Applied Analysis on African American Representation In The Media

I am convinced that in general people do not prefer to receive their news from someone of their own race because they believe members of their race are more credible journalist and authentic source of information. I am however convinced people do prefer to receive their news from certain individuals that they can connect with through identity. This could be through education, class, sex, sexual orientation, and race. It is important to have different platforms that present news to different groups so that the news, which will affect the lives of the various groups, actually reaches them. All minorities, but more importantly African Americans need to be informed about serious news and trends in a different way than traditional news so that topics concerning their lives are presented and discussed in depth in a way that is attractive. An example of something that pertains to Africans Americans but is not on the air of CNN, ABC News, or PBS is that the last lynching of an African American occurred just fourteen years ago. Facts that pertain to one race may be mentioned on CNN but not properly analyzed or discussed as they should. For example, “Only 41% of Black men graduate from high school in the United States,” or that in 2006, “the net worth of black families was $6,100 – the net worth of $67,000.” ("Morehouse male initiative")

Newspaper, television, and radio news outlets influence our opinions on certain matters. Formal news can create a negative outlook on a certain race because that race does not fit the framework of a particular news outlet, that is rich and white. National news television stations present hard serious news for educated individuals. National stations mainly report major world and domestic news like the death of important figures and celebrities, war, and national news involving race, historical events, politics, and news that can affect an entire country such as the increase of deaths on college campuses or a killing that is racially motivated.

The way news is presented defines the type of audiences it targets. Hard news is presented in a general way so that it can relate to the masses. National television networks like CNN only present the surface of news and do not focus on issues that affect certain individuals enough, such as the unemployment of African Americans is double the national average or that A young Black male in America is more likely to die from gun fire than was any soldier in Vietnam. ("Morehouse male initiative") The focus is more on how news can affect all of America, not urban America.

Travis Dixon wrote an article titled, “He was a black guy”: How the News Continues to Creative Fear of Blacks.” The article focuses on the fact stereotypical crime portrayals shape perceptions of African Americans and crime. Through research Dixon found that Blacks were twice likely as whites to be portrayed as perpetrators of crime on local television news. To reverse stereotypes of African Americans there needs to be less overrepresentation of Blacks as criminals and more representation of Blacks as civil contributors to a better society in news, instead of a danger to American society. Blacks are represented in the news as thieves, gangsters, and people without distinction way too often. Dixon claimed in his article, “heavy news viewers exposed to either race-unidentified suspects or a majority of Black suspects will have mismemory of non-Black, more support for the police, increased perceptions of danger, racial animus and greater culpability judgments of criminals.” (Dixon 24-30) This shows why a platform that is dedicated to the empowerment of African Americans is necessary. There are too many stigmas and automatic assumptions that criminal activity is connected to an African American.

Black Entertainment Television or better known as BET covers the same political and national news as national but present information that pertains to African- American audiences more. BET entertains and attends to a certain community; BET concentrates but is not limited to the black community. **BET was created to broadcast the culture, genius, beauty and talents of the black race.** ("kgb anwsers") BET is a network that is important to America and especially African- Americans because it offers entertainment, education, and unity to a national community all of different racial, political, and social levels.

BET News covers national politics, sports, health and global news. BET News offers financial help, information on the 2012 election, voting rights, and draws audience’s attention to important matters like gay rights, anti-violence and bullying campaign, and the presidential election debate. I am convinced that BET News is less credible than traditional because of the audience it focuses on. BET’s new show *Don’t Sleep* which is hosted by T.J Homes, who spent 5 years anchoring at [CNN](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CNN)*.* The show has a panel discussion form people with different backgrounds, political, and racial views, what separates the show from other news related shows is that the panel is all African-Americans. Members of conservative, republican, independent, democratic parties have been on the panel of *Don’t Sleep*. Professional and Olympic athletes, independent film makers, CEO’s, authors, comics, music artist, and activist have appeared on the show. Issues on affirmative action, presidential debates, marriage equality of the GLBT community, and a recent lynching of a chair by a southern American all have been discussed on the show. These are all important issues that affect the overall relations between the various cultures in American, but it pertains more to African-Americans.

