4 "Bamboozling" Stereotypes Through the 20th Century

In the new millennium year 2000, a film by African American director Spike Lee was released and quickly became a center of controversy because of its use of Black stereotypes from a supposedly bygone era. The film, *Bamboozled*, depicted minstrel shows with Black actors in blackface and parodied a cast of stereotypical characters ranging from mammies to pickaninnies and virtually every other vile portrayal of Blacks ever exhibited in the guise of American entertainment. The target of Lee's satire was the network television industry of the early 21st century. The message: Film and video producers were continuing to "bamboozle" American audiences with distorted image displays of all peoples of color and pass them off as marginalized caricatures in society. To understand how entertainment and popular culture in the United States could enter the 21st century under the shadow of antiquated notions of racial and cultural insensitivity, we must review those aspects of the historical development of mass media in America.

Motion Pictures Bring Racism to a New Medium

Although the live stage remained the primary entertainment venue as the United States entered the 20th century, it would only be a matter of a few decades before motion pictures would captivate American audiences. Thomas Edison is generally credited with the development of motion picture technology with his invention of the Kinetoscope in 1889. In 1903, one of his assistants produced the first motion picture with a story line, *The Great Train Robbery.* Movies were projected without sound until 1927

when Al Jolson starred in *The Jazz Singer,* the first "talking" (and, of course, "singing") movie.

Not surprisingly, portrayals of people of color appeared very early in motion picture history. As early as 1894, one could view the *Sioux Ghost Dance* on one of Edison's contraptions. By 1898, Buffalo Bill's Wild West show had been committed to film complete with its imagery of the Native American Indian's collapse before White "civilization." Perhaps the first film to openly proclaim the doctrine of White supremacy over Native American Indians was William S. Hart's *The Aryan,* which was released in 1916. One of the titles projected across the screen of this silent movie also played to the fear of miscegenation and read in part, "Our women shall be guarded." As was most commonly the practice in early movies, Whites portrayed all of the non-White characters in both films. (It is interesting to note, however, that genuine Native American Indians were sometimes employed to play minor roles, but the practice was not without problems. Directors found it difficult to teach them how to act "Indian," prompting one observer to write an article on "The Dangers of Employing Redskins as Movie Actors.")

Al Jolson was one of many White entertainers who performed in blackface on stage and in movies.

Source: © Bettmann/CORBIS.

African American characterizations likely first appeared on film in 1904 when Biograph released a one-reel feature (*A Bucket of Cream Ale*) depicting a Black maid employed by a White man. A White actress in blackface played the maid. Other films soon followed including *The Wooing and Wedding of a Coon* (1905), *The Masher* (1907), and *The Nigger* (1915). The most notorious of early Black stereotypes, however, appeared in the cinematic technical epic *The Birth of a Nation* by D. W. Griffith (1915). Griffith established a pattern, which would endure for decades, of portraying American Blacks as intellectually and morally inferior to Whites and perpetrated a strong message against sexual contact between the races.

Latinos fared no better in the first two decades of American cinema. Between 1910 and 1914, several films projected Mexican stereotypes

including a series of works with the term *greaser* in the titles. These included *Tony, the Greaser* (1911) and *The Greaser's Revenge* (1914). During this era, Mexicans in American film were presented as vile characters that indulged in banditry, pillage, plundering, rape, and murder. The portrayals were so severe that the Mexican government banned such films in 1922 after filing a written protest in 1919 that went unheeded. Hollywood's response was to transport the "greaser" role to other nations or to invent locales with pseudo Latin names. In a perverse manner, these films set the stage for the popularity of the mysterious, forbidden "Latin lover" roles that became a movie staple in the 1920s and 1930s. Rudolph Valentino was Hollywood's biggest star in that role.

Japanese actor Sessue Hayakawa was involved in at least two early films in which he portrayed Asian characters. In *The Typhoon* (1914), Hayakawa plays a young Japanese diplomat in Paris who, among other things, becomes romantically involved with a French actress. During the course of an argument, the woman hurls racial epithets including "whining yellow rat" at the diplomat, and he kills her. In *The Cheat* (1915), Hayakawa is cast as a deceitful Asian who schemes to obtain the sexual favors of a naive, but married, White socialite. Again, in both *The Typhoon* and *The Cheat,* the message is clear: Interracial love leads to tragedy.

Consistent with the White perception of Asian peoples at the turn of the century, they appeared stereotypically as diabolical personalities with the 1916 release of *The Yellow Menace.* Interestingly, in *The Yellow Menace,* Asians and Mexicans are portrayed as combining forces in a subversive plot against the United States.

In 1897, Edison produced a short film titled *Fatima* that depicted "Arab" women dancing provocatively to seduce a White male audience. A 1917 film *The Sultan's Wife* in which an evil raja tries to force a White girl (Gloria Swanson) into his harem was among the early depictions of Middle Eastern people. Rudolph Valentino, the silent film romantic star, ventured away from Latino characterizations to portray an "Arabian" in two films, *The Sheik* (1921) and *The Son of the Sheik* (1926), in which Arab characters were seen as thieves and murderers, thus paving the way for 21st-century Middle Eastern–themed images now pervading American movie screens.

Generally, characterizations of people of color in early American films projected an attitudinal posture of White superiority. That attitude revealed itself on screen through the portrayal of "minority" groups as inferior in two major capacities: intellectual and moral. Given the low socioeconomic status of working-class Whites during the heyday of the industrial age, movie producers of the era capitalized on audience insecurities by using racial stereotypes to bolster their self-esteem and reinforce racial attitudes. Anglo European insecurities, as reflected in the first 40 years of American popular cinema, were revealed to be a fear of miscegenation and the threat that numerical minority cultures would have an impact on hegemonic White social values. Thus, as live stage producers and entertainers profited

Silent screen idol Rudolph Valentino (shown here with Agnes Ayres) twice portrayed an Arabian sheik in the 1920s and paved the way for a movie stereotype that persisted into the 21st century.

Source: The Sheik, Paramount Pictures, 1921.

financially by giving the masses what they wanted, moviemakers quickly developed a symbiotic relationship with their patrons often at the expense of foreign cultures and Americans of color.

Several basic movie themes derived from the attitudinal premises of White intellectual and moral supremacy (see Table 4.1), and they were applied at various times to all of the groups addressed in this book.

Table 4.1 Some Traits Commonly Applied to People of Color in Early Movies

Intellectual Traits	Moral Traits
Preoccupation with simple ideas.	Low regard for human life.
Inferior strategy in warfare/conflict situations.	Criminal behavior.
Low or nonexistent occupational status.	Sexual promiscuity.
Poor speech patterns/dialect.	Drug/alcohol abuse.
Comedic foil.	Dishonesty.

Hollywood's Heyday, Comics, and Radio Racism: 1930–1945

The fact that stereotypes can, and do, change is evidenced by shifts in racial portrayals during the 15-year period from 1930 to 1945. Although basic attitudes held by Whites toward peoples of color did not undergo significant change, the passage of time altered social relationships between Whites and non-Whites. The result was that Hollywood had to make changes to conform to new realities. Unfortunately, the portrayals did not become more accurate and sensitive to the realities of the non-White experience in America but were merely adjusted to conform to more credible representations. For example, Blacks could not continue to be seen as only criminals and undesirables of various types (the primary theme of the years 1900–1920) because it was clear they had other dimensions of character that were easily observed in "real life." The movie industry response to social reality was simply to shift to new stereotypes that were still consistent with prejudicial notions.

About the same time a new mass medium, commercial radio, emerged and began to captivate American audiences. By 1930, the most popular radio show was "Amos 'n' Andy," a program that featured two White men, Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden, portraying the comedic adventures of two Black men and their associates. The show was the first to be nationally syndicated in the United States and was attracting 40 million listeners each week.

Portrayals of Native American Indians changed very little between 1930 and 1945 probably because of their unique place in American lore. They symbolized the fulfillment of the American dream—the White immigrant's ability to conquer the obstacles presented by a new continent and its existing inhabitants and to harvest its seemingly endless riches as a reward. Hollywood adopted the Indian as a living monument to the ideals of Manifest Destiny and created a stereotype that barely managed to be a facsimile of Native American culture. Examples include *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939) and *Northwest Passage* (1940). No distinction was made in the movies between Indian cultures of the Northeast, the Plains, and the Southeast. Feathered headdresses, beads, fringed pants, pinto ponies, and halted English dialects were applied indiscriminately to represent the concept of "Indian" to movie audiences. Those stereotypical notions played well across the United States as moviegoers seemingly could not get their fill of "cowboy and Indian" movies and serials.

Radio audiences also got full doses of the stereotypical Indian when the "Lone Ranger" and his native sidekick Tonto rode across the airwaves in 1933. The Lone Ranger successfully crossed over into motion pictures and comic books and ultimately was an easy choice for television programmers when that medium came to fruition in the 1950s. Similarly, "Red Ryder," a Western cowboy comic strip, began in 1938 featuring the title character and his juvenile Indian sidekick Little Beaver. The comic strip gravitated to radio in 1942 and also had a run as a movie serial before its appearance on television the following decade.

Hattie McDaniel earned an Oscar for her portrayal of the faithful mammy to Vivien Leigh's Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind* (1939). Hollywood usually depicted Black slaves as being delighted with their servile roles.

Source: MGM Studios/Handount/Moviepix/Getty Images.

Generally, however, the Native American's role was to constantly help audiences relive his defeat at the hands of the U.S. Calvary and other assorted "good guys." Thus, the major change in Native American movie portrayals from 1930 to World War II was the crystallization of an image. The Native American Indian became a cliché. Clichés die hard, and the movie Indian remained so throughout the heyday of Hollywood cinema.

