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### Recognizing Anti-blackness in Media and Other Institutions

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## Recognizing anti-blackness in media and other institutions

By Marissa Lucero © July 31, 2020

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In detail, Myra Washington can explain the very moment media literacy seized her attention and never let go; it was during her years studying communication as an undergraduate, at Vanderbilt University where she vowed to never again consume media the same way.

***“For media, race is crucial, not only because we want to see visible diversity, but the diversity that we most often times miss.” - Myra Washington, UNM associate professor***

The course was pop culture and the subject was “Mighty Morphin Power Rangers.” Sounds frivolous to some, but the assignment led to a lifetime of work, and for Washington, it’s a passion.

“It was a show I remember watching but it wasn’t until that class where I remember thinking, ‘Why was the one White woman, the pink ranger, the Asian woman, the yellow ranger and the Black man, the black ranger?’” Washington said. “These are things so common in media, yet, we don’t realize what’s happening in front of our eyes.”

Washington, a Communication and Journalism Department (<https://cjdept.unm.edu/>) associate professor at The University of New Mexico, has spent 8 years teaching and researching cultural studies, rhetoric, and both Asian American and African American studies.

She also considers herself a media junkie, but not without a critical analysis of every piece of media she consumes.

Washington defines **anti-blackness** as multiple institutions working together to marginalize Black people.

She said if people choose to discuss anti-blackness in media, it’s imperative to discuss other instances that showcase anti-blackness within different institutions.

“People have to understand that media is one part of a system. The system also includes education, policy, healthcare, religion, economy, and family and they’re all moving at the same time,” Washington said. “We can’t just say, ‘Media hates Black people.’ That’s not true because media works simultaneously alongside education and education alongside policy and so on.”



In 2017, three educators April Baker-Bell, Raven Jones Stanbrough and Sakeena Everett wrote, “The Stories They Tell: Mainstream Media, Pedagogies of Healing and Critical Media Literacy.”

In the article, the authors discuss the importance of images in media. They wrote, “Constructing images that promote racial inferiority contributes to a lack of empathy for Black life. Because of this lack of empathy, society becomes desensitized to Black suffering and Black humanity. Desensitization of brutal violence and death of Black people, such as seeing video clips on social media of those who were

murdered in real-time become part of the normal order of business. Undoubtedly, these dehumanizing portrayals of Black people in media are part of a historical lineage that continues to support a white supremacist agenda that leads to anti-blackness.”

While Washington said she agrees images are powerful enough to invoke change, she said she believes the answer is much more complex.

“Seeing Black people dying over and over can be dehumanizing, but it’s too simple to say, ‘This is dehumanizing, and it leads to anti-blackness,’” she said. “We know from history that there is power in death. There was power in George Floyd’s last utterances and people reacted to that power in the form of protest.”

She explained the power of an image is something she shares with students.

“I always tell them I never want to focus on what’s considered a positive, negative, good, bad, right or wrong image of Black people, because there are some Black people who are criminals,” Washington said. “The problem is we don’t see enough variety of images. Black people should be everything in media because white people are everything in media.”



Washington’s fellow departmental colleague Shinsuke Eguchi said they share a similar enthusiasm with their students when discussing International and Intercultural Communication as it relates to the politics of race and anti-blackness. Eguchi offered their perspective, not from a Black person, but from a Queer Asian-American scholar whose interests lie in Queer Critical Race Studies.

Eguchi, unlike Washington, moved to the U.S. as an International Undergraduate student in 2001. He said it was a sudden culture shock because of a dominant force, media.

“When I lived in Japan, I was consuming a lot of U.S. media, and it portrayed the U.S. as this place filled with diversity and it implied that race didn’t matter,” Eguchi said. “When I got to college and noticed how segregated all the different races were, it was a complete shock and I felt the image I had of the American culture had been tainted.”

Eguchi graduated with a doctorate in culture and communication from Howard University, a historically Black university, in Washington D.C.

“I learned so much about the complexity of race and racism and how it’s ingrained, even in people of color, because race can be internalized,” Eguchi said. “When we talk about anti-blackness, I think solidarity is missing from the conversation. My time at Howard University and the friends I made taught me so much about myself as a queer Asian, lacking to understand what anti-blackness means for Black people and what that means for their bodies. My friends from there hold me accountable for the assumptions I make, but they also give me the space to learn and that’s made me more aware each time I hear other Asian Americans make racist comments, I feel the urge to call them out and educate them.”

It's those interactions and conversations that are of utmost importance Washington said. It ultimately leads to helping other institutions, including media, realize the images and messages that convey anti-blackness.

"For media, race is crucial, not only because we want to see visible diversity, but the diversity that we most often times miss," Washington said. "We all bring different experiences and different understandings and it's all based on racial identity, gender identity our sexualities and even our geographies. That's the key that people forget, differences are where the quality, strength and beauty in media is."

The takeaway, Washington said, is not only in the variety of media people consume but seeing that variety reflected in the images people see.

"The power of media is it really does frame how we see the world," she said. "But the access that people have these days has helped diversify the views because you have so many options. That has corresponded to the awakening that we see happening in America right now."

***Special thank you to Associate Professors Myra Washington***

***(<https://cjdept.unm.edu/people/faculty/profile/myra-washington.html>) and Shinsuke Eguchi***

***(<https://cjdept.unm.edu/people/faculty/profile/shinsuke-eguchi.html>) with UNM's Communication and Journalism Department.***

**Sources: academia.edu (<https://secure.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/EE/0492-jan2017/EE0492Stories.pdf>)**

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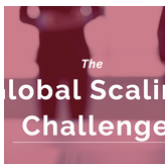
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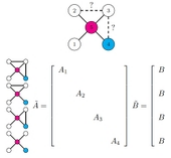
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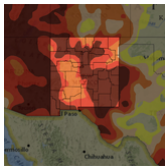
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