



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Correlation of Racial Prejudices and Black Representation

by
Elly Morgan

Supervisor: Richard William Morgan

Project submitted as part of the requirements for the award of BSc
(Hons) Computing (Computer Games Design)

April 2021

DECLARATION

I, Eleanor Louise Morgan declare that I am the sole author of this Project; that all references cited have been consulted; that I have conducted all work of which this is a record, and that the finished work lies within the prescribed word limits.

This work has not previously been accepted as part of any other degree submission.

FORM OF CONSENT

I, Eleanor Louise Morgan hereby consent that my Project, submitted in candidature for the B.Sc. (Hons) Computing (Computer Games Design) degree, if successful, may be available for inter-library loan or photocopying (subject to the law of copyright), and that the title and abstract may be available to outside organisations.

Content Warning:

This written piece of work covers sensitive issues regarding race and racial stereotypes, and contains offensive content and imagery. In no way in examining these past artefacts is this essay promoting or encouraging the portrayal of the racial group shown.

Abstract

This work covers the topic of black representation in western, animated media. From the research done, this paper discusses how media is associated with the general public and how media works to form biases with prejudiced views.

Overall it looks into racial stereotypes and how it correlates to the systemic racism occurring at the time (1800-1900). Then it begins analyzing films with black characters during the 1900s and comparing and contrasting to the presentation of said characters in modern films. Finally it goes over diversity in the workplace and the importance of it and how it relates to the creation of better representation.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

This written work will be looking and discussing the representation of black people in the media. Focusing primarily on animated films/shows but will also analyse other forms of entertainment. In particular, we will be examining western media, largely concentrating on ones created in America.

The goals of this essay is to gain a better understanding of past stereotypes, especially for creators and artists. Being knowledgeable of the past representations of minority groups, means that the characters and stories we create today and in future, are less likely to hold any resemblance to the negative portrayals seen in history. If we don't learn why certain things are offensive or racist, then there's a higher chance that we will recreate those very stereotypes, even if done without any ill intent. It's essential to be mindful about these topics, so that we can avoid any further hurt or create an unwelcoming environment. We should examine any unconscious biases we hold and work towards improving them.

The outline of this work will go as follows. Firstly briefly going over the origins of black representation, how history presented black Americans to a white populace. This allows us context of some of the meaning behind these negative stereotypes and how it relates to the racist attitudes at the time.

Then we will analyse some of these portrayals in animation, looking at films from the 1930s-1950s. Afterwards looking at the modern representations we see today. Being able to compare and contrast these two time periods, shows us the development of black characters and how films are often a reflection of public views.

Finally this paper will discuss the importance of diversity in a creative workplace and how a diverse team can help influence the representation of minority groups.

Chapter 2.1:

Analysing Elements of Black Representation within History

Minstrel Shows and Blackface

To begin diving into the topic of the representation of black people in the media, it is important to first look at the origins, in order to gain a better understanding by analyzing the history behind this topic.

Minstrel shows were commonplace throughout the 1800s-1900s, with a few of these performances continuing on until as late as the 1970s. Minstrel shows would be performed by white entertainers in blackface and would play characters that were in essence, deeply racist portrayals that mocked and dehumanized black communities. These shows acted as an exhibition of African American culture and lifestyle through the lens of white performers imitating slaves (Harbord, 2015,p.1).

While it was organized around the quite explicit "borrowing" of black cultural materials for white dissemination, a borrowing that ultimately depended on the material relations of slavery, the minstrel show obscured these relations by pretending that slavery was amusing, right and natural.

(Lott, 1993, p.4)

One of the earliest and perhaps most famous minstrel performers was Thomas Dartmouth Rice, notably known as the father of minstrelsy. Jim Crow was a character he often played and was supposedly based on a slave he had seen one day. In his shows, he would often sing "Negro Ditties" and spoke with an overdramatic African American Vernacular English (AAVE) accent (*The Original Jim Crow*, 2013). His influence was so massive that not only was the Jim Crow character imitated by other minstrels, it also later became the common name of segregation laws during the 1870s to the 1960s.

The most popular song *Jump Jim Crow* would often be sung in various versions, all with the lyrics cited intending to emulate African-American dialect along with broken english, truly giving the audience the impression of a dull witted, happy go lucky black man. Interestingly there was one variation of *Jump Jim Crow* that held lyrics with anti-slavery sentiments and voicing ideas of equality (Burns, 2021).

Should dey get to fighting,
 Perhaps de blacks pee
 For deir wish for freedom,
 Is shining in deir eyes.

And if de blacks should get free,
 I guess dey'll see some bigger,
 An I shall consider it,
 A bold stroke for de nigger.

I'm for freedom,
 An for Union altogether,
 Although I'm a black man,
 De white is call'd my broder.

(Rice, 1832, alternative lyrics of *Jump Jim Crow*)

Even with these lyrics, the message of freedom and the abolishment of slavery, falls flat when it's a white man performing as a character that ridicules and belittles the very people who he impersonates and profits off of by doing so. "The first minstrel shows put narrative to a variety of uses, but it relied first and foremost on the objectification of black characters in comic set pieces, repartee, physical burlesque." (Lott, 1993, p.144).



Fig.1 George Thatcher's Greatest Minstrels (1899)
 Theatrical Poster



Fig.2 Wm. H. West's Big Minstrel Jubilee
 (1900)

There were various minstrel shows during this time period, notable ones being the *Virginia Minstrels* and *Ethiopian Serenaders*, to name a few. The impact of this form of entertainment was phenomenal. It quickly became the most popular form of entertainment and was an iconic part of American culture. Minstrel shows were one of the first representations of black culture and it completely stereotyped black people as either "happy, frolicking plantation darkies or inept urban fools" (Toll, 1978).

The novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Stowe, 1852) was released and was wildly successful for its story that portrayed more of the realities of living as a slave from the perspective of the character Uncle Tom. (*Slavery In America*, 2013). However even though the book helped to shed light on this topic, with the aim to show white audiences the harm of slavery, it ultimately got turned into another joke that minstrels could use and became a new source of inspiration. These would be called Tom Show's which, as most minstrel characters did, depreciated the struggles of slavery and transformed it into a source of comedy and amusement.

