

Whites and Blacks, young and old, rich and poor, and scholars and non-scholars acknowledge that adverse stereotypical images of Black Americans in the media can produce adverse economic outcomes for Blacks. In response to this problem, it is expected that Blacks would exert efforts to eliminate such images. These images constitute critical roadblocks on the highway of growth and development for Blacks in the United States and around the world. Without doubt, Black Americans possess the potential to perform at the highest level in every field. However, an important barrier to such achievement is opportunity, which is often denied by gatekeepers who are predisposed to the idea that Black Americans cannot perform successfully in certain capacities. If the truth be known, and this book is designed to reveal certain truths, those gatekeepers' perceptions of Blacks are often formed through observations of adverse stereotypical images of Blacks in the media. It is only when such images are removed from the culture-forming, reality-shaping landscape (i.e., the television and movie screens, newspapers, magazines, etc.) that Black Americans will be able to move forward unencumbered. Of course, this principle applies to other ethnic groups as well, but the express purpose of this book was to address the issue from a Black American perspective.

Adverse images of Blacks in the media would not be the source of such ink spillage if they passed benignly through the minds of viewers. History and the data tell us that they do not. These images penetrate to viewers' mental inner core and become the impetus for behaviors, which can dramatically affect economic outcomes for Blacks. At a minimum, adverse stereotypical images of Blacks contribute to the production of the following adverse outcomes: Poorer education, poorer health, less income-producing and beneficial employment, reduced ability to create wealth, and, generally, a poorer quality of life than they would otherwise experience.

How can Americans claim a commitment to fairness and equality knowing that adverse stereotypical images have the power to produce the just-described outcomes, and yet do so little to eliminate these images? Why have Black Americans themselves taken so little action on this fulcrum issue? This book provided answers to these questions. Moreover, it also presented a workable solution to the problem. It is now up to Black and other Americans who are interested in improving outcomes for Black Americans to take the prescribed actions, which can help solve a major American and world problem. Failure to do so, without other dramatic interventions, will condemn Black Americans to a history of economic, social, and psychological suffering, and ultimately to their possible disappearance.¹

¹Behind a veil of ignorance, a society could conclude that persons who are unproductive and noncontributing could be designated as expungable when resources become scarce. Theoretically, world resources are likely to increase in scarcity in the future. Given the effect of adverse stereotypical media images, Black Americans may be perceived as consumers of valuable resources without being producers of a concomitant set of valuable goods and services. Therefore, in an extreme case, a society could decide to eliminate certain Black Americans.

The remainder of this chapter provides final packaging of the previous eight chapters. In addition, final thoughts are provided on actions that are required to assist Blacks in America and around the world in escaping the painful dilemma, which has its seat in adverse stereotypical media images.

Chapter One set the scene for this book by posing a few basic questions. Why has skin color become a metaphor for character in America? Why have adverse stereotypical images of Blacks proliferated in the media? How should Blacks respond to such images? What are the economic implications of adverse stereotypical images of Blacks in the media? The chapter informed us that these questions would be answered in the eight remaining chapters—and they were. However, Chapter One also stated that a failure by Blacks to address the problem of adverse stereotypical images would produce significant adverse outcomes for Blacks; something that we have already discussed in this conclusion, and to which we will return before closing.

Chapter Two discussed the power of the media. The power of the media can be characterized no better than in a recent headline that was used by the Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, as part of its release of the *2007 Statistical Abstract of the United States*. The headline read, “Nearly Half of Our Lives are Spent with TV, Radio, Internet, and Newspapers.” Economists often argue that we are all equal to the extent that we have one valuable resource—24 hours in each day. When the data tells us that we spend almost half of our time consuming media, then we come to the full realization that media is a very powerful force, and that we are virtually powerless to it. However, the headline says little about the economic resources that media industries command, which was the focus of Chapter Two. Nor does the headline highlight the media’s power to control our thoughts and actions—something about which we are often unaware. Chapter Two provided an excellent perspective of media as a continuously growing phenomenon that incubates adverse stereotypical images of Blacks, which is the core problem that this book seeks to address.

Chapter Three took the reader on an historical journey back to 1992-93, and a study that tested television media’s representativeness and the roles that Blacks portrayed at that time. Focused on the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area and programming on the six broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC, UPN, and WBN), the study concluded that, indeed, Blacks had a statistically representative presence on television, but that one could not rule out the fact that, when Blacks were sighted on television, they were presented in stereotypical roles. The chapter took up considerable space with the definition of stereotypes and provided a clear view on how stereotypical roles are characterized (see Appendix A to Chapter Three).

Chapter Four was linked directly to Chapter Three in that it provided the results of an update to the 1992-93 study based on data collected in 2005-06. Interestingly, the key results of the two studies were quite similar. However, data from the latter study indicated a swing away from a preponderance of stereotypical images on certain networks. We attributed this change to increasing efforts by networks to focus their programs to specific target

audiences. The 2005-06 study showed that programming on certain broadcast networks reflected clear efforts to target Black audiences by airing more programs that featured Black characters. The characters, in turn, portrayed stereotypical roles. What is most disturbing about these results is that such clear evidence could be identified in the data, which provides a strong inference for how audiences are targeted and segmented in the cable television world. Such audience segmentation is bad news for Blacks who self-select and lock themselves out of valuable information that might be available at locations along the broadcast and cable television spectrum that they choose to ignore.

