

THE CHARACTER ASSASSINATION OF
BLACK FIGURES IN THE MEDIA

RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY:
TORYN VELLA TISDOM

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Abstract

This study uses framing theory to investigate the portrayal of African-Americans in the mass media and how it influences audiences to hold a negative perception of African-Americans. The “black figure” refers to a central African-American that has been targeted by the media and used to discredit and criminalize their image and character. Central figures that are studied are Fred Hampton, a Black Panther leader and Tupac Shakur, a popular Hip-hop artist and actor. Findings revealed that audiences are aware that the media promotes negative stereotypes of African-Americans, however, they respond negatively to a victim of harsh stereotypes, Tupac Shakur.

Keywords: mass media, framing theory, African-American, image

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Acknowledgement

As a black woman raised by a single black man with two other siblings, I felt obligated to write this thesis. I have watched my household and other households struggle because a system wanted us to be something that were weren't: failures. I thank my father for being the first strong figure I've ever noticed (and still do). My family are my strongest supporters and it's a blessing to have struggled, grown, learned, and succeeded with them.

I want to thank Tupac Shakur for being the soundtrack to our household's lives. Through his lyrics, I realized that Tupac was a very human figure that had both the blessing and curse to express his thoughts through music. I suppose it's easy to call a man like him a contradiction, but I see him as a person taking on waves of life constantly changing. I am hurt how the messages of Tupac Shakur and The Black Panthers have been ignored by the media in favor of their controversial, militant image. The black man will always be scary and animalistic to the media. The black woman will always be a loud, ghetto object to the media. I will be a loud, ghetto object to the media – as long as I stay quiet and not confront them. As the media represents our nation, I must point out that they have the answers wrong and I am not who they think I am. I am strong, abundant, and peaceful...and that must be known.

I also want to thank Dr. Karina Kim for being the mentor of this thesis. Dr. Kim kept me in class to revise this thesis when I was very satisfied with the results. She said, "I know you want to go home, but I also know how passionate you are about this thesis." And I am truly grateful that I was given the opportunity to share this passion when I could have been given a topic that I was very detached from.

This thesis will be very beginning of my life as a filmmaker, who will bring to the world knowledge and truth.

INTRODUCTION

The American mass media have always had a haunting grip on the public's opinion of societal matters. With the mass media's dark history of racism and institutionalized racism being a non-direct but dangerous successor to the aggressive and blatant approach of oppressing minorities, the study of the mass media's portrayal of black figures remains popular and considerable to academic literature.

Institutional racism refers to social institutions and organizations (which may include banks and courts of law) giving negative treatment to a group based on their race. Since this practice is very subtle with its approach, it can be assumed that the mass media uses a similar approach, as institutional racism disguises their racism as rationale, equality-bearing reporting, and decision making. This study seeks to introduce how harmful the media's reporting and representation of black figures are. With the given historical context, such as the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) creating an illegal activity of surveilling and discrediting assertive political organizations that aligned with the civil rights movement, this study observes how higher power enforcements and media organizations influenced the public opinion with sharing negative images and misrepresentation of black figures.

In a 2004 study, Fraley and Roushanzamir (2004) investigated the news concerning the death of Fred Hampton, a young Black Panther leader that challenged racial issues. Their study highlights the general press, notably the *Chicago Tribune*, misrepresenting the Black Panthers as a failing, but small group. Ultimately the "articles simultaneously confirmed the dangerous nature of the Panthers and presented an organization with leadership and membership problems caused by criminal activities" (p.158).

Kara Keeling's (1999) study presented a modern look into the negative portrayal of a popular black figure: her subject being Tupac Shakur, a late Hip-hop artist and actor that achieved fame and death in the 1990s. In particular, Keeling capitalizes on three characteristics that shape Shakur: his image, the Black Panthers, and his controversial music. Keeling (1999) acknowledges that Shakur may be a disappointment as a modern-day successor to the Black Power movement because of his criminal charges and violent lyrics. "The conclusion most often drawn about him in the Tupac discourse (and, by extension, about the generation of which he is symbolic) is that he failed to live up to the potential afford him by the new opportunities open to black people since *the 60s*" (pg. 60). It's a condescending conclusion, at that, as African-Americans were treated as lesser and often targets of the "dangerous black man" narrative (Potts 1997).

The purpose of this study is to address how the mass media uses negative portrayals of black figures to shape audience perception. The media only emphasizes Tupac's image as a "gangsta" rap artist and not as a philosopher that questioned the systematic oppression of African-Americans. "Continuing to frame the Panthers in ways that delegitimated their existence as a political party with a cause, the media connected the early morning raid in Chicago to Hampton's criminal record and nationwide police - Panther clashes" (Fraley & Roushanzamir, p. 158). To expand on Fraley, Roushanzamir, and Keeling's observations on media portrayal of black figures, this study will use the framing theory to confirm if audiences are affected by the media's warped and bias images of black figures. Specifically, my hypothesis will question whether audiences have adopted the media's negative beliefs of black figures.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Black Panthers

December 1969, a twelve-year veteran of the Chicago Police Department, Sergeant Daniel Groth, received a tip that a cache of stolen, illegal weaponry was stored inside the apartment of a Black Panther. Groth was given the go-ahead to plan a raid and a search warrant was issued. Fourteen policemen arrived at the apartment at 4:45 a.m. Nine policemen were stationed outside to prevent anyone from escaping through windows and also to serve as backup snipers. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, Groth announced their presence and forcibly entered the apartment where they “were met with shotgun volley” (Lee and Wiedrich, 1969). The violent exchange resulted in the death of 21-year-old Illinois Black Panther chairman Frank Hampton, who was found unmoving on his bed with a loaded .45 pistol in his hand and a shotgun next to him. Deborah Johnson, Hampton’s 8-month pregnant girlfriend, provided a different story. According to a 1988 interview with Terry Rockefeller (1988), she revealed important details not mentioned in the *Chicago Tribune*. Johnson was in bed with Hampton when the police used unannounced firepower towards their bedroom. “He’s barely alive, he’ll barely make it,” Johnson has heard as she was escorted from the room. “The shooting, I heard some shooting start again. Not much. Just a little shooting, and, um, and someone said, “He’s good and dead now.” Johnson’s quote implies that it was an assassination, which would further the assumption that the *Chicago Tribune* falsely covered the raid incident by only publishing Groth’s account without including any testimonials from Panther witnesses.