Within the playbill of one of these shows, these lyrics are shown highlighting the difference between the original novel and the play:

Oh, white folks, we'll have you to know
 Dis am not de version of Mrs. Stowe;
 Wid her de Darks am all unlucky
 But we am de boys from Old Kentucky.
 Den hand de Banjo down to play
 We'll make it ring both night and day
 And we care not what de white folks say
 Dey can't get us to run away.

(Lii, 2003, p.659)

Minstrel shows set the standard and backbone of black representation, they were the main driving force behind black depictions in entertainment. They were often the only source of exposure that white audiences had towards African American culture and these stereotypes helped to uphold beliefs of superiority over black people because of these harmful characterizations.



Fig.3 Photograph of Minstrels,Unknown (Roughly around the 1930s)



Fig.4 Photograph of Minstrels,Unknown (Roughly around the 1930s)

Minstrel shows and the act of blackface gradually developed alongside technology and remained a part of our entertainment for decades, they would be seen performing in Broadway plays and you could even listen to them on the radio. So it wasn't long until they made their way onto our screens.

Development of Minstrelsy within the United Kingdom

Movies and tv shows in the 1900s would feature minstrel shows or actors performing in blackface. Even though this originated in America, it wasn't limited to America and was seen on a global scale.

Throughout the United Kingdom (UK), it was common to see forms of racist caricatures both in our household products and our toys, the most memorable being the *Golliwog* which could be found in almost every British household. Simply because these certain identifiable forms of racism stemmed in America does not exempt the UK from having had these same exact ideologies and performing similar racial discrimination. British television has its fair share of blackface and damaging depictions within its media.

The Black and White Minstrel Show aired on the BBC from 1958 onwards to 1978 when it eventually stopped airing and was removed from the broadcast.

For better context on why this particular show is so distinctive in terms of its time frame, is because during its air time The Civil Rights Movement was at its highest. This alone displays how much ignorance there was in the general public about why minstrel shows were so hurtful and conveys the lack of knowledge about the connotations behind blackface. At a time where people were fighting to end institutionalised racism and discrimination (History, 2009), you could turn on the tv and watch a family friendly minstrel show.

At the time, I'm not saying this in hindsight, people thought and certainly when I was a school kid "don't they think we have any feelings?". Doesn't it occur to them that there's a whole history behind this caricature?

When that was pointed out some time a great deal later everybody sort of said "oh don't you have a sense of humor?". Well no. We didn't have a sense of humor about being assaulted and insulted and humiliated. So there's something I still can't

get my head around looking back to 1958 that it didn't occur to them that there were tensions implicit in the idea of introducing this sort of entertainment.

(*Timeshift: Black and White Minstrels*, 2005)



Fig.5 Still image taken from *The Black and White Minstrel show*



Fig.6 Still image taken from *The Black and White Minstrel Show*

Although *The Black and White Minstrel show* itself did not explicitly state or present itself as openly ridiculing black people, it supposedly focused on the showmanship and art of minstrelsy as a form of theatre. It doesn't remove the history of minstrelsy and by being unaware of this fact it was introducing more and more people to this form of entertainment.

Even with these innocent intentions, there were still songs sung within the show with lyrics that reference picking cotton, "Yes I'm from Dixie! Where the fields of cotton, they beckon to me." and lyrics such as, "I'm going to the love that's ever-growing, to the cold black mammy of mine."

This show is an excellent example about how easy it is to brush off harmful practices like blackface due to a lack of knowledge and an unwillingness to learn about its history. It makes it much more simple to claim it's unprejudiced for the fact that it doesn't explicitly say or make racist comments, but it's this form of naivete that leads to airing shows like this that results in normalizing blackface for millions of people.

Early Black Performers and Actors

Another aspect of minstrelsy that shouldn't be ignored is that it wasn't limited to white performers. There are multiple examples of black actors, performers and entertainers dressing themselves up in blackface and acting in a stereotypical demeanor. They were able to gain fame and build successful careers doing this, and as much as this may be encouraging to see people use aspects that racially demeaned them and flipping the switch by earning profit and prominence, it also highlights how little opportunities and options there were available at the time.

One person having a seat at the table is better than nothing, but it's effectively meaningless. One person can't change an institution and it's not a reflection of large transformation or significant change, particularly as it relates to racial or gender equity...The success of one individual does not erase the systemic racial and gender barriers for others.

(Williams, 2020, p.2)

This area of history brings into question whether this was more hurtful, especially for other black audience members, because it may have suggested compliance and encouraged these forms of racist jokes, making them appear more acceptable. Or whether there's a sense of empowerment to use one of the tools of oppression to further along your own career while also allowing more space and opportunities for black performers to be seen in the public eye.

One noteworthy black performer at this time was Bert Williams, he began his musical career in the 1890s and in 1893, created a collaborative act with George W. Walker named *Two Real Coons*. (Padgett, 2009). The two quickly grew wildly successful and became international stars with *Theatre Magazine* claiming that Williams was "a vastly funnier man than any white comedian now on the American stage." (Sturgis, 2015)



Fig.7 Williams poses for a publicity still. (1920)

Even as a single act Bert Williams went on to perform on Broadway and even traveled to the UK to perform at Buckingham Palace. Alongside all this he was the first ever black actor to appear in cinema with the film *Darktown Jubilee* (1913) that he himself co-directed (New York Times, 2014).



Fig.8 Bert Williams with Odessa Warren Grey in a scene from the unreleased 1913 film, *Darktown Jubilee*.

