been shown that even positive stereotypes of African Americans in media can have an effect of prejudice on consumers. The roles of African Americans in media has evolved over time. On typical cable channels the amount of ads shown with African Americans has become neutral, but on channels such as B.E.T.<sup>[42]</sup><sup>[better source needed]</sup> where the viewership is mostly that of African Americans, all of the ads consist of healthy, stable, independent and enthusiastic African Americans who are goal oriented. African Americans now have bigger roles in media such as that of reporters, business owners and artists. African American women have made an uprising in mainstream media as confident and strong individuals. Several organizations have been based on the empowerment of African American women in media.<sup>[43]</sup> The representation of African American women in media has also made an increase since beauty expectations have changed. Cultural appropriation<sup>[44]</sup><sup>[better source needed]</sup> has somewhat changed the beauty standards of media. Fashion styles have taken on the cultural dynamics of many countries.

### **Stereotypical roles of African American Men:**<sup>[edit]</sup>

- Negative: includes gang members, " thugs", pimps, some type of criminal, rapper, drug-dealer
- "Positives"- Athlete
- "Hypersexuality, violence, misogyny, and elite athleticism are extreme versions of stereotypical male qualities, and each is used to caricature and stereotype black males in particular." <sup>[45]</sup>

- Blacks are overrepresented as perpetrators of violent crime when news coverage is compared with arrest rates [but are underrepresented in the more sympathetic roles of victim, law enforcer].<sup>[46]</sup>

- Black men [in mainstream print ads], with rare exceptions, are represented as workers, athletes, laborers, entertainers, criminals, or some combination thereof. <sup>[47]</sup>

### **Stereotypical roles of African American Women:**<sup>[edit]</sup>

Negative: "Angry black woman" stereotype, maids/ "the help", overly sexualized/promiscuous, crack victims/abusers of welfare, prostitutes/strippers<sup>[48]</sup>

Positives: "Strong independent black woman"<sup>[49]</sup>

### **Stereotypical roles that both African American men and women:**<sup>[edit]</sup>

- Almost always portrayed in a negative light. - As some kind of criminal doing lower class, more violent crimes like robbery and burglary, rather than more "high class"/white crimes like embezzlement
- Both seen as "the help"- Doing a lot of jobs that require labor
- Both hypersexualized. Men seen as aggressive when it comes to sex and women seen as promiscuous
- Both play the stereotypical "Black Best Friend" that's usually around for funny and witty comments and helping the white main character.<sup>[50]</sup>

### **Blackface and Minstrelsy**<sup>[edit]</sup>

See main article [Blackface](#)

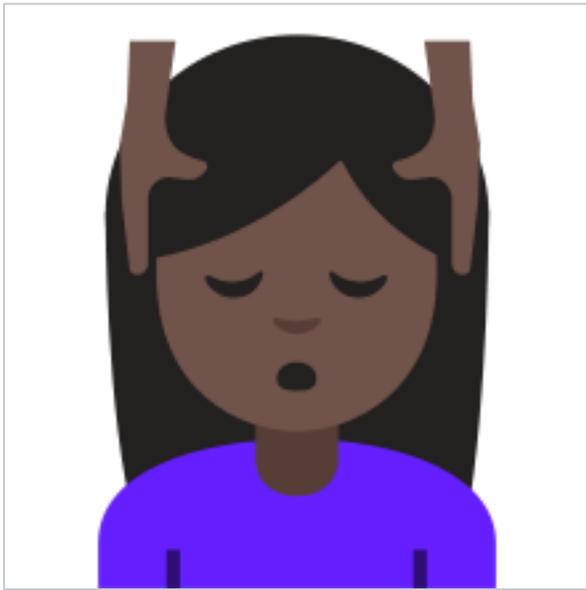
The misinterpretation of African Americans in the media can be traced back to the degrading images of them depicted through black minstrelsy. With the rise of these minstrelsy performances, we see a faux black subjectivity created for the consumption of the mainstream, inaccurate portrayals and caricatures arise in order to draw upon an absence presence of true black culture. <sup>[51]</sup>A critical component of this is the misconstrued emergence of the black English, drawing upon diverse markers, intensifying this rigid separation and creating an inflexible caricature. <sup>[52]</sup> It can be noted how these African American actors tried altering their images and playing upon stereotypes in order to cater to the white, urban -predominately male- audiences. <sup>[53]</sup>Mass media depictions of black bodies through outlets such as minstrel shows, between the 19th and 20th century reveal the beginning of this form of cultural policing which subjugates African American presence to this white gaze.