Of course, “How the media talks about an issue can influence whether people use stereotypes to understand that issue, even when people don’t endorse the stereotypes.” (Gorham 17-24) Formal television news networks present news in one traditional way that for the most part does attract and properly address topics of the urban community, which is uneducated and poor considering the fact that the unemployment of African Americans is double the national average and a small percentage of blacks graduate from high school.

Although T.J. Homes has merit and journalistic credibility he does not wear a tie. *Don’t Sleep* is more community focused and allows people of different walks of life to participate and voice their opinions. Because Homes sharescamera time with his guest the show is more welcoming and therefore includes more people into community building. It could be argued tha CN and other traditional news networks further separate “Black America” and “the United States of America.” Traditionally one anchor talks into the camera and reports the news. *Don’t Sleep* creates a different platform to receive news and discussion from because Homes is not highlighted by a lot of camera time.

The main national television stations, that is, CNN, Fox News, ABC News, and even ESPN influences our perceptions on certain races, social classes, religion, and education levels. In the killing of unarmed 17 year old African –American teenager, Trayvon Martin by the hands of [George Zimmerman](http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/who-is-george-zimmerman/2012/03/22/gIQAkXdbUS_story.html), the neighborhood watch captain of a Florida gated community, the media influenced perceptions on African- Americans worldwide. Some people who were not threatened by African-American became threatened because they were persuaded by the certain media groups to think Trayvon Martin was the aggressor and therefore was justifiably shoot by Zimmerman. CNN seemed to only regurgitate the news. CNN did a good job reporting the development of the story, the reaction of the black community, and whites. I believe. although CNN fairly questioned if Trayvon’s murder was racially motivated or not. CNN did not focus to the different sections of the black community, that is, different education, social classes, and social mobility levels.

*Don’t Sleep* has had less than 10 episodes, in the shows short existence it has provided worthy news, valuable content, and entertainment by having comics on the show and references to popular black celebrities and experiences. All this creates a different platform for the presentation of news. The segment *This week in Ratchet* on the show fights against social stigmas concerning blacks by showcasing the shallow, ignorant, and childish behavior of popular black celebrities and trends. It fights against the negative images some popular forces create that deter the image of African-Americans as a whole. Because of some music artist like Lil Wayne and Waka Flaka promote violence, drug abuse, and the exploration of a women. most African-Americans are subject to discrimination and racial profiling like Trayvon Martin. Hill Harper, Sherri Shepard, co-host of *The View*, comedian and actor Brandon T. Jackson were the guest who made up the panel for the first episode of the show. Sherri Shepard represents someone who entertains people of various social statues and education level because viewers of the view are diverse in this manner. Viewers of *The View* are different culturally and racially yet they all relate to the content of the show as feminine, intellectual and successful women, like the host of the show. Brandon T. Jackson represents the modern teenage and young adult demographic. He stands for social mobility like the others on the panel but he better represents the struggle through the underrepresentation in television and in society and discrimination of black because unlike Harper and Shepard he is not a college graduate and has attained his success by untraditional methods, which is not receiving a degree and working a white collar job.

Leaders in the black community, entertainment, and academia who would not normally have presence on dominantly white news networks have the ability to voice their opinions and discuss from their point of view how they really feel on *Don’t Sleep.* The show is more laid back and welcoming than CNN or Fox News. For that reason topics and issues of national importance can be analyzed from the point of view of the black community. As Americans and more importantly those who are African Americans need to fight against classism, racism, and underrepresentation. Travis Dixon said to properly fight stereotypes people need to be careful what they watch and to “as citizens, you should consider becoming involved in actually writing media outlets and advocating for more balanced coverage of topics.” BET, BET News, and the show Don’t Sleep is a start to ending current social issues that carry on into every generation, but the country as a whole should be trying to unite America.

Works Cited

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