Despite all his triumphs and affluence, he still faced prejudice during his career where other performers would refuse to have their names next to his on playlists or appear in shows with him. During the screening of *Darktown Jubilee*, it had to be removed from circulation due to an uproar from white audience members for the choice of having an all black cast and was received with boos and jeers that even escalated to audience members closely inciting a riot. (Sturgis, 2015)

Although Williams battled against traces of this will to forget and erase him during his career, a handful of years after his death his name and his art were not linked to success, achievement and the politics of integration....instead his name became inextricably linked to the demonic history of possession, caricature, slavery and demunaiztion embodied by the form he in fact reinvented and appropriated to subversive effect: blackface minstrelsy.

(Chude-Sokei, 2006, p.4)

Another well known movie star, Lincoln Perry, but most commonly known as his show name Stepin Fetchit, was another black actor that made millions at the height of his career in the 1920s - 1930s. He made his debut with the film *In Old Kentucky* and was an instant sensation. Throughout his career he played the role of the "lazy, stupid, crap shooting, chicken stealing idiot" (*Black History: Lost, Stolen or Strayed*, 1968) and constintantly maintained this character.



Fig. 9 Lincoln Perry (Stepin Fetchit)

After the boom in his career however, he quickly fell out of favour especially amongst the black community due to the changing of attitudes since the Civil Rights Movement, with most feeling that his character had not evolved with the times and that the embodiment of this *Uncle Tom* esque character was regressive. It was also felt that Stepin Fetchit was pandering to white audiences by validating their already pre conceived notions about black people and by doing so, further reinforcing these racial biases (Regeester, 1994, p.502).

His legacy became an example of what should be avoided by other actors/performers and he was generally reviled for prioritizing his success over the humiliation of acting as a damaging stereotype (History Collection, 2018).

His complicated legacy offers insights into a tension that still exists for black comedians today: how to remain defiantly black and proud in a system that was not built for you, and not be forced to choose between popular recognition and your basic human dignity.

(Vulture, 2017)

For both Williams and Perry, they were able to gain fame by conforming to the expected stereotypes that demeaned and originated in ridiculing black Americans. However even though they were not breaking any barriers in terms of positive representation, they, as well as others, did help to open doors for more actors to enter the entertainment scene and were a part of the stepping stones that helped normalize black characters, played by black people, in our media.

Chapter 2.2: **Prejudice Stereotypes and Cartoons**

Popular Caricatures and Prominent Stereotypes

As well as understanding a bit more of the history and having a look at the first types of black representation in Western media, it helps to examine the most common caricatures and the meaning behind these stereotypes.

The racist portrayal of black people was so broad and integrated within our media and was such a huge part of our entertainment that audiences could instantly recognize what stereotype was being conveyed based on design alone. All of these base caricatures have some origin that reinforces negative beliefs about the black populace, promoting ideas of the happy servant, and that slavery was the natural order of things.

One and probably the most popular caricature was the "Coon", the traits of this caricature was that he was lazy, stupid and either too unmotivated or too dull-witted to work, in order to rise in status/class (Coon panel, 2013). This imagining of the "Coon" archetype derived from plantation owners, who believed that certain slaves were too simple-minded to learn how to work for them correctly and were more of a hassle than they were worth. Without knowing that in some cases this behaviour may have been done purposefully, with the motivations for acting sluggish, being a form of retaliation.

The most general defect in the character of the negro, is hypocrisy; and this hypocrisy frequently makes him pretend to more ignorance than he possesses and if his master treats him as a fool, he will be sure to act the fools part.

(Stampp, 1989, p.99)

The "Mammy" caricature was often depicted as a plus size, black woman that worked to serve her family and was defined by having a nurturing nature, often prioritizing the white family over her own, but also acted in a brash and snappy manner to her peers (Mammy as maid, 2013). Because this caricature was seen as a maternal figure, the image of the "Mammy" was used to help sell common household cleaning and cooking products, a notorious example being *Aunt Jemima's Pancakes* (1889).



Fig. 10 Advertisement image from *Aunt Jemimas Pancakes*

She fulfilled her duties as caretaker and did not have any goals outside of servitude and her cheerful demeanor sent the message of fulfillment and happiness in this lifestyle. By common standards she was not viewed to be beautiful and lacked any sexual appeal, due to her skin, size and often domineering attitude.

The male counterpart that has similar traits was the "Tom" or often referred to as "Uncle Tom" with very similar aspects. The imagery of this caricature was used to promote and sell products and pushed this ideology of the ideal servant, catering to your every need and always being reliable. He would go out of his way to make his master happy and was pleased to do so, dependent on their approval (Tom panel, 2013) . These types of caricatures were done to comfort and reassure white people, to make them feel better and reaffirm their beliefs of superiority. These stereotypes led people to believe "Tom's" were satisfied by this way of life, but these portrayals were a form of propaganda. "They submitted, but submission did not necessarily mean enjoyment or even contentment." (Stampp, 1989, p.89)

The "Savage" stereotype, also worked to help form white audiences' views towards black people. These caricature designs simplified certain African tribal culture and generalized them into cannibals with bones in their hair with grass as skirts, it completely reduced

areas of African society down into a gimmick or skit to laugh at. "Savage's" were primitive and animalistic, they upheld notions that supposedly proved that without slavery, black people would revert back to these primeval ways, so were unfit for modern society and to live among their better counterparts (Savage panel, 2013).

This idea of inferiority amongst the black population is reflected not just in the media but scientists and professors at the time conducted research and made claims stating that they physically felt less pain and would compare them to both likeness and to the intelligence of apes. "These stereotypes of the animal-like savage were used to rationalize the harsh treatment of slaves during slavery as well as the murder, torture and oppression of African-Americans following emancipation." (Green, 2019)

A comparable caricature that reinforced some of these same notions was the "Brute". They shared common traits but the "Brute" stereotype focuses and harnesses on the fear of black men raping and assaulting white women. This fear came about after the Civil War when slavery was abolished, because of the conception that granting black people freedom would result in them becoming wildly violent and unstable (Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, 2012).

Anti-Black propaganda was common fodder in so-called scientific journals, including those promoting elimination of racial undesirables through eugenics, and in crime novels, which frequently resorted to the Black rapist as a plot device.

