

Audience Construction: Race, Ethnicity and Segmentation in Popular Media

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Introduction

Audience segmentation is a social practice readily identified with a variety of modernist projects marked by a planned intervention in the lives of individuals. Segmentation is both the product and the source of strategic information about individuals who share an identifiable status based on any number of attributes. The focus of this paper is the segmentation of media audiences on the basis of ascriptive, or claimed membership in groups defined by race or ethnicity. Segments based on language (Hispanics) and race (African American) are most clearly defined, but other constructions will be considered along the way.

Audience segmentation is specific case of a more general process of social construction. It is part of a complex process through which the great variety that sets us apart as individuals is cast off, or ignored in order to emphasize the similarities that help to shape and define us as members of groups.

The discourses of a variety of social actors-- advertisers, government regulators, writers and program producers, as well as political activists, are implicated in the construction of segments that become the focus of targeted communications. It is for this reason that we refer to these segments as audiences.

While segmentation is usually explored from the perspective of powerful actors whose discursive actions define categories and make distinctions, individuals also recognize themselves in these texts, and then behave in ways that tighten the link between the description and the experience of membership within groups defined as segments (Turow 1997). Over time, these links may serve to reproduce, and make the boundaries between segments less permeable, and more stable (Dervin 1989).

Constructing the audience

James Anderson (1997) provides a well-developed approach to understanding an audience as a theoretical construct. Anderson's formal audiences can be understood as being encoded within the texts created by authors, as well as being constructed theoretically as analytical audiences for more strategic actors. The analytical audiences are especially relevant to the construction of audiences that Anderson defines as

empirical. The audiences that are created through a process we refer to as segmentation, can be differentiated further when viewed from different social agents with particular interests in the behavior of audience segments. We can locate these agents in a variety of settings that range from corporate boards to college classrooms, and we can distinguish between them by means of the linkage between their interests, and the interests of segment members.

As developed in relation to the governing paradigms thought to distinguish among broadcasters, four relatively distinct perspectives are worthy of our consideration for audience segmentation more generally. Ien Ang identifies in the case of commercial and public service broadcasters two perspectives which at one time may have been seen as unalterably opposed. Where the first sees the audience as a potential consumer, the latter constructs the audience as composed of “citizens who must be reformed, educated, informed as well as entertained--in short-- ‘served’--presumably to enable them to better perform their democratic rights and duties” (Ang 1991), pp. 28-29. Webster and Phalen suggest that the audience can also be understood as commodity that has been “produced” for the market (Webster and Phalen 1994). Thus, from within the commercial sphere, important distinctions can be made between audiences that are the object, rather than the subject of marketing efforts. Media critics and policy-oriented activists have historically constructed the audience, or segments of it, as victims who are likely to be harmed by repeated exposure to dangerous content, or by contact others who have consumed such fare (Webster and Phalen 1997), p. 126. Let us begin our exploration of audience segmentation with an introduction to audiences as publics, markets, commodities, and victims

Audience as public

Common to each of the primary constructions of audience is the assumption that audiences have interests, and in some formulations, those interests can be understood as rising to the level of rights. The rights, interests, and reasonable expectations of publics are often used as the basis for evaluating the performance of mass media systems and organizations (McQuail 1992). Both public and commercial broadcasters may be assigned specific social responsibilities under a "public trustee" model (Polic and Oscar H. Gandy 1991). Where public media have a specific responsibility for the maintenance of an active public sphere, struggles over the definition of such an ideal have increasingly turned on an uncertainty regarding the need for a multiplicity of public spheres that would reflect and accommodate the substantial inequality that exists between groups in society (Fraser 1993).

The functions served by targeted media or audiences constructed as publics, differs substantially from those common to other constructions. For immigrant communities, these media often serve as a vital link to the country of origin. As a conduit between the homeland, and exiles, or those who maintain an active interest in politics, they are often used as a means of mobilizing support or opposition. They also serve as a focal point for the development of a local consensus, and a means of expression of the community's demands upon the wider host community. The heritage of Blacks in the UK is primarily

that of immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean. This critical distinction is reflected in the differences in the number and variety of targeted media in the UK (Benjamin 1995).

The specification of the political role for media varies as a function of the size, character, and social position of minority groups which varies between nations as a function of their different histories of immigration, as well as different constructions of the idealized nation. Germany is identified as a nation with a very “narrow ethnic definition of citizenship.” While large populations of ethnic minorities are denied the benefits of citizenship in Germany, the state still supports ethnic targeting under the assumption that such programming will facilitate their return home at some time in the future (Husband 1994), p. 5.

