Introduction

"…They will be judged, not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

> From Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, August 28, 1963, Washington, D.C.

In an ideal world, all of our efforts would be directed toward optimizing our spiritual, mental, and material well-being. Through the "invisible hand," we would create continuously improved outcomes for ourselves and others.[1] We would be part of a world defined, in part, by the opening quote: A world where persons are judged, not by the color of their skin, but by their character and the capital (human, cultural and physical) that they offer the larger society. Such a definition does not address directly differences of all kinds—notably economic, educational, social, and political. However, if we define the word "character" to mean those unique identifying traits that constitute individuals, then judging persons based on their character means taking into account all of the aforementioned differences. The problem is that today's world is infused and imbued with media—media that, because we let it, defines who we are and that shapes our thinking about others. If the media used the aforementioned definition of "character" to characterize individuals, we might be in a world where we defined and assessed ourselves and others based on "character." Unfortunately, the media reflects a proclivity for using skin color as a metaphor for character. Moreover, the media often extends the almost universal practice of equating black skin color with that which is not desired.[2] Taken together, we realize that the media has the power to perpetuate a society and a world that are not ideal.

A logical reader would argue that, just as we are able to discern flaws in media characterizations, other individuals are able to do likewise and are not unduly influenced by the media. This counter-argument; however, does not account for two important facts. First and foremost, it underestimates the power of the media. Essentially, today's media, because of its pervasiveness, serves as a major conditioner of thought and behavior in our society. It is everywhere one turns—television, radio, movies, the Internet, newspapers, magazines, IPods, books, billboards,

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[1] See Smith (1976, p. 456).

[2] The English language is fraught with cases where that which is black or brown is associated with the unwanted: White is pure and clean, while black is dirty; in food, white is associated with "angel," while black or brown is associated with "devil"; a white horse is gallant and a symbol of triumph, while a dark (black) horse has little chance of winning; the ideal or joyous day of Christmas occurs when it is "white" with snow, while an adverse economic outcome, as in a stock market crash, is known as a black day—viz. the "Black Monday" that saw the stock market tumble on October 19, 1987.

etc.—and it invades and consumes our thoughts. Therefore, even if one is able to analytically account for media flaws, the force of the media can be so overwhelming as to swamp our rationality.[3]

The second important consideration is that it is human nature to view oneself in a positive light, and to elevate one's status above others. Therefore, there is a tendency to use the positive media images that one can identify with to build and amplify one's self-esteem, while at the same time using unflattering media images of others as a basis for lowering our opinions of others. When interpreted across racial groups, the reality is that blacks and whites may focus on, and inculcate, the positive images they observe in the media of themselves, but use the adverse images of the other group as a basis for forming adverse opinions of others. This process can, and does, result in anti-social behavior one group for the other; e.g., racism, violence, and general distrust, including an unwillingness to engage in economic exchanges.

Because blacks or African-Americans constitute a small sub-group of the larger United States (U.S.) population, they have limited potential for using unflattering media images of whites as a basis for exhibiting anti-social behavior and imposing adverse outcomes on whites.[4] Whites, on the other hand, because they constitute the largest group within the U.S. population, have very strong potential for, and in fact do, use unflattering media images of Black Americans to impose adverse outcomes on African-Americans.[5]

In the U.S., because whites are dominant population-wise, economically, educational, politically, and socially, they control the production of media images.[6] Given human nature, one would not

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[3] As a few examples of the media's ability to swamp our rationality consider a March 10, 2003 article from *The Washington Post* entitled "Watching TV Violence as Child Can Lead to Adult Aggression," which outlined how violent media "erodes a natural aversion to violence." A December 27, 2003 story by Stephanie Simon published in *The Seattle Times* entitled "Deal Likely to Free Boy From Lifetime Behind Prison Bars" discussed the possible release from prison of a 16-year-old boy who was convicted of first-degree murder of a 6-year-old neighbor while emulating television wrestling when he was 12 years old. Also, consider a February 24, 2004 article by Caroline E. Mayer in *The Washington Post* entitled "Regulators Urged to Further Limit Ads Aimed at Children," which explained researchers' findings that "youngsters lack the skills to question a commercial's claim as anything but fact."