The Happy Plantation Ducky was one of the first stigmatized representations featured in minstrel shows, with the producers behind this offensive character claiming it to be a comical relief and generalized image, denying its racist implications <sup>[54]</sup>. This figure was widely accepted among viewers from all backgrounds in society, some seemed to be oblivious to its racist undertones and often disregarded the exaggerated features this character possessed which, often denied by its producer, represented the commonly misconceived social perceptions of the black body's physical characteristics. This character was often depicted in tattered clothing and hunched over or slouching when walking around stage, showing his inferiority through physical mannerisms <sup>[55]</sup> Blackface minstrelsy have been read as a logonomic system, by seeing how positions of power are implicated through these shows not only through its racist material but also the rigid rules and regulations involved in the shows. <sup>[56]</sup> As noted previously, many of those watching these minstrel shows did not interpret the characters to be racially specific, merely as clown-like figures with exaggerated features, their laughter and reading of these figures as pure comical reliefs then reinforces this notion of superiority by mocking their inferiority, which is made apparent through their physical being and clothing. <sup>[57]</sup> Minstrel shows and their misinterpretations of black bodies in respects to their physical and social depictions, is then masked by this "comical" depiction.

The dichotomy present amongst the black and white actors featured in these minstrelsy shows further depicted this parallel of the current power dynamic in society, but depicted through outlets such as theatre performance. The basis of these performances were shaped around current socioeconomic dilemmas, specifically referring to the rise of urbanization and industrialization. Pressured by the stress of socioeconomic achievement and development, white performers then shaped these minstrel characters to represent this inverse entity of what it meant to be "modern" in terms of Northern white social standards. <sup>[58]</sup> These minstrel shows throughout the 19th and 20th produced not only the discriminatory practice of blackface, but it also created characters that imposed stereotypes on African Americans and their role in society. These characters included the "mammy", the "dandy" and the "buck". <sup>[59]</sup> Each of these figures were shaped to be the antithesis of modernity, attempting to convey their inability to conform to white ideals through exaggerated features and physical idiosyncrasies The "mammy" paralleled what the white media viewed black women to be in terms of their core role to the family, keeping them together with her mother-like qualities but still looked down upon because of her incompetency which was trademarked by her naive nature and "plantation" dialect. <sup>[60]</sup> Whereas the "dandy" represented the northern black men,

often seen dressed in white upper-class clothing and possessed a more “sophisticated” melancholy, however he was not seen as modern with his exaggerated imitations merely intensifying his marginalization.<sup>[61]</sup> The “Buck” was often seen as a larger black man whose intelligence was exhibited through his imperiling actions, often unapologetic of his presence and was depicted as a threatening entity to those around him, specifically towards the white women he pursued.<sup>[62]</sup>

### "Digital Blackface"<sup>[edit]</sup>



Example of dark-skinned emoji.

The use of memes, gifs, and emojis in contemporary communication software has led to discussions around the concept of “digital blackface.” Digital Blackface refers to the online form of mimicking and appropriating Black people or Black culture through usage of online technologies such as emojis, gifs, and memes.<sup>[63][64]</sup> The concept surfaced due to the popular featuring of Black people in various gifs and memes, as well as the use of darker skin toned emojis that do not reflect one’s own skin color.<sup>[65]</sup> Emojis with different colored skinned tones were introduced by iOS 8.3 in 2015 with the purpose of promoting diversity and inclusivity.<sup>[66]</sup> Popular gifs and memes feature notable African-American figures such as [Tiffany Pollard](#), [Viola Davis](#), and [Nick Young](#), as well as unknown and obscure African- American individuals, in a variety of scenes from everyday situations to specific reactions.

