

Criminalized Representations of the Black Body and how they Impact Mass Incarceration

Areyana Proctor, Pr. Angie Chuang

University of Colorado, Boulder, USA

Abstract

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the entire world. A disproportionate number of people within our prisons are people of color. Historically, media images of people of color, and Black people, in particular, have been criminalized. Research has well established these negative historical and current criminalized images within the mass media. These criminalized messages can and have reshaped laws in society. These criminalized messages have been revitalized in new landscapes that continue to conceptualize Black bodies as sites of social control. The prior research that I have analyzed establishes the history of racial control in the United States through various means such as slavery and mass incarceration, the continuous criminalization of the Black body through mediated images, and the connection of the two. For this project, I plan to examine criminalized representations within select pieces of historical and current forms of media, including films, tv shows, and news reports. Through exploring specific examples of Black representation, I will examine whether or not they criminalize the Black body, and explore the question of how this may connect to mass incarceration. This research will add to the overall body of research that suggests mass incarceration is a form of social and racial control, and that the media has been a contributing force. These findings will be developed into a short film. This film will include my analysis of the specific mediated images, along with expert and professional interviews, and images that highlight the pervasiveness of the carceral state. This overall project will ultimately highlight these criminalized representations, their connection to mass incarceration, how this connects to a larger racial project within the United States, and how the media can move forward with improved representation.

Keywords: media representation, carcerality, technology, mass media, mass incarceration, prison-industrial complex, systemic racism

Introduction

According to the [World Prison Brief](#), the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the entire world. A [report](#) done by The Sentencing Project informs us that Black Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at nearly 5 times the rate of white Americans, despite only making up about 13% of the population. Why is this? There are two lines of thought that can emerge from this issue. Some may argue that Black people commit more crimes because they are culturally more prone to violence, therefore the discrepancy is excused. The flip side to this is that there are a mix and variety of socioeconomic factors that have led to these racial disparities and a societal proclivity towards incarceration rather than rehabilitation. Some of these factors

4th WORLD CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

18-20 March 2022 Prague, Czech Republic



include schooling environments, home environments, economic level, friend and family supports, and more. I am arguing for the latter of the two schools of thought.

I choose the institution of mass media as my factor to examine because of its past and future increasing prevalence within our society, especially in regards to technological advances that extend beyond our television screens. Criminalized and invisible representation is something that I have experienced and witnessed throughout my entire life. Past research has highlighted the impacts of these mediated images on our brains and sociological decisions. Despite this, I feel as if more research is needed to understand the direct link and connection between these criminalized and negative images and the rise in mass incarceration.

In addition, the prison landscape that exists in our country is one that was not created for the means of combating “crime”, but for social and racial control. The Prison Industrial Complex, which is the use of the prison population as a profit model for businesses and companies, is carrying out this job very well.

Despite there being a variety of socioeconomic factors that have led to both the huge expansion of incarcerated individuals, and the discrepancy of those incarcerated individuals being Black, the factor that I choose to analyze in this paper is criminalized images of Black people within the mass media. There are a multitude of groups of people, other than Black people, that are impacted by this system. However, my focus on the Black population stems from my own personal connection and encounters with the pervasiveness of this system, as well as the historical and specific anti-Black racism within our country that has been a factor of this corrupted system.

While I have never had a direct encounter with a prison, I have felt their impact within my own community. Peers and family members that I know have either died as a result of violence in our communities, or are currently or have been incarcerated in some capacity. Moreover, the research that I plan to conduct will analyze criminalized representations of Black people and culture within the media, which has had direct impacts on me and the ways in which I, my friends and my family are perceived and shaped within society. So much of this has also impacted my own personal self-esteem and perception of myself and my ethnicity, and has at times set me back socially from other people. The influence that these images have on society are immense. There is a constant catch-up that is required of people that are identified as Black within the United States. When an individual exceeds the barriers that are placed before them, they are regarded as exceptional. There is rarely ever an effort to critique the social structures that created such a disparity to begin with.

Mass media is a social structure within our current environment. It is shaped by and has shaped so much of how we operate today. This includes a variety of technologies that we use to communicate and disseminate information. So many different forms and types of media have played into the same social structures that have subjugated groups of people since the formation of the United States. In order to understand the current problem of mass incarceration in the United States, which is the primary form of punishment for perceived crimes, and the disproportionate amount of Black people that have been enveloped into that system, it is important to understand the historical racial project that has defined the United States as well

4th WORLD CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

18-20 March 2022 Prague, Czech Republic



and how they are interlinked. “There have been different race projects associated with traditional racism, including Jim Crow and segregation.” (Zamudio & Rios, pg. 486, 2006). Then, so much of why the United States would turn to such drastic and dehumanizing measures begins to make sense.

