INTRODUCTION

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Nearly every day, mass media audiences are confronted with issues related to race and ethnicity. In the United States, Barack Obama’s election and re-election were routinely framed by news organizations as evidence of a “post-racial” America, a notion that casts racism and discrimination as vestiges of America’s past and dominates racial representations in both journalism and entertainment media. Local TV newscasts and much entertainment media in the US are dominated by images of African-American and Hispanic men as violent, pathological criminals. Journalism and entertainment media in the US and abroad routinely cast immigrants as deviant, as dangerous. These representations take on even more significance given the general invisibility in the media of people who are part of the minority populations in the countries in which they live.

The Routledge Companion to Media and Race is designed as a guide to understanding the key debates about the impact of media messages on racial attitudes and understanding. Its 28 chapters examine approaches to the study of race and media, the role that various media play in generating meanings about race, the representation of specific races and ethnicities, and the relationship of those meanings to studies of gender and sexuality. The work in this book offers scant evidence that media systems in the US and around the world are providing audiences with the kind of accurate, meaningful, and complex representations of people who live outside of the dominant cultures. Instead, mainstream media outlets continue to routinely ignore or stereotype “others.”

The book is divided into three sections. Part I, Studying Race and Media: Theories and Approaches, looks at several of the most significant approaches that media scholars have used to examine the complexity of media messages. This section begins with my discussion of the work of British Cultural Studies scholar Stuart Hall and others who have examined race and media through the lens of representation. It provides a description of the roots of cultural-critical media analysis and cites multiple studies that describe the complex ways powerful meanings about race and ethnicity are generated through media texts, including those generated through social media. Hall described the complex ways that mediated messages function as the “politics of signification,” an observation that is especially applicable to the hegemonic power of the myths about race and ethnicity that are reified in journalism and in entertainment media.

In the second chapter, Frank J. Ortega and Joe R. Feagin look at framing theory and how the persistence of the white/dominant racial “frame” is important to social science approaches that analyze media and society. The authors use framing analysis to highlight African-American and Latina/o stereotypes in the media and describe how prevailing media images often operate out of an anti-other subframe, resulting in the mis-characterization of people of color. The chapter concludes with a discussion concerning
the challenges presented by racialized media framing, the great need for accurate racial
depictions, and the necessity of a broader critical focus on the mostly white owners and
controllers of mainstream media content in regard to racial matters.

Next, Valerie J. Callanan and Jared S. Rosenberger look at *cultivation theory*. They exam-
ine the seminal work of George Gerbner and his associates beginning in the 1970s, who
looked at the impact of long-term television viewing on the attitudes of audience members,
including the notion of the “mean world” syndrome, in which heavy television viewers
perceive the world as a very scary place. The chapter summarizes research on media culti-
vation of perceptions about race and crime in three areas: fear of crime, punitive attitudes,
and attitudes toward law enforcement. Those perceptions have heavily influenced signifi-
cant, misguided public policy decisions in the US and elsewhere. As the authors observe,
“When we portray crime in simple moral and racialized terms—dark evil doer versus the
white heroic crime fighter—it invokes simple responses to a complex issue.”

In Chapter 4, Vanessa Murphree examines scholarship that has addressed race as it has
played out through media history. In describing *historical media analysis*, she explains that
scholars have generally examined two aspects of that history: the story of racism in the
mainstream, white media and the story of empowerment in alternative, minority-focused
media. Through an examination of the scholarship surrounding the history of media and
race, she describes the many perspectives that help to explain how the white majority
has oppressed minority groups and how these same groups have employed the media to
advance their causes and positions in society.

Next, Francesca R. Dillman Carpentier opens with a review of literature explaining
*media priming* effects based on associative network models. Following this review, she
highlights key studies about how media depictions of race and ethnicity “prime” stereo-
types and bias social judgments. She discusses these studies in terms of how they have
contributed to our general understanding of the relationship between media exposure
and race-related beliefs and attitudes, as well as how they exemplify the typical method-
ologies used to address this area of research. Her chapter closes with a discussion of recent
work that suggests ways to combat media effects that are detrimental to social progress
toward understanding and acceptance of diversity, including media literacy solutions that
work within existing associative networks to more effectively link concepts of race with
positive, if not more representative, attributes.

In Chapter 6, Kim M. LeDuff explores how *Critical Race Theory* (CRT), a relatively
recent legal theory, can be used by mass media scholars to better understand how con-
temporary media narratives have led to polarization based on race and class in America.
LeDuff explains that the roots of CRT extend back to the 1970s when a group of legal
scholars and activists realized that the waves of change following the Civil Rights era
of the 1960s were not having the long-term impact on society that the movement had
expected. She describes examples of news stories and narratives from contemporary media
to illustrate the application of CRT in media criticism.