Fred Hampton was a charismatic, promising leader of the Black Panther Party at a young age. Hampton was a pre-law student enrolled at Triton Junior College, and yet the *Tribune* dis-educates him as a man apart of a “frightening” political party that housed “secret headquarters”

(Fraleley & Lester-Roushanzamir, 2004). However, the Black Panthers made their activities no secret. The Panthers created the “Ten Point Platform & Program,” a set of demands that listed “decent housing, education, and justice. Point seven reads: “we want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people” (Boykoff & Gies, 2010). They took the initiative into their hands by hosting a free children’s breakfast program and opening free health clinics. Though the mass media has already villainized the Black Panthers as a violent, hate group, they became fascinated with the Black Panthers’ militant image, which subsequently silenced the group’s pleas in favor of analyzing their attire: armed, leather jackets, sunglasses, and black berets; and legally permitted weaponry (Boykoff & Gies, 2010). However, the Black Panthers’ disciplined image was a direct response to the assassination of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., whose non-violent approach to civil rights resulted in a violent end, thus indirectly sending a message that peaceful and passive approach were futile (Boykoff and Gies, 2010). The Panther image, which comprised of poor African-American soldiers, appealed to younger audiences that were eager to continue the civil rights movement. Media reaction was primarily negative, as discourse scholar Michael E. Staub observes: “The Panthers were definitively cast in the folk devil role in the mainstream media — portrayed as a motley crew of unstable, paranoid black juvenile delinquents” (Boykoff & Gies, 2010, p.283). Jane Rhodes (2007, p.89) concluded that “stereotypes about black people were barely hidden, and fear of and disdain for black power were subsumed under a rhetoric of law and order.”

The Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) was initiated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in August 1956. It was intended to eliminate radical political opponents of the United States by use of harassment, exposure, and prosecution. The COINTELPRO project targeted and disrupted domestic political groups through surveillance and infiltration, and most

leftist groups and individuals suspected as subversive were targeted. COINTELPRO agents were instructed by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to “expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, neutralize or otherwise eliminate” leftist group activities and their leaders (Farley, 2008). Notable targets were the Black Panthers, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., who was tagged by the FBI as the “most dangerous Negro” in the United States (Blow, 2013), and Malcolm X.

COINTELPRO was able to maintain public opinion about the existence of democracy in the country, thus hiding the repressive and illegal activities of the operation and successfully weakening the domestic political opposition. The operation controlled audience’s perception of political opponents and radical groups such as the Black Panthers, and by doing so, they made the repression and isolation of the groups legitimate. J. Edgar Hoover famously said in his COINTELPRO report, “Prevent the RISE OF A “MESSIAH” who could unify and electrify, the militant black nationalist movement” (“The FBI Sets Goals for COINTELPRO,” n.d.). The term “messiah” is defined as a leader or savior of a particular group or cause: meaning that a figure must have an expansive presence and charismatic speech. The goal is to prevent these future messiahs from gaining “respectability” by discrediting them to the “negro” and “white community.” Discrediting would mean to harm the character’s reputation, which is a widespread belief held by the public. This goal can only be achieved by seeking the mass media to frame a black figure negatively. If the mass media already has a tainted, racist history against blacks, then it’s possible that the mass media may demonize and stereotype normal black figures with no political agenda: this includes entertainers and unarmed black men.

Framing Theory: The Negative Portrayals of Black Figures

The concept of framing theory implies that people develop a precise conceptualization of an issue. The mass media feeds a conventional expectancy to reshape the audience’s thoughts on

a topic (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Frames form a system, which takes a long-range of effort that has to be built up over time. Because each frame may be masked as everyday reality, it is important to identify how the media portrays black figures. With the influence of the FBI and COINTELPRO, this topic can easily be shaped around the Agenda Setting Theory, the belief that the media actively seeks to change public opinion with their powerful influence. However, because the media may criticize black men considered ordinary and without an agenda of their own, the framing theory is the more appropriate theoretical approach. First, COINTELPRO was the long ranged foundation to the media's racist framing, by discrediting and distorting the black figure's original intent. Second, as the frame is disguised as reality, this influences and changes audience's perception of black figures.

As the media became infatuated with the Black Panther's militia dress attire, Potts claims that society developed ways to profit from the "dangerous black man" or "gangsta" image. Potts (1997) provides a list of marketing products that advertises this newsworthy appearance, which includes malt liquor, clothing, television programs, feature films, and home security. With negative images being promoted on everyday necessities or entertainment, not surprisingly these redundant images are changing and controlling audiences to perceive black figures in similar aggressive approaches. The public representation of black figures has become distorted by the mass media's use of symbols and stereotypes "as a shorthand way of communicating through headlines, characters, and pictures" (Diuguid & Rivers, 2000, p. 122). Diuguid and Rivers (2000) note that the misimpression subconsciously comes to the fore whenever people have to face African-Americans seeking equality demands.

The Newsroom. In a 2013 survey study, The American Society of News Editors (ASNE) reported that 90 percent of newsroom supervisors were white, and only 12.37 percent of

minorities were employed in the newsroom (Gertz, 2015). In 2015, International Business Times (IBT) reported that fewer minorities were getting opportunities to work in the newsroom, and news organizations were lacking in the important diverse voices and representation to report on minority populations (James, 2015). Reporting on black figures without crucial representation implies that the newsroom is reporting as outsiders. Thus they have a limited understanding of black cases and figures.