Common gifs and memes of Black Individuals come from television shows such as [Real Housewives Atlanta](#), [Love and Hip Hop](#), and [Flavor of Love](#). The use of these gifs and memes has been seen as a continued form of Blackface, where non-black people can portray themselves as Black through their use of these gifs and memes.

There is current debate on the existence of "digital blackface" and whether or not it is a contemporary reproduction of previous versions of [Blackface](#).<sup>[67]</sup>

## Minority Ownership Task Force<sup>[edit]</sup>

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The lack of representation has spawned a number of U.S. [Federal Communications Commission](#) (FCC) initiatives to increase diversity. In 1969 the Supreme Court ruled that the implicated FCC regulations that were designed to increase viewpoint diversity were not in conflict with the [First Amendment](#), and the people "as a whole" retain their interest in free speech and the right to have "diverse programming" via the constitution.<sup>[68]</sup> In the 1960s the release of a report by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (the Kerner Commission) reported that the "media" did not effectively communicate to the majority of their decidedly white audience the sense of "degradation, misery, and hopelessness of living in the ghetto."<sup>[69]</sup>

The commission also continued to report that unless the media became more sensitive to the portrayal of African Americans specifically, the degrading stereotypical content would continue to be displayed. In response to this commission, the FCC initiated a race-neutral regulatory policy to increase the likelihood that African Americans would be employed with a broadcaster.<sup>[70]</sup> This included changing hiring practices of broadcasters to eliminate racial discrimination from the employment process. However, despite these rules, the FCC found that levels of representation did not change significantly.<sup>[71]</sup>

To continue its effort to provide access to the "minority voice", the FCC established the Minority Ownership Task Force (MOTF). This group would focus on researching ways to include minorities in the broadcasting industry. The FCC notes that having a sufficient representation of the minority would be serving the needs of not only the interests of the minority community, but would "enrich and educate" the majority.

## *Metro Broadcasting v. FCC*<sup>[edit]</sup>

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The case of [Metro Broadcasting v. FCC](#) in 1990 challenged the constitutionality of two minority preference policies of the [Federal Communications Commission](#). Under the first policy challenged by Metro Broadcasting, Inc., minority applicants for broadcast licenses were given preference if all other relevant factors were roughly equal. The second policy, known as the "distress sale," was challenged by Shurberg Broadcasting of Hartford, Inc. This policy allowed broadcasters in danger of losing their licenses to sell their stations to minority buyers before the FCC formally ruled on the viability of the troubled stations.<sup>[72]</sup>

The FCC's minority preference policies were constitutional because they provided appropriate remedies for discrimination victims and were aimed at the advancement of legitimate congressional objectives for program diversity. The FCC's minority preference policies were closely related to, and substantially advanced, Congress's legitimate interest in affording the public a diverse array of programming options. The availability of program diversity serves the entire viewing and listening public, not just minorities, and is therefore consistent with First Amendment values.<sup>[72]</sup>

## Examples of Contemporary Positive Representation for the Black Community in the Media<sup>[edit]</sup>

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### **Black Panther:**<sup>[edit]</sup>

- In Theaters on Feb. 16th 2018. Had cultural significance because of the predominantly African American cast, and the highest grossing film by a black director.<sup>[73]</sup>

### **Black-ish:**<sup>[edit]</sup>

- Premiered in September of 2014. TV Show/family comedy where the lead roles and main family are African American. Received 4 Emmy nominations in 2017.<sup>[74]</sup>

### **Insecure:**<sup>[edit]</sup>

- Premiered back in October of 2016. Mainly black cast. Issa Rae, the creator of the show, was nominated in both 2017 and 2018 for Best Actress.<sup>[75]</sup>

### **Atlanta:**<sup>[edit]</sup>

- Premiered in September 2016. Written, Created, Directed, and starred in by Donald Glover. Predominant African American cast.<sup>[76]</sup>

## See also<sup>[edit]</sup>

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- [Video vixen](#)
- [Misogyny in hip hop culture](#)
- [Early film racism in the United States](#)
- [Racial bias in criminal news in the United States](#)

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