(The Authentic History Centre, 2012)

The idea behind the "Brute" allowed white people, especially members of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) to justify the lynching and killing of numerous black men all for the supposed sake of protecting and maintaining the safety of their women. They were able to use this reasoning to mask their true intentions, which purley derived from hatred.



Fig. 11. Cover art of Spicy-Adventure Stories #2, 1934



Fig. 12. Cover art of Spicy-Adventure Stories #33, 1937

Finally, the last caricature to briefly go over is the "Jezebel", she can be summarized as a hyper-sexualized black woman, acting as a temptress for men. She is materialized from the fetishization and romanticisation of "foreign-looking" women and would appeal to the fantasies of white men (Jezebel panel, 2013).

This notion of promiscuity was quite far from the reality of what women both in slavery and afterwards faced, they were commonly assaulted, stripped and raped without being able to defy for fear of punishment both to herself and to her family.

After the Civil War and onwards till the 1960s, there were zero convictions against white, males for the rape of black women, but that's not to say these crimes never occurred. Black women, especially in the South had little legal recourse and were reluctant to report in the first place. (Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, 2012).

So the idea of having this "Jezebel" stereotype, almost acted as a way to excuse the rape of black women because of the notion that they were wanton and so the blame could easily be shifted onto them for acting in a sexually provocative manner.

Why These Caricatures Are So Destructive

The reasons why these caricatures are so harmful and negatively impactful is because they don't solely remain within the media presented and it isn't just a small handful of these stereotypes disseminated throughout Western culture. These portrayals are in the millions and would have been seen virtually everywhere, from within your own home, to advertisements and through your entertainment. These negative representations lasted and evolved for a hundred years, "the caricatured depictions of African Americans were deliberate attempts to distort the humanity of black people." (Images as Propaganda, 2013).

The effects of these stereotypes are long-lasting and shape people's perceptions and judgement, not only do they affect how white people and others form biases, it negatively impacts black people's own self-image of themselves. (Yuen, 2019)

You laugh
Because I'm poor and black and funny —
Not the same as you —
Because my mind is dull
And dice instead of books will do
For me to play with
When the day is through.

I am the fool of the whole world.
Laugh and push me down.
Only in song and laughter
I rise again — a black clown.

(The Black Clown, 1931)

We create snap judgements of people and we use our own knowledge and experience to form these judgements, but when the exposure to certain groups of people are commonly painted in a negative light in such a dramatic way, our own perception will reflect the stereotypes that we frequently see. "People of color often are treated by others as stereotypes, not individual people. That puts them at a significant disadvantage in innumerable ways." (Hope College: Blog Network, 2020).

Representation In Animation (1930-1950)

Animation as a medium allows us to express and exaggerate elements of both character design and storytelling in a way that may be limited in live-action films or tv shows. During the 1900s, the most popular and well-known cartoons frequently featured black characters and were not exclusive in their ways of showcasing demeaning stereotypes and was another major example of racist portrayals within the media.

...animations fantastic plasticity, its magnificent metamorphics flights, its fearful disrespect for the boundary between the real and the imagined are profoundly of a piece with its worst fantasies about black bodies.

(Sammond, 2015)

From learning more about the meaning and gaining insight behind popular subtypes of black representation, it is much easier to see why these cartoons are banned and no longer shown for modern audiences. Analysing a few examples throughout a timeline will help to provide more context and understanding about animation today and doing so allows us to compare and contrast in its differences and similarities.

(1930s) Little Black Sambo:

Little Black Sambo originated as a children's novel written by Helen Bannerman in 1899, wanting to illustrate and create a story for her own children. The story and mannerisms of the characters within this book themselves aren't necessarily problematic. The story itself is set in India but the names and likeness of the characters share common racist traits of the portrayal of black Americans (Jeyathurai, 2012).



Fig.13 The Story of *Little Black Sambo* [book illustration] by Helen Bannerman

Poet, Langston Hughes commented about children's stories similar to *Little Black Sambo* and dejected "amusing undoubtedly to the white child, but like an unkind word to one who has known too many hurts to enjoy the additional pain of being laughed at." (cited by Drasek, 2009).

There have been many adaptations of this story including modern versions of the novel, board game and toys and even a chain of restaurants named *Sambo's*, that featured the characters painted onto their walls, with the last remaining restaurant of this chain renaming to *Chad's* in 2020 (Lalley, 2020).



Fig.14 Images from personal home recording of *Little Black Sambo* (1935)

So the adaptation to the 1935 animated version by Ub Iwerks, was inevitable. With the original narrative from the storybook no longer being present and due to the design of the characters, it was no longer about the story of an Indian child, but was watered down to a skit about an African American "Pickaninny". Both characters seen in this animated film, fulfil the roles given to their stereotypes. One of the lines seen spoken from the "Mammy" character is: "Run along and play Honey chil - but watch out for that big bad tiger. Yeah, he likes dark meat!"

(1940s) Fantasia:



Fig.15 *Sunflower* seen polishing the hooves of a white centaurette
(*Fantasia*, 1940)

In Disney's *Fantasia* (1940) we see the character Sunflower, portrayed as the typical "Pickaninny" and is seen all throughout her screen time assisting the other centaurettes. Throughout this sequence we see all the centaurettes dressing up to get ready to meet their love match, however because of the way both the white and black centaurettes are presented, there is a clear dynamic where Sunflower is the servant and shows no other real qualities outside of working to please and putting the others on display.

The two contrasting designs of Sunflower and the other centaurettes clearly send a message that they are far more beautiful, thus deserving of love whereas she, with the body of a donkey, over caricatured features and missing teeth, is not.

In 1969 after the Civil Rights Movement, they edited the film to crop out scenes that she appeared in and where that wasn't possible, outright removed her.



Fig. 16 Two of the zebra centaurettes acting as servants (*Fantasia*, 1940)

However, she is not the only black character shown, for a brief moment we get to see these zebra centaurettes that are still present in the movie today. Their designs are far less caricatured than Sunflower but there is potential to harken them to the "Jezebel", especially due to the time this movie was created, it's doubtful these characters did not conform to some semblance of a black stereotype.

