



**BlackEconomics.org®**

Report Brief

## **The Media Gap: Implications for Black America**

by

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## Introduction

Economists are quick to discuss and analyze the Black-White income and wealth gaps. However, as we discussed in “[Incorrect Diagnosis and Prescription](#),” a more important gap may be the media gap.<sup>1</sup> In this **BlackEconomics.org** Report Brief, we analyze: (1) What the media gap is; (2) Why the media gap is important; (3) certain statistics that confirm the media gap; and (4) strategies for addressing the media gap.

## The Media Gap

The media gap is measurable from a variety of perspectives. But one must first define what is meant by media. For practical purposes, we include in media: (1) Print media (books, magazines, newspapers, and other periodicals) in hard copy and digital forms; (2) electronic media [the Internet (including all forms of social media—e.g., Meta (formerly Facebook), Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, TikTok, etc.), television (networks, cable, and the multiplicity of streaming services), and radio]; (3) digital media made available through wired and wireless telephone networks; and (4) films (motion pictures) that are presented in traditional movie theaters. The foregoing is neither rigorously comprehensive nor precise. However, what is intended are most of the products and services created, generated, produced, and delivered through, by, and with those industries that are classified under the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS) code 51—Information.

The media gap can be measured on a representativeness principle: i.e., Black Americans may be underrepresented (in roles) in certain media based on

representation in the population, while White Americans may be overrepresented. Also, this principle can be applied when considering Black versus White ownership of media firms and employment in media industries. Finally, consistent with the representativeness principle, it is important to think of the gap from a topical perspective. For example, there may be representativeness in role assignments, but there may be a gap in the consideration of “Black” versus “White” topics/content.

## Media Gap Importance

When one understands the importance of media, then the importance of the media gap becomes transparent. Argued simply, media has the power to shape perceptions. It is common knowledge that positive perceptions increase the likelihood of success. The ability to control others’ perceptions of you and your perception of yourself, therefore, increases prospects for your success. A media gap serves to restrict one’s ability to shape perception and reduces prospects for success.

Consider the long and pervasive arm of the media through the following modified quote from the previously cited submission entitled, “[Incorrect Diagnosis and Prescription](#).”

The media informs us of what is transpiring in our world. It tells us to be hungry and what to eat. It tells us to get sick and which medicines to take or procedures to undergo to cure our illnesses. It tells us what favorable leisure is and how to enjoy that leisure. It tells us which clothes, shoes, makeup, and scents to wear. It tells us when to shop because the “sale is too good to miss.” It tells us which forms

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<sup>1</sup> Readers are invited to peruse the **BlackEconomics.org** [Media](#) page, which reflects