A more pronounced stereotypical shift took place in the movie characterization of Black Americans during the boom period. The venomous, hate-filled disparagement of Blacks epitomized in *The Birth of a Nation* and other films of its era evolved into less threatening characterizations. The new stereotype played to White perceptions of Black personalities who, in the vernacular of the era, "knew their place" in American society. Blacks now appeared in movies for the purpose of entertaining White audiences within the context of social limitations. They had roles in musicals where they could demonstrate their "rhythmic" talents as singers and dancers.

Meanwhile, the supposed inferior mental capacities of Blacks made for hilarious comedy. When in movie character, Blacks were subservient to Whites as maids, mammies, domestics, and sidekicks. The pre–World War II era brought to the screen Stepin Fetchit, Mantan Moreland, and Willie Best. It also produced the "Our Gang" series with the characters of Buckwheat, Farina, and Stymie. When the old days of the antebellum South were recalled by Hollywood, as in *Gone With the Wind* (1939), Blacks played the happy, faithful, and sometimes lazy slaves. Hattie McDaniel received the first Oscar awarded to a Black actor for her portrayal of the dutiful and protective mammy to Scarlett O'Hara in the screen classic. Ms. McDaniel's award for "Best *Supporting* Actress" was, therefore, doubly symbolic.

Perhaps the primary reason for the change in Latino stereotyping during the 1930s was economics. The formal protest and subsequent banning of American moviemaking and distribution in Mexico by the Mexican government in 1922 did not go unnoticed in other Latin American countries. Although Hollywood intended the "greaser" stereotype to be its vision of Mexicans, Central and South American nations took equal offense when filmmakers began to create euphemisms for the roles in an attempt to placate Mexico. Film distribution sales in the affected countries were lucrative, so Hollywood eventually imported Latino actors and actresses to star in sizzling romantic features in an attempt to appeal to the foreign market. It took the film industry awhile to learn how to effectively cope with the problem. In the late 1920s and 1930s, filmmakers promoted Latinos to a more sophisticated level of "greasery." The Latino male had yet to attain personal integrity and social acceptability, but he did, in the words of one movie critic, at least dress well. At the same time, it was non-Latino actors such as Noah Beery and Paul Muni who played the Latino roles in *The Dove* (1928) and *Bordertown* (1935), respectively. Alas, the "Latin lover" wasn't even Latino.

One of the traits Hollywood ascribed to Mexicans was a quick temper, and films of this era almost always allowed for a display of irrational Latino temperament. The concept was soon incorporated into female roles, and by the mid-1930s and early 1940s Hollywood had recruited a number of sensuous, tempestuous leading ladies for the purpose. The idea was to appeal to both U.S. and Latin American audiences. Among the new female stars were Dolores del Rio (*The Red Dance,* 1928) and Lupe Velez (*Hot Pepper,* 1933; *Strictly Dynamite,* 1934; *Mexican Spitfire,* 1940). One concept in the tradition of Hollywood racial portrayals was unchanged, however; interracial movie romances were virtually never successful between Latinos and their White lovers.

By this time, relations with Latin America were vital also for political reasons because the United States could ill afford to offend potential allies at a time when war was imminent. This circumstance paved the way for other Latino actors who virtually flooded Hollywood shortly before the outbreak of World War II. The display of Hollywood goodwill and profit

motive produced Carmen Miranda, Cesar Romero, and Desi Arnaz, and film titles began to reflect a Latin American flavor (*Down Argentine Way,* 1940; *Week-End in Havana,* 1941). Concurrently there was a conscious attempt to acquaint American audiences with Latin American history through movies on Benito Juárez and Simón Bolívar. Although political and economic pressures combined to accord Latinos the largest degree of change in stereotype among people of color between 1930 and 1945, certain prejudices lingered on screen. In general, Latinos were not seen as people with family values or stable romantic relationships; nor were they seen as in pursuit of honorable careers. Moreover, Latino men still had an uncomfortable (for Anglo American audiences) proclivity for romantic interest in White women.

Lupe Velez, who was born in Mexico, was cast in a series of movies including *Mexican Spitfire* (1940) as the sexy, tempestuous Latina.

Source: Hulton Archive/Stringer/Getty Images.

With the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, the presence of Japanese characters in popular films effectively ceased until they were brought to the American conscience again with the arrival of World War II. The "Yellow Peril," insofar as the Japanese were concerned, was no longer a threat to White American sensibilities during the 1930s. Instead, China and its people became the center of American attention in the Far East. China was in the midst of civil war and had been since 1911. Negative racial imagery had been popularly established with the appearance around 1910 of Sax Rohmer's fictional character, Dr. Fu Manchu, in several stories and novels. Fu Manchu soon became a diabolical movie villain and provided Hollywood with an entree into new stereotypes based upon Chinese warlords. Movies of the genre proved to be highly successful. Among the most profitable of these films that exploited the "mysterious Orient" were *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1933), *Oil for the Lamps of China* (1935), and *The General Died at Dawn* (1936).

On the domestic front, the decade of the 1930s belonged to Charlie Chan who was the Chinese American's cinematic representative, although no Chinese or other Asian actor portrayed him during the series that spanned

Charlie Chan, here played by Sidney Toler (left), in *The Chinese Cat.* Chan epitomized several stereotypes but is perhaps the most popular Asian character Hollywood has produced.

Source: © John Springer Collection/CORBIS.

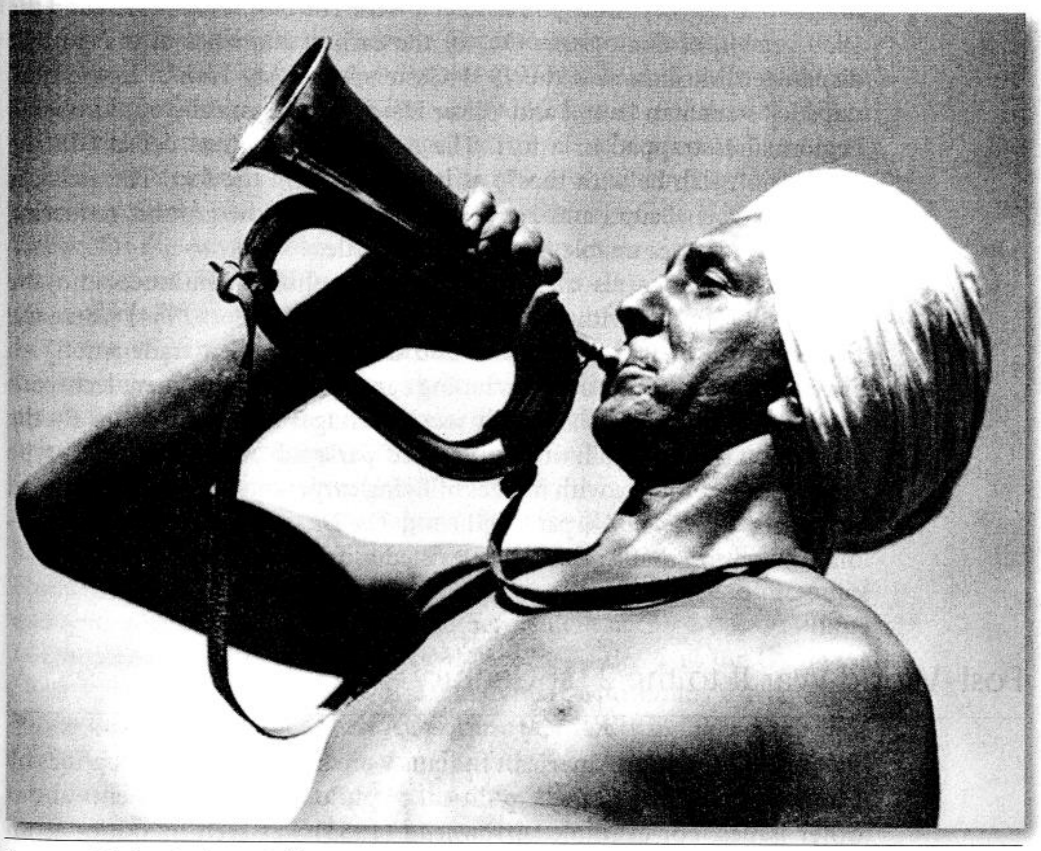
six decades with the 1981 release of a Peter Ustinov version. Charlie Chan movies were rife with stereotypical affectations. Although Chan seemed the most cerebral of the characters involved in his movie escapades, there were also the "Oriental" traits with which American audiences could identify. Chan was mysterious in his crime-solving techniques; one never knew what thought processes or logic he was employing until the critical moment at the movie's end. White America's memories of the diabolical Asian were readily recalled when Chan offered this advice to one of his many sons: "Keep eyes, ears open. Keep mouth shut." His slow gait, drowsy manner, and halting speech suggested Chan might have spent private moments with an opium pipe. The character's immense popularity with American movie audiences throughout the 1930s and 1940s may have contributed to the pro-Chinese sentiment that existed then.

Ironically, the image of the Asian male had taken a somewhat positive twist with the appearance of the popular radio show "The Green Hornet"

that first aired in 1936. Kato, the lead character's sidekick, was not only a dutiful servant but a martial arts master. *The Green Hornet* (1940) was brought to the movie screen and to comic books in the 1940s. But, with the onset of World War II, Hollywood revived and escalated its negative portrayals of the Japanese. Although the Chinese peasant image enjoyed favored status among Americans in the afterglow of Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* novel and subsequent movie, Hollywood had little difficulty resurrecting the Yellow Peril theme against Japan, as it became a threat to both China and the United States. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor sealed their fate in American cinema for many years, and Japanese Americans who were shuttled to "relocation" camps during the war felt the sting of attitudes long since implanted in the mass psyche and nurtured in movie houses.

In films produced between 1942 and 1945, Hollywood dusted off the old images of Japanese duplicity, inhumanity, and lust for White women.

Sam Jaffe portrayed the title character in the 1939 movie adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's "Gunga Din" that glamorized British colonialism in India.