Even where there are similar constructions of the nation and its heritage (Karim 1997), there are differences in the strategies that are believed to best serve the interests of the more powerful groups (Riggins 1992). While not always distinct, one can identify integrationist approaches that may be seen to differ from multiculturalist strategies that place a higher value on the preservation and celebration of difference. One need not be cynical in order to find examples of policies that are designed to lessen the force of minority claims by dividing one group against the other. Such efforts at social control may also involve the state, or other dominant institution engaging in pre-emptive strikes by establishing a communications entity under its control before independent, and more oppositional enterprises are developed by minority communities on their own.

Targeted media may be seen as serving a pacification function. This is seen to be especially important in those communities in which immigrant groups are in competition for limited resources with each other, or perhaps with resident minorities at the bottom of racial hierarchy. An emphasis on popular music programming is seen as one way in which local broadcasters can be seen as responsive to local communities, while actively avoiding sensitive issues that might emerge in print, or in discussion (Husband and Chouhan 1985).

Other instrumentalist goals may lead to the development of minority targeted media by governments in the belief that education and training, or other forms of desired social transformation would be produced more efficiently in this way. Similar motivations govern the investments made in ethnic media by religious organizations.

Simon Cottle describes the responsibilities of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) toward Britain’s ethnic minorities as primarily being one of enhancing their representation (Cottle 1998). In discussing the history of the BBC’s efforts in this regard, Cottle notes that what is now referred to as “multicultural programming” has gone through a complex, and often contentious process of evolution. We might understand the nature of continuing struggles within Britain and other nations that have assigned these responsibilities primarily to the public broadcasting organization in terms of the conflict between the need to speak to persons of color, and the need to speak about them to others.

More generally, however, when racial and ethnic minority audiences are framed as publics, they can readily be seen as being under-served by mainstream media (Husband and Chouhan 1985). A variety of responses to criticism, including expanded programs of research, have emerged. In the US, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting initiated a program of research that they hoped would improve their ability to serve "the needs and interests of minority audiences" (Myrick and Keegan 1981). It seems likely, however, that the rapidly spreading efforts to "reinvent the welfare state" will help to shrink the size of government budgets allocated to the provision of specialized services to groups justified on the basis of some loosely articulated social need (Calabrese 1997). Increasingly the commercial market is presented as not only capable, but ultimately more efficient than state-run media in responding to a host of concerns subsumed under a public interest umbrella.

Audience as market

Those who produce and distribute media content see the audience of actual and potential consumers as a market. The behavior of consumers in the market is governed by tastes and preferences that vary between individuals, but are assumed to be more similar within than between definable groups, or population segments. Audience research seeks to identify and describe the relationships between the attributes of audience segments and the attributes of the content they prefer. Membership in racial and ethnic groups has increasingly come to be considered along with other demographic indicators as a predictor of media choice. Of course, racial and ethnic identity can never be a completely reliable basis for defining a market for media content. Racial and ethnic identity is only part of the complex of influences that shape the decision to consume (Davis and Gandy 1999). As Mahan (1995, p. 28) suggests, "it is far from certain that an identity created through consumption of media or other popular culture products weakens, obliterates, or is even separable from other identities that operate in the same individual at other times." In addition, as Ang (1991, p. 41) reminds us, the pursuit of knowledge regarding audience segments, actually produces greater ignorance over time because the "institutionally-produced discursive constructions...are under constant pressure of reconstruction, whenever they turn out to be imperfect weapons in the quest for control." Competition among those who see audiences as markets leads to the production of alternative, presumably more reliable bases for segmentation. There are other problems inherent in the nature of markets.

Consumers are assumed to be rational actors, and in the context of efficient markets, the price they are willing to pay reflects the value they derive from consumption of media products. Yet, even from the perspective of mainstream economists, it is possible that some segments of the population can be seen as being "under-supplied" by the market (Siegelman and Waldfogel 1998), (Wildman and Karamanis 1998). It is in the nature of the capitalist market that if there is more money to be earned by supplying programs desired by a large majority of the population, producers will supply more content than is actually required by this majority. The largest segments will thus be "over-supplied," and resources will be "wasted." On the other hand, content of interest to smaller, or minority audiences will not be produced in amounts that will satisfy the preferences of the minority. The tendency to supply less content than minority consumers would be willing

to buy, is complicated further by the fact that in some media markets, advertisers, rather than consumers pay for the creation and distribution of content to audiences.