Part II, Race, the Medium, the Message, examines scholarship related to all types of
media, from TV shows to social media to sports coverage. The authors identify disturb-
ing patterns—primarily invisibility and stereotypes—of people of color across all forms
of media, patterns rooted in the oldest forms of popular culture and persisting into the
current landscape of social media and video games. In Chapter 7, Dana Mastro, Andrea
Figueroa-Caballero, and Alexander Sink document *primetime television* portrayals of racial
and ethnic minority groups across the decades and address the implications of exposure
to this content on audience members. Their examinations reveal that representations
INTRODUCTION

vary over time and across racial/ethnic groups, in terms of both quality and quantity, and that content-analytic evidence also indicates that racial/ethnic groups are largely underrepresented and constrained to a narrow scope of character-types on television. Finally, they discuss evidence from experimental and survey-based studies that examine the negative effects of exposure to this content.

Next, Gerald Sim examines how racial ideology exists and functions in film. He considers the medium’s material base, textual operations, modes of address, and genres, and he discusses cinema as a social and economic institution. Within each of those paradigms, he highlights key ideas from critical race film studies and illustrates them with examples from both canonical and contemporary film culture. The chapter reflects on the ways that cinema in all its forms is implicated in Eurocentrism and white privilege and on those in which counter-ideological strategies have been practiced and theorized.

In Chapter 9, Paul Linden examines popular music and the growth of rock ‘n’ roll, reggae, rap and salsa; he argues that their growth demonstrates the semantic instability of “race” and “musical genre” as interpretive categories. He explains that translation is employed as a methodological concept allowing for semantic analysis of musical forms as they pass through geographical, social, and economic contexts, and he argues that the careers of Elvis Presley and Bob Marley exemplify the movement of popular music forms into the American mainstream. His analysis looks at the systematic, hidden expenses of mainstream success, including the alienation of core fan bases as well as artists’ loss of both creative control and authorship.

Chapters 10 and 11 look at “new” media. First, Kishonna L. Gray provides a contemporary context for the Internet as it relates to race and ethnicity. By examining the racialized dynamics in access (i.e., the “digital divide”), Internet usage (i.e., “Black Twitter”), and control (i.e., the lack of diversity and inclusion in the Internet industries), she examines just how unequal the Internet still is along racial lines. Her most significant contribution is providing an overview of whiteness as a hegemonic identity operating within Internet culture. She argues that if we are to truly dissect and transform how race is communicated within Internet culture, we need to focus our attention on the industry, on access, on Internet use, on experiences within virtual settings, on representations, and even on the politics of technological production. Next, Gina Masullo Chen focuses on the intersection of social media and race. She explores how social media have helped provide a public voice for people of color that has been lacking for decades in traditional forms of media, such as television, newspapers, and movies. In addition, she explores how the hashtag has provided a means for people of color to gather together virtually around specific topics and even shift the discourse around news events. Finally, she examines the role of social media in encouraging people of color to register to vote and cast their ballots.

The next two chapters look at race and journalism. First, Cheryl D. Jenkins focuses on journalism and African Americans, explaining that the often simplistic and episodic news coverage of complex issues like race and racism by the American mainstream media has helped to strengthen the decades-old argument by industry critics that a more diverse news media, with viewpoints that reflect the actual makeup of the communities being covered, would serve a true democracy better. She demonstrates that research in the area of newsroom diversity shows a troubling trend in mainstream media, which has consistently been less inclusive of voices outside of dominant power structures in society. In Chapter 13, Raul Reis describes similar issues by examining journalism and Latinos. He writes that communication researchers who have studied the representation of Latinos in both news and entertainment U.S. media have been arguing for decades that this
portrayal is skewed and inaccurate. He explains that an academic discussion about Latinos and journalism could hardly fail to acknowledge how scholars have dealt with three main issues: stereotyping and its effects on popular perception; underrepresentation and its pitfalls; and ignorance about the group and the potentially negative consequences of that ignorance.

In Chapter 14, Anthony J. Cortese looks at the advertising history and explains that images of ethnic minorities in advertising shape cultural attitudes about race and are very powerful agents of socialization. He writes that advertising is a barometer of the willingness of whites to share mainstream culture with people of color and argues that studying these images fosters critical media literacy and allows audiences to challenge racist ideologies. He examines how ethnic images and race relations have been historically presented in advertising and how such portrayals correlate with patterns of intergroup relations and tensions.

Next, Sherry S. Yu explains that the mediascape in multicultural societies is transforming. She writes that, aside from increasing transnational migration, forces of globalization (both cultural and economic) and digitalization make media transcend their formal national boundaries, and that ethnic media are no exception. She explains that while ethnic media were once confined to the domain of ethnic or diasporic communities, these media go beyond not only geographic, but also ethnic boundaries. She argues that what is lagging behind this shift is the social perception and academic approach toward ethnic media, which consider ethnic media as media by and for immigrant, ethno-racial, and linguistic minorities only. Her discussion traces the evolution of ethnic media by examining various aspects—terminologies, historical trajectories, and trends in production and consumption—and suggests that new critical approaches to understanding ethnic media are needed.