The choice to make them zebras could be a nod towards them being of African descent, but another way to read this design is from using the context of the film, where each centaurette is paired with her male counterpart of a similar colour. The mix of black and white in the zebras could be interpreted as a mockery of mixed-race children born from interracial partners (Di, 2017).

Dumbo:



Fig. 17 *The Crows* as seen in *Dumbo* (1941)

Dumbo (Disney, 1941), also features black characters that received heavy criticism, especially from modern audiences today going back to re-watch this film.

During the final few scenes in the movie, we are introduced to these groups of crows. Initially looking at their character designs it is not obvious what form of racism they hold, they obviously present as black when watching the film, from their dialect and their jazzy song number *When I See An Elephant Fly*, in fact in comparison to other representations at this time, it was fairly okay. They helped to teach the character Dumbo how to fly, they understood and empathised with his pain of being an outcast from the rest of society and don't heavily conform to stereotypes (Wainer, 2019). That being said, when diving into the background information of these characters it's plain to see where the real issues lie. The main one being the name of the leader, Jim Crow, as we've learnt Jim Crow was firstly an immensely popular minstrel character but not only that, it was the term used to define the set of laws that segregated black people from white society.

Segregation put the black population in a "coloured" box. You were unable to attend the same schools, forced to use facilities separate from others or live in the same neighbourhoods and so much more, and to do otherwise was a punishable offence. It was

a system put in place to purposefully limit and degrade black Americans and denied them the same equalities granted to the white populace.

[1]



[2]



[3]



Fig.18 Collection of photographs displaying life in segregation. [1] *Untitled, Shady Grove, Alabama, 1956* (Gordon Parks) [2] *Department Store, Mobile, Alabama, 1956* (Gordon Parks) [3] Re coloured photo edited by Jared Enos and Mads Madsen

Merrie Melodies, 'All This and Rabbit Stew':



Fig.19 Both the hunter character and Bugs Bunny (*All This and Rabbit Stew*, 1941)

Another renowned studio, Warner Bros and their *Merrie Melodies* (1931-1997) series had plenty of viewers and a collection of episodes nominated for Academy Awards.

In one episode titled *All This and Rabbit Stew* (1941) that features the popular character Bugs Bunny, we see yet another substandard and offensive black stereotype. The episode follows the expected plot with a hunter character trying to catch Bugs Bunny, but the character presented here has all of the traits of the "Coon", he is slow, acts moronic, and is gullible and childish. The way he speaks and behaves even has comparisons to Stepin Fetchit and on top of this, shows the racist stereotyping of loving to play dice. He is a completely one-dimensional character, with every single one of his traits being an insulting stereotype and is void of anything but this.

All This and Rabbit Stew is part of the Censored 11, which are a group of past animations created by Warner Bros that have since been removed from circulation and are no longer deemed fit for modern viewing. Out of these eleven films that also include notably racist themes are *Jungle Jitters* (1938) and *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs* (1943).

1950s (Tom & Jerry):

Finally looking at *Tom & Jerry* (Warner Bros, 1940). The main premise of the show focuses on the two main characters Tom and Jerry, but there is a side character, named Mammy Two Shoes. She follows the demeanour of a stereotypical "Mammy" although she does break some of the expected roles. She owns her own house and isn't under someone else's servitude, otherwise, she is a cookie-cutter example of a "Mammy". There isn't much else to suggest more dimensionality to her and she is only ever viewed from the waist down, we never get to see her face, meaning the audience never fully gets to realise her as a character.



Fig.20 Mammy Two Shoes as most commonly seen throughout the Tom and Jerry series

Within the show, there are also a lot of blackface gags played for laughs. After having some cartoon TNT blow up in their faces, they would turn and face the audience with the makeup of a minstrel performer.

For *Tom & Jerry's* primary audience being young children, these jokes were obviously targeted at the parents as minstrel shows around this time weren't at their height, and children wouldn't understand the symbolism behind it. These jokes acted as a means of nostalgia for the older audience but they also give us an example of how blackface was evolving for the new generation.



Fig.21 Examples of how blackface was used for jokes across various episodes of *Tom & Jerry*

Impact of These Stereotypes

These forms of stereotypes presented in children's entertainment are effective ways of perpetuating negative views of black people because it's being presented to a young audience while their brains are still developing social skills. It's sending the message that mockery aimed towards people with darker skin is acceptable (Games and Toys, 2013).

Character designs that have more likeness to minstrels than real people, can prevent children from being able to see them as characters they can truly relate to and empathise with, especially so with black children, if these are the only ways they see themselves in a storytelling format. Being able to see a character who looks like you being the hero matters.

By looking at a small handful of older animated films and shows, we can begin to see connections from the past and it gives us an idea of the variety of depictions of black people in this particular medium. On the surface, it can seem quite harmless but underlying all of these examples are racist ideas of black Americans that keep up the standard of bigotry and inequality.

Whereas sometimes creating a stereotypical character can help the audience instantly gauge the personality and build a relationship of said character quicker. Without any substance or features that break these stereotypes however, it simply just becomes another portrayal that upholds poor ideologies. As said in an article written by Barker stereotypes formed "the identity of Black people [they] became "an undifferentiated blob... [in which] each black person is interchangeable, indistinguishable, or substitutable"" (Cited by Barker, 2010).

Stereotypes like these are not the sole problem or reason behind why racism was so prevalent, but it was a reflection of the general public's views and helped to integrate discriminatory acts further.

Most Hollywood films, even the early ones, weren't really nasty... What producers were doing was making money and to make money they made pictures that white ticket buyers would enjoy. They showed negroes the way most Americans liked to think of them. To blame Hollywood is like throwing a rock in the mirror because you don't like what you see in it.

(Black History: Lost, Stolen or Strayed, 1968)

The reason it's important to watch these now is because they are part of the evolution of black representation and what we see today. By viewing these cartoons it gives us more understanding now as to why it's so important for audiences today to have positive characters that they can relate to without feeling as if they are the butt of the joke. Negative portrayals work to shape a culture of misunderstanding, so racial representations that are more socially responsible, are a move worth making. (Rojecki and Entman, 1971, p.225).