Where the interests of advertisers and minority segments diverge, the under-supply of content is bound to be severe. To the extent that advertisers place a lower value on gaining access to particular minority audiences, those who would produce content for that segment will be punished by the market. As rational actors, they must ultimately withdraw from the market, and if they are to remain in the business, they must turn their attention to producing for other audiences.

If having a preference for content preferred by few others is correlated with being relatively poor, both direct and advertiser-financed markets are almost certain to supply less of minority interest content than is desired (Wildman and Karamanis 1998).

Audience as commodity

The audience constructed as a market is fundamentally different from that same audience when it is thought of as a commodity--a product created for sale within the market. Dallas Smythe is credited with introducing the notion of the commodity audience into the often heated debates among critical scholars who were, from his perspective, needlessly fixated on ideological concerns (Jhally and Livant 1986), (Meehan 1993). Although Smythe's arguments failed to take root within cultural studies, mainstream media scholars continue to emphasize his essential point:

“The first and most serious mistake that an analyst of the television industry can make is to assume that advertising-supported television broadcasters are in the business to broadcast programs. They are not. Broadcasters are in the business of producing audiences. These audiences, or means of access to them, are sold to advertisers. The product of a television station is measured in dimensions of people and time. The price of the product is quoted in dollars per thousand viewers per unit of commercial time, typically 20 or 30 seconds” (Owen and Wildman 1992), p. 3.

The production of audiences for the market can be understood as an industrial process through which different combinations of inputs (such as scripts, music, talented acting, and special effects) can produce audiences with varying degrees of efficiency. The relative importance of particular inputs can be estimated through linear regression where output is measured by ratings or sales, and inputs can be measured in units as precise as the number of acts of violence (Gandy and Signorielli 1981).

The same approach can be applied to the production of audience segments by estimating unique models for each segment. Given the assumption that audience attention is captured by content and forms that are attractive to audience members, it is reasonable to expect that different music, settings, actors, and outcomes will be more attractive to some types of viewers than others.

What is critical to understanding the consequences that flow within a media system governed by a capitalist logic, is that not all audiences are equally valued in the market. If particular audience segments that are attracted (produced) by particular content are under-valued in the market, advertisers will be unwilling to pay the same "cost-per-

thousand" they would be willing to pay for more "desirable" audiences. Rational participants in such markets can not survive by producing audiences that no one will buy, nor can they survive by producing those audiences if the costs of production exceed the income that can be derived from their sale. Efforts to attract buyers, or to produce audiences at a lower unit cost, can have unexpected social consequences that are not altogether different from the effects of pollution occasioned by the use of cheap fuels in the production, and sexually-oriented advertising in the marketing of traditional commodities.

As with all goods sold in the market, producers and distributors of audiences have an incentive to try and increase the perceived value of their commodities. Producers of minority audiences have the same incentive to represent their wares as being of high quality. However, unlike the vendors of other commodities, the need to overcome racial and ethnic prejudice and stereotypes, represents an additional burden. Ironically, the use of stereotypes in the effort to sell "problematic" audiences, may serve to reinforce negative, or extremely limited constructions of the populations from which the segments are derived.

Audience as victim

Historically, media critics have charged the industry with bringing harm to individuals and to the society at large. The harm can be direct or indirect. Indirect harm is assumed be produced through misrepresentation, or marginalization. Critics are most often successful in bringing about the desired public response when they frame their critique in terms that define the victims as being incapable of defending themselves. While cultural criticism can no longer characterize the entire audience as naïve innocents, unable to resist temptation, or see through the bald misrepresentation of people and relationships, few hesitate to claim that children represent a population at risk.

Less frequently critics will suggest that there are adult populations that may be incapable of defending its members against subtle communicative appeals. The paternalism that is inherent in these appeals is especially troublesome because the population groups are assumed to have a large proportion of its adult members at risk. Groups defined by ethnicity and race are believed to be particularly vulnerable to appeals inviting the consumption or abuse dangerous commodities, or engagement in high risk activities (Smith and Cooper-Martin 1997). This criticism has been particularly sharp with regard to the targeted marketing of alcohol and tobacco products to African Americans, Indians and Hispanics.

There is a particular irony to be examined in this regard. Minority-owned media are more likely to be struggling financially because they serve an undervalued market. As a result they are more likely to be dependent upon income from the purveyors of suspect goods and services. The Black press, for example, has long been criticized for its publication of ads for "aphrodisiacs, patent medicines, clairvoyants' services, lucky charms and other appeals to superstition, and skin lighteners" (Wolseley 1990), p. 330.