The Un-American Men. Tupac Shakur was a famed rapper during the 1990s that popularized the Hip-hop subgenre of “gangster rap.” Tupac became one of the music industry’s controversial figures, constantly under the ridicule of the media and whose lyrics have been shamed as misogynistic and violent. The negative viewpoint of Tupac continues to fascinate the media, though the artist passed away in 1996 after sustaining fatal wounds from a drive-by shooting in Las Vegas, with his death highly thought to be gang related. Shakur has become a posthumous meme in pop culture – his tied bandana and motto “THUG LIFE” has constantly been used as an homage, satire, or to deliver a criminalist message. In popular belief, “THUG LIFE” represents a criminal or rebellion. However, Tupac describes his motto on video, which can be accessed through Youtube, as “an acronym for “The Hate U Gave Little Infants ‘F.U.C.K.’ Everybody. Meaning what you feed us as seeds, grows and blows up in your face” (Combs, 2014).

It is not widespread knowledge that Tupac Shakur was born into a family of Black Panthers. Afeni Shakur, his birth mother, was linked to the 1969 Panther 21 incident where twenty-one Black Panther members were accused of coordinating a plan to bomb two police stations in New York City. Afeni had been pregnant with Tupac during this trial, which she served as her own lawyer and acquitted all twenty-one members in 1971 (Keeling, 1999). Tupac

established “THUG LIFE” as a political movement with his step-father and fellow Black Panther, Mutulu Shakur, to help politicize the Bloods and Crips gangs (“Code of THUG LIFE,” n.d.). A “code” of “THUG LIFE” listed 26 requirements that would guide gang members into protecting their community. Specific goals stated, “Harm to children will not be forgiven,” “Senseless brutality and rape must stop,” and “The Boys in Blue don’t run nothing; we do. Control the hood, and make it safe for squares.”

The New York Times published a breaking-news article with the headline “Rapper Charged in Shootings of Off-Duty Officers.” The first two sentences of the article were: “Tupac Shakur, whose rap recordings sketch what he calls the “thug life” of inner-city violence, was charged on Sunday with shooting two off-duty suburban policemen. The Atlanta police said the shooting occurred after two cars carrying Mr. Shakur and his party almost struck the two men and their wives as they crossed a city street early Sunday morning.” Ronald Smothers (1993), the author of the article, proceeded to post lyrics from Tupac’s violent song targeted towards the police titled “Soulja’s Story,” referencing twice “Droppin’ the Cop!” After briefly analyzing the song, Smothers then states that “Many of the details of the incident remained murky” and that witnesses saw the officers draw their guns first. According to Connie Bruck of *The New Yorker* (1997), charges were dropped when it emerged that the policemen had been drinking and had been harassing a group of black male bikers. The guns that the officers used to attack Tupac with “had been seized in a drug bust and then stolen from an evidence locker.” Smothers had begun the article antagonizing Tupac without complete information. *The New Yorker* was the only major magazine and news publisher to report on the full case details. Other major publishers briefly stated that charges were dropped and immediately followed with listing Tupac’s other criminal offenses.

The Impact of the Negative Portrayals of Black Figures on Viewers

The media's misconception of the black figure and negative reports dangerous urban youth and communities results in a continuing fear of African American males, who have been stereotyped by the media as a criminal. The media images of the African-American as being comprised of foul language, poor performance in school, criminal behavior, buffoonish conduct, and bad attitudes are likely the only images many white people will have of African Americans because this country is still very segregated (Diuguid & Rivers, 2000, p. 123). Smiley and Fakunle (2016) hypothesized that black males are suspects in America. By observing how the media shifted from the term "brute" to "thug" implies that negative connotations have a lasting presence in the media and it's hidden as coded language for the racist term "nigger." Like Tupac Shakur, black males that have been victimized by police brutality can be not lamented on without questioning (or mentioning) their criminal history, thus re-establishing the social construction of race. Ramasubramanian's (2007) study suggested that processing implicit stereotypes go beyond an individual's control. Consumers subconsciously process the stereotype with little or no mental effort.

With the media influencing the consumer's social judgments through framing negative images of black figures, the consumer can make judgments on the group without conscious awareness. If the media consumer is conscious of the media's role in shaping social reality, they would less likely be influenced to make social judgments (Ramasubramanian, 2007). However, if the consumer has limited knowledge of black figures (such as lacking awareness of the Black Panthers' "Ten Point Program" or Tupac's political upbringing), then they may subconsciously respond to information negatively, as "the negative images act like chains and shackles holding

African Americans back and making it harder for them to be seen as just as competent and committed as anyone else” (Diuguid & Rivers, 2000, p. 123).

The research question addresses the mass media’s liking for drama and novelty, and deciding how images of black figures should be portrayed.

RQ1: Have the mass media warped the viewer’s perception of black figures by reporting negative images of them?

And finally, because the media often “served to endorse police conduct and justify violence against the Black Panthers” (Brame and Shriver, 2013), this would imply that a higher, racist establishment would have great influence over the mass media to demonize civil rights movements and black figures. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H1: The mass media’s portrayal and reporting of black figures have caused audiences to respond to black figures negatively.

CHAPTER TWO: METHOD

Overview

This audience study used a web-based questionnaire survey method to explore the effects of framing theory and how individuals interpret media texts. This qualitative study focuses on how individuals respond to African-American figures in the media through observing a media text from a major publication. SurveyMonkey, an online survey software, was the ideal platform to host the survey on. Easy distribution from the professional software was expected, offering a variety of “collectors,” such as web links, automatic email, purchase of respondents, social media, embedded survey for website purposes, and manual data entry. With an approaching deadline to have a number of participants complete the survey, SurveyMonkey allowed participants to respond in a secure and quick manner. Participants could also stop the survey at any time and resume their participation later. This allowed the participants to feel less pressured as possible. I will test the following research questions and hypotheses to prove that the negative images the media shares with audiences influence their perception of black figures. First, will participants contradict their answers after responding to the New York Times’ Tupac Shakur article? Second, will African-American participants respond positively to the New York Times’ Tupac Shakur article? I will hypothesize that participants will contradict their answers of noticing mistreatment of black figures in the media after they respond negatively to the New York Times’ Tupac Shakur article. And second, African-American participants will respond more positively than other ethnicities to the New York Times’ Tupac Shakur article.