The final two chapters in Part II look at sports media. In Daniel Sipocz’s examination of sports media in the United States, he focuses on the power of sports and sports media to construct racial stereotypes. He discusses how sports and sports media, as institutions in daily life, contribute to the sociological understanding of the world around us. Through contemporary examples of racial stereotypes in sports coverage and through previous scholarship, he outlines why there is a need to study sports media and the sports media’s role in reinforcing stereotypes. Finally, Jacco van Sterkenburg examines sports media in Europe. He explains that its massive popularity and the diversity of the players it features make “mediasport” an important producer of discourse surrounding racial and ethnic diversity. He also looks at European sports media audiences and how diverse audiences receive and negotiate racialized ideologies (re)produced by sports media.

In Part III, Race, Ethnicity, and Intersectionality, The Routledge Companion to Media and Race provides a broad summary of the scholarship about media issues related to specific races and ethnicities both in the US and around the world. It also looks at the relationship of the study of race and media to the study of gender and sexuality. The authors in this section make it clear that media in the US and elsewhere feed hegemonic notions about race and ethnicity, and that those notions often intersect with patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies.

In Chapter 18, Rockell A. Brown examines media representation of African Americans, primarily by exploring reality television. She shows how the reality television genre depicts African Americans in stereotypical ways similar to how they have been portrayed historically in popular culture. She describes the most common of those stereotypes that began in the era of minstrel shows as well as the contemporary, assimilationist representations that persist on primetime television. Next, Celeste González de Bustamante and Jessica Retis look at Latin@s (Latino and Latina Americans). They explain that despite
the extraordinary growth of the Latin@ population in the US, news and entertainment media continue to ignore this segment of the population. They provide an overview of scholarship that has examined representations of Latin@s and describe common examples of mainstream media representations (and misrepresentations). They also discuss how Latin@s choose to portray and depict themselves and discuss the possibilities and challenges in so doing in a twenty-first-century digital landscape.

In Chapter 20, Debra Merskin looks at Native Americans. She explains that in books, magazines, newspapers, movies, and television programs, representations of American Indians have been stereotypical, with problematic representations that date back more than 200 years. These limited and limiting portrayals present, to both Indians and non-Indians, one-dimensional visions of Indian-ness that, for both men and women, emphasize violence, sexuality, and savagery. She contextualizes media representations by discussing contemporary conditions of being Native in America, describing the history of representations of American Indians in several mass media forms (cinema, newspapers, and television) and presenting perspectives and debates in existing scholarship about Native Americans.

Next, Vincent N. Pham and Kent A. Ono address media representations of Asian Americans. After providing an overview of those representations across media formats, they point out that Asians and Asian Americans have played a pivotal role in producing the contemporary Internet. They explain that while key figures such as Steve Chen and Jawed Karim, co-founders of YouTube—appear centrally in discussions of the digital universe, little research has been done on media discourse about Asian Americans’ pivotal role in building the Internet. They explore discourse about Asians and Asian Americans as new media pioneers and Internet entrepreneurs and argue that aspects of the predominant “model minority” myth discourse about Asians and Asian Americans are simultaneously complicated and reinforced in media narratives.

Evelyn Alsultany in Chapter 22 provides an overview of how Arabs, Muslims, and Arab Americans have been portrayed in the U.S. media. She begins with a discussion of how Arab and Muslim identities have been conflated and racialized in U.S. government and media discourses. She then explores two time periods of representations: 1898 to 2000 and September 11, 2001 to the present. She demonstrates how images have changed from romantic sheikhs to rich oil sheikhs to terrorists; from sultry belly dancers and harem girls to oppressed, veiled women; from one-dimensional terrorist characters to the introduction of sympathetic characters alongside representations of more complex terrorist characters.

Next, Ji-Hyun Ahn explains that media scholars have argued that the media/cultural representations of mixed-race people have shifted “from pathologization to celebration” and “from tragic to heroic.” She addresses the causes of this shift and its significance for the larger social transformation by critically examining the politics of mixed-race representation in the American media landscape. She covers miscegenation and passing narratives in early Hollywood to the recent increase of multiracial representation in various forms of popular media. While she primarily focuses on scholarly discussion in the United States, she also examines transnational scholarship by introducing research on mixed-race representation in East Asia that takes a different historical trajectory from the West.