Audience segmentation

While segmentation became the dominant approach to constructing the audience as consumer at the end of the 21st century, the concept of segmentation actually emerged quite early in the development of consumer culture (Ewan 1976). Depending upon the perspective of the actor, different approaches will be relied upon for the identification of audience segments. Divergence in goals will engender reliance on different techniques for modifying those segments through discursive action. While early segmentation was based on gender, rather than race or ethnicity, marketers quickly developed specialized appeals that were designed to capture the attention and loyalty of women as a segment of the reading and listening audience.

Language use was, and continues to be a primary basis for segmenting ethnic audiences. The size and stability of linguistically defined audience segments varies widely among nations and communities, and across historical periods. This variability reflects the differential rates at which loyalty to one's linguistic heritage is eroded by adoption of the language of the majority community. Differences in reliance and use of the mother tongue among members of French, German and Italian communities in the United States helps to explain differences in the survival of the associated ethnic press that once served these immigrant groups (Haller 1988). The decision to maintain, and to reproduce linguistic competence in the face of fierce pressure to conform to an "English only" standard, reflects a high level of group identification.

Group identification

Racial and ethnic identity varies as a reflection of the influence of a complex of factors that push and pull individuals toward diffusion and assimilation or the maintenance of socio-cultural distinctiveness within the dominant society (Cornell and Hartmann 1998), (Subervi-Velez 1986).

There has been important work published in recent years that has helped us to understand the ways in which racial and ethnic identities are formed and transformed (Gandy 1998). A critical distinction is made between identity and identification. Identity is understood as a reflection of individual and collective agency, while identification is understood as a result of the exercise of power by others. Among the more sophisticated analyses of identity formation that engage both power and agency are those which describe the ways in which social structures help to determine the salience of particular identities (Cornell and Hartmann 1998). Unfortunately, there has been only scant attention paid to those factors that determine the role that racial and ethnic identity, rather than identification plays in the construction of audience segments. Identity is thought to reflect, as well as shape the response of individuals to particular media content. Audience segments may differ to the extent that racial and ethnic identity has a central core that is political and collectivist.

Anderson (1996) distinguishes between strategic and engaged audiences on the basis of the extent to which these audiences are formally organized, and engage with each other in mutually dependent relationships. Strategic audiences may be understood in relation to associated concepts of interpretive communities, social locations, and cultural capital.

Theorists assume that a high degree of common understanding and appreciation of cultural artifacts has been derived from similar experiences, and a critical response to media content reflects common ideological perspective. An acknowledged group identity of this type is revealed when a particular group, such as African Americans “oppose what they see and hear from an ideological position as harmful, unpleasant, or distasteful media representations” (Davis and Gandy 1999), p. 368.

Jorge Schement (1998) has examined the distinctions between racial and ethnic identification in relation to media segmentation. He suggests that the use of race as a category advantages Whites because as the dominant group, they can use the language of race to stereotype, and thereby assign members of groups defined racially to a subordinate status. On the other hand, he sees ethnicity as a matter of choice, as reflecting greater autonomy and self-determination in the realm of identity. At the same time he suggests that “in the calculus of modern media, ethnicity has emerged as a potent determinant for organizing market segments” (Schement 1998), p. 93.

Whether race, or ethnicity, or some unstable mix of the two forms the basis for the classification of groups, identification is also the product of a complex of influences that includes, but extends beyond those actors with a strategic, or instrumental interest in audiences. Castells (1997), for example, explores the ways in which ethnicity is being "specified as a source of meaning and identity" which is different from the ways in which racial identification has been used as a "source of oppression and discrimination" in the past (Castells 1997), p. 53. His charting of the evolution of African American racial identity emphasizes the cleavages that have emerged within the population along class and ethnic lines. He finds a contemporary ethnic division among African Americans based on religion that is being brought about by the growing importance of Islam in Black communities. Yet, Castells still suggests that ethnicity does not have genuine potential as the basis for forming a common identity "because it is based on primary bonds that lose significance, when cut from their historical context." In the networked society that he sees developing, "ethnic roots are twisted, divided, reprocessed, mixed, differentially stigmatized or rewarded" according to a logic "that makes symbolic composites out of blurred identities" (Castells 1997), p. 59.

Measurement

As Peterson suggests, “the ways that media and market researchers measure audiences pervasively shape the ways that people in the media and advertising view those audiences. And at the same time, the ways that these communicators wish to view audiences shape the ways that researchers measure them” (Peterson 1994), p.171.