Procedure

Web-based questionnaire requires a professional, online survey software that creates accessible and easy to use surveys for an unlimited amount of participants. SurveyMonkey

proved to be the most popular survey software. The survey was distributed with a web link, which is a flexible collector for sharing a link via email or social media. First, the web link was distributed through social media platforms Instagram and Facebook. Second, the web link was attached in emails to distribute amongst California State University, Dominguez Hills employees, and students. And third, the web link was briefly promoted on a WordPress blog: The Lost Scripts, a blog that reviews unproduced screenplays. However, because the subject matters were starkly different, the web link was removed.

When clicking on the web link, the participant was immediately taken to the nine-page survey titled “Media View and Perception of the World.” Participants were greeted with a consent form that listed eight objectives the participants must be comfortable with: the purpose of the study, procedures to be followed, discomforts and risks, benefits, duration of survey (which could take up to thirty minutes), statement of confidentiality, right to ask questions, and voluntary participation. After reviewing the consent form carefully, the participant would click the “next” button to respond to the survey.

The first section of the survey provides general questions of their media intake. The second section is a New York Times article published November 2, 1993, that details a violent confrontation between a now-deceased rapper, Tupac Shakur, and two off-duty police officers. Because SurveyMonkey has limitations to how much text could be placed on a page, the article was forced to be cut in half. SurveyMonkey did not permit a web link to the full article to be published on the page. Next, the participants would answer a series of questions about their thoughts on the article’s subject, Tupac Shakur. Participants responded to additional questions that asked if they could identify negative stereotypes in African-Americans in the media. The final section of the survey included general demographic questions.

Ethical Considerations

SurveyMonkey assures that responses will be collected and tracked anonymously. Participants can be assured that their security and privacy concerns are important to the principal investigator and SurveyMonkey. The demographics section asked for general, personal details such as their gender, age, racial/ethnicity, and the highest level of education. However, because *The New York Times* article on Tupac Shakur could not be posted to its full length, the response of participants may not be accurate. The survey may also harm Tupac Shakur's character and the audience's knowledge of him since the article gives a very brief history on him. Audiences may feel that they have a complete understanding of his character and will not pursue his other work which may not be entirely negative.

Measurements

The 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was the primary measurement device used in the survey.

Independent variables.

Demographics. Participants were asked to report their age and ethnicity. These traits are important when responding to an article about the controversial, 1990s Hip-hop artist, Tupac Shakur.

Dependent variables.

Tupac Shakur. After reading the New York Times article on Tupac Shakur, participants were asked a series of single-row 5-point Likert scale questions to answer how they felt about Tupac Shakur. Questions asked if he was the "primary assaulter," "displayed criminal behavior," "committed an act of self-defense," and if participants had a "complete

understanding” of Tupac after reading the article. Participants were then asked to use the 5-point Likert scale if they found him individually “immoral,” “bad,” and “dangerous.”

Additional Questions. Again, using the single-row 5-point Likert scale, participants were asked if they were aware of negative stereotypes associated with African-Americans, and if they ever consumed media that promoted the negative stereotypes. Last, they were asked if they believed that negative stereotypes, in general, existed in both past and present media.

General media use. The 5-point Likert scale rated the extent of the participant’s media intake and their common purposes for consumption. After choosing the primary platform they consumed the most in daily life, participants ranked their purpose for consumption, choices being: entertainment, education, political news, societal issues, and sports.

CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to test whether audiences responded to black figures in the media negatively. Because the mass media frames African-Americans to invoke a negative perception, the study seeks to find the audiences’ attitudes and whether they are attentive of racial stereotyping and negative imagery.

The survey procedure resulted in 168 participants. Of these, 141 participants completed the full survey, so these select few will be analyzed. Asian/Pacific Islanders were the most to respond to the survey at 36.88%. In second and third place respectively, White/Caucasian, 36.99% and African-American, 16.31%. Hispanics and Native Americans were equally 5.67% and Other at 4.46%. 58.16% of respondents were male, and 41.84% female. Displayed in the results section, the participants’ choice of media consumption is reported as general media use.

