This research was designed to demonstrate how the current racial ideology in America is portrayed through television and film. It is primarily guided by the work of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva in his book Racism Without Racists. From a new understanding of the ideology of this new racism – its frames, styles, and storylines – the content of two television shows are analyzed to identify the racial ideology and the representation of people of color within.

Scandal (ABC) is progressive in the sense that it has a Black female lead, and two other main POC (people of color) characters. It is the first show in 38 years featuring a Black female lead that has been renewed by a major network. The Walking Dead (AMC) is about reconstructing society and trying to survive amid a zombie apocalypse. In race still a salient issue in this context? Those who call for a ‘post-racial society’ would say no, but the show constructs a reality that is quite different.

A qualitative content analysis using simple emergent coding procedures was utilized. Although there are characters in this program who are people of color, scandals are found to have zero representation of race, whether it be through dialogue or plot related, besides the fact of the characters’ skin tones. The Walking Dead portrays numerous instances of direct, or overt, racism and constructs ideologies of people of color that are regressive and problematic. Plot in this program at times upholds white supremacy and relegates the lives of people of color to insignificance.

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.

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/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 institutionally created 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.

This 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 to propagate their ideas, values, and beliefs.

2. The content of two televisions shows are analyzed to identify the racial ideology and the representation of people of color within.

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, rare 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.” 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 could have been played by an actor or actress because race is a non-factor. Further analysis to support any conclusion is found below.

The Walking Dead features more nuanced representation. The cast is more diverse and includes numerous POC characters both with and without speaking roles. There were seven (7) instances of dialogue regarding race, and each of these I classify as “direct” race comments. An important caveat to one of these instances is described in the discussion portion. Two (2) instances of plot I classify as direct, and both are discussed below. Besides T-Dog’s name being stereotypical, the four main recurring POC characters in the first season are progressive. They do not rely on stereotypes. They are somewhat central to the plot, and completely central at certain points. And regarding plot construction, two episodes in particular were constructed in such a manner that they put forward a racial ideology, and both of these constructions are problematic and regressive. Particular emphasis is provided in the discussion. Overall, this show cannot be argued to adhere to a colorblind ideology, and I posit that the ideology is more direct, relying on racist epithets, jokes and slurs, and problematic and regressive constructions, including upholding white supremacy and POC.