Chapter 3: **Modern Black Representation**

Black representation in animation today is often met with critical eyes but with the extensive past of this topic, it's unsurprising that audiences expect higher quality due to the exhaustion of only seeing faulty stereotypes for decades.

This means there is a lot less room for error and while it is great to see how far we have come and how much more we can do to improve, one of the potential downsides is that it may limit creators' exploration of black characters. If people feel too fearful of critique when creating stories based around cultures different from their own, or even based on their own experiences as a part of this racial group, it could hinder potential works or stories.

One of the problems that arises due to including more representation is the issue of tokenism. Tokenism is an example of attempting to be more inclusive without actually committing to it. This can formulate itself in the media as seeing black characters only playing the role of sidekick, or only including black characters as background extras. Rarely in these instances are they playing main roles in a way that isn't pandering to audiences.

Firms will often create characters with various ethnicities and backgrounds just as a way to profit into this new market. However doing so, haphazardly can fail to create or strengthen an inclusive narrative. (Podoshen, Ekpo and Abiru, 2020, pg. 133)

While characters falling under tokenism may not have any racial stereotypes and may in fact actively work to push against them, the un-authenticity of the reasoning to include these characters being for profit or to maintain reputation prevents any real progress for strong depictions of marginalized characters being shown. " When characters are

marketed merely for their race, that trivialization leads to the opposite of progress." (Podoshen, Ekpo and Abiru, 2020, pg. 134)

There is no easy solution to how we tackle black representation. Black characters and stories can be told in thousands of different ways from the viewpoint of a thousand different people. It's impossible to create a single framework on how to create black characters or how to be more inclusive in your storytelling.

Analysing Animation from 2000's Onwards

Since the 2000s we have been seeing a slow increase in black representation and they are presented in a lot more positive light in comparison to the past. Black characters are no longer jokes for the audience to laugh at their own expense, they have become fully fleshed out characters with dimension and complex personalities.

Even though the progress being made now is a substantial improvement, keep in mind common positive portrayals have only really been around in the last 15-20 years. Compare that to almost 100 years worth of animation. It shows just how long these racist depictions have been in our media for and how difficult it can be for modern representation to fight back against old ones. So truly only in recent years are we seeing black stories with black protagonists in a healthy and positive manner.

Looking now at a couple of the most famous studios that have high production animated films, we will start analysing and discussing elements of their black characters.

The Princess and the Frog



Fig. 22. Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog* (2009)

Tiana in *The Princess and the Frog* (Disney, 2009), although not a very modern film, is an important landmark to note for black representation, Tiana is the first and only African American Disney princess.

Disney princesses have become staple role models, especially for young girls to look up to, so the presence of Tiana shouldn't be understated. As mentioned previously, children being able to see characters that look like them is so important to help develop self identity and feelings of belonging.

The implied message of Tiana, that black American girls can be as elegant as Snow White, is a milestone in the national imagery, according to a range of scholars and cultural historians... Princess Tiana might well become the symbol of a culture-changing standard of feminine beauty.

(Tucker, cited by Lester, 2010)

However, since its release, many people were disappointed, regarding the character Prince Naveen. He doesn't present as African-American and so he is left as an ambiguous, fantasy race. One fan stated: "Naveen's character is an artistic decision that I may never get over because I am just so perplexed as to why Disney consciously crafted him to be the way that he is." (Unknown, 2013).

While others wished to see an African-American couple have their "happily ever after", many parents were ultimately happy to be able to see their own children's identify with and relate to him regardless of the obscurity behind his background. "[My son] has yet to realize that this guy is from another country, and he can still identify with him because he's brown. That gave me a sense of comfort and made me overlook that very easily" (Hare, 2010).

Spider-man: Into the Spider-Verse



Fig.23. Miles Morales from *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018)

Miles Morales as a character was first introduced in the comic *Ultimate Fallout* #4 (Marvel Comics, 2011) and is an alternative version of the popular superhero, Spiderman. Peter Parker, the original character for Spiderman, is typically portrayed as a white student but in this racebending version of Spiderman, Miles is a multi racial teenager, with his father being African American and his mother being Puerto Rican.

By re-imagining iconic stories in such a way, it opens a lot of room for the exploration of certain topics in an already recognizable setting that the audience knows, while giving new life to an old story.

"(Re) casting characters using alternative race and ethnicities creates possibilities for popular comics and other “classics” to be told from underrepresented perspectives rarely seen in literature." (Worlds and Miller, 2019, p.45)

The film *Spider-man: Into the Spider-Verse* (Sony, 2018), truly helped to bring Miles into the forefront and helped to firmly establish him into the Marvel universe. His ethnicity in the film is not a primary subject but is not an ignored element. It shows in his interests and the way he interacts with the other characters, often speaking Spanish to his mother or as inside jokes for the audience.

The story arc in which Miles develops as a character and tackles self identity, can have subtext to the struggle of racial identity. It's because of his ethnicity being Afro-Latino, that this underlying connotation is able to come forward. If this same story was being told through Peter Parker, it may not have held these same notes, therefore resulting in a less impactful story.

Soul



Fig.24. Joe Gardner from *Soul* (2020)

In *Soul* (Disney/Pixar, 2020), we follow the story of Joe Gardner, an unfulfilled Jazz musician. The story revolves around following Joe through his feelings, believing his life was meaningless and learning to find fulfillment without success defining its purpose. There are an extensive range of black characters seen all throughout *Soul* and the story doesn't try to ignore black culture, it provides a balance of creating a film with a message that everyone can understand while also making it a film featuring black characters.

The barber shop scene is probably the most iconic scene in *Soul* that showcases black culture. Black hair has been shunned for generations, people feeling as if they need to conform to styling their hair to white standards. So authentic black hairstyles being showcased in this way is hugely important. In an interview, co-director Kemp Powers talked about the significance of this scene, especially for a black audience.