General Media Use

Figure 1: *Descriptive Analysis of Media Consumed the Most in Daily Life*

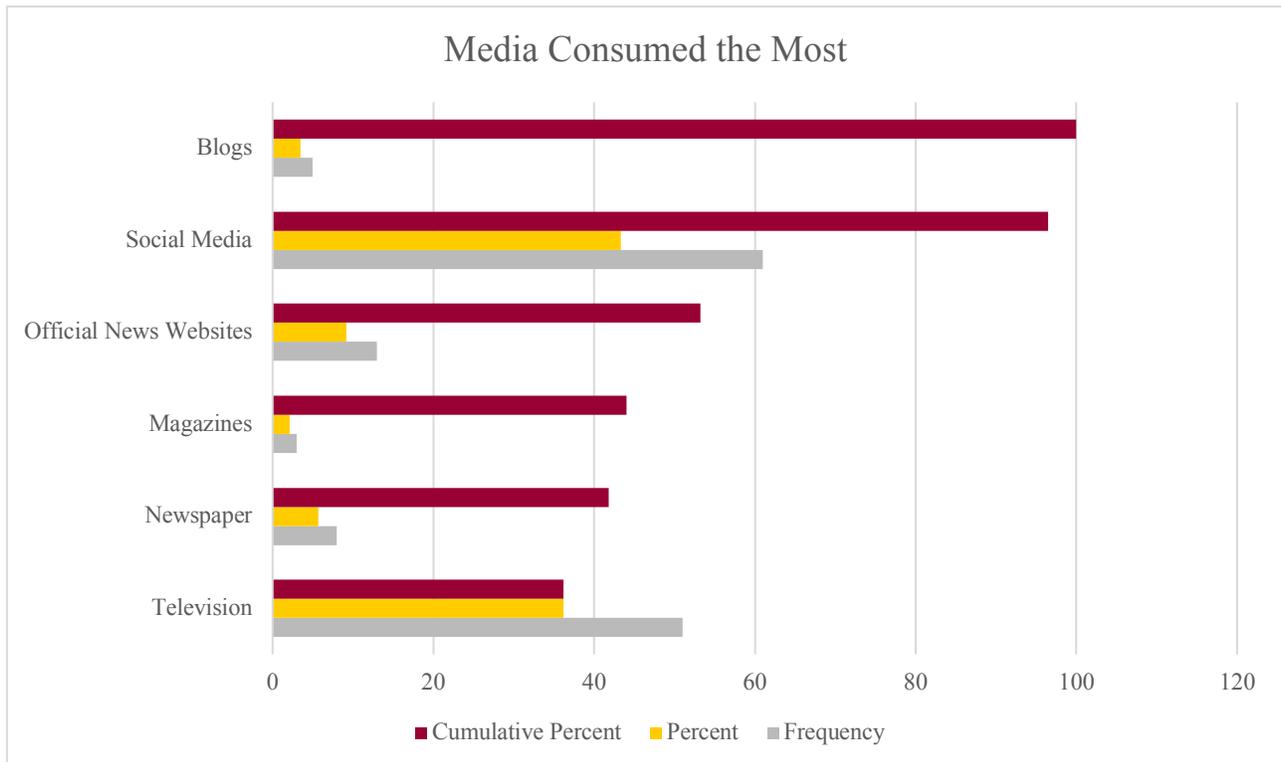


Table 1: *Descriptive Analysis of Media Consumed the Most in Daily Life*

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Television | 51 | 36.2 | 36.2 | 36.2 |
| | Newspaper | 8 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 41.8 |
| | Magazines | 3 | 2.1 | 2.1 | 44.0 |
| | Official News Websites | 13 | 9.2 | 9.2 | 53.2 |
| | Social Media | 61 | 43.3 | 43.3 | 96.5 |
| | Blogs | 5 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 141 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

As shown in Table and Figure 1 that details the frequency of media consumption, social media has the highest number of news consumption with 61 (43.3%) of respondents agreeing that social media is their best way of consuming news. Television has 51 (36.2%) respondents, and 13 (9.2%) respondents claimed official news websites (CNN, MSN, etc.) to be their primary source, 8 (5.7%) respondents consume news through newspapers, 5 (3.5%) respondents uses blogs and last, 3 (2.1%) respondents claimed that magazine is their method of consumption. From the results above, it can be concluded that the majority of the respondents uses social media as their primary source.

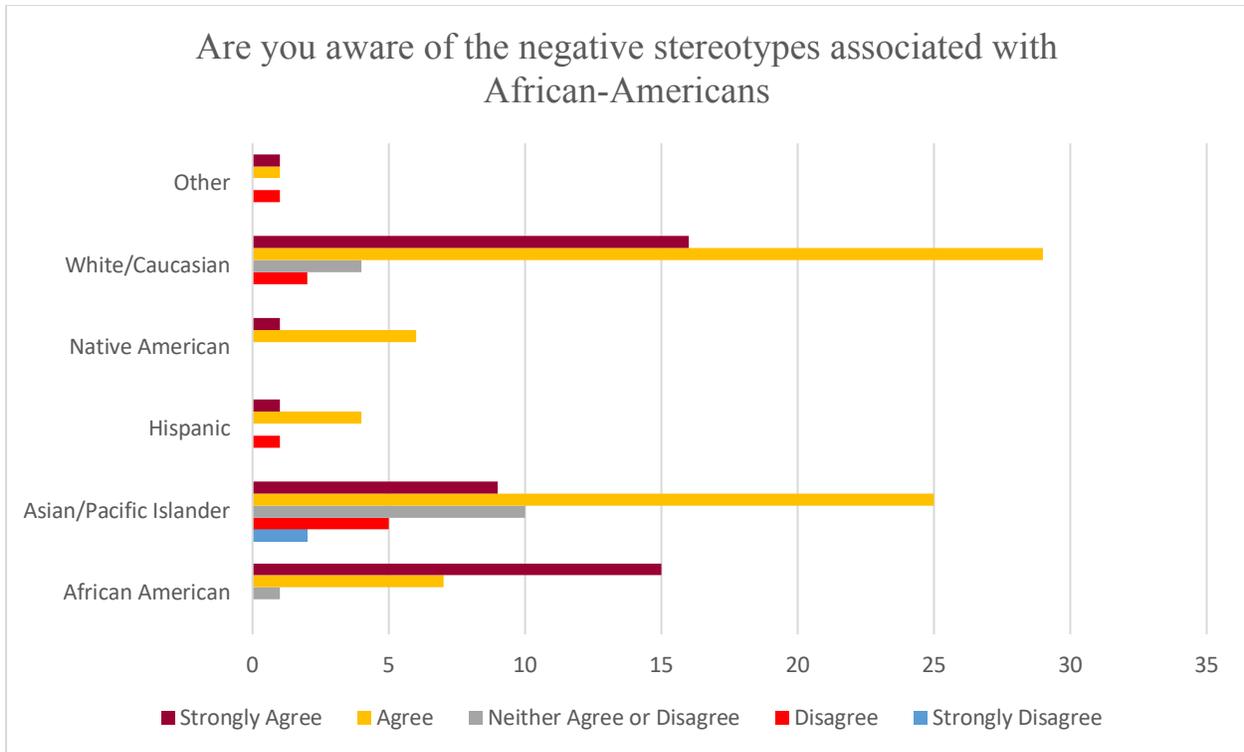
Table 2: *Bivariate Correlations of How People Are Portrayed in the Media (and Are Aware)*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|--------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. Entertainment | 1 | .323** | .252** | .331** | .258** | .099 |
| 2. Education | .323** | 1 | .390** | .410** | .237** | .051 |
| 3. Political Issues | .252** | .390** | 1 | .696** | .221** | -.001 |
| 4. Societal Issues | .331** | .410** | .696** | 1 | .217** | -.039 |
| 5. Sports | .258** | .237** | .221** | .217** | 1 | -2.36** |
| 6. Negative Stereotypes | .099 | .051 | -.001 | -.039 | -2.36** | 1 |

As noted in Table 2: Correlation, results show that $p=0.241$, $r=0.099$ means that there is no statistically significant relationship between how media portrayed and reported about African-Americans through entertainment news and audience responded negatively to African-Americans but $r=0.099$ means that portrayal and mass media report increase how audience respond negatively to African-Americans by 0.099.