The social construction of audiences proceeds from mental images through the development of simple classifications that become "facts" once captured by checkmarks on one official form or another. Estimates of the size of current population segments, and predictions of those to be encountered in the future are based on such facts.

For the most part, when Whites identify minority audience segments, either for commerce, or for public service, there is a tendency to be guided more by convenience,

than by consideration of the identities actually held by members of target populations. While people who are identified as Asians in the United States, or Britain, or Australia may ultimately come to identify themselves in this way, it is clear that their own identity departs from official classifications upon arrival as an immigrant. The impact of official classifications is widespread. For example, because the limited budgets of public service broadcasters such as the BBC have to be distributed among the major minority communities, the decision to "serve" Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Indians from East Africa by means of a single program, like Asian Magazine, seems perfectly reasonable to White program managers. The fact that this ethnic construction is rejected as unacceptable by the members of these ethnic communities is taken as further evidence of their unreasonable demands, and insatiable appetites for special treatment (Husband and Chouhan 1985).

The political economy of segmentation

The development of segmented audiences takes place in the context of an environment that is shaped by changes in technology, markets, and regulatory philosophy and practice that both reflect, and are implicated in the transformation of global cultures (Mosco 1996), (Schiller 1999). We are entering into an era in which regulation by so-called "market forces" is replacing more direct forms of institutional control (Mosco 1989), pp. 85-94, (Polic and Oscar H. Gandy 1991). The reduction of regulatory barriers to the ownership of broadcasting entities has, somewhat ironically, reduced the number of stations owned by minorities at the same time that the number of stations targeted to those populations has increased (Siegelman and Waldfogel 1998).

Differences between media

Understanding the construction of audience segments clearly requires consideration of the differences between media technologies that make the pursuit of distinctions within populations worthwhile. A primary constraint on the production of diversity within audiences is the availability of bandwidth, or channel capacity. An assumption of channel scarcity has historically been offered as a justification for regulatory control over access to the infrastructure of broadcasting. A given state of technical development as well as politicized decisions about the allocation of spectrum to particular functions have, over time, determined that less, rather than more diversity would be the defining characteristic of national broadcasting systems.

It is unwise to think about communications technology independently of the regulatory systems and market structures that govern access to and control of production and distribution resources. For example, while it may be technologically feasible to dramatically increase the number of distinctly programmed channels it may not be economically or politically feasible to do so. The costs of owning and operating broadcasting entities have meant historically that members of minority groups have been excluded from positions of administrative authority. However, because operational control can be separated from ownership, members of minority communities have still been involved in the production of specialized content. Where the technology of networking makes it possible to consolidate small, isolated communities into an

economically, or politically viable segment, minority group members may be called upon, or invited to produce program material. In the United States “Black radio networks allowed blacks to write, produce, and broadcast news, sports, information, and entertainment exclusively for blacks”(Johnson 1993/4), p. 183.

Of course, elitist assumptions about program standards may serve to limit the involvement of racial and ethnic minority group members in the production of targeted media content within certain media. In Australia, ethnic radio broadcasters employed large numbers of individuals from targeted linguistic communities in the production of programs. Yet, responsibility for the production of “multicultural” programs for the television service was reserved for professional organizations managed by Whites because of assumed differences in standards and skill (Patterson 1990).

Because of the comparatively minor expenses required for the publication of a newspaper, magazine, or newsletter, we observe publications serving very small communities. This fact, in combination with the limited scope of distribution that geographic segmentation enables, has made it possible for these periodicals to be published for a specialized readership numbering in the hundreds. With access to inexpensive computers and desktop publishing software, rather sophisticated examples of an ethnic community press have been produced.

While the economics that characterize the production and distribution of print media include incremental costs of paper, ink, and fuel, that may still be a constraint on diversity, the economics of distribution for the Internet are quite different. This rapidly developing network makes it possible to imagine, develop, and sustain a system of global distribution for any number of diasporic communities (Zhang and Xiaoming 1999). Here the primary constraints are the economic limitations on access to minority audiences that is described as “the digital divide” (Bikson and Panis 1995), (Ervin and Gilmore 1999), where the maxim size of the target audience is limited because its members have not invested in the necessary equipment.

The identification of audience segments may include estimates of the actual as well as the potential audience. The possibility of being in an audience depends upon a variety of factors, such as the ownership of the devices necessary to receive and display media content; being in the community or neighborhood that is served by a particular delivery system, such as cable television; and having the requisite skills, such as literacy, in order to be in the market for magazines and newspapers. Attempts to project the size, rate, and extent of participation in the markets for new technology are both expensive and unreliable, even for the mainstream audience (Carey and