When I use the terms racial and social project, I refer to the ways in which the United States has systematically, whether through cultural standards or policies, set in place different forms of control that racialize and subjugate certain groups of people and caste them into a permanent state of under-privilege. These are defined as intentional efforts to racialize and reinforce meanings among arbitrary social and racial lines that have substantial impacts on those groups of people. Some of these iterations include the movement of Black bodies across the sea and exploitation of them in chattel slavery, the legal segregation of the Jim Crow south, and the lack of resources given to poor communities of color currently.

I want to analyze the phenomenon of mass incarceration and the criminalization of Black bodies in contemporary society. I will examine the feedback loop that is created by the criminalization of the Black body. This loop informs the perspective that audience members may develop and then feeds back into the images of criminality that continue to be recycled in the media. In order to do this, I seek to explore the underpinnings of the racial formations that produce images of criminality. These formations have sprung from the need to justify the usage of Black bodies as a means of profit and social control. Understanding the social factors that led to the racial power imbalance that exists today will provide some important context and understanding for the ways in which the criminalization of the Black body is necessary for those in power. This also makes it all the more plausible that these criminalized representations are still embedded into our society. Media has been an important tool for disseminating these messages, so I want to explore these racial formations through the lens of the media.

In addition, I want to understand how Black media practitioners have shaped their work around providing an alternative to these narratives and what this says about how representation should be. This connects to the issue of mass incarceration and media representation’s linkage to it. A historical analysis will be important because of the historical implications of prior representations of people of color. They have impacted our modern understanding of and creation of mediated images.

The overall question of this research project is whether or not, and to what degree, do criminalized representations of the past and present impact the increase and sustainability of mass incarceration? The connecting question is how can we pull from positive, counteracting instances of these negative messages to create more positive, revolutionary images that negate these effects of mass incarceration and push us towards a more positive, afro-futuristic, free society?

Literature Review

4th WORLD CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

18-20 March 2022 Prague, Czech Republic



History of Racial Control in the United States

In order to understand the basis of incarceration and criminalized images, we can start by looking at the ways in which the United States has a history of racial control for the purpose of its racial projects. Race has not always been a formerly bound concept. The idea of race began to form alongside capitalistic economic growth as a way of justifying the exploitation of human bodies. “The deep interconnection between the development of the modern world system - of capitalism, seaborne empire, and slavery - and the exfoliation of a worldwide process of racialization is not in doubt.” (Winant, pg. 170, 2000). Winant introduces the racial formation theory, which examines the meaning of race and the content of racial identities as unstable and politically contested. This essentially groups various ethnic groups around the world into racial hierarchies and groupings. The mass grouping of people into categorical races created the correlation between racism and capitalism and highlights the ways in which those two systems and ideologies are interlinked.

It is important to note that, before the beginning of racialized slavery, different forms of slavery existed in other countries across time and history. However, white indentured servants and Black slaves began to notice their subjugated and dehumanized status. Revolts were attempted. The white, plantation colonizers of the time saw the need to establish more of a hierarchy in society in order to reduce the risks of revolutionary backlash from the masses. Thus, slavery became racialized. This has all played into a larger social project, and has been embedded into the actual creation and formation of the United States. This racial project has

been reconstructed within various time periods and decades in the United States. It has not gone away. It is evident when looking at the beginning of America and examining the ways in which chattel slavery was turned into a racialized enterprise with Black people cast as less than and non-human. It shifted into the end of slavery and the reconstruction era, where Black development and progress was continuously stunted through various act of violence codified by the law. The Jim Crow era came, and the legalized segregation and mistreatment of the entire population of Black people was seen as necessary. The lingering hatred that were the stains of America’s troubling past with racialized slavery were evident then, and still continue to be evident today.

“The race project of the post-Civil Rights era largely depends on promoting a

‘color-blind’ discourse to denounce the traditional racism of the past, on one hand, while denying that traditional racism continues in the modern era to affect structural inequality” (Zamudio & Rios, pg. 484, 2006). Many people see and believe that we have moved into a more colorblind era, but so much research says and shows the opposite. So much of the explicit racial commands and laws have simply become more hidden, and thus more perfected. “It is under the guise of supporting liberal principles of equality and merit that the most reprehensible stereotypes and dehumanizing ideologies about people of color are disseminated.” (Zamudio & Rios, pg. 497, 2006). We are able to project ourselves as a democratic, free nation that respects all people, while continuing to condemn thousands of people behind bars while profiting off of their labor. The race project of the traditional era developed grotesque stereotypes of people of color that continue to underlie much of the discourse of the present in one form or another. Stereotypes about groups serve to erase individuality and ultimately