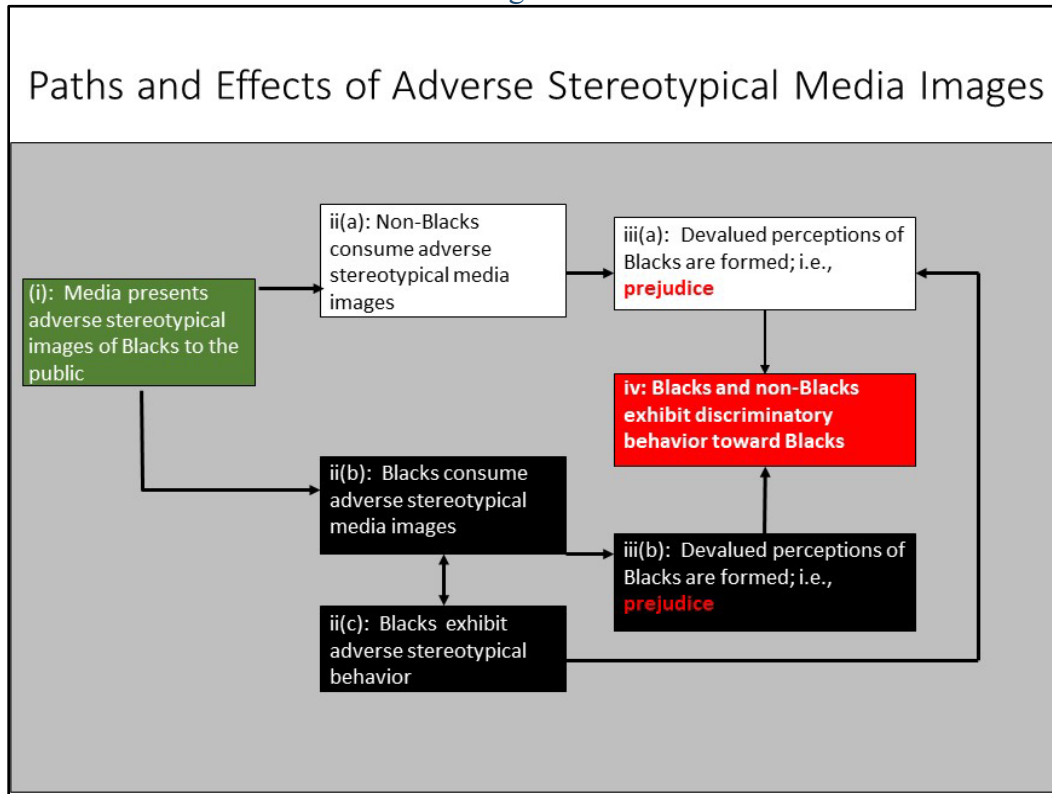
a variety of submissions on the intersection of Black Americans, economics, and the media.

of transportation we should employ. It tells us that education is important and the sources we should seek out to obtain that education. It tells us the job that is correct for us, how to obtain that job, and how to act in that form of employment. It tells us how to invest our money to secure transportation, housing, and a nest egg for our retirement. [It tells us how to raise our offspring.]<sup>2</sup> Finally, it tells us how to die and what to expect after death. There is a program for everything and for everything a program.

In the aforementioned submission, we point out that media often serves as the basis for our perceptions about ourselves and others. When media is biased, it presents adverse (negative) stereotypes. These stereotypes are at the root of prejudice. Prejudice can produce discriminatory acts. When discriminatory acts are founded on racial stereotypes, then we have racism.

Consider Figure 1. It serves as a simplified diagrammatic and pseudo-theoretical framework for the evolution of racism due to the presentation of adverse stereotypes in biased media.

Figure 1



Source: [BlackEconomics.org](http://BlackEconomics.org)

A close review of Figure 1 reveals that the media has the power to produce

discriminatory behavior toward Black Americans by both White (and other non-

<sup>2</sup> The statement in brackets is added for completeness.

Black) and Black Americans. It happens every day. It is a two-edged sword that Black Americans should address using every available tool at our disposal. Given the certainty of opportunity for non-Black and Black Americans to consume biased media (adverse stereotypical media images), which can adversely affect outcomes for Black Americans (in economics parlance, this is a “negative consumption externality”), we should make every effort to eliminate the media gap. This assumes that when Blacks have more opportunities to produce media, and greater control of media, then we will experience a more balanced media—and reduced negative consumption externalities. At the same time, there should be ongoing efforts to convince non-Black Americans to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, media that is biased against Black Americans.

The primary point of this section is to emphasize that media has the power to shape and control our lives—and does so in many respects. Clearly, the media embodies biased and adverse images of Black Americans that can impact us in a very negative way. In combination, these two facts produce a deadly cocktail that can exert significant downward pressure on Black Americans’ rise as fully functioning members of US society. If this downward pressure is unabated, then it can relegate Black Americans perpetually to the bottom of the US socioeconomic system—despite the upward filtering of some Black Americans who enjoy selected economic success.