Source: © John Springer Collection/CORBIS.

Unlike the Germans, who were portrayed as a respectable but misguided people under the influence of the Nazi regime, the Japanese were seen in American theaters strafing Red Cross ships, bayoneting children, and delighting in applying torture techniques presumably handed down from centuries of malevolent practice. Examples can be found in *Wake Island* (1942), *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943), and *Objective, Burma!* (1945).

In 1939, when Rudyard Kipling's poem "Gunga Din" was adapted for the Hollywood screen, the era of British colonialism in India was glamorized. The notion of racial hierarchy was plainly evident as the title character was a water boy for the British soldiers who longed to become accepted into the military ranks of the colonial occupants of his country. Thus, although there was little or no presence of South Asian Indian residents in the United States at the time, the idea of their inferiority was introduced or reinforced for legions of Anglo American moviegoers across the country during Hollywood's heyday. Other literary works by Kipling (*The Jungle Book*, 1894) and Jules Verne (*Around the World in 80 Days*, 1873) were later adapted as popular American films and added to the stereotypical legacy of Asian Indians.

By the 1930s, Middle Eastern cultural stereotypes had been firmly entrenched in the post–silent movie era. Among the films that brought images of unsavory Arabs to the screen were *The Barbarian* (1933) and the 1939 version of *Beau Geste.* One of the earliest comedies of the era that disparaged Muslims was the 1931 Geste spoof *Beau Hunks.* In the film, slapstick stars Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy save drastically outnumbered Legionnaires trapped in a fort. The Arab enemy suffers defeat (despite shouts of "Allah be with thee") as its forces storm the fort. The attack is thwarted when Laurel and Hardy spread tacks on the ground, rendering their barefoot foes unable to pursue the battle.

Comedic portrayals of Middle Eastern cultures continued into the World War II years with the release of *Lost in a Harem* (1944) where the comedy team of Bud Abbott and Lou Costello ply their trade among an array of stereotypical Arabs including sensual dancing women, lecherous sheiks, and a desert palace with secret passages and a dungeon. By the 1950s, a variety of Hollywood films had parlayed "Arabian Nights"–type escapades—complete with images of flying carpets and thieves in Baghdad including *The Magic Carpet* (1951) and *The Desert Song* (1953 version)—into the notion that Arab nations existed as fantasylands.

Post–World War II to the 21st Century

By the 1950s, Native American Indians were being used as metaphors by filmmakers seeking to make political or philosophical statements about other issues. For example, *Arrowhead* (1953) was seen by critics as an

ultra-right-wing allegory of the McCarthy era while *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964) spoke strongly against German extermination camps as well as Indian persecution. Later, both *Soldier Blue* and *Little Big Man* (1970) made statements about American involvement in Vietnam. At the same time, White America (in the midst of the Black-inspired civil rights movement) experienced a guilt complex over the historical and persistent mistreatment of Native American Indians. The result was a series of Hollywood productions designed to purge that guilt including *Hombre* (1967), *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* (1969), and *Jeremiah Johnson* (1972). Taking matters further, Hollywood reversed itself on portrayals of two Indian tamers it had immortalized in earlier films. In *Little Big Man* (1970), General George A. Custer is characterized as meeting a just end at the Little Bighorn massacre as retribution for atrocities perpetrated against the Indians. Similarly, William Cody is portrayed as a mercenary eagerly exploiting Native Americans for the sake of showmanship in *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* (1976).

The 1970s can generally be viewed as the decade when movie portrayals became pro–Native American Indian. Although the image of the violent Indian remained into the 1980s, Hollywood tended to mitigate the violence by placing it in the context of survival, self-defense, or retribution. The 1990s brought more sympathetic, although idealized, portrayals of Native Americans to the big screen. Foremost were *Dances With Wolves* (1990) and *I Will Fight No More Forever* (1975), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), and *Geronimo* (1993). The animated feature *Pocahontas* (1995) continued the mythical "noble savage" portrayals of years past.

Meanwhile, Black Americans benefited from a shift in White attitudes following World War II when—under the prodding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, other civil rights groups, and President Harry Truman's administration—Hollywood began to make films illustrating the folly and unfairness of racial discrimination against them. A catalyst in this movement was the manner in which Black military men had distinguished themselves during World War II. The practice of prejudice against Blacks was denunciated in *Pinky, Lost Boundaries,* and *Home of the Brave* (1949); *No Way Out* (1950); *Blackboard Jungle* (1955); and *The Defiant Ones* (1958).

The 1960s belonged to the imagery of the sophisticated Black who was heroic in proportions. Actor Sidney Poitier epitomized the intelligent, cool Black American who harnessed his hidden rage in tolerance to prejudice and ignorance found in Whites of lesser refinement in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and *In the Heat of the Night* (1967). Poitier won the Oscar for "Best Actor" for his portrayal of a handyman who builds a chapel for White European nuns in a rural American community in *Lilies of the Field* (1963). Harry Belafonte and Sammy Davis Jr. were two other Black actors who starred in films of the period in roles that showed Blacks in nonthreatening circumstances.

Whoopi Goldberg is among the Black performers who moved from nightclub stand-up comedy ranks to movie stardom in the 1980s.

Source: Daniel Langer and Comic Relief, Inc.

The mid-1960s and early 1970s brought a definitely threatening Black image to the movies as the so-called blaxploitation movies featuring nearly all-Black casts cavorted on screen with the assumption of a militant posture. The civil rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was at its zenith. Hollywood again purged its conscience as urban Blacks took revenge against Whites in such movies as *Sweet Sweetback's Baadassss Song* (1971) and in two urban detective films featuring Richard Roundtree in *Shaft* (1971) and *Shaft's Big Score* (1972). Whites generally showed little box-office interest in blaxploitation movies, and the genre soon lost its financial luster.

The mid- to late 1980s, however, brought a resurgence of African American presence in cinema due largely to the popularity of two Black comics—Eddie Murphy and Whoopi Goldberg—who had made their marks in television and the stand-up comedy circuit. Murphy proved to have major racial crossover appeal at the box office following a string of movies including *Trading Places* (1983), *Beverly Hills Cop* and its sequel *Beverly Hills Cop II* (1984 and 1987), *Coming to America* (1988), and *Harlem Nights* (1989). Goldberg made her movie debut to critical acclaim in *The Color Purple* (1985) and followed it with *Jumpin' Jack Flash* (1986) and *Clara's Heart* (1988). In the 1990s, she starred in *Ghost* (1990), *Sarafina!* and *Sister Act* (1992), and *Sister Act 2* (1993), among others. Goldberg's roles ranged from purely whimsical and comedic to serious and sensitive portrayals of Black women.

Black films with a harsher edge depicting life in urban ghettos also appeared in the 1990s including *Boyz N the Hood, Jungle Fever,* and *New Jack City* (1991). These works coincided with the emergence of a group of Black film directors who were successful in getting Hollywood to bankroll their efforts. Among them were Spike Lee, John Singleton, and Matty Rich. By the 1990s, Denzel Washington (*Glory,* 1989; *Mo' Better Blues,* 1990; *Malcolm X,* 1992; *The Pelican Brief,* 1993) had replaced Sidney Poitier as the foremost Black male dramatic actor.

The immediate post–World War II period saw a continuation of the relationship established before the war between Latinos and Hollywood that was built on economic considerations. During the war, U.S. filmmakers could not distribute their wares to European markets. Latin American countries came to represent 20% of Hollywood's total foreign market business during the era resulting in the development of joint movie projects. Many movies were filmed in Latin American nations with writing and financing provided by Hollywood. Most of the supporting roles were played by Latino actors, and the alliance led to an overly positive image of Latino characters as evidenced by such films as *The Fugitive* (1948) and *Way of a Gaucho* (1952). In 1954, a precedent was established with the independent production of *Salt of the Earth* in which Latino or Latin American actors portrayed all of the major roles.

By the 1960s, the Latin American market withered for Hollywood because Latin American countries had developed their own film industries and screen personalities. The number of Hollywood movies utilizing Latino themes dropped drastically, and those that did reverted to old stereotypical form by reintroducing the "greaser" as an urban gang member. Puerto Ricans were singled out for updated "greaser" treatment in two 1961 films, *West Side Story* and *The Young Savages.* The emphasis was on gang violence in urban America. Hollywood continued the violent "greaser" trend with *Duck, You Sucker* (1972), *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974), *The Warriors* (1979), and *Boulevard Nights* (1979). A distorted view of the Mexican family was presented in *The Children of Sanchez* (1978), but the early 1980s included movies produced and directed by Chicanos (*Seguín,* 1981; *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez,* 1982). The 1981 release of *Zoot Suit* followed the success of the play that began its run in 1978. In *Zoot Suit,* based on an actual incident, the Mexican American is realistically portrayed during a World War II–era race riot in Los Angeles.

A series of movies beginning in the 1970s featured the nonthreatening, comedic adventures of "Cheech and Chong" in the Mexican American urban barrio. These films, however, were criticized for their perceived glorification of the drug culture, sexist orientation, and nontraditional lifestyle of the featured characters. In general, Hollywood offerings did little to portray Latinos as part of the social mainstream in the United States during the first half of the 1980s other than in bit parts. A more positive portrayal appeared with the release of *Stand and Deliver* (1988) based on the true story of a Mexican American high school mathematics teacher. Also receiving critical acclaim were *La Bamba* (1987) and *The Milagro Beanfield War* (1988). Generally, however, the late 1980s and early 1990s found Latinos in the story line background as either street toughs or drug traffickers as in *Colors* (1988), *Tequila Sunrise* (1988), and *Carlito's Way* (1993). Better images resulted when veteran actors Jimmy Smits and Edward James Olmos were featured in *My Family/Mi Familia* in 1995, which told the story of three generations of a Latino immigrant family,

and the film biography of "Tejano" singer *Selena* (1997) helped bring Latina singer/actress Jennifer Lopez to stardom.