4th WORLD CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

18-20 March 2022 Prague, Czech Republic



dehumanize its victims. It is a form of othering and it is the outcome of hundreds of years of traditional

racism. Stereotyping and the dehumanization it creates often precede violence. For example, in our society, we have often associated people of color with criminality. This stereotypical relationship has allowed a system of injustice to penalize people of color at far greater rates than whites. From racial profiling to the death penalty, people of color, particularly black and brown men, are at far greater risk than the general population to be victims of institutional violence. And despite the evidence, many continue to stereotype people of color in the most grotesque ways. (Zamudio & Rios, pg. 491, 2006). This is the exact same as we did in the days of slavery. All of this is a part of a larger racial project for social control and profit. Mass incarceration is one of the newest iterations of this centuries long project.

Mass Incarceration is a form of Social Control

The incarceration model in our country is not one that is made for the actual betterment of society. People are kept in small cells, locked behind cages, and only let out when they adhere to the rules good enough. They must perform free or cheap labor in order to continue to provide for the economy that they cannot participate in. These are the unquestioned ways that criminality, revenge, and incarceration is shaped within the United States. So much of the labor that prison inmates perform is wrapped into the economic system that all people use and benefit from today, from clothing brands to furniture brands and more. Prisons are a business. From the amount that inmates have to pay through phone services in order to call their families, through the commissary and money they have to pay in order to get some decent food and snacks while they are in jail. The ways in which prisons are created are remnants of the same form of social and capitalistic control that slavery was. Hence, mass incarceration is modern day slavery.

The presence of chain gangs and Black codes directly after the end of slavery signifies this. The ways in which Black people were immediately criminalized in order to maintain this same form of social control that kept them enslaved for profit was seen as a necessity for our country. It had been the basis of U.S. economic growth for so long. When looking at the different forms of prison in other countries, and their models that are based on rehabilitation rather than incarceration, this becomes very stark and apparent.

Upon reflection, it is relatively easy to understand how Americans come to deny the evils of mass incarceration. Denial is facilitated by persistent racial segregation in housing and schools, by political demagoguery, by racialized media imagery, and by the ease of changing one's perception of reality simply by changing television channels. There is little reason to doubt the prevailing 'common sense' that black and brown men have been locked up en masse merely in response to crime rates when one's sources of information are mainstream media outlets. In many respects, the reality of mass incarceration is easier to avoid knowing than the injustices and sufferings associated with slavery or Jim Crow. Those confined to prisons are out of sight and out of mind; once released, they are typically confined to ghettos. Most Americans only come to 'know' about the people cycling in and out of prisons through fictional police dramas,

4th WORLD CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

18-20 March 2022 Prague, Czech Republic



music videos, gangsta rap, and ‘true’ accounts of ghetto experience on evening news. These racialized narratives tend to confirm and reinforce the prevailing public consensus that we need not care about

‘those people’; they deserve what they get. (Alexander, pg. 226-227, 2020).

All of this ties into the larger social project that has been undertaken throughout the history of the United States, and how mass incarceration is perfectly aligned with this racial project.

The Criminalization of Black Bodies in the Media

All of this past research on social and racial control ties into how and why mass media has been used as another tool for that control. Historically, within the media, Black bodies have been criminalized. These findings and analysis tie into the larger racial project that past researchers have unearthed. The Black body needs to be criminalized in order to justify its use in mass incarceration, and the exploitation of the Black body for profit. We are able to see how the media has time and time again created a moral panic. Racial white victimhood is perpetrated and this has a societal impact. These criminalized messages can and have reshaped laws in society. There is a constant concentration on the duality between victims and villains. These criminalized messages have been revitalized in new landscapes that continue to conceptualize Black bodies as sites of social control. (King, 2015).

Through this constant duality of images and a constant need to depict Black bodies as evil and criminalized, the overrepresentation of them within prison landscapes can be justified within the mind of the everyday American. The media can be used as a tool for structural oppression. There is a constant dehumanizing portrayal of the Black family. Much is said about the power of the police as well. This is a constant stigmatizing process that works within cycles of larger systemic oppression. (Ogden, Fulambarker, & Haggerty, 2020).

These images are not created in a vacuum, but are instead a part of a larger historical process of systemic oppression and constant criminal portrayals of Black people in order to justify their subjugation. These representations have meaning based on social, cultural, and economic contexts. Through a constructionist view, we can analyze how meaning, representation and language operate within symbolic practices and processes, and how a wide availability creates a cultural product that constructs meaning into lives. This constant criminality of the

4th WORLD CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

18-20 March 2022 Prague, Czech Republic



Black body within media also ties into a representational paradigm, which is “a shared common perspective on representation among cultural producers who cluster together in a way that ensures the dominance of a certain paradigm as a form of representation.” This allows them to develop a common agenda of central themes that express a certain world view. (Smith & Huber, 2018).