Chapter Five, the heart of this book, focused on proving the case that adverse stereotypical media images of Blacks produce adverse economic outcomes for Blacks. By testing regression models that included 30 years of data on primetime television broadcasts and a plethora of economic variables, we not only showed that programs that feature adverse stereotypical images of Blacks are highly correlated with increases in the unemployment rate gap between Blacks and Whites, but we were also able to shed light on the transmission mechanism that produces this outcome. In essence, we found that programs, which contain adverse stereotypical images of Blacks, contribute to a broad cultural milieu. However, a strongly discernable perception within that milieu is that Blacks are associated with crime. The latter factor ultimately influences prospective hiring officials' decisions to not employ blacks. This reality has large economic implications; millions of jobs and billions of dollars in income have been lost over the years as a result of Black adverse stereotypical media images. These losses contribute to many other gaps that exist between Blacks and Whites in America—wealth, education, etc.

Chapter Six examined the role of an iconic television program, *60 Minutes*, and its affect on the perception of Blacks in America. Assessing 13 programs that were broadcast during the fall of 2003-04 season, what surfaced in crystal clear fashion was that the producers of the program incorporated a limited representation of Black images. The majority of the Black images/personalities that were presented were adverse images. Moreover, *60 Minutes* appeared to go out of its way to ensure that Ed Bradley, a Black correspondent for the program, presented most of the Black images that were broadcast during the period under study. Based on our examination of the episodes that were presented on the program and the paid and unpaid advertisements, we were hard pressed to come away with a sense that *60 Minutes* presented Black Americans in a non-stereotypical manner. *60 Minutes* has been one of the most popular programs in television history, and many millions of Americans watch the program each Sunday evening. It stands to reason then, that many Americans have difficulty forming positive opinions of Black Americans, especially if they base their perceptions on the images that are presented on a program such as *60 Minutes*.

Chapter Seven delved into the question of, "Given an opportunity to control the image of Black Americans, how would Black American owned/controlled networks respond?" We performed an assessment of one

week of prime-time programs in December of 2006, on three cable television networks that expressly target Black Americans audiences and were at some point in their histories owned or controlled primarily by Black Americans: Black Entertainment Television (BET); The Black Family Channel (BFC); and TV One. Because BET was launched in 1980, it had a longer history than the other two networks; therefore, we also performed an historical comparison of BET primetime programs. For the latter analysis, we found that BET's primetime broadcasts included more programs that featured Black Americans in adverse stereotypical roles in 2006 than in 1990. For the former analysis, we found that BET and TV One broadcast considerably more programs featuring adverse stereotypical images of Black Americans than the BFC in 2006. In fact BFC was the only network of the three that appeared to present a balanced package of primetime programs; including news, sports, information, music, religious programs, situation comedies, other entertainment, and movies. BET and TV One provided primarily a diet of music and situation comedies. Being the most profitable of the three networks and with ownership by a non-Black-owned company, there appears to be little reason to expect that BET will change its lineup of programs in the near term. TV One appears to be mimicking BET in an attempt to increase its audience share and to achieve profitability, which may be a mandate from its multiple owners. BFC stands as the lone network, which continues to be owned by Blacks. It appears to be concerned about, and willing to improve, Black American images on television.

Chapter Eight, considers a game theoretic approach to understanding why adverse stereotypical images of Blacks continue on television when these images produce non-optimal outcome for Blacks. The conclusion was that the networks have no incentives to change their program lineup in favor of Blacks at this time. However, given sufficient pressure from Black Americans or from other sources, the networks could find it in their best interest to discontinue the broadcast of adverse images of Blacks. Based on Olson's (1971) *Logic of Collective Action*, we concluded that it was in Blacks' best interest to form special interest groups to rent seek the networks for a change in their image. The problem with this solution is that a special interest group is unlikely to form and be successful in its efforts unless individual returns from the collective action are greater than the costs of participation in the collective action. Consequently, we prescribed that existing or new Black American organizations should form special interest groups to lobby the networks as a subfunction of a broader, but related, purpose to improve the status of Blacks in America and the world. To date, it does not appear that Black Americans have a well-designed strategy to use Black American special interest groups to launch a long-term rent-seeking campaign to improve Black Americans' image on television.

We pause to ask, "Where does all of this leave us?"

Although certain chapters in this book provide current information about the economics of Blacks in the media, the book may be viewed as providing more of an historical perspective. What we know is that one must fully

comprehend where one has been in order to be able to identify a current location, or to plot effective future direction. The latter statement may, in fact, provide generous insight about what this book has accomplished. It has provided strong arguments that explain why adverse economic outcomes are experienced by Black Americans as a result of their image in the media. What this tells us, plain and simple, is that, if Blacks wish to reverse these outcomes, then they must change their image in the media. This statement leads automatically to the question of how this is to be accomplished. As already mentioned, the “how” is discussed in Chapter Eight, and we will not duplicate that information here. Suffice it to say that Blacks must organize a long-term strategy for resolving this “image problem.”