Japanese portrayals continued to be very negative immediately following World War II as American audiences were offered more war movies. Japanese acts of cruelty and torture were seen in *Tokyo Joe* (1949) and *Three Came Home* (1950). An exception, perhaps inspired by guilt response to the Japanese relocation camps, was *Go for Broke!* (1951), a positive portrayal of the heroic Japanese American military units that fought in Europe. A major reversal would soon take place, however, between Japanese and Chinese imagery in the movies.

With the coming of the Korean War, the Cold War, and McCarthyism, the issue of communism became the focal point of American fears and anxieties. Synonymous with communism were the Soviet Union and China. China, whose people had been viewed so warmly by Americans only a decade earlier, was once again seen as home of the Yellow Peril. Japan, on the other hand, was virtually a U.S. satellite and close ally by the late 1950s. Popular movies reflected both attitudes. The Japanese were initially portrayed with much more sensitivity than at any time since the Immigration Act of 1924. *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) and *Battle of the Coral Sea* (1959) are examples of the softer treatment given the Japanese by Hollywood. Even the touchy subject of Japanese Anglo romance was explored in *Sayonara* (1957) and *My Geisha* (1962). Although such romances did not have happy endings, they were nevertheless not treated as a basic violation of nature.

Meanwhile, China (by now commonly referred to as "Red China" or "Communist China") took on the movie depictions reminiscent of the early 1930s. The Chinese regime was seen as oppressive and exploitive of its own people in *Satan Never Sleeps* (1962) and as a devious threat to the American system in *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962). The year 1963 marked the release of *55 Days at Peking* followed in 1966 by *The Sand Pebbles.* The latter two films were set in early-20th-century China and reinforced the image of drug addiction, prostitution, inhumanity, and deceit as staples of Chinese life. From the mid-1970s, following the reopening of diplomatic and trade ties with China, the pendulum swung again in China's favor, and Hollywood curtailed its negative portrayals after several fantasy characterizations such as *Dr. No* (1962) and others in the James Bond spy thriller series. A surge of American interest in Oriental martial arts, however, spurred the creation of a series of films featuring almost nonstop violent action scenes showing villains and heroes employing kung fu, karate, and other combative techniques.

Chinese American actor Bruce Lee, an acrobatic master of the martial arts, became the catalyst for that motion picture genre that portrayed the Chinese as sadistically violent. Generally, however, his films depicted Chinese characters in both heroic and villainous roles. In terms of popularity with American audiences, Jackie Chan succeeded Lee as the martial arts master. Chan's roles, however, were comedic, and he teamed

with Black comedian Chris Tucker in a series of movie escapades including *Rush Hour* (1998) that generally played to traditional stereotypes.

In the post–Vietnam War era, American film producers made the Vietnamese their next target of Asian stereotyping based on the same long-standing attitudes. These people were portrayed on screen as crafty, devious, guerilla warfare perpetrators of violence in *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and *Platoon* (1986), among other films into the 1980s. From the mid-1980s into the 1990s, White actors Chuck Norris and Jean-Claude Van Damme assumed the mantle as filmdom's leading martial arts masters, often vanquishing Asian foes in the process. Although the Japanese American community voiced concerns about stereotypical characterizations in *Rising Sun* (1993), more sensitive portrayals of Asian peoples surfaced occasionally during the period including *The Killing Fields* (1984) and *The Last Emperor* (1987). Perhaps the most insightful American film portrayal of Asians in many years was the screen adaptation of Amy Tan's novel, *The Joy Luck Club* (1993). The movie explored Chinese and Chinese American cultural nuances and resulting interpersonal conflicts through the eyes of three generations of Chinese women. A continuation of the trend toward a more esoteric view of Chinese culture was manifest in the special effects triumph of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000).

As U.S. forces fought conflicts in the Middle East in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, racial, cultural, and religious intolerance toward Arab, Muslim, and Islamic peoples brought forth a spate of new negative stereotypes to American movie screens. It was against this backdrop that the 1995 bombing of a federal office building in Oklahoma City—later determined to be perpetrated by a White disillusioned former U.S. soldier—initially set off public fears that Arab terrorists were responsible. By 1998 *The Siege,* a story about terrorism in New York City, featured a government roundup of Arab American citizens called "towel heads" by a character in the film.

Television Brings Stereotypes Home

Commercial television became a significant factor in American information and entertainment in 1948 when Milton Berle's network variety show *Texaco Star Theater* achieved nationwide popularity. The show spurred the purchase of TV sets in epidemic proportions. Little time was wasted in telecasting tried-and-true stereotypes of marginalized racial and cultural groups into America's homes. The Second World War had ended, and the old notions and images were seamlessly transferred to the new medium. Moreover, sponsors lined up to cash in on the new communications technology.

In short order, the "noble savage" was revisited. Among the first was Tonto, the Lone Ranger's "faithful" Indian companion played throughout the series's eight-year run by Jay Silverheels, an actor of Mohawk tribal heritage. *The Lone Ranger* first aired on television in 1949 but had begun

Jay Silverheels, an actor of Mohawk heritage, played the trusted sidekick of the masked Lone Ranger in the 1950s television series that began on radio in 1933.

Source: © Bettmann/CORBIS.

as a radio series in 1933. While the Lone Ranger's mask often made those he encountered in his Western adventures apprehensive, the fact he maintained a friendship with a Native American Indian made him even more suspect. Tonto's image, however, was otherwise positive because he fought for justice in the highest tradition of American folklore. His role as a Native American reflected the established stereotypes including the pinto pony, broken English dialect, fringed buckskin attire, and secondary status relative to the White hero.

In ensuing years, the historical portrayal of Native Americans on network television differed little from that experienced in Hollywood cinema. The list of primetime TV series featuring positive, accurate representations of Native Americans is extremely brief as an examination of either past or present conditions. Perhaps the only attempt to do so was made in the 1955–1956 season when CBS aired *Brave Eagle.* The show sought to portray Native American Indians' viewpoint of the White expansionist movement into their territory during the latter part of the 19th century. The program did feature Native American cast members, but, ironically, a real Indian (Keena Nomkeena) played the foster son to White actor Keith Larsen who played a Cheyenne tribal chief. There was also an old sage who orally recited tribal history and events—a character also played by a White actor. *Brave Eagle* was followed by ABC's *Broken Arrow,* which appeared for five years (1956–1960). The series, however, featured an all-White cast, and the story line centered on Indian and White cooperation in fighting frontier injustice. During the 1960s when television was dominated by Westerns, Native American Indians were mostly relegated to their movie image, serving as either foils or backdrops to the stories of how the West was won.

This basic pattern continued into the 1990s. One example was *The Young Riders* offered by ABC from 1989 into the early 1990s. In the show Gregg Rainwater played the role of Running Buck Cross, who was half Kiowa Indian. The story line was about the Pony Express era, but television sensibilities of the 1980s and 1990s demanded revisionist history of the western frontier, so *The Young Riders* spent most of their time protecting the innocent and displaying kindness to any Native Americans who happened to wander into an episode. A different and unique twist came to Native American TV portrayals with the 1990 arrival of *Northern Exposure* on CBS. In it Elaine Miles portrayed Eskimo medical receptionist Marilyn Whirlwind, an unflappable and down-to-earth personality. The show was a ratings success and continued on prime time into the mid-1990s.

Black Americans composed the largest non-White racial presence on network television over the last 50 years of the 20th century. That fact, however, did not result in an altogether satisfactory TV portrayal of the realities of the diverse and complex Black experience in the United States. In variety programming, Blacks appeared frequently as guest performers almost from the inception of network commercial television. Ed Sullivan featured them as early as 1948 on his CBS *Toast of the Town* show (later called *The Ed Sullivan Show*) as did Steve Allen as host of NBC's *The Tonight Show* from 1954 to 1957. In 1950, three network shows went on the air featuring Blacks in their casts as regulars. They were *Beulah, The Jack Benny Program,* and *The Stu Erwin Show,* and each portrayed Blacks in subservient, domestic roles. The *Beulah* character was a maid and mammy figure in a White household; Eddie Anderson portrayed Jack Benny's valet "Rochester" on TV for 15 years; and Willie Best, who had played imitative Stepin Fetchit roles in numerous movies, brought the character to the *Erwin Show* as the family handyman.

The first show with an all-Black cast made its television debut in 1951, although it had been immensely popular as a radio series since 1929 with its White creators playing the major roles. *The Amos 'n Andy Show* was awaited with much anticipation across the nation because the show's creators, Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, held a widely publicized four-year search for the Black actors who would bring the show to television. A special televised segment was arranged before a studio audience for Gosden and Correll to introduce the handpicked cast prior to the first show. In introducing the male actors, the creators occasionally referred to them as *boys*, a term long despised by Blacks as a relic of slavery in the United States. The original series lasted two years, but reruns continued into the mid-1960s, always in controversy over the images projected about Blacks. Although the show was based on characters with little intellectual capacities or otherwise lacking ethical values and employment, there were Black characters seen as attorneys, business owners, educators, and other professionals. Nevertheless, pressure from civil rights groups forced the program

off the air entirely in 1966 when CBS withdrew it from sale. The advent of videocassette technology made *Amos 'n Andy* a brisk seller in the home entertainment market into the latter half of the 1990s.

Two other significant programs featuring Blacks prior to the civil rights movement of the 1960s starred male vocalists. In 1952, ABC's 15-minute *Billy Daniels Show* was the first national TV program with a Black host. It ran for only 13 weeks, one third of a season by industry standards of the time. A musical-variety show hosted by singer Nat "King" Cole, which aired for 59 consecutive weeks from 1956 to 1957, fared somewhat better. Many prominent entertainers, several sponsors, and NBC executives supported Cole and made considerable efforts to keep the show afloat despite poor ratings throughout its 13-month history. Although Cole was an extremely talented vocalist and successful recording star, his show could not win the ratings competition against the popular mainstream programs in its time slot.[1] From the mid-1960s into the mid-1980s, Blacks were seen on numerous TV series usually as comedy-variety show hosts or in situation comedies.