The Sociological Impacts of Media

The way that an image is viewed impacts the perceptions that are created about those groups of people, and thus how they are treated. Theorists have highlighted how mass media is the mass production of messages that reflect the structures and processes of the institutions that shape them. (Hall & Callanan, 2012). When connecting back to the history of racial control within our country, and how all of this has been shaped by those in power seeking more power and profit, then these systems of control have been carried into the media we consume today, and impact the messages that we view. The way that stories are told have huge impacts. They shape the connections that are made in the viewer’s mind that are made about the world and others around them. Research has even shown that “... cognitive associations are so strong that simply exposure to a particular trait (e.g. criminality) may elicit thoughts about a particular racial group.” (Pollock, Tapia, & Sibila, pg. 2, 2021). In addition, media is not just a social enterprise. Mass media has on its own become a commodification and a business model as well. Producers are always trying to create the most sensationalized and timely news and content, sometimes irrespective of the social impacts that their creations may have. Just like prisons, the media itself is a business as well that profits from these criminalized messages and representations.

Many social constructionists argue that in modern societies, media is a major factor in defining social conditions as problems as well as influencing individual’s perceptions of reality.

A big focal point that has been sometimes overlooked and missed are these images’ impact on non-mainstream audiences, and those whose image is being represented. There do tend to be different camps of thought on examining the degree to this impact, and whether social conditions shape the images that are created, or if images shape the social conditions. The resonance hypothesis claims that media messages are stronger when they are meshed with viewers’ experiences and realities. These images impact fear and perception of crime within audience members’ own neighborhoods, but can also tie into the environment that they are within to begin with. (Callanan, 2012).

Sometimes, however, these images can fill in the void for the lack of experience or exposure that audience members may have with the identifier of the image. The media may be a primary source of information for viewers regarding unfamiliar people, cultures and norms. This influences audiences cognitive, emotional and behavioral tendencies. (Stamps, 2020). The identity of the group may also impact what type of news and group they decide to consume. A study conducted by Holt and Carnahan revealed how the identity of the group may also impact what type of news and about what racial group they decide to consume. From their study, they analyzed that groups tended to prefer examining bad news from their own racial group, and

4th WORLD CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

18-20 March 2022 Prague, Czech Republic



this can align with a Group Vitality theory, or the ways in which a group may assess their status, support, and influence within society and how they view their own racial group. This can impact their decision to seek out and admonish negative representations of behavior coming from their own group, in order to distance themselves from that behavior.

Overall, the images that are displayed within mass media have long lasting effects on society. “Media exposure has been determined to play a meaningful role in matters ranging from the construction and maintenance of racial/ethnic cognitions (and emotions) to expectations about intergroup relations to policy decision-making to perceptions of self and identity.” (Mastro, pg. 2, 2015).

Criminalized Representations Influence Incarceration

In tying back to the historical implications of criminalized representations, and their moral panic that they create, researchers have highlighted how this criminalization is a direct link to the rise in mass incarceration, and not just a coincidence. These criminalized messages are reproduced in new landscapes that continue to contextualize Black bodies as sites of social control, and they do so in a particular politico-discursive terrain. (King, 2015). The media is very saturated within society. There is not really a way to avoid its influence. These criminalized messages have been so imprinted into the media, that they start to become natural and second nature to audiences. They start to become unquestioned. These images occur over and over again. This constant feeding of negative images can make it difficult for an audience member to think anything else of the Black body when they are constantly told that the Black body is a criminal body, an alien body, subhuman, less than, prone to violence and the ghettoized environment that we are seen to exist in.

Current research has also investigated the impact that public punitiveness has on mass incarceration. From this research, there seems to be a link. The question that then arises is, What impacted public punitiveness? What changed in our environment that caused us to develop more of this “tough on crime”, incarceration mindset? One possibility is criminalized mediated messages, because of how prevalent they also conveniently became during this time. Crime content is a pronounced feature of mass media and distorts the reality of crime by disproportionately focusing on random violent crimes. (Callanan, 2012). When watching an image over and over, this has an impact on the psyche of the human mind. This has real, tangible, sociological impacts on our world. One of those sociological impacts has been the increase in prisons and incarceration within our country.