“This guy has to pass through authentically Black spaces and there’s no more authentically Black, than a barbershop.” And it came from a selfish place. It came from a place of, “I just want to see Black hair.” I want to see all different kinds of Black hair.

(cited by Hampton, 2020)

There were mixed opinions when *Soul* first released due to the narrative that takes place, where a portion of a way through the movie, Joe’s soul is switched out for another character and voice actor Tina Fey (a white woman) replaces his voice.

There is an emerging trend in animated films where black characters are often transformed, and throughout the majority of the screentime aren't seen. For example *The Princess and The Frog*, where through the majority of the film Tiana is cursed to be a frog and in *Spies In Disguise* (2019), where protagonist, Lance Sterling is turned into a pigeon.

There are definitely issues in this, where audiences expect to be able to watch a film featuring black characters without having to hide them behind anthropomorphic animals or in the film *Souls*’ case, ethereal shapes.

But in contradiction to this, *Soul* is a good example of showing the balance of being able to centre a film around a black character, without it being the only defining feature of this film. It allows Joe to be black, without it impacting the story in a way that restricts itself in its narrative. In a video created by Jeff Hagood, he talks about this dynamic and says "I believe black characters are allowed to be in a movie that taps into universal messages, and not just be a movie that's specific to black struggle or black experiences." (Hagood, 2020).

In comparison to the representation of black characters in animated media in the era of the 1900s and the animations we are seeing today, there is a significant improvement. We are seeing more black protagonists and characters that don't revolve around being some form of comedic relief. There are still problems about the range of representation and the amount we see, but hopefully, these will gradually continue to improve and we will have more role models and relatable characters for future generations.

Chapter 4: **The Impact of Diversity**

The Effect of Media Representations

The reason why good representation in the media matters so much is that not only does it allow people with different perspectives to be heard in this storytelling format, but because it acts as a window into people's lives.

When you present a culture to an audience that doesn't have first hand experience of said culture, then what the audience observes in their media, becomes their source of information. So when all the public sees are these stereotypes that dehumanize an entire race of people, the effects this can have easily plays into areas of politics, hence why it shouldn't be underestimated. "Prejudice always manifests itself in action because the way I see the world drives my actions in the world" (DiAngelo, 2018, p.20)

With the context of the presentation of black Americans during the early 1900s, the negative portrayals acted as a form of propaganda that helped regulate systemic racism and why segregation was easily integrated into society at the time. The racist depictions of the black populace easily bleed into life and help to form prejudiced biases, and the effects of these negative stereotypes are long lasting and are still felt in a modern society due to how intrinsic these stereotypes were in Western media. .

As evidence into how these stereotypes perpetuated these negative views of black people into society, a study by Katz and Bralery in 1933, asked 100 students to assign, from a list of traits, words used to describe a particular race. The results showed that 88% of students picked the word superstitious, 75% chose lazy and 38% picked happy-go-lucky. (Katz and Bralery, 1933,p.284)

From their findings, they deduced that from these results it "seem[ed] too great to be the sole result of the students' contacts with members of these races." (Katz and Bralery, 1933,p.288). This implies that the only reason they chose these characteristics was from outside information, such as media entertainment. There are a lot of similarities in what they chose to be the best descriptive traits of black people, and the popular stereotype of the "Coon".

NEGROES		
Traits checked		
Rank order	No	Per cent
Superstitious.	84	84
Lazy.	75	75
Happy-go-lucky.	38	38
Ignorant.	38	38
Musical.	26	26
Ostentatious.	26	26
Very religious.	24	24
Stupid.	22	22
Physically dirty.	17	17
Naive	14	14
Slovenly.	13	13
Unreliable.	12	12

Fig.25 Compiled image of table of conducted research by Katz and Braley

A different source of information showed a correlation between internalized racist stereotyping in young, black american, male students, and self handicapping in an academic setting with an overall decrease of engagement in school. "Oftentimes, members of this population are labeled as violent, undesirable, unintelligent, and overall, 'troublemakers' and 'problems'" (James cited by University of Kentucky, 2016, p.6) Because of these labels it results in young, black males struggling with their own social identities and how they may be perceived by their peers. If society has deemed them to be these stereotypes then why must they work harder than others in order to prove what they are not.

Another study done asked participants to rate the likeness of which mothers on welfare were more likely to take advantage of the system or never return to work, etc. They used both white and black mothers as examples with various scenarios attached to these personas.

Their results showed that when negative stereotypes were met, with the black mother, they thought more critically and severely about her in comparison to the white mother, who was in the exact same scenario.

When responding to scenarios of blacks who confirm their negative expectations.... Such respondents consistently display a discriminatory double

standard, such that they offer far more harsh judgments of blacks than of similarly described whites.

(Peffley, Hurwitz and Sniderman.1997)

These examples show just how necessary it is for positive representation to be prevalent in what we watch and engage with due to the real world effects stereotyping has.

Hiring For Diversity

Diversity specifically in the workforce can play a huge role in creating positive representation. Having black characters present in media is definitely a step in the right direction, but studios having a diverse team behind the creation, can provide valuable insight and help guide other team members about how best to portray these characters.

Having black characters, but only a team of white creators, tends to leave a bad taste, and is where issues of tokenism can come into play. That's not to say that only black creators can make content on black experience, and only white creators can make white characters. It just means allowing more space and opportunities for black creators to join, without doing so in a tokenistic manner.

David Steward, one of the founders of *Lion Forge Comics* (2011), behind the creation of the animated short *Hair Love* (2019) commented on this topic of diversity in relation to animation. “Companies are coming around to diversity, but there isn’t one way of doing it,” ... “Having a main character that’s of color when none of the production team is of color might not be the best way to do it.” (cited by Tangcay, 2020)



Fig.26 Still image from *Hair Love* (2019)

A common element of hiring for diversity's sake is that black employees find themselves being hired, but aren't truly done so in a manner that comes across as authentic. When a company or studio, purposefully hires a creator other than white, it shouldn't be done for the sake of reputation or publicity.