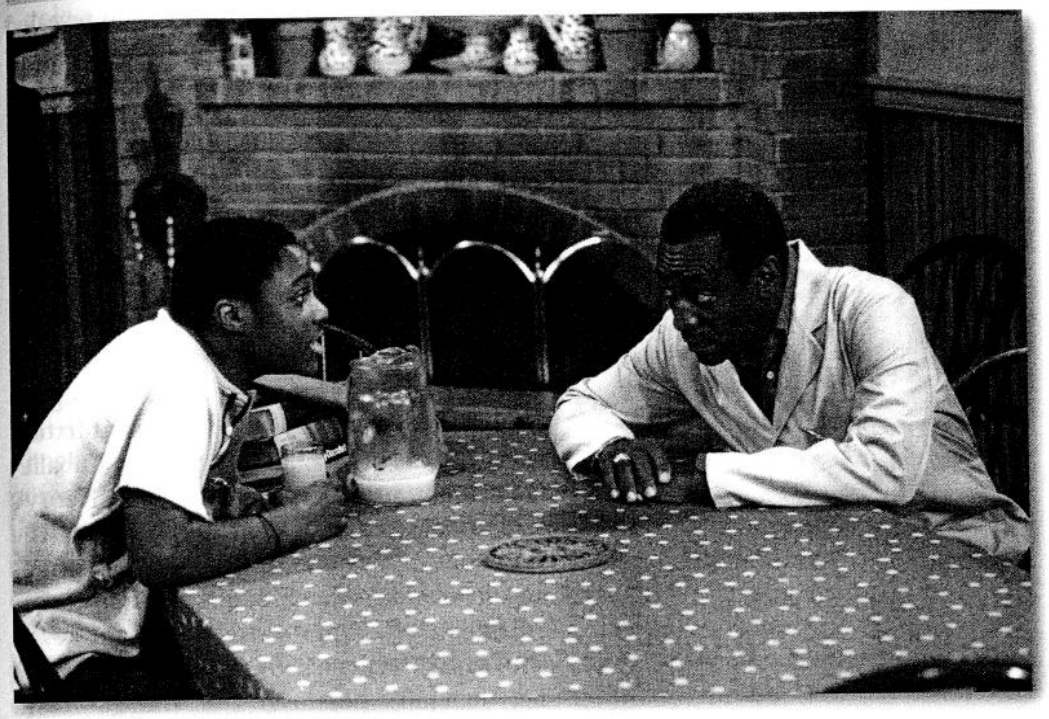
Actress Diahann Carroll broke racial and cultural barriers in her nonstereotypical role as nurse Julia Baker in the weekly series *Julia,* which ran from 1968 to 1971 on NBC.

Source: © Bettmann/CORBIS.

Many shows employed what were seen by critics as a single "token" Black character and from "Amos 'n' Andy" to the fall of 1984 there were only four other shows (all situation comedies) with predominantly Black casts that lasted more than one season in regular network television: *Sanford and Son* (1972), *Good Times* (1974), *The Jeffersons* (1975), and *What's Happening!!* (1976). Of course, the TV ratings epoch *Roots* aired as a prime-time "miniseries" special in 1977, and many believed it served as a catharsis of guilt for Whites over the historical treatment of Blacks in America. An estimated 100 million viewers watched the program over eight consecutive nights that began several trends in television programming.

Into the mid-1980s the primary roles for Blacks in prime-time network television were still in situation comedies rather than serious dramatic programs. Arguably, however, critics maintained that network television in the 1980s was almost all

Bill Cosby (right) starred in the nation's top-rated television program throughout much of the 1980s. His sitcom, *The Cosby Show,* featured an all-Black cast, including Malcolm-Jamal Warner, pictured here, who played his son.



Source: © Jacques M. Chenet/CORBIS.

situation comedies and prime-time "soap opera" serials. Actress Diahann Carroll, who became the first Black woman to star in a network comedy/dramatic series (*Julia,* 1968), made history again in 1984 when she joined the regular cast of ABC's prime-time soap opera *Dynasty.* That same year marked the opening season of NBC's *The Cosby Show,* which became television's number-one rated program throughout the mid-1980s, proving that a show with an all-Black cast could be an overwhelming commercial success. *The Cosby Show*'s success opened the way for numerous other Black-oriented sitcoms that flooded the airwaves into the early 2000s. Few of them, however, had the production and scriptwriting qualities that characterized the *Cosby* program.

The most significant Black comedy/variety show of the early and mid-1990s was the Fox network's *In Living Color,* which first aired in 1990. The fast-paced show resembled a hybrid of *Laugh-In* and *Saturday Night Live,* and its success was due primarily to its multitalented writer, producer, director, actor, and comedian, Keenen Ivory Wayans. By the mid-1990s, advertisers and their television network cohorts had awakened to the fact

that Blacks watched more TV than any other racial group, and, in 1994, 25 programs were aired on the four networks either starring or featuring Blacks in major roles. Significantly, however, there were major differences in the viewing patterns of Blacks as compared to the general American audience. A listing of the most popular shows of the 1993 season revealed no programs made the top 10 on both lists.[2] A significant development of the late 1990s and early 2000s was the emergence of television's United Paramount Network (UPN), which seemed to target the African American audience with all-Black situation comedies such as *The Hughleys* and *The Parkers.*

Latinos were also brought to the small screen early in television history when the romantic figure of *The Cisco Kid* rode into American homes in 1950. The series aired for seven years but only in syndication to independent stations. In 1994, some 37 years after the original series ended, it was revived as a movie with Jimmy Smits in the lead role. *The Cisco Kid* was the first successful syndicated program and was among the first color filmed series. *The Cisco Kid* had been an entertainment fixture since the character's creation in the O'Henry short story, "The Caballero's Way." Cisco was originally a bandito-type character in O'Henry's story who preyed on the rich to help the poor, à la Robin Hood. The character was brought to the movies in several productions with various leading men including Duncan Renaldo, who brought the role to TV. Cisco and his sidekick Pancho delighted youngsters, who were the key to their popularity, as they enjoyed a jovial repartee while roaming the Southwest to fight injustice. Renaldo's portrayal was vintage "Latin lover" except he never got romantically involved with the love-stricken ladies given the fact his audience was primarily children. Pancho, played by Leo Carrillo, was a rotund, gregarious character who affected the stereotypical speech American audiences had come to expect from movie Mexicans who were not "Latin lovers." Often Pancho would urge his partner, "Hey Cees-ko, let's went!" The next Latino role appeared in 1951 when a White actor, Don Diamond, played El Toro, the Mexican sidekick to the lead in *The Adventures of Kit Carson.*

But the biggest Latino television personality of the early days of television was Desi Arnaz who was Lucille Ball's actual and theatrical husband in the long-running show, *I Love Lucy.* Although Arnaz played a respectable husband who was a bandleader, he also played the straight man to Lucy's zany schemes. His Latin temperament, which exploded into a torrent of Spanish diatribe when Lucy's ill-fated activities were revealed, was classic stereotyped imagery. The popular series came to television in 1951 and continued in original production until 1957. A swashbuckling adventure show, *Zorro,* debuted in 1957, and although set in early California, it concerned the political struggles of Spanish settlers. Mexicans, however, served only as villains, buffoons, or backdrops to the affairs of the more highly cultured Spanish aristocracy.

In the 1960s three television programs stood out for their Latino portrayals. In *The Real McCoys* (1957–1963), Tony Martinez played farmhand Pepino Garcia, a role consistent with audience expectations. A non-Latino carried the TV image of the simple-minded Mexican when *The Bill Dana Show* appeared in 1963 for a two-year run. Dana's opening line with a thick Mexican accent became a virtual national catchphrase because of his nightclub act and record sales: "My name, Jose Jimenez." In the show Jimenez worked as a hotel bellhop whose ineptness constantly got him into comedic situations. Perhaps the most unusual prime-time TV show centering on Latino characters was *The High Chaparral* (1967–1971). It was one of the numerous "adult Westerns" aired during the period and featured an interracial marriage between the daughter of a Mexican cattle baron and a wealthy White rancher. The characters portrayed by Latino actors, however, generally had roles as ranch hands.

Latino (Puerto Rican) actor Jimmy Smits became a prominent fixture in the cast of several network television shows beginning in the 1980s.

Source: ©istockphoto.com/EdStock.

In the 1970s, there were two network situation comedies based on the Mexican American barrio of East Los Angeles. Most recognized and criticized of the two was *Chico and the Man* starring Freddie Prinze Sr., which aired for five seasons on NBC beginning in 1974. Chico was a young streetwise character who used his savvy to drum up business for the auto repair garage where he worked. The racial "humor" and image portrayed by Chico was the subject of controversy throughout the show's network existence. In 1976, another "sitcom" was brought to ABC titled *Viva Valdez* about an East Los Angeles family. It lasted only four months. Two other series featuring Latino actors began in the 1970s and continued until 1983. NBC screened *CHiPs* for the first time in 1977 cofeaturing handsome Latino actor Erik Estrada as a California Highway Patrolman with romance on his mind. *Fantasy Island* (1977) starred Ricardo Montalban as the romantic figure host on an idyllic isle. Neither portrayal was very distant from the Latin lover roles that Hollywood had created decades earlier. In 1984, ABC made its second attempt at a sitcom centered on the life of an East Los Angeles barrio family with Paul Rodriguez in *a.k.a. Pablo.* Critics claimed the show was harmful because Rodriguez's jokes were seen as ridiculing Mexican American culture. The program

lasted only six episodes and did not return in 1985. A Latino flavor was captured in NBC's *Miami Vice,* which aired from 1984 to 1990 with Edward James Olmos starring as Lt. Martin Castillo against a backdrop of various drug operatives, many of whom were Latino. A more positive portrayal came in 1986 with Jimmy Smits's role as lawyer Victor Sifuentes on NBC's *L.A. Law.* The show continued its run into 1994, a year in which Latinos filled only 11 of national television's 800 prime-time roles.

