An American Mess: How Colorblind Racism Prevents an Enlightened Conversation on Race in Television Media

This project aims to demonstrate how the current racial ideology in America is portrayed through television media, and is primarily guided by the work of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. The research is done with two core empirical truths as a foundation:

1. To consume media is to consume a pre-constructed ideology, that is created by humans.
2. This research is done with two core empirical truths as a foundation.

The purpose of this study is to examine how race is constructed through selected contemporary television programs and to analyze the racial ideology they deliver.

In this research, I will refer to non-white racial and ethnic groups with the broad term “people/person of color” as the term minority has been rejected in many spheres as connoting inferiority.

People of color (POC), at least in contemporary usage, is an umbrella term that links together the Black/Latino/a, Asian and Pacific Islander (API), and Native American communities.

POC is a descriptor that these groups created as a means of self-naming (as opposed to the imbalanced power dynamic of “minorities” and empowerment, and unlike the case with “minorities,” recognizes that this power dynamic was institutionalized and is institutionally maintained).

Even with a Black first family, Americans fail at having a constructive conversation about race through our national dialogue - the media. This presentation will examine the dominant racial ideology of contemporary America, and show examples of how a modern form of racism are is perpetuated through one of the most powerful institutions of our nation.

INTRODUCTION
Race is one of the most, if not the most, significant factors of our identity. It shapes our ideas on sexuality, gender, power, success, love, religion, our ideals, our hopes and our dreams. We are all racialized beings, and the media is inherently interested in portrayals of race in American society.

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DATA ANALYSIS
In first season of Scandal there are three main characters who are POC. However, there were zero (0) instances of plot or dialogue that portrayed race in any way. Race is not just marginal to this show, but it is invisible, save for the characters’ skin color. For the first research question, how POC characters are represented, the answer can only be that they are “non-representative.”

This non-representation means that Scandal strictly adheres to a colorblind ideology. The roles of POC (people of color) characters are somewhat central to the plot, and completely central at certain points. And regarding the group faces as they struggle to balance their humanity with their survival against the zombie apocalypse, race is not a factor in any way in any of their lives, and their racial identity may as well not exist. This non-representation means that Scandal strictly adheres to a colorblind ideology. The roles of POC characters are some of the most powerful institutions of our nation.

CONCLUSION

Americans of all identities who view mainstream media are taught to maintain a worldview that values white people over people of color; or to disregard other identity groups completely. Colorblind ideology is so insidiously at play in the media, inaction is an action, indecision is decision. Not naming POC in substantive roles or not dealing with issues in meaningful ways (only aiming race for humor are artistic/editorial directions. Even when made by accident, they work to demonstrate how colorblind ideology has destroyed any modicum of seriously addressing issues concerning race/ethnicity in America, working to prevent racial parity and suggesting that we live in a society where race isn’t salient in people’s lives (except under the guise of humans).

Every day millions of Americans view media that is completely or mostly made by and featuring whiteness and white people. And every day we think that is acceptable, we think it is normal, and we think we shouldn’t do anything to change it. In essence, we are bystanders, or passive accomplices, with the media that we follow, support, and believe in, and that systematically under-values or excludes POC. We reinforce and promulgate colorblind racism in our own homes each time we turn on a TV show or a movie in which people of color (as well as Whites who recognize structural racism and oppression) are not reflected in and choose not to change the channel, or press the power button.

REFERENCES