By looking historically at the repeated instances of the criminalized representation of the Black body, and understanding the sociological impact of media and images in general, then it must be clear that these messages have had a large social impact. Mass incarceration has been and is a huge problem in our society and in our country. Criminality is the denominator that makes one “deserving” of being put in prison and placed behind bars. When looking at the amounts of these criminalized images in the media at the time of the rise in mass incarceration, and with the literal impact that these images have had on the public, it starts to become very plausible that these criminalized representations have led to the increase in mass incarceration.

4th WORLD CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

18-20 March 2022 Prague, Czech Republic



By connecting the dots of history, it becomes clear that the prison industrial complex is the United State's newest and updated form of social and racial control.

The lack of attention geared toward the intersectional approach of these criminalized representations and the impacts of mass incarceration, specifically on women of color, deserves discussion as well. Black women within these contexts are also criminalized in very specific and dehumanizing ways. Within these criminalized images, there is a prevalence of "... traditional gender roles in which men are powerful and dominant, whereas women are weak and submissive." (Pollock, Tapia, & Sibila, pg. 4, 2021). From negative and sexualized representations such as the Jezebel to the Mammy, Black women in addition to femme and queer bodies are placed within a particular category within this carceral context of both racism and sexism.

...from slavery forward, black women's sexuality forms that painful site where battles over agency take place. Even while female slaves were configured as property entirely subject to the will of their respective 'owners', black women have also paradoxically been seen as sexual predators, asserting their (sexual) agency to seduce and consume the white master. This sexual will, where no agency theoretically existed, was read as

'primitive', as uncontrolled, and as deviant. (Young, pg. 378, 2005).

These representations have had negative impacts within the prison system as well. "Indeed, since 2010 women have been the fastest-growing fraction of the US prison population, rising by an average of 3.4% annually, even as the number of incarcerated men was undergoing a modest decline." (De Giorgi, pg. 6, 2015). Not only are Black women and femme bodies subject to the same criminalized treatment as Black male bodies, they are continuously ignored and made invisible within these discourses.

...the high rates of black female incarceration suggest that public discourse only recognizes black women in their criminality, a direct legacy of slavery in which blacks were without agency except when that agency was criminalized. The prison, as a mechanism to control a society's alleged abject and its aberrant, naturalizes and continually reinvents the relationship between black agency and criminality that was established during slavery." (Young, pg. 378, 2005).

As evident, these carceral contexts are not declining but are only getting worse. As more groups continue to be marginalized and dehumanized it, is important to not only analyze this as a problem of the past, but something that still very apparent and problematic within current structures today as well.

Current Implications

There are still contemporary iterations and crumbs of these past criminalized representations that still stand to be corrected. A [report](#) conducted by Color of Change analyzed mediated messages (in the form of crime-based TV shows primarily) to examine the representations of race and representations of criminal procedure, the normativity of the behavior, and the diversity of the writers behind these various television shows. This study examined Criminal

4th WORLD CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

18-20 March 2022 Prague, Czech Republic



Justice Professional Characters (CJP) within these television shows and calculated the amount of times they committed a wrongful action. The study found that the “Good Guy” CJP characters committed more wrongful acts than the “Bad Guy” CJP characters, which makes it appear as if a person that works within the law committing a wrongful act is forgivable and necessary. On top of that, the study found that 64% of depictions of wrongful behavior came from a person of color or women-identified character, and they seemed to use people of color characters as validators of wrongful behavior. Many of these series continue to misconstrue the realities of the criminal justice system and render racism invisible, the study found. People of color and women are also continuously excluded behind the camera. Due to this, it is evident that there are still problematic and criminalized representations of Black people within modern day popular media today, even if it has been rebranded.

The old criminalized representations of the past have not gone away. They have simply been reinscribed into the various forms of media that people consume today. “In spite of social advances, there remains within the TV and film industry a practice of presenting negative stereotype images of Black people scripted from early characters predicated on the racial inferiority of Blacks.” (Adams-Bass, Stevenson, & Kotzin, pg. 368, 2014). Unless deep and radical change within these institutions are created, there will never be a true erasure and eradication of these criminalized representations. The stains will always linger. Shows cloak traditional stereotypes in contemporary characters by using modern colloquial language, clothing, gadgets, and in some cases surrounding Black characters

with multicultural casts. As such, the media racial socialization of negative Black stereotypes persists across generations as older shows are retained, longstanding stereotypical characters are not modified despite contemporary contexts and frames, and no counter-socialization strategies are presented in contemporary shows to debate the negative portrayals of these stereotypes. (Adams-Bass, Stevenson, & Kotzin, pg. 372, 2014)