## The Media Gap

<sup>3</sup> The statistics are from BLS’s and Current Population Survey Table 18. Employed persons by detailed industry, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity; <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat18.htm> (Ret. 102721).

## Media Gap Statistics

Media is massive and pervasive. Nevertheless, many of the statistics that one might present to characterize the media gap are not readily available. In this section, we present the following broad statistics: (1) Employment in media (Information) industries; (2) ownership, payrolls, and receipts of employer and nonemployer firms in media industries; and (3) media consumption patterns across Black and White American households. These high-level statistics obfuscate granular detail (e.g., the number of Black versus White media writers, producers, creators, editors, financiers, personalities, programs, hours of media content, etc.) that might provide more clarity concerning the media gap and prospects for Black Americans to control how Black Americans are presented and perceived through the media.

### *Media Employment*

Statistics on White versus Black employment in the Information (NAICS 51) industries are available from the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).<sup>3</sup> For 2020, BLS indicates that the Information industries employed about 2.6 million workers. White Americans comprised 76.1 percent of the employment, while Black Americans comprised 11.5 percent. The latter statistic indicates a gap based on the representativeness principle. In 2019 (the latest year for which data are available), Black Americans comprised 13.4 percent of the US population according to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.<sup>4</sup> *A priori*, the gap does not appear to

<sup>4</sup>See Census Bureau “Quick Facts – United States;” <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219> (Ret. 102821).

be huge (11.5 percent versus 13.4 percent). However, details underlying the BLS data show that Blacks are underrepresented (with respect to the population proportion) in eight of the ten Information subindustries for which data are provided—for certain subindustries, the underrepresentation is stark. Blacks are overrepresented in two telecommunications subindustries that mainly concern the operation of physical infrastructure associated with Information industries—not the development and production of media content.

The Media Gap

*Media Ownership/Payroll/Receipts*

Tables 1 and 2 below highlight gaps (based on the representativeness principle) in Black American ownership, the value of annual payroll, and receipts (sales, value of shipments, or revenue) of media (Information Industry, NAICS 51) employer and nonemployer firms. The data are from the US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1.--Total and Black Information Industry Ownership and Payroll: Employers, 2018**

Line No.	Categories	(A) NAICS 51 Information Industry Totals	(B) Black American Totals	(C) Black American as a Percent of the Total (C=B/A)
1	Number of employer firms	81,618	1,346	1.65%
2	Value of annual payroll (USD millions)	390,433	749	0.19%

Source: US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census; **BlackEconomics.org** computation of percentages

**Table 2.--Total and Black Information Industry Ownership and Receipts: Nonemployers, 2017**

Line No.	Categories	(A) NAICS 51 Information Industry Totals	(B) Black American Totals	(C) Black American as a Percent of the Total (C=B/A)
1	Number of nonemployer firms	340,000	28,500	8.38%
2	Sales, value of shipments, or revenue (USD millions)	12,381	580	4.69%

Source: US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census; **BlackEconomics.org** computation of percentages

Column C of Tables 1 and 2 reflects an absence of representativeness (13.4 percent) of Black American employer and nonemployer firms in Information industries. Notably, the gap in representativeness for

Black employer firms is starker than for nonemployer firms. It is unfortunate that data are not available currently on the sales, value of shipments, or revenue (receipts) of employer firms. Nevertheless, the data on the

<sup>5</sup> The data for Tables 1 and 2 are available at the following Internet website addresses, respectively: [https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=Owner%20Race](https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=Owner%20Race%20and%20Ethnicity&tid=ABSCS2018.AB1800C.SA01)

[e%20and%20Ethnicity&tid=ABSCS2018.AB1800C.SA01](https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=Owner%20Race%20and%20Ethnicity&tid=ABSCS2018.AB1800C.SA01); and <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/abs/data/nesc.html> (Ret. 102821).

value of annual payroll provide a hint concerning the likely gap in receipts for Black employer firms.