[4] See the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census report, *The Black Population in the United States: March 2002*, which indicates that the black population was 36.0 million in March 2002, 13 percent of the total U.S. population (http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/p20-541.pdf).

[5] Of course, the notion of monolithic whiteness is also incorrect in a context that excludes nonwhites. Whites are quick to draw distinctions between themselves when no nonwhites are involved; i.e., they gravitate toward historical national origins—Irish, Scottish, German, French, Italian, Spanish, etc.

[6] The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, reported in the 1997 Economic Census that Blacks (African-Americans) owned 3.11 percent of media-type firms: 2.3 percent of firms in the Printing and publishing industry (Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) 27), 5.41 percent of firms in the Communications industry (SIC 48), and 2.62 percent of Motion picture industry firms (SIC 78). See http://www.census.gov/epcd/mwb97/us/us.html#Total%20minorities. Note: These data were

expect whites to produce media images that have an adverse affect on whites. That is, one does not expect whites to produce a preponderance of images that lower whites' self-perception. However, the same human nature does provide a rationale for whites to produce media images of Black Americans that are not favorable. When this occurs, at least two outcomes are produced. First, whites may, and do, use these unfavorable media images of Black Americans as a basis for anti-social behavior toward Blacks. Second, these unfavorable media images become embodied in the culture and are accepted as the "norm." The latter outcome results in some Black Americans adopting these images as "true," which initiates a non-virtuous circle of declining self-esteem and of negative reinforcing behavior.

What is "unfavorable?" Should all media images be "positive" or "favorable"? What is "positive" or "favorable" in this case? These are important and complex questions, but they are not difficult to answer. Given the emphasis on information, intelligence, and material well-being in today's world, media images that portray a particular group as unintelligent (i.e., devoid of knowledge) and unable to produce material well-being constitutes "unfavorable" images. This definition holds whether the image is factual or non-factual/fantasy/creative.

This leads us to the question of whether all media images should be positive or favorable. Absolutely not! We would step beyond the pale if we called for strictly positive or favorable media images on television, in movies, in print media, and in advertising; we must respect First Amendment Rights and free expression of ideas that are not explicitly harmful.[7]   However, our intellects should permit us to interpret appropriately unfavorable media images that are based on facts. Unfavorable images that are not fact-based leave media consumers without a true frame of reference for analyzing the nature of the images—their *raison d'etre*. Not knowing the appropriate context of unfavorable media images may very well serve as a basis (justification) for anti-social behavior against the group portrayed in an unfavorable light. Observing a subject who is an intravenous drug user elicits a different response depending on the context provided: e.g., (1) the drug user became addicted when treated for injuries suffered as a U.S. Army veteran; or (2) the drug user is a high school dropout who turned to drug use voluntarily at an early age.

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published in 2001 and similar data for later periods were not available on a North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) basis at the time of this writing.

[7] Amendment I to the Constitution of the United States of America states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. " This amendment is generally interpreted to mean that U.S. citizens possess a right to freedom of speech.

What are "positive" or "favorable" images?   They are images that reflect intelligence and the power to create material well-being; i.e., they reflect rational behavior, whatever the circumstances. Again, this definition should be viewed as a universal principle and should not be affected by the factual/non-factual nature of the context in which the images appear. In the latter case, because intelligence and wealth creation is viewed as positive all around, a non-factual context of positive media images should not motivate anti-social behavior toward the group or groups presented.

It is important to stress, that cultural nuances or differences are not, in and of themselves, a defining element in the determination of whether media images are positive or favorable. The definition promulgated here is based strictly on the premise that one can identify the degree to which images are intelligent (intellectually-based) or reflect wealth-creating characteristics. Positive or favorable images are ones that reflect behaviors that ultimately have productive import; they produce a good or an outcome that is viewed as valuable to the individual(s) involved or the society at large. What is valuable? Goods or outcomes that advance the long-term well-being of the individual(s) involved or the society at large are valuable.