With the reproduction of these images in contemporary contexts, there has also been a rise in “reality-based” crime-drama shows, which also have implications in this problem. One can find a surplus amount of content on various mediums that either claim to produce real-life accounts of crime fighting, or “reality-based” crime-drama shows based in realistic locations. “...genres that feature more ‘realistic’ representations (e.g., news, ‘reality’-based police shows) are the most problematic types of programming in terms of racially-biased portrayals, and particularly so in terms of bias toward African American men.” (Oliver, pg. 5, 2003)

Additionally, the carcerality of the Black body is beginning to extend into technological advancements, which further highlights the intent behind it. One of these forms of technology that are being produced is predictive policing. Predictive policing claims to be a more “unbiased” and “objective” way of tracking and stopping crime, however, the racist and classist histories that are enveloped into our sense of crime continue to be unaddressed, even in the making of a seemingly objective algorithm. “In doing so, it rationalizes the lie that black, brown, queer, and poor people and the places where they live are intrinsically threatening to the broader public.” (Benjamin & Scannell, pg. 111, 2019). Once again, false rhetoric claims to be progressing through advancements in society that allow stakeholders and people who hold

4th WORLD CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

18-20 March 2022 Prague, Czech Republic



power to be more fair and unbiased. The problem is that the horrific histories that uphold the country continue to

be unaddressed, so actual progress can't be made. These "progressive policies" continue to have the same implications on Black people and communities as they did during the days of chattel slavery. Those in power have simply gotten better at hiding their intentions.

In addition, future work needs to continue to be situated with the interaction between media and the impact it has on an audience. This ties into the potential for resistance within the media, and how these images can be counteracted. Mass media is a powerful force in our society. Instead of being used to disseminate negative messages, its potential needs to instead be used to revolutionize the negative parts of our society.

Counteracting these Images: Black Media Practitioners

Despite centuries of systemic and racial oppression, and the media being used as a tool for that oppression, these subjects that are depicted so negatively can still create counterinsurgent images. By focusing more on positive life with ordinary, future oriented expectations we can lessen the focus on the negative aspects of a group of people. Efforts can also be merged with grassroots organizing in order to ensure that the image being created is under the pursuit of change for the people. There also needs to be more of an understanding that criminality spans beyond prisons. It has been embedded into our landscape. The thinking around what constitutes a prison, or even a criminal, needs to continue to be pushed. Carceral representations must be depicted as something other than perpetrators and victims. The representations that are created to critique these negative representations can create alternative discourses to punishment. (Brown).

Despite the overwhelming amount of evidence that points to the negative societal impacts of the media, this form of art also has the ability to generate powerful and positive social change.

It is also important to acknowledge that "...positive Black media images also exist.

Unfortunately, the frequency of the appearance of these images in mainstream media is low compared with the appearance of negative stereotype characters." (Adams-Bass, Stevenson, & Kotzin, pg. 373, 2014). It is important to seek these images out and pull inspiration from them so that they can continue to become more normalized.

There are tactics and efforts that can be made to reduce and mitigate these effects. In addition to counteracting these negative messages within the media, there is a form of education known as media literacy that informs the audience of these negative representations and messages, why they are incorrect, and how to counter them within their own daily lives. "...there is promise for education efforts addressing the media's role in stereotyping to mitigate the effects of exposure to negative or narrow media depictions of social groups and possibly even enhance the positive media influence of exposure to non stereotypical and favorable media depictions." (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, pg. 172, 2015). Scharrer and Ramasubramanian inform us of a huge aspect of media literacy, which entails a

4th WORLD CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

18-20 March 2022 Prague, Czech Republic



...combination of audience-centered and message-centered approaches ... audience-centered strategies take a more motivational approach by developing media literacy and critical viewing and thinking skills among audiences, with an example being a scenario in which an expert (such as a media literacy facilitator) explicitly encourages a negative view of stereotyping by appealing to audiences' cognitive processing. In contrast, message-centered strategies such as exposure to counter stereotypes (e.g., a media example featuring a depiction that runs directly counter to a common stereotype used as an experimental stimulus) may offer a more proactive alternative to achieve similar goals, which are easier to manipulate and require less mental effort than motivational strategies. (pg. 175, 2015).

The undoing of this vast social problem will not be quick or easy, and can not be reversed by only changing the content of the media. However, this can be a positive step in the right direction towards a truly just future. These calls for change are echoed from other researchers.

This evidence obviously calls for greater responsibility on the part of media producers to alleviate the types of biased portrayals that are unfortunately a common occurrence ... viewers' selective perception and interpretation of media content suggest that equitable media portrayals of race in crime-related programming may not be sufficient to address the concerns presented here ... future researchers must address additional steps such as counter-stereotyping and greater attention to media literacy. (Oliver, pg. 16, 2003). Ultimately, work and efforts have been created to counteract and reduce the impacts of these criminalized messages and representations within the media. These efforts need to be highlighted and multiplied.