From the table above, results show that $p=0.547$, $r=0.051$ means that there is no statistically significant relationship between how media portrayed and reported about African-Americans through education news and the audience responded negatively to African-Americans. However, $r=0.051$ says that portrayal and mass media report increase how audience respond negatively to African-Americans by 0.051. $P=0.994$, $r=-0.001$ means that there is no statistically significant relationship between how media portrayed and reported about African-Americans through societal news and audience responded negatively to African-Americans but $r=-0.001$ means that portrayal and mass media report decreases how audience respond negatively to African-Americans by 0.001. In addition, results also show that $p=0.643$, $r=-0.039$, meaning that there is no statistically significant relationship between how media portrayed and reported about African-Americans through entertainment news and audience responded negatively to African-Americans, however, $r=-0.039$ means that portrayal and mass media report decreases how audience respond negatively to African Americans by 0.039. Results show that $p=0.003$, $r=-0.236$, meaning that there is statistically significant relationship between how media portrayed and reported about African-Americans through entertainment news and audience responded negatively to African-Americans but $r=-0.236$ means that portrayal and mass media report decreases how audience respond negatively to African-Americans by 0.236.

Figure 2: *Aware of Negative Stereotypes Associate with African-Americans*



Results indicate that most of the African-Americans strongly believe that they are aware of the negative stereotypes associated with African-Americans. Similarly, most Asian/Pacific Islander and White/Caucasian respondents also are aware of these stereotypes.

Tupac Shakur

In Table 3, respondents were required to respond to an article by the *New York Times* that was framed to portray Tupac Shakur’s act of self-defense against two office-duty police officers as thug-like behavior. After thoroughly reading the article, 43% of respondents believed that Tupac Shakur was the primary assaulter, whereas 57% believed Tupac Shakur was not the primary assaulter. Almost 57% respondents believe Tupac Shakur displayed criminal behavior. 39% respondents believed that Tupac Shakur committed an act of self-defense. Only nearly 40% respondents think they have a complete understanding of Tupac Shakur.

Table 3: *Bivariate Correlation on the Reactions to Tupac Shakur*

| Do you believe that Tupac Shakur was the primary assaulter? | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|--------------------------------------|-----------|---------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 14 | 9.9 | 9.9 | 9.9 |
| | Disagree | 22 | 15.6 | 15.6 | 25.5 |
| | Neither Agree or Disagree | 44 | 31.2 | 31.2 | 56.7 |
| | Agree | 52 | 36.9 | 36.9 | 93.6 |
| | Strongly Agree | 9 | 6.4 | 6.4 | 100.0 |
| Do you believe that Tupac Shakur displayed criminal behavior? | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 9 | 6.4 | 6.4 | 6.4 |
| | Disagree | 20 | 14.2 | 14.2 | 20.6 |
| | Neither Agree or Disagree | 31 | 22.0 | 22.0 | 42.6 |
| | Agree | 60 | 42.6 | 42.6 | 85.1 |
| | Strongly Agree | 21 | 14.9 | 14.9 | 100.0 |
| Do you believe that Tupac Shakur committed an act of self-defense? | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 7 | 5.0 | 5.0 | 5.0 |
| | Disagree | 25 | 17.7 | 17.7 | 22.7 |
| | Neither Agree or Disagree | 53 | 37.6 | 37.6 | 60.3 |
| | Agree | 52 | 36.9 | 36.9 | 97.2 |
| | Strongly Agree | 4 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 100.0 |
| Do you believe that you have a complete understanding of Tupac Shakur? | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 12 | 8.5 | 8.5 | 8.5 |
| | Disagree | 37 | 26.2 | 26.2 | 34.8 |
| | Neither Agree or Disagree | 34 | 24.1 | 24.1 | 58.9 |
| | Agree | 47 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 92.2 |
| | Strongly Agree | 11 | 7.8 | 7.8 | 100.0 |

Table 4 includes responses judging Shakur’s character. Nearly 36% believed that Shakur was immoral. 38% respondents believed that Shakur was bad. Nearly 53% respondents believed Shakur was dangerous. With “neither agree or disagree” being the highest scored option and with 33% of respondents agreeing that they have a complete understanding of Shakur, the hypothesis: the mass media’s portrayal and reporting of African Americans have caused audiences to respond negatively to African Americans is true and accepted.

Table 4: *Bivariate Correlation on Judgments of Tupac Shakur*

| Do you believe Tupac Shakur was immoral? | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 9 | 6.4 | 6.5 | 6.5 |
| | Disagree | 33 | 23.4 | 23.7 | 30.2 |
| | Neither Agree or Disagree | 47 | 33.3 | 33.8 | 64.0 |
| | Agree | 36 | 25.5 | 25.9 | 89.9 |
| | Strongly Agree | 14 | 9.9 | 10.1 | 100.0 |
| Do you believe Tupac Shakur was bad? | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 9 | 6.4 | 6.4 | 6.4 |
| | Disagree | 31 | 22.0 | 22.1 | 28.6 |
| | Neither Agree or Disagree | 46 | 32.6 | 32.9 | 61.4 |
| | Agree | 39 | 27.7 | 27.9 | 89.3 |
| | Strongly Agree | 15 | 10.6 | 10.7 | 100.0 |
| Do you believe Tupac Shakur was dangerous? | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 12 | 8.5 | 8.6 | 8.6 |
| | Disagree | 23 | 16.3 | 16.4 | 25.0 |
| | Neither Agree or Disagree | 31 | 22.0 | 22.1 | 47.1 |
| | Agree | 51 | 36.2 | 36.4 | 83.6 |
| | Strongly Agree | 23 | 16.3 | 16.4 | 100.0 |

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

This study found that the exposure to negatively framed reports on black figures causes audiences to respond negatively to them. The study's new findings shed light on how the media is consumed for entertainment and societal purposes, and how the frame of the stories with black figures as the primary subject affects fair character representation.