The foregoing should not be viewed as a plea for white Americans to, willy-nilly, transform all adverse media images of Black Americans into positive or favorable images. In a democratic and pseudo-capitalistic society, individuals and groups are free to respond to available information and conditions to produce the best possible outcomes. White Americans see current benefits in maintaining the status quo; they cannot be expected to abandon it as a response to simple verbal pleas for change.[8] However, it is in the great traditions of freedom, democracy, and capitalism that small groups (so called minorities) can take "appropriate action" to engender desired change—in this case, the transformation of adverse media images of Black Americans into positive, favorable, or benign images. A major aim of this book is to highlight the appropriateness of rent seeking as an "appropriate action."

Having defined the situation that we find ourselves in vis-à-vis the media, and having provided definitions for a few key terms, we can now go on to outline how this book represents an effort to make our world more ideal. Plainly put, this book is primarily an effort to establish the factual nature of popular opinions about the media from a Black American perspective. Specifically, original research and analysis and evidence from other scholars are presented that confirm the existence of adverse stereotypical images of Black Americans in the media and that

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[8]In "Race, Class, and the Economics of Identity: A Theory of Racism," William Darity, Jr., Patrick L. Mason, and James B. Stewart provide a theoretical framework that explains the fundamental reasons why whites collaborate to maintain a position of economic superiority vis-à-vis blacks.

confirm the harmful effects caused by these images. Afterwards, we lay at readers' feet tools that might be used to ameliorate and ultimately eliminate African-American problems, particularly economic problems, which have adverse media images as their root cause. It is left to the reader to determine an appropriate course of action—individually and as part of the broader society.

Chapter 2 of this book provides official statistics and documented evidence on the power of the media. It is important to begin here because one cannot conceive the true nature of a task until one has an accurate assessment of the size and scope of the task. In this case, it is imperative that readers become familiar with the size and scope of the U.S. media in this country and abroad. Initially, the sheer volume of receipts earned by the U.S. media may impress one; however, for purposes of this effort, readers should also be awed by the power of the media to influence those it touches—and the media touches everyone.

Chapters 3 and 4 assess whether the media, especially television, in fact, presents adverse stereotypical images of Black Americans. This is not a novel claim. Black Americans have held this view for a considerable period.[9] These two chapters present the results of studies that were conducted a little over a decade apart: The first in 1993 and the second in 2005. The sole and simple purpose of the studies was to observe network television and to assess the nature of Black American images. How prevalent are television images of Black Americans and are those images positive or adverse? These questions are answered for the two periods. Given the timing of the studies, the chapters clue us in on whether outcomes are stable, improving, or deteriorating.

Chapter 5 is the centerpiece of this book. Once and for all, it answers the question: Are Black Americans affected adversely, from an economic perspective, by their portrayal on network television? One might focus on a variety of economic variables when conducting this type of inquiry: Wealth, income, or business ownership. However, in this case, the focus is on the one variable on which these other economic variables are largely determined—Black employment or the lack thereof. Specifically, the inquiry concerns whether the Black unemployment rate, which is twice that of the nation's unemployment rate in all periods of recent history, is affected by the portrayals of Black Americans on network television. This question is tested using multiple regression models, which yield definitive results

Chapter 6 considers Black American portrayals with respect to an American icon—the television program "60 Minutes." As one of the most popular television news programs over the past 30 years, it stands to reason that "60 Minutes" is a major force in shaping American opinion

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[9]See, for example, a 1977 report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights entitled, *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television.*

and culture.[10] Consequently, how Black Americans are perceived in America must be determined, in part, by their portrayals on "60 Minutes." We assess those portrayals during the 2003 fall season. By focusing on "60 Minutes," the chapter provides an up-to-date view of how much of America views Black Americans.