Creative Project

Creative media approaches to this topic have debated the display of incarceration and carcerality within their media and whether it works to combat or reproduce stereotypes. Regardless, the importance of creating counterinsurgent images, whether through directly invoking the audience with these negative images and the hypocrisy behind them, or providing alternative images, is highlighted through various forms of more contemporary media. Many of them provide an insistence on the positive life and potential of their Black subjects, rather than the overplayed negative and trauma-based situations that many Black characters and subjects have fulfilled within the media. Also, some creative media approaches that critique these negative images work with other grassroots movements that do work to counteract this criminality that is embedded within our social institutions, and is also something that allows the creative media approaches that I am examining to stand out. They go beyond the mirage of race and examine the classist and capitalistic components of this problem as well, which allows us to critique it from a more radical and collective perspective.

I will use my creative project, a short film/documentary about the impact of these criminalized messages on mass incarceration and how this can be critiqued, to explore and highlight for others this issue. I will also use it to further examine the specific link between mass incarceration and carceral media images, and also how modern media and Black media practitioners have critiqued this. By looking at the research that has been conducted

4th WORLD CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

18-20 March 2022 Prague, Czech Republic



surrounding the racial projects within the history of the United States, the sociological impacts of negative media, and how media has been historically and currently used as a tool for this racial project, I will use my creative project to examine these historical and cultural occurrences within media, these implications for the problem of incarceration and ultimate surveillance, and what media should shift into in order for a better future within media to exist. My creative project will add to the examination of negative representations within the media, its specific contribution to our current iteration of a centuries long racial project, and what a counterinsurgence of images would and should look like by drawing from other practitioners and subjects.

I will start by doing a content analysis of some of these criminalized representations for myself, both in the past and the present. I will compare them to positive messages created by other Black media practitioners or artists working towards the eradication of this racial project. Pulling from the themes and claims that I find from this content analysis and information that I have learned from by qualitative analysis of prior research, I will then develop this into my short film, which will be up to 10 minutes long. This will be a narrative, poetic, and reflexive film about this history of racism within the film, its impact on mass incarceration, and what can be done instead. I also hope to draw from other artists that speak to afro-futurism and revolutionary work in order to envision a world beyond carcerality and systemic racism. This will be initially shared among small groups of people within educational and personal contexts, but I will create this with the potential to be played in larger venues as well. I will conduct archival research for the materials that I will incorporate into my films, interviews with other artists and experts in this field, and my own original footage. I am still currently developing my list of sources that I will use for this project, but the sources will primarily be professors, researchers, and artists. This list of information will be collated through personal contacts, word of mouth, and public information containing potential subjects email addresses and phone numbers.

This project will both address the problematic images of the past while exploring the potentials for the future. I hope to create a blueprint for future artists to draw from and use as a way to examine criminalized representations and their impacts on modern society, potential negative directions of the future, and what can be done to counteract that.

Throughout this break and at the beginning of Spring semester, I plan to move into archival research and hone in on the specific media artifacts and practitioners that I plan to examine, and develop a specific plan for collecting that data. At the start of Spring semester, I will begin conducting interviews, conducting my content analysis, capturing footage, continuing to examine archival footage, and begin the production process. By the end of March, my short film should be finalized and ready for review and editing. By the end of April, my project should be ready for defense and potential public dissemination.

References

Critical race theory/racial formations

Winant, H. (2000). Race and Race Theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 169–185.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/223441>

Zamudio, M. M., & Rios, F. (2006). From Traditional to Liberal Racism: Living Racism in the Everyday. *Sociological Perspectives*, 49(4), 483–501.
<https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2006.49.4.483>

Media Representation/Sociological impacts of media

Adams-Bass, V., Stevenson, H., & Kotzin, D. (2014). Measuring the Meaning of Black Media Stereotypes and Their Relationship to the Racial Identity, Black History Knowledge, and Racial Socialization of African American Youth. *Journal of Black Studies*, 45(5), 367-395. Retrieved September 7, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24573089>

Callanan, V. (2012). Media Consumption, Perceptions of Crime Risk and Fear of Crime: Examining Race/Ethnic Differences. *Sociological Perspectives*, 55(1), 93-115. doi:10.1525/sop.2012.55.1.93

David Stamps (2020) Race and Media: A Critical Essay Acknowledging the Current State of Race-Related Media Effects Research and Directions for Future Exploration, *Howard Journal of Communications*, 31:2, 121-136, DOI: [10.1080/10646175.2020.1714513](https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2020.1714513)