Although the multibillion-dollar Latino consumer market in the United States created an expanded presence for them in television, change was gradual. Some Latino actors such as Raquel Welch and Martin Sheen once took non-Latino roles and subverted their cultural identities to obtain steady employment. By the year 2000, they were "able to be ethnically present to the Latino audience but ethnically invisible to a majority audience," said Felix Sanchez, president of the National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts, in a *New York Times* article.[3] Sanchez added, "We need to move it beyond that to where our culture and identity are fully integrated in a character."[4]

Asian portrayals came to television in 1949 in an ABC crime show called *Mysteries of Chinatown* starring White actor Marvin Miller as Dr. Yat Fu. The show was set in San Francisco's Chinatown where Miller's character was in stereotype as owner of an herb and curio shop. The regular supporting cast was all White and, as evidenced by the show's title, was designed to exploit the old stereotype of the "mysterious" Asian. Next to surface was the TV version of *The Adventures of Dr. Fu Manchu* (1956), another crime drama with an all-White cast. The program was full of vintage "Yellow Peril" imagery with Dr. Fu sending his agents on various missions designed to subvert the cause of Western civilization. The nefarious and wily Dr. Fu was based in various cities in the Orient as the series dredged up the old Sax Rohmer stereotypes. In fact, the series was facilitated by Rohmer's sale of rights to his creation in 1955 to Republic Pictures. The show was a non-network syndicated production and aired for only one season. Ironically, the following year (1956) it was followed to television by the other venerable Chinese character, Charlie Chan. *The New Adventures of Charlie Chan* was also a syndicated series lasting only one year. J. Carrol Naish played Chan, but an Asian actor, James Hong, was cast in the role of Chan's "number-one son" Barry Chan. The series was produced in Great Britain, and the Chan character operated from London.

In the 1960s, ABC aired an adventure series, *Hong Kong,* which reinforced the Chinese image of intrigue, sexy women, smuggling, and drug peddling. At least two Asian actors were cast as series regulars during its single-year run (1960–1961). The same network brought *The Green Hornet* to prime-time TV for a one-year stay in 1966–1967. The significance of the series was the casting of Bruce Lee as the Green Hornet's sidekick Kato. Lee's weekly demonstration of martial arts skills as he fought crime helped launch the popularity of Oriental self-defense techniques in the U.S. Interestingly, *The Green Hornet* was the creation of George W. Trendle who also developed *The Lone Ranger.* In both concepts, a trusty ethnic minority sidekick, perhaps for the purpose of adding a fantasy appeal for the mass audience, supports the hero. Bruce Lee's influence

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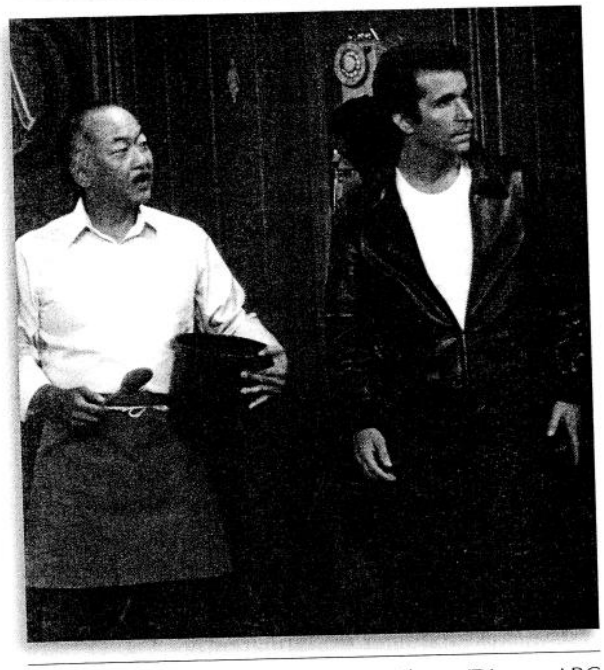
sparked another ABC series, *Kung Fu,* a Western starring David Carradine and supporting Asian actors including Keye Luke and Philip Ahn. Lee was a consultant to those who developed the *Kung Fu* show and labored under the impression he was to be their choice for the lead role. When Carradine was selected for the part, Lee confided to friends that he had been the victim of racism. *Kung Fu*'s producers told Lee they didn't believe a Chinese actor could be seen as a hero in the eyes of the American television audience.[5] The show became a throwback to the "mysterious" Asian stereotype. It aired from 1972 to 1975. With racism standing as a barrier to stardom in the United States, Bruce Lee went to Hong Kong where he achieved superstardom throughout Asia as a film star.

The greatest Asian presence in television began in the 1960s and featured an array of supporting police and criminal characters in the long-running CBS series *Hawaii Five-O* (1968–1980). At least three Asian actors appeared as regulars on the show, and lead character, Detective Steve McGarrett, pursued an archenemy Asian character, Wo Fat, periodically throughout its 12-year tenure. Generally, Asian portrayals in *Hawaii Five-O* were varied and diverse although definite stereotypes were projected. The show's vulnerability to stereotypical criticism was its portrayal of White superiority and leadership in a predominantly Asian environment.

There have been several prime-time shows throughout the history of American television that perpetuated the subservient, humble Asian image. Among them were *Bachelor Father* (1957–1962) with an Asian "houseboy" character played by Sammee Tong and *Bonanza* (1959–1972) with Chinese cook Hop Sing played by Victor Sen Yung. In *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* (1969–1972), Miyoshi Umeki played a housekeeper who was often befuddled by situations that arose in the household. Umeki's character was apparently married to an American because her role was that of "Mrs. Livingston" although her mannerisms and philosophy were clearly Japanese, as U.S. entertainment media have defined them over the years.

The early 1980s were characterized by a continuation of Asian supporting roles in various sitcoms and dramatic offerings. Two unique programs utilizing Asian themes came to network TV in 1980. A weeklong miniseries, *Shogun,* was based on the exploits of a White adventurer in feudal Japan. Although providing American audiences with some insight into Japanese culture, the program placed an emphasis upon the violence of samurai warriors and an aura of the sexual mysticism of Japanese women. The same year NBC brought a variety show called *Pink Lady* to its schedule featuring a Japanese singing duo of the same name. The two young ladies were attractive and spoke little English, so comic Jeff Altman served as facilitator. As an attempt to bring the demure, humble, and sexy image of the Japanese woman to network television, *Pink Lady* was a failure and was cancelled after less than two months on the air. That female image, however, returned to prominence in 1983 when actress Rosalind Chao took a costarring role in *After M.A.S.H.* In the CBS series, which aired until December 1984, Ms. Chao's role was as the Korean wife of a White ex-GI who had served in the Korean War. A different Asian female portrayal

Pat Morita, a Japanese American actor, was featured in the popular television series *Happy Days* and later starred in his own series, *Ohara*, in which he portrayed a police officer who used mystical Asian techniques to apprehend criminals.



Source: ABC Photo Archives/Contributor/Disney ABC Television Group/Getty Images.

came to television in 1994 with the ABC sitcom *All-American Girl* featuring Margaret Cho. Cho's character personified a quick-tongued modern Asian woman with a distinctly "American" attitude, but the show failed to convey a genuine sense of Asian America, as discussed further in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Japanese American actor Pat Morita, who had played the role of Arnold in the long-running (1974–1984) *Happy Days* on ABC, became the star of his own series on the same network. For two seasons in 1987–1988, Morita starred in *Ohara* as the title character, a Los Angeles police detective who preferred mystical Asian patience and persuasion to violence in dealing with criminals. Lt. Ohara usually didn't carry a gun but, true to stereotype, would resort to martial arts when necessary. A similar series using a Chinese actor in the lead role was *Martial Law* (1998) featuring corpulent Sammo Hung Kam-Bo as a Hong Kong detective on loan to the Los Angeles Police Department.

Television viewers of the 1950s through the 1990s found little original programming featuring Middle Eastern characters. In general, they saw television airings of movies that had been made decades earlier, thus providing new generations of Americans the "opportunity" to absorb old stereotypes from a bygone era. Unfortunately, there were plenty of films featuring Sinbad the Sailor, magic carpets, and an assortment of dubious sheiks. When fresh material featuring Muslim people and other persons from the Middle East made their way onto the small screen after the turn of the 21st century, the resulting programming was decidedly more disturbing.

And There's Sexism Too

For women of color, the lack of representation in the media is even bleaker. Not only do they face the obstacles of gender discrimination, but they

must also overcome the hurdles of tokenism in an industry notorious for its lack of performance in achieving diversity goals. As was noted at a 2002 conference on Empowering Women of Color in the media:

> The universes of "media" and "women of color" have a strained relationship borne out of absence and misrepresentation. We may think of the tokenized Asian character in an otherwise completely white TV sitcom, of the newspaper articles that unequivocally state it is young Latina and African American girls that are predominantly unwed and uneducated mothers, or of the ongoing portrayals of Middle Eastern women as utterly oppressed and uneducated victims. It can seem that the face of mainstream media in the United States has, in some ways, changed very little; our articulate, authentic, and ever-evolving voices are simply unheard.[6]

Research data that specifically address women of color are limited, but the following discussion provides a broader overview of the status of women in the media, with an emphasis on minority women where data are available. The dearth of minority female perspectives in media management perpetuates stereotypical, sexist, and often classist images that continue to undermine the credibility and value of women in the larger society.