How bad is the image problem? On December 26, 2006, we read a *New York Times* article that was emblematic of the image problem and how it can create adverse economic outcomes. In the article, Jodi Kantor tells the story of how “Nanny Hunt Can be a ‘Slap in the Face’ for Blacks.” Kantor described how “middle-class” Blacks had difficulty hiring nannies to care for their children so that they could accept employment that paid six figure salaries and more. The gist of the story was that, for a variety of reasons, neither White nor Black nannies preferred to work for Black professionals. Even immigrant nannies, in the main, appeared to reflect this attitude. One such nanny, Viola Waszkiewicz, a White nanny from Eastern Europe, explained the rationale for the aforementioned attitude:

“We come here, and we watch TV and the news, and all we see is black people who got hurt, got murdered,” she said. Most of the nannies she knows, “think all black people are bad,” she said. “They’re afraid to go to black neighborhoods.”

Do all Blacks get hurt or get murdered? Are all Blacks bad people? Are all Black neighborhoods unsafe? The facts speak for themselves and the answer to each of these questions is a resounding NO! Nevertheless, stories in the media paint a different picture; one that is imbibed by the uninitiated public and accepted and responded to as gospel.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Throughout this book, there are examples of the image problem and of the multidimensional harm that it imposes on Black Americans.

So what are we to do? Here “we” refers to any individual or group of individuals who see the true import of the problem. Those who fully comprehend the ultimate result of the continued stigmatization of Black Americans in the media should, individually and or collectively, use any workable strategies that are outlined in this book or elsewhere to eliminate adverse stereotypical images of Blacks from the media.

If we do not take this action, previously described outcomes will ensue. Amid the millions of lost jobs, the billions (if not trillions) of dollars in lost income, the self-hate, the physical and mental anguish and pain, the broken families

and homes, the failed careers, the premature deaths, the addictions, and all of the other adverse outcomes that are directly or tangentially related to adverse stereotypical images of Black Americans, America creates conditions for her own destruction by permitting the perpetuation of adverse stereotypical media images of Blacks.

Easterly and Levine (1997) and Easterly (2006) have written powerfully concerning ethnic fragmentation that has wreaked havoc on the people, economies, and nations of Africa. Adverse images of Blacks (and other American ethnic groups) in the media place America on the same evolutionary path as African nations. When ethnic groups in a nation learn to cling more to their ethnicity than to their nationhood, then the seeds for that nation's destruction become strongly rooted and blossom into destructive fragmentation. Today's world of the Internet and terrorism provide a rich source of information concerning how individuals and groups can respond when they incur continuous harm from a nebulous entity that they are unable to arrest. They strike out expressing their anguish and pain. Those who do not respond in this way, may decide to abandon America; viz. Randall Robinson's (2004) *Quitting America*. In either event, America is the loser.

According to the Catholic News Service (2006), Pope Benedict called for the end of discrimination during one of his 2006 Christmas messages. Eliminating adverse stereotypical media images of Blacks would be an important step in ending discrimination in America. America has risen to challenges in the past, it can do so again. Nevertheless, Black Americans must take the lead on this issue. They must, on their own and in concert with others, develop a complete strategy for ending the adverse economic and other affects of negative stereotypical media images. If Black Americans do not accept and respond appropriately to this challenge, then they, America, and the world will be the losers. After all, it may be that Black Americans can help the world achieve something new under the sun: People of different skin colors and ethnicities simply living peaceably together in one undifferentiated civil society.

References

- Catholic News Service (2006). "Pope Asks Christians to End Discrimination Against Migrants." *The Georgia Bulletin*. December 30. Retrieved from the Internet on December 30, 2006; <http://www.georgiabulletin.org/world/2006/01/16/WORLD-1/>.
- Easterly, William and Levine, Ross(1998). "Africa's Growth Tragedy: Policies and Ethnic Divisions." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. Vol. 112, No. 4; pp. 1203-50
- _____ (2006). *The Whiteman's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*. Penguin's Press. New York, NY.
- Kantor, Jodi (2006). "Nanny Hunt Can be a 'Slap in the Face' for Blacks." *New York Times*. December 26th. Obtained from the Internet on December 26th; <http://www.NewYorkTimes.com>.
- Olson, Mancur. (1971). *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, MA.
- Robinson, Randall (2004). *Quitting America*. The Penguin Group. New York, NY.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2006). "Nearly Half of our Lives Spent with TV, Radio, Internet, Newspapers, According to Census Bureau Publication." *U.S. Census Bureau News*. U.S. Department of Commerce. Washington, D.C.: December 15th. Retrieved from the Internet on December 28, 2006; <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/miscellaneous/007871.html>.

BBR:12/30/06