### *Media Consumption*

We provide statistics on differences in White versus Black media consumption patterns to assess their likely effects. The data are from BLS's 2019 *American Time Use Survey*.<sup>6</sup> The data show that Whites spend an average of 3.53 hours per day consuming media (defined as "Watching TV," "Reading," and "Playing games and computer use for leisure"), while Blacks spend 3.71 hours per day. Blacks' slightly higher level of media consumption means that we likely experience greater exposure to adverse stereotypical media images that generate and reinforce Black American stereotypical behavior (see Figure 1 above). Such behavior can generate and reinforce Whites' adverse perceptions of Black Americans. In addition, Whites may form adverse perceptions of Black Americans through the former's direct consumption of adverse stereotypical images of Black Americans in media.

### **Strategies for Addressing the Media Gap**

We do not know, what we do not know. In other words, Black Americans are not fully informed concerning the extent of adverse media images or their effects. Consequently, a first order of business should be to develop a "watch dog" organization that researches

and measures these two dimensions of adverse stereotypical media images of Black Americans. Given this two-dimensional knowledge, at a minimum, Black Americans should consider generating legislation that prohibits the production of adverse stereotypical images of Black Americans in media—with severe penalties for violators.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, Black Americans should consider the following actions:

- Encourage Black Americans who are engaged in media production to refuse to participate in producing media that include adverse stereotypical images of Black Americans.
- Boycott media that include adverse stereotypical images of Black Americans.
- Negotiate with and motivate all media producers to eliminate adverse stereotypical images of Black Americans and to increase the production of more positive and neutral images of Black Americans in media.

### **Conclusion**

Today's great consternation concerning the impact of social media on our thinking and our lives is ironic. The uproar is mainly about the impact of Meta's Instagram on young White teenagers (especially females).<sup>8</sup> Why

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<sup>6</sup> See BLS *American Time Use Survey* Results, Table 11A. Time spent in leisure and sports activities for the civilian population by selected characteristics, averages per day, 2019 annual averages; [AMERICAN TIME USE SURVEY-2019 RESULTS \(bls.gov\)](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/amtime2.pdf) (Ret. 102621).

<sup>7</sup> Such a strategy was adopted on stereotypes in advertising in the United Kingdom. See the Advertising Standards Authority's (2017). *Depictions, Perceptions, and Harm: A Report on Gender Stereotypes in Advertising*;

<https://www.asa.org.uk/resource/depictions-perceptions-and-harm.html> (Ret. 102821).

<sup>8</sup> See Emily Weinstein (2018), "The social media seesaw: Positive and negative influences on adolescents' affective well being," *New Media & Society*: Vol. 20, No. 10; pp. 3597-3623. Monica Anderson and Jingjing Jiang (2018), "Teens' Social Media Habits and Experiences," Pew Research Center, November 28; <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/11/28/teens-social-media-habits-and-experiences/> (Ret.



has there not been aggressive consideration of, and action against, the long-standing impact of adverse stereotypical images in all media on Black Americans? The answer to this question is that Black Americans have not fought vigorously and aggressively these adverse images—and to our own detriment.

Obviously, we need to take all possible actions to close the media gap. As already suggested, we should certainly form a watchdog organization(s) to fight adverse stereotypical media images of Black Americans. If such adverse images are

removed from the landscape, it will increase our prospects—possibly in a generation—of enjoying a more even playing field in all aspects of socioeconomic life: Education, employment, entrepreneurship, etc. Given these improved prospects, we should make progress on closing the income and wealth gaps. On the other hand, if we do not take action to close the media gap, then we relegate ourselves to continued existence at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder in the American and global society and to persistent and potentially widening income and wealth gaps.

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102721). Pratiti Raychoudhury (2021), “What Our Research Really Says About Teen Well-Being and Instagram,” Facebook, September 26;

<https://about.fb.com/news/2021/09/research-teen-well-being-and-instagram/> (Ret. 102721).