Results showed that media consumed most in daily life is social media and television, as this would mean that audiences accustomed to social media are consuming different media messages: auditory (podcast, music), visual (video), and written (articles, newspapers, magazines). The common purpose for consuming media use was entertainment and societal news (discussion of issues that plagues a representative group of people within a society), where likewise, they were likely to pay attention to the portrayal of people. Social media is open to little restraint of speech and link to news (including fake), and television is still popular among the masses with no limit to age groups. All respondents consumed an average of six hours of media on a typical weekday, thus allowing the framing theory to be effective through accessibility and a given consideration of information being stored in memory.

In response to *The New York Times* article, "Rapper Charged in Shooting of Off-Duty Officers," respondents believed that Shakur was the primary assaulter, meaning that he initiated or out powered the two off-duty officers in gun exchange. Naturally, respondents also believed that Shakur displayed criminal behavior, and whether he was engaging in the act of self-defense left respondents with mixed feelings. Importantly, most respondents felt that they had a complete understanding of Shakur. The *New York Times* article was framed in order: announce incident, describe Tupac's negative lyrics regarding police officers, establish that details are "murky" and witnesses claimed that police officers initiated conflict, then list minor biography detailing

Shakur's accomplishments as an actor. As most audiences voted that they have a complete understanding of Tupac Shakur's character, this concludes that negatively framed black figures have caused audiences to respond negatively to them.

Theoretical Implications

Previous studies by Potts (1997) suggest that the media uses misrepresentations of African-Americans is caused by the sensational media portraying African-American men as an endangering society. One possible interpretation of the findings is that respondents linked Shakur's career as a Hip-hop artist whose lyrics "Droppin the Cops" illustrated violent acts against the law enforcement, with being a criminal. Respondents could have likely assumed that Shakur was a dangerous figure, and that race likely had nothing to do with it. The headline *Rapper Charged in Shooting of Off-Duty Officers* feeds into the negative image of Hip-hop artists being dangerous and thuggish, which likely caught the attention and stored into the memory of respondents. On the contrary, this would mean that respondents proceeded to ignore the remaining details of the article, focusing on the attentive and magnified details of his criminal-like image and gangster image.

Practical Implications

Results from the study showed that reactions to Tupac Shakur had been negative, though most respondents claimed that they were aware of negative stereotypes associated with African-Americans. Most respondents agreed that they had a complete understanding of Shakur, and proceeded to rank whether they believed him to be immoral, bad, and dangerous. Results showed that respondents agreed with all three options. Thus, it could be noted that a negatively framed article could change audience perception of a black figure.

The “neither disagree or agree” option, which serves as a “neutral middle” response, was the most popular vote of choice when reacting to the New York Times article and Shakur. Interestingly, Baka and Friggou (2012) argues that this option is treated similarly to “no opinion,” mixed feelings, or indecisiveness. An “I don’t know” option would have lowered the neutral responses, and the additional questions proved that respondents were attentive to negative stereotypes. However, responses to the additional questions, which were asked after respondents judged Shakur’s character, contradicted answers to the New York Times article and Shakur. It could be assumed that respondents had mixed feelings towards Shakur, though most leaned towards negative judgment since the “agree” option was the second most popular vote of choice. This could also mean that participants, who were mostly Asian/Pacific Islander and White/Caucasian, are unaware of Shakur. However, it should be noted that audiences were expected not to hold any biases, so those unaware of Shakur answered honestly, as intended.

Limitations

This study suffers from some limitations, one of which was The New York Times article, *Rapper Charged in Shooting of Off-Duty Officers*, presented to respondents. Due to SurveyMonkey’s limitations on the amount of text that could be published in the survey, the article was forced to be cut in half. The 1014 worded article was reduced to 472 words. No hyperlink was provided to the complete article since SurveyMonkey disallowed hyperlinks to official off-site websites. While inserting a full hyperlink would have been the more ethical choice, respondents would likely not seek to visit an off-site link that would distract their survey time, as the informed consent form promised that the survey should take no more than 30 minutes to complete.

The study also failed to provide any examples of African-American women being misrepresented by the media. As African-American men are portrayed by the media as “dangerous” and “thuggish,” African-American women as sexual objects and subordinate to aggressive males. This study only pursued black figures, most who were men: Fred Hampton and Tupac Shakur, who might be presumed as a controversial figure that could spark debate on whether their character was violent or immoral. However, this study had debunked such debate, since the media sensationalized their persona and image as aggressive and negative.

There have been countless studies on the portrayal of African-American women, yet most are found to be central to topics about music videos. Future research should include an African-American woman as an example with Hampton and Shakur, which could also determine if respondents are swayed by gender and will react differently to African-American males and females.

For future research, respondents should be expected to complete a survey with the duration longer than an hour, which would give time to read complete articles and answer additional framing questions, now including African-American women. Research can also be expanded to compare the portrayal of black figures with white/Caucasian figures, such as observing article headlines and structure. Also, it should be noted that framing theory may take effect on the consumer subconsciously (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Pointing out the contradicting results of the respondents’ negative attitude towards Tupac Shakur and their knowledge of negative stereotypes in the media could attribute to individuals basing their opinions without conscious deliberation. An extended study may evoke some difficulty in testing. However, respondents were clearly affected by framing theory working subconsciously, and pointing out that black figures are misrepresented can only make the media better.

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4. On a typical WEEKDAY, how many hours you spend consuming media? _____ hours.

Article Part I: Please read the following New York Times article to its full length carefully. You will be asked a series a questions regarding the article after you are done.

The complete article can be found on the official New York Times website.