Oftentimes, in these instances when hired in this manner, black employees may feel excluded from the work environment and aren't in any positions that can create true change. "Visible representation matters, but only if the ecosystem is set up to welcome and retain minoritized groups without exploiting them." (Berenstain cited by Birhane and Guest, 2020, p.7) Members of non-dominant groups are too often invited in but ultimately marginalized or removed. Being inclusive means hiring minorities to be a part of the decision making progress, not just to act as advisors. (AFOG, 2020)

There is also a dedency, especially within the entertainment industry, to hire based on your surrounding network. This can lead to hiring people similar to you, including, a similar ethnicity. Actively looking outside of your common pool of employees and reaching out to find people of different backgrounds matters. It helps to prevent companies and studios from becoming a clique and allows opportunities to those that wouldn't typically be considered in the first place.

In an article discussing the tech industry and the racial issues found there, Nitasha Tiku wrote:

Bias is reinforced in part because of the tech industry's monoculture, in which white and Asian men tend to hire the people in their networks, who in turn hire from their networks, which can define what is considered acceptable workplace behavior and who is viewed as an outsider.

(Tiku, 2020)

This same idea can easily be applied towards black creatives within the entertainment industry. By setting these types of racial standards for a working environment, it may lead to people not feeling welcome, so avoid applying. But it can also lead to when hiring, dismissing certain groups of people because they don't conform to the expectations of the imagined person that would fit that job role.

The more we see only one type of face behind these industries, the more likely it is that we associate people who share similar traits will be successful, while subconsciously doubting and hindering opportunities for others who look different from what's expected.

Why Diversity Matters

Breaking these cycles are paramount, even more so when it's in a workplace that revolves around what we see in our media. Because we draw conclusions on groups of people through what we see in films/tv and other forms of entertainment, these industries have some type of responsibility to accurately portray people and cultures.

So if the only people providing us these narratives are white and only tell stories from a white perspective, the viewpoints of these stories can be narrow and can create this feeling of any character from a different race being viewed as the "other". "Those who write and direct films are our cultural narrators; the stories they tell shape our worldviews. " (DiAngelo, 2018, p.31)

This has been going on for so long, that any character or story told from a different perspective is automatically viewed as different and foreign to audiences because for so long we've primarily only seen white protagonists leading the stories we tell.

When looking at the percentages of people who are in positions to create our media, we can see there is a huge imbalance of race/culture.

- People who decide which Tv shows we see: 93 per cent white
- People who decide which books we read: 90 per cent white
- People who directed the one hundred top-grossing films of all time, worldwide: 95 per cent white

(DiAngelo, 2018, p.30)

Film London, with a scheme that aims to offer more roles for minority groups, looked at Creative Skillset's census, which reported that: "the number of black, Asian or minority ethnic talent working in the production industries was only 5.4% in 2012, which is a fall from 6.7% in 2009 and 7.4% in 2006." (Rosser, 2015,).

Because of how vital it is to ensure that what audiences are shown are positive portrayals, how can we be sure that we are getting accurate depictions when it's only coming from a single source.

This is why, ensuring we have a diverse team behind our media reduces the likelihood of negative stereotypes and also broadens our horizons in what we as an audience experience. "I wish companies understood if you had a little bit of everybody in the room, you will avoid a lot of bad decisions and will make better ones." (Williams, 2020, p.62)

The more people we have with different backgrounds who work in creating our media, the more untold stories with new perspectives are shown to us. "It's essential that we get a greater diversity of voices at every level of the industry if we're to safeguard it and make it relevant for future generations. " (Watsam cited by Film London)

Final Thoughts

We are slowly working towards seeing a more diverse workplace, and hopefully this will continue to increase as the years go on. There are still major changes that need to be completed on a higher level in order to see diversity become a common aspect of the workplace environment as there are still racial imbalances, especially in higher positions. Being able to uplift minorities to take equal place in these positions without it being done so in a tokenistic manner, will be majorly beneficial to seeing better diversity across all aspects of media.

The roots left behind of the racist stereotypes portrayed in the media are still deeply embedded in today's society and this isn't something that can be easily remedied. We still have racial injustices occurring currently, and dismissal attitudes towards the struggles and hardships of minorities are still present.

There is a constant loop of feedback from the audience to the media and back again. The attitude of society greatly influences what we see in our media, and whatever our creative outputs are, will work towards shaping people's views and opinions, especially when targeted at younger generations. This is why positive representations are crucial in working towards ending bigotry and racial inequities.

The outlook is hopeful when looking at current standards of representation and from seeing a more positive attitude on this subject, but we need to make sure that we continue this upward trend and constantly work towards improving and maintaining this so that we don't repeat the mistakes of the past.

Chapter 5:

Conclusion

In conclusion, the history of black representation is immensely vast due to how pervasive it was in our media. This written work truly only covers a small area of this topic and there are a lot more aspects that haven't been covered here.

The negative stereotypes we see in the media, most of the time, are closely associated with racist biases that worked as propaganda that helped to form prejudiced views within the general public.

The effects that media can have, play very easily into our attitudes as a society, hence why this subject shouldn't be disregarded. This work mainly covered the medium of animation which may not seem an important aspect of media, but it's good to keep in mind that a lot of the time animated films and tv shows are targeted towards children. Good representation in this form of entertainment is essential, so that we can ensure we are avoiding teaching new generations negative biases.

Oftentimes, the best way to make certain that we can achieve this is by having a diverse creative team behind these forms of media. Not only does it allow more opportunities for minorities to work in these roles, it also broadens our storytelling by having new and various perspectives forming these narratives.

Overall, we are seeing a positive increase in these aspects but there are still areas that need improvement. Being able to analyse a subject as this is crucial to understanding why negative stereotypes are so hurtful and keeps us mindful about how to avoid these in our own work. There should be some element of responsibility, as creatives working in this form of industry to have more knowledge on topics like this, because what we create eventually ends up in the hands of the public. What we create and how we create it, has an impact, even if it's in the smallest of ways.

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