Breaking the Barrier

It was a historical night for African American performers when Halle Berry and Denzel Washington won Oscars for "Best Actress" and "Best Actor," respectively, at the 74th Academy Awards in 2002. Not only was it the first time that two African Americans won Hollywood's highest awards for acting, but Berry also became the first African American woman to win for Best Actress for her role in *Monster's Ball.* Three years earlier, she won an Emmy for her portrayal of Dorothy Dandridge, the first African American woman to receive an Oscar nomination for Best Actress for *Carmen Jones* in 1954. Upon receiving her award, an emotional Berry acknowledged the magnitude of the moment as she gushed: "This moment is so much bigger than me. This moment is for Dorothy Dandridge, Lena Horne, Diahann Carroll. It's for the women who stand beside me, Jada Pinkett, Angela Bassett, Vivica Fox, and the nameless, faceless women of color who now stand a chance tonight because the door has been opened."[7]

The groundbreaking evening trumpeted a new era in which women of color not only could break racial barriers, but also could play leads in nontraditional—though often stereotypical—female roles in mainstream films. While lead roles that featured African American women are still few and far between, such as Whitney Houston's role in *The Bodyguard* (1992), a number have been cast in high-profile supporting roles such as Whoopi Goldberg in *Ghost* (1990) and Beyoncé Knowles in *Austin Powers in*

Goldmember (2002). Indeed, African American women had come a long way since the days when they were cast as affable servants content to serve their White masters, as in *Gone With the Wind* (1939), or as subservient buffoons as in the 1950s ABC show *Beulah*, or even as a tough femme fatale that made Pam Grier the queen of blaxploitation in films like *Coffy* (1973), *Foxy Brown* (1974), and *Friday Foster* (1975).

Diahann Carroll broke down racial barriers in the 1960s with her television role as earnest nurse Julia Baker in NBC's *Julia* (1968–1971). In response to the social movements and racial reforms of the 1960s, television moved to present "respectable" images of Blacks that more closely reflected America's newfound sense of racial morality. Consequently, Carroll became the first African American actress who did not portray a servant to star in her own series.[8]

But the drawbacks to such "assimilationist" shows like *Julia* that featured African Americans in middle-class lifestyles unfortunately positioned them as tokens in a White world disconnected from the stark realities of a largely economically disadvantaged Black community. In contrast, during the 1970s, a series of Black-oriented sitcoms featuring African American women emerged on network television such as *Good Times* (CBS) and *The Jeffersons* (CBS) that exposed the gritty realities of inner-city and/or urban life—albeit sanitized with humor and comic relief. However, while the shows were firmly set in the Black world with Black characters, they were still developed by White writers and producers to appeal to the predominantly White television audience. In fact, some critics questioned whether the medium had actually regressed back to the buffoonish portrayals of the 1950s.[9]

African Americans have experienced the greatest success both on screen and behind the scenes. According to a study published by the UCLA Center for African American Studies (2002), both Black and White Americans were overrepresented on the screen in 2001, accounting for 76% of all characters, and 16% of all "featured" characters—or those who have speaking roles or who are explicitly highlighted by the words or actions of other "featured" actors. Combined, these two groups represented 92% of all prime-time characters, while composing only 82% of the nation's population.

In contrast, Latinos were grossly underrepresented in prime time, constituting only 2% of all characters, while Asian Americans approached appropriate representation at roughly 3% of all characters. Native Americans were the most underrepresented group, at 0% of all characters. When comparing genders, Black men significantly outnumber Black women on the screen 59% to 41%. The percentages are identical for White men and women.[10]

In the 2001–2002 and 2002–2003 television seasons, African American women enjoyed the greatest amount of exposure on their own prime-time shows—although essentially "ghettoized" on the two least-watched networks (UPN and WB) in a handful of Black-oriented sitcoms. In the

2002–2003 fall lineup, Tracee Ellis Ross, Golden Brooks, Persia White, and Jill Marie Jones reprised their roles in UPN's *Girlfriends*. Although there were no plans for singer/actress Brandy to return in UPN's *Moesha*, her show was responsible for spinning off *The Parkers*, featuring the popular actress Mo'Nique. And Rachel True, Essence Atkins, and Telma Hopkins were featured in UPN's 2002–2006 show, *Half & Half*.[11]

While television has been considered by many to be the most powerful medium, it has historically been resistant to diversifying the power at the top. However, a number of African American women have risen through the ranks to hold real power positions that influence projects and determine what we see and don't see on the small screen.

In 2001, Pamela Thomas-Graham was named president and CEO of CNBC, and took responsibility for overseeing the company's $500 million domestic operations—which include programming, advertising sales, and ensuring brand synergy across CNBC's TV and Internet platforms. Broadcast veteran Lana Corbi is president and CEO of Crown Media United States. Prior to becoming CEO, she was executive vice president and COO of the holding company, which owns the $114 million Hallmark Channel, and had held several top-level executive positions at Fox Broadcasting Company. In 2002, Christina Norman was named executive vice president and general manager of VH1, a subsidiary of Viacom that reaches more than 82 million U.S. households. At the time, she supervised VH1's sister channels, VH1 Classic, VH1 MegaHits (Brazil only), VH1 Soul, VH1 Country (now CMT Pure Country), and VH1 Uno (now mtvU). Paula Madison, who began her journalism career as a print reporter and moved to television news in 1984, was president and general manager of NBC 4 (KNBC), NBC's owned and operated station in Los Angeles, until 2011. She was the first African American woman to become general manager at a network-owned station in a top-five market.[12]

Arguably the most prominent, powerful woman of color in television is Oprah Winfrey, who is chairman and CEO of Harpo Productions and cofounder of Oxygen Media, which includes a women's cable network. She became a television icon when her television program, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, debuted in 1986 and became an enormous success—attracting 26 million U.S. viewers. In fact, her influence was so far-reaching that when a book was featured on Oprah's Book Club, it instantly hit the best-seller list. Her development deals with ABC through Harpo Productions resulted in the award-winning TV movie, *Tuesdays with Morrie,* and she also starred in and produced the Oxygen Network show, *Use Your Life*.[13]

Sexism in Hollywood

Historically, Latina women have been portrayed in the media as either fiery, passionate, tempestuous sexpots or domestic help. Mexican film stars

such as the glamorous Maria Felix, whose perfect beauty got her discovered as she was walking down the street and catapulted her to international stardom, portrayed a collection of fierce women over several decades in such films as *La Generala* (1970) and *Enamorada* (1946).[14]

One of the most recognizable Latina actresses is the former Raquel Tejada, better known as Raquel Welch. When Welch broke into movies in the mid-1960s with such early hits as *One Million Years B.C.* and *Fantastic Voyage,* the studios never promoted the fact that she had a Latino background. Today, she trumpets the fact, and has reinvented herself as a Latina actress who now boasts of her cultural roots. The PBS series, *American Family,* created by Gregory Nava (director of *Selena*), premiered in 2002 and was billed as the first drama series on broadcast TV featuring a Latino cast. The series about a Mexican American family deals with the serious—and often comedic—aspects of life in East Los Angeles.[15] Welch plays Aunt Dora, the drama queen of the family, who is a passionate, romantic woman who might have become a Hollywood star if she had vigorously pursued an acting career. As one television critic noted, Welch infused the role with her trademark sultriness and smoky voice.

As for getting beyond the role of the maid or sex kitten, actress Lupe Ontiveros's idea of a plum role that counters traditional media stereotypes was that of Hispanic heroine and union organizer Dolores Huerta, who founded the United Farm Workers, or the 17th-century Mexican poet and nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz—who is often viewed as the first feminist of the Americas.[16]

Despite the headway some Hispanic actresses have made by being cast in nonstereotypical roles, most Latinas are still portrayed by the media in ways that connote sex and sexuality. For instance, the Winter 2002 edition of *Sports Illustrated* featured bikini-clad model Yamila Diaz-Rahi on the cover with the subheading "Red Hot in Latin America . . . Yamila sizzles in Mexico." Even on the Spanish-language publication *TVyNovelas*, the cover had two Latina actresses posing in swimsuits—despite the fact that the issue has nothing to do with swimwear. In a *New York Times* article titled "Latino Style Is Cool. Oh, All Right: It's Hot," author Ruth La Ferla describes 17-year-old Lisa Forero of La Guardia High School of Performing Arts in Manhattan, perched on 4-inch platform boots, playing up her curves in a form-fitting gray spandex dress and sporting outsize gold hoop earrings with pink and cream airbrushed fingertips. Did she fret that her image—that of a saucy bombshell—bordered on self-parody? Not in the least. In fact, dressing up as a familiar stereotype was Ms. Forero's pointedly aggressive way of claiming her Latino heritage.[17]

In "Will the Real Latina Please Stand Up?" *Latina* magazine (July 2002) profiled three nonstereotypical Latina authors to show how, in reality, Hispanic women come packaged in many different shades and sizes. While the public may immediately conjure up images of Cameron Diaz (tall,

blonde, blue-eyed), Salma Hayek (petite, brunette, olive-skinned), or Gina Torres (statuesque, curly haired, dark-skinned), the truth is that Latinas include a broad range of peoples from various ethnicities and nationalities. For example, profiled author Veronica Chambers hails from Panama and may look African American, but she cannot deny her Latin roots. When people see author Michele Serros's straight black hair, prominent nose, and flat face, they automatically assume she's Native American, but she is—as her Latina friends assert—"totally Mexican." For author Rosa Lowinger, her rapid-fire Spanish perplexes most people who'll ask, "What language is that?" When she replies it's Cuban, they look astounded and blurt, "How can you be Cuban with light hair and blue eyes?" She may explain that her grandparents were Eastern European Jews who emigrated to Cuba in the 1920s, but if she detects a racist or stereotypical attitude behind the question, she'll retort, "What, am I not dark enough to call myself *Cubana*?"[18]

Perhaps the most visible and successful Latina actress to emerge in the 1990s and transition into nontraditional, nonstereotypical roles is the multitalented Jennifer Lopez. She not only appeared in a string of box-office hits with some of Hollywood's leading men, but she also topped the music charts with her CDs *On the 6, J.Lo,* and *This Is Me . . . Then.* Born in the Bronx, New York, and of Puerto Rican descent, Lopez got her first big break in 1990 when she won a dance audition that landed her a spot as a Fly Girl on Keenen Ivory Wayans's Fox television series *In Living Color.* She went on to appear in the series *Second Chances* and *Hotel Malibu* (credited on both as Melinda Lopez), the short-lived *South Central,* and the television movie *Nurses on the Line: The Crash of Flight 7* (1993).