Chapter 7 provides a note on three cable television networks that were founded by Black Americans for Black Americans. In 1980, the Black Entertainment Television (BET) cable network was established. At that time, and still today, cable television began wooing larger and larger audiences from the major networks: The American Broadcasting Company (ABC), the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC). BET was the first television network owned and operated by Black Americans. Given this important tool and the need to use it wisely, how has BET fared? What about two relatively new Black cable televisions networks: The Black Family Channel (BFC) and TV One, which were launched in 1999 and 2004, respectively? Have BET, BFC, and TV One provided positive images of Black Americans? What are these networks' program profiles? Are they advancing or hindering the "cause" of Black Americans? How are they shaping America's perception of Black Americans? These questions are addressed in Chapter 7.

Arab, Asian, Hispanic, Italian, Jewish, and other ethnic groups in the U.S. have responded to their portrayal in the media by forming "watchdog" organizations to rent seek on their behalf: Is it in Black Americans' best interest to form such an organization? From time-to-time, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Urban League (NUL), and other Black organizations take up media image issues; however, there has been no persistent, consistent, focused, and long-term effort to influence and make more favorable the portrayal of African-Americans in the media. It might be argued that these organizations approach the Black American condition in the best possible way by responding directly to barriers to Black American well-being; addressing media image issues is viewed as an indirect approach to Black American problems. In contrast, it can be argued that urgent action should be taken to address Black Americans images in the media, because these images constitute the highest hurdle to Black overall achievement in the U.S. and around the world. It stands to reason that the long-term harmful effects of adverse media images of Blacks and the related loss of material-well being far exceed the benefits gained by a few Black Americans who may receive employment in media industries

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[10] Since its inception in 1968 until 1999, *60 Minutes* was the top ranked regular program series four years (1979-80, 1982-83, 1991-92, and 1992-93) based on household ratings, according to Nielsen Media Research. For the 1998-99-network television season, *60 Minutes* was the 7th most viewed regular program series. (See 2000 Report on Television: The First 50 Years, published by Nielsen Media Research.)

as a result of rent-seeking by Black organizations. Chapter 8 discusses Black American media image issues in a game theoretic context and explores the use of special interest groups (SIG) as a key tool for preventing these images and the harm that they inflict.

Chapter 9 concludes the book with final insights about how media, particularly television, will shape economic and other outcomes for Black Americans should appropriate action not be taken to ameliorate adverse stereotypical images of Blacks in the media.

There are numerous books that have Black American media image issues as a central topic. They focus on the nature of the images within specific television programs or movies, discuss Black Americans as the audience for Black American media images, assess the psychological impact of viewing Black media images, and the like. However, this is the first book that adopts a primarily economic approach to Black American media image issues. Like the lives of other groups in the U.S., the quality of Black Americans' lives is largely determined by the economic conditions in which they find themselves. Therefore, it was imperative that this book be written and an explanation be provided for a major determinant of economic outcomes for Black Americans.

Two important points should be gleaned from this work. First, Black Americans should comprehend that, as economic agents, it is not outside of their purview to act to influence their image in the media. If undertaken wisely, action can be designed to influence producers of Black American media images to shape those images in a more favorable light. If appropriate approaches are taken, it may take time, but we can all be assured that favorable media images will translate into favorable economic outcomes for Black Americans.

The second important point that should be recognized, not only from reading this book, but also by putting two and two together, is that if Black Americans do not take it upon themselves to address adverse media images and their related outcomes in the near-term, a very heavy burden will be placed on the shoulders of future generations of Black Americans. Failure to address the issue now will result in the continued reinforcement of these images in the hearts and minds of non-Black-Americans the world over. These images are of the type that can prompt societies to make Black Americans scapegoats when, and if, certain conditions come into existence. Given those conditions, societies often do terrible things to their scapegoats.

We believe that this book warrants a close and deliberate reading so that the reader can assess what is truly at stake, can make appropriate decisions, and can take appropriate action.

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