Holt, L. F., & Carnahan, D. (2020). Which Bad News to Choose? The Influence of Race and Social Identity on Story Selections Within Negative News Contexts. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 97(3), 644–662. [https://doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1077699019892632](https://doi.org/colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1077699019892632)

Mastro, D. (2015). Why the Media's Role in Issues of Race and Ethnicity Should be in the Spotlight. *Journal of Social Issues*, 71(1), 1–16. <https://doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/josi.12093>

Pollock, W., Tapia, N. D., & Sibila, D. (2021). Cultivation theory: The impact of crime media's portrayal of race on the desire to become a U.S. police officer. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 1. <https://doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/14613557211036555>

Scharrer, E., & Ramasubramanian, S. (2015). Intervening in the Media's Influence on Stereotypes of Race and Ethnicity: The Role of Media Literacy Education. *Journal of*

**4th WORLD CONFERENCE ON
SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES**
18-20 March 2022 Prague, Czech Republic



Social Issues, 71(1), 171–185. <https://doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/josi.12103>

Criminality of the Black body in media

Benjamin, R., & Scannell, R. J. (2019). *Captivating technology: Race, carceral technoscience, and liberatory imagination in everyday life*. Duke University Press.

King, M. (2015). The 'knockout game': moral panic and the politics of white victimhood. *Race & Class*, 56(4), 85–94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396814567411>

Lydia P. Ogden, Anjali J. Fulambarker & Christina Haggerty (2020) Race and Disability in Media Coverage of the Police Homicide of Eric Garner, *Journal of Social Work Education*, 56:4, 649-663, DOI: [10.1080/10437797.2019.1661918](https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2019.1661918)

Oliver, M. (2003). African American Men as "Criminal and Dangerous": Implications of Media Portrayals of Crime on the "Criminalization" of African American Men. *Journal of African American Studies*, 7(2), 3-18. Retrieved September 7, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41819017>

Smith, J. M., & Huber, C. (2018). Colombian Criminals, Moral Whites: Reproducing and Resonating Hierarchy in U.S. Film. *Sociological Inquiry*, 88(1), 106–130. <https://doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/soin.12182>

Mass Incarceration

Alexander, M. (2020). *The New Jim Crow*. The New Press.

Color of Change. (2021, March 5). *Normalizing injustice - crime TV*. Color Of Change Hollywood. Retrieved December 14, 2021, from <https://hollywood.colorofchange.org/crime-tv-report/>.

De Giorgi, A. (2015). Five Theses on Mass Incarceration. *Social Justice*, 42(2 (140)), 5–30. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24871281>

Enns, P. (2014). The Public's Increasing Punitiveness and Its Influence on Mass Incarceration in the United States. *American Journal of Political Science*, 58(4), 857-872. Retrieved September 6, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24363530>

Ferrell, J. (1999). Cultural Criminology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 25(1), 395. <https://doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.25.1.395>

Nellis, A., & Porter, N. D. (2021, November 1). *The Color of Justice: Racial and ethnic disparity in state prisons*. The Sentencing Project. Retrieved December 14, 2021, from

**4th WORLD CONFERENCE ON
SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES**
18-20 March 2022 Prague, Czech Republic



<https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/>.

Robert D. Crutchfield, G. A. W. (2021, March 17). *The effects of mass incarceration on communities of color*. Issues in Science and Technology. Retrieved November 3, 2021, from <https://issues.org/effects-mass-incarceration-communities-color/#.YYIwzXZ5XJM.link>.

WESTERN, B., & MULLER, C. (2013). Mass Incarceration, Macrosociology, and the Poor. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 647, 166–189. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23479100>

Western, B. (2007). Mass Imprisonment and Economic Inequality. *Social Research*, 74(2), 509–532. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40971942>

World Prison Brief. (n.d.). *Highest to lowest - prison population total*. Highest to Lowest - Prison Population Total | World Prison Brief. Retrieved December 14, 2021, from https://www.prisonstudies.org/highest-to-lowest/prison-population-total?field_region_taxonomy_tid=All.

Black Media Practitioners

Brown, M. (2014). Visual criminology and carceral studies: Counter-images in the carceral age. *Theoretical Criminology*, 18(2), 176–197. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480613508426>

Ryan, J. (2004). Outing the Black Feminist Filmmaker in Julie Dash's *Illusions*. *Signs*, 30(1), 1319–1344. doi:10.1086/421884

Williams, J. (1995). Re-creating their media image: Two generations of Black women filmmakers. *Black Scholar*, 25(2), 47. <https://doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/00064246.1995.11430719>

Young, H. B. (2005). Inheriting the Criminalized Black Body: Race, Gender, and Slavery in “Eva’s Man.” *African American Review*, 39(3), 377–393. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40033670>