The next three chapters of Part III examine media representations of race and ethnicity outside of the United States. In planning this book, I had hoped to include discussions about ethnic media representations from around the globe, but, alas, I found that in some parts of the world—for instance, China, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa—scholars appear to be reluctant to enter the debate about those representations.
If nothing else, I found that close investigation of media and ethnicity in developing countries remains an area ripe for examination, though such examinations likely will be coupled with a certain amount of political risk.

In Chapter 24, Christian Schemer and Philipp Müller examine the media in Europe. They find that despite differences in the way ethnic minorities are represented in the media of different European countries, general patterns apply to nearly all countries within the European Union. They write that ethnic minority groups are generally underrepresented, but that, like in the US, they are overrepresented in negative roles, often as delinquents or criminals. They argue that this negativity is especially pronounced for social groups that are culturally distant or considered somehow less beneficial to the receiving country, and that the political discourse on immigration is also often negative or not positive enough to reduce the negative image of ethnic minorities to the general population. They fear that the lack of positivity sometimes legitimizes the overt expression of prejudice and discrimination among the European public. Next, Yasue Kuwahara examines the internal and external aspects of racial and ethnic issues in mass media in East Asia. Internally, she writes, mass media have shaped and reflected the changing relationships among East Asian countries since the end of WWII—from animosity stemming from the colonial memory to economic alliance. Externally, she finds, while the perception of racial “others” has begun to change as the exposure to non-Asians increases, the representation of race in mass media still shows the strong influence of Western hegemony.

In Chapter 26, Sidharth Muralidharan surveys the racial climate in India and the role played by mass media (especially advertising) in this context. The first part of the chapter provides a brief historical background on the Indian perception of “whiteness” and how brands of fairness creams have capitalized on the skewed notions of beauty among men and women to sell their wares. The second part of the chapter delves into gender disparity caused by the caste system and how advertising campaigns and innovative media can help spread the message of preventing violence against women. He ends by describing the extraordinary physical and media racial abuse faced by African immigrants and the Indians of the Northeast, and provides suggestions on curbing racial and gender bias based on academic literature and his personal experience.

This section’s final two chapters look at the notion of intersectionality—how ideas about race and ethnicity in media studies intersect with those about gender and sexuality. In Chapter 27, Mia Moody- Ramírez describes the relationship of gender and Black Feminist Theory to the study of race and media. She offers an overview of feminist theory, defines terms relevant to the study of race, gender, and Black Feminist Theory, and summarizes the contributions of Black Feminist Theorists such as Alice Walker, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Angela Davis, and Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw. In the final chapter, Robert D. Byrd, Jr. focuses on the intersection of race and sexuality and the media representations at that intersection. He explores the cultural phenomena that occur not only in media portrayals of LGBTQ people of color, but also the broader LGBTQ rights movement in society. He explains that most literature on the subject asserts media have followed a greater move toward an assimilationist movement that focuses on heteronormative and homonormative adherence to the status quo, and, ultimately, subordinates race, gender, class, and sexuality. He examines white, gay male privilege and the role of race and gender in asserting privilege. He also explores the role of co-opted black civil rights rhetoric in the modern gay rights movement, which has led to the symbolic annihilation of LGBTQ people of color—not only in the movement, but also in media representations of LGBTQ people and issues.
In reflecting on the work that is contained in this book, I cannot find much evidence to be hopeful that the mass media in the US and elsewhere are providing audiences with representations that could diminish racism and ethnic resentment. Indeed, the authors have provided us with a gloomy view of the role that the media play in propagating misguided and hurtful portrayals of “others.” Journalism, advertising, and the entertainment industry all have long histories of symbolically annihilating and stereotyping people and communities that exist outside of the dominant culture, and this book provides testimony that these problems persist in the twenty-first century. Other than cases in which new forms of media appear to be giving a voice to people who have often been voiceless—for instance, social media’s success in advancing the Black Lives Matter movement—there is little evidence that we can expect dramatic changes in the mainstream media anytime soon. In an era in which American-style capitalism is dominating the international political economy, media companies that generate enormous revenues will surely cling to patterns that put profit motives above the higher purpose of providing audiences with the kind of accurate, complex, and meaningful portrayals that could have an impact on dominant cultures’ racial and ethnic attitudes and on improved public policy decisions.

But I do not believe that all is lost. Minimally, as media empires realize that there is profit to be made from providing more diverse content for increasingly diverse audiences, things should change. New technologies have dramatically increased the number of media outlets to which audiences have access and represent another area of hope. Many media professionals are aware of the critiques described in this book, and there are many instances in which they do the right thing. The first step in identifying solutions is to clarify the magnitude of the problems. The value of this book, then, is in summarizing and describing the important issues about race and ethnicity that media organizations need to address. The work that follows makes it clear that media content can have profound cultural impacts and consequences. It also makes it clear that the potential for media systems in the US and around the world to provide audiences with improved representations of all of the world’s peoples is enormous.