In 1995, Lopez made her big-screen debut in *The Money Train* opposite Wesley Snipes and Woody Harrelson, before working with director Gregory Nava in *My Family/Mi Familia* (1995). This led indirectly to the high-profile role of murdered Tejano star Selena Quintanilla in the 1997 biopic *Selena,* which garnered Lopez Golden Globe and MTV Movie Award nominations for "Best Actress." By 2002, Lopez became the first Latina actress to earn $12 million per film, and her long list of movie credits include *Jack* (1996), *Anaconda* (1997), *Out of Sight* (1998), *The Cell* (2000), *The Wedding Planner* (2001), *Angel Eyes* (2001), *Enough* (2002), and *Maid in Manhattan* (2002).[19]

Future roles for Latinas may be best illustrated by actress Salma Hayek, who moved to Los Angeles in 1991 to make movies after being Mexico's most popular soap opera star at age 21 on *Teresa.* After enrolling in a Shakespearean acting class to learn English, she soon found out she did not need it to play the parts she was being offered: extras and maids. Although she eventually landed a recurring role in 1993 as a neighbor on sitcom *The Sinbad Show,* work remained scarce. "I came here and had to start at the bottom," said Hayek. "There were no parts for Latinas. It was very painful, but the hardest part about staying was that I was constantly

offered soaps in Mexico. The temptation to take the work was great. Then I got the part in *Desperado* [1995], and everything changed."[20]

After landing roles in such movies as *Fools Rush In* (1997), *Dogma* (1999), and *Wild Wild West* (1999), she founded her own production company, Ventanarosa (*Pink Window*), and starred in several films the company produced: *No One Writes to the Colonel* (1999), *In the Time of the Butterflies* (2001), and *Frida* (2002)—a film both Madonna and Jennifer Lopez tried to make about the life of the innovative Mexican artist and free thinker, Frida Kahlo, but that Hayek won out with pure passion after a seven-year struggle to produce and star in the film. Her performance in the film earned her an Academy Award nomination. Reflecting on her success, she said, "I used to be a whiner . . . Now, instead of whining that there are no parts for women, no parts for Latinas, I am creating them."[21]

From Geisha Girl to Woman Warrior

Over the past two decades there has been an unusual proliferation of Asian women news anchors in major markets, spurred by Hollywood's stereotypical images and the success enjoyed by such high-profile newscasters as Connie Chung. From portrayals of the submissive, subservient "geisha" girl in such 1950s movies as *Sayonara,* to the Asian woman as an exotic, sexual object in films like *The World of Suzie Wong,* Hollywood has created a favorable perception of the Asian woman as being beautiful, docile, and sensual to the American audience.

Nancy Kwan portrayed Chinese women in the early 1960s movies *The World of Suzie Wong* and *Flower Drum Song.*

Source: © John Springer Collection/CORBIS.

San Francisco news anchor Wendy Tokuda believes the profusion of Asian women newscasters reflects the fascination Americans have with the geisha girl—or Singapore Girl—and is rooted in the experiences U.S. servicemen had with Asian women while overseas in China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and Vietnam. The contact, however, was primarily with prostitutes, "a very select strata of the society overseas, and they bring those images home," says Tokuda. This, in turn, has contributed to—if not created—the "Suzie Wong syndrome," or distinct impressions about the exotic Asian female that still lingers today.[22]

This archetype of the Asian woman is vividly illustrated in a 1979 *Oakland Tribune* feature article titled "East Meets West," in which the author describes a 48-year-old divorcée who found the ultimate gift to the American male in a 23-year-old "Oriental" servant:

> She would be required to be a complete housekeeper. She would prepare meals on the evenings when he dines at home. She would do laundry. She would keep the apartment immaculate because he's a "nutsy clean." . . . Naturally, she would do the grocery shopping and the cooking from a marketing allowance of $90 a week.
>
> And the understanding went beyond that. He liked to be bathed. He told her all of his requirements in advance. And he would like on occasion more than just massage. She understood. And about every 10 days or so he would be entertaining. He likes to give dinner parties for three couples, and the young maid would be expected to prepare and serve, with no indication she was other than hired help. No twinges of jealousy were to cross her eyes; no hints to the lady he'd brought as his date to one of his dinner parties.
>
> "You couldn't believe," he said. "She's only 23, but with the wisdom of a woman much older. That's the Oriental mind. And she doesn't get demanding. She's grateful for what I've given her—her privacy when she wants to go into her own room and shut the door, her $100 a month which she can save, her uniforms which she seems proud to wear. It's working out very well."[23]

While Margaret Cho's sitcom, *All-American Girl,* was one of the first to feature a mostly Asian American cast, the show's portrayal of the culture was very stereotypical due to its mostly White crew.

Source: ©iStockphoto/EdStock.

Asian actresses have also been typecast in roles that perpetuate the Asian mystique. In the 1957 film *Sayonara,* Miyoshi Umeki portrayed the stereotypical coy, subservient geisha, and Nancy Kwan defined the "Suzie Wong" sex-object image with long hair, long legs, and slit dress in the 1960 film *The World of Suzie Wong.* Later, Joan Chen perpetuated these images in her role as the sensual, submissive Asian Pacific woman in the 1986 movie *Tai-Pan.*

Comedienne Margaret Cho's prime-time network comedy, *All-American Girl* (1994), departed from the stereotypical portrayals of Asian females in earlier movies and programs, but her attempt to convey a genuine sense of Asian America within a U.S. television comedy framework was unsuccessful in

the short-lived series. *All-American Girl* featured a predominantly Asian American cast, but its tone of hip-20-something-California-"Valley Girl"-meets-the-Borscht-Belt had mostly White writers and producers. In addition, her TV Asian family was largely parodied, wasting the talents of such accomplished actors as BD Wong. In short, the show revealed to America not an emerging subculture, but rather the watered-down stereotypes of Asian Americans. By 2002, no prime-time network television series with an Asian emphasis had aired since *All-American Girl* was cancelled.[24]

While Asian women have also historically been depicted as dragon ladies, domestic workers, gang molls, and hookers or in subservient, overexoticized images, more contemporary roles for Asian women have launched a new genre that typecasts them as "women warriors." Whether it's Zhang Ziyi performing gravity-defying stunts in the Academy Award–winning *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), Lucy Liu kickboxing as a femme fatale in the 2000 remake of *Charlie's Angels,* or Kelly Hu storming soldiers and tyrants in *The Scorpion King* (2002), a contemporary woman's strength and independence these days is measured by her ability to master her maneuvers in the martial arts. As film critic Leonard Maltin says, images of strong women in the more organic or cerebral sense of the word do not sell tickets; what young women in the audiences today want to see are women kicking butt on screen.[25]

A Shameful Legacy

Entertainment stereotypes of non-Whites in American mass media have historical roots in racist attitudes that existed for various social and political reasons against each of the groups prior to their inclusion in media. The stereotypes were based upon negative prejudicial characteristics that, when compared against the values of the majority White society, were deemed to be innately inferior traits. Because the economic success of mass entertainment media in the United States was predicated upon their ability to meet audience demands, mass support for negative and inferior portrayals of people of color indicates that producers satisfied consumer desires. The stereotypes, then, were representative of popular attitudes.

We have also seen that although wide cultural differences exist among the cultural and racial groups under consideration, their portrayals in American mass media have been remarkably similar and are the result of the attitudinal premise of White intellectual and moral supremacy. The fundamental concepts of racial stereotyping were applied consistently across all platforms of American mass entertainment media. Now, in the second decade of the new century, the technological evolution of media platforms for information and entertainment has broadened the challenge of media practitioners to apply better standards of ethics and accountability

in providing content for a society that continues to become more racially and culturally diverse.

The record shows that the force of demographic change accompanied by the buying power of the diverse racial and cultural marketplace has brought about improvements in the inclusion of a wider array of Americans in media coverage and portrayals. Yet, there remains a lack of racial and gender sensitivity in the new media order that operates in context of what some describe as a social lack of civility in American discourse. That uncivility is too often expressed in terms that reflect racial and cultural intolerance and continues to spread racism across media outlets including blogs, politically charged talk radio, cable TV programs, and independent videos in addition to the "old" media platforms of newspapers, over-the-air commercial radio, television, and general-audience motion pictures. The shameful legacy of marginalization and stereotyping of peoples of color permeated the communications media industry in the United States at the beginning of the 21st century. How these media have reacted to the new multicultural milieu is the subject of the following chapter.

Notes

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6. Libby Lewis, "Racial Constructions and Visual Representations of Blacks in Television News Media," paper presented at the annual Empowering Women of Color Conference, Berkeley, CA, March 2, 2002.

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18. "Will the Real Latina Please Stand Up?," *Latina*, July 2002, 83.

19. *People*, December 30, 2002, 106–107. For more information on Jennifer Lopez see the following websites: www.jenniferlopez.com and www.jennifer lopezonline.com.

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21. Ibid., 9–10.

22. H. Chang, *Asian Americans in the News,* unpublished paper prepared for the honors colloquium at UC Berkeley, 1984.

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