Rapper Charged in Shootings of Off-Duty Officers

By RONALD SMOTHERS

ATLANTA, Nov. 1— Tupac Shakur, whose rap recordings sketch what he calls the "thug life" of inner-city violence, was charged on Sunday with shooting two off-duty suburban policemen.

The Atlanta police said the shooting occurred after two cars carrying Mr. Shakur and his party almost struck the two men and their wives as they crossed a city street early Sunday morning.

The 22-year-old performer, who lives in California but was in town to perform at a local college, was arrested at his hotel shortly after the shooting. He was charged with two counts of aggravated assault and released this morning on \$55,059 bond until a Dec. 1 hearing to determine if the case will be sent to a grand jury.

The two officers were released today from Grady Hospital here; one was wounded in the abdomen, the other was in the buttocks. 'Droppin' the Cop!'

Some of Mr. Shakur's best-known lyrics describe young black men as targets of police violence and discuss gang members shooting police officers.

"Drop them or let them drop you?" one lyric asks on the 1991 album "2pacalypse Now." "I choose droppin' the cop!"

Vice President Dan Quayle assailed the album and called on record stores to stop selling it.

Kenneth Ellis, Mr. Shakur's lawyer, said that it appeared from investigators' descriptions of the incident that the two officers started whatever gun play occurred.

"They have a person on whom they can lay a case initially and it may sound good because of what my client is identified with," he said. "But when you look at the bare facts, the only crime appears to be the actions of these two officers."

Many of the details of the incident remained murky today, said police officials. Capt. Herb Carson of the Atlanta Police Department's homicide division, which is investigating the

case, said that so far the police were relying on the accounts of unnamed witnesses. Who Shot First?

According to some of those accounts, it was one of the officers who first drew and possibly fired a gun, although no weapons have been recovered.

In the last year Mr. Shakur's run-ins with the police have resulted in his filing a \$10 million brutality suit in Oakland, Calif.; an arrest in Los Angeles last March on charges, later dismissed, that he assaulted a limousine driver, and accusations still under investigation in Los Angeles that he and others beat up a film director.

He is the son of Afeni Shakur, who in the early 70's was among the New York 21, a group of Black Panthers accused of plotting bombings in New York; all were acquitted. Ms. Shakur was released from jail when she was eight months' pregnant with Tupac. This background figures prominently in his press packet and his publicist, Taliba Mbonisi, says Tupac Shakur's "revolutionary credentials are in his blood."

Article Part II: After reading the article, please answer honestly your thoughts on the article's subject, Tupac Shakur.

5. Do you believe that Tupac Shakur was the primary assaulter?

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Disagree or Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

6. Do you believe that Tupac Shakur displayed criminal behavior?

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Disagree or Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

7. Do you believe that Tupac Shakur committed an act of self-defense?

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Disagree or Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|

8. Do you believe that you have a complete understanding of Tupac Shakur?

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Disagree or Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

9. Please SELECT how you feel about Tupac Shakur.

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Strongly disagree | | | | | | | Strongly agree |
| Immoral | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Bad | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Dangerous | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Societal Issues | <input type="checkbox"/> |

10. Are you aware of the negative stereotypes associated with African-Americans?

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Disagree or Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

11. Have you ever viewed a news broadcast that promoted negative stereotypes of African-Americans?

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Disagree or Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

12. Have you ever read a magazine, newspaper, or news website that promoted negative stereotypes of African-Americans?

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Disagree or Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

13. Do you believe that negative stereotypes exist in today's media?

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Disagree or Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

14. Do you believe that negative stereotypes have existed in past media?

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Disagree or Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Demographics

15. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

16. What is your age? _____

17. Which of the following best describes your racial/ethnic group or groups? (Please check all that apply)

- African American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Hispanic

- Native American
- White/Caucasian
- Other

18. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

- Some high school
- High school degree or GED equivalent
- Some college
- 2-Year college degree (A.A., A.S., or equivalent) or vocational certification
- 4-Year college degree (B.A., B.S., or equivalent)
- Some graduate or professional school
- Graduate or professional degree (M.A., Ph.D., J.D., M.D. or equivalent)
- I prefer not to answer this question

19. How long did it take you to complete this survey? _____

Thank you for your participation!

Recruitment Message

To Whom It May Concern -

I am a senior student conducting research at California State University, Dominguez Hills. Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

The purpose of this research study is to explore how audiences respond to African-Americans in the media. If you would like to participate in the study, your participation would involve filling out the attached questionnaire about your opinions about black figures and history.

Neither your name nor your user ID will not be associated with any of your responses. This questionnaire should take you no longer than 30 minutes to complete.

If you are interested in participating in the study, you can fill out the consent form for the study and the questionnaire. You *must* be 18 older in order to participate in research.

Once again, thank you for considering participation in the study.

If you have any additional questions about this study, please contact Toryn Tisdom, a senior student in the Department of communications at California State University, Dominguez Hills. My e-mail address is ttisdom@csudh.edu.

Sincerely,

Toryn Tisdom

Informed Consent Form

California State University Dominguez Hills

Title of Project: Media View and Perception of the World

Principal Investigator: Toryn V. Tisdom
1000 E. Victoria Street, Carson, CA 90747
ttisdom@csudh.edu

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to determine how African-Americans are portrayed in the media.
2. Procedures to be followed: You will be organized to discuss your experience and opinions about African-Americans in the media.
3. Discomforts and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.
4. Benefits: There are some potential benefits to participation. You may be informed or inspired to seek out African-American history and icons of the culture.
5. Duration: It will take up to 30 minutes to complete the study.
6. Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation in this study is confidential. If this research is published, no information that would identify you will be written.
7. Right to Ask Questions: You can ask questions about this research. Contact Toryn V. Tisdom at ttisdom@csudh.edu with questions. You can also call this number if you have concerns or complaints about this research, or if you feel that you have been harmed by this study.
8. Voluntary Participation: You do not have to participate in this research. You can end your participation at any time by telling the person in charge. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

Clicking the “Next” button below indicates that you are 18 years of age or older, and indicates your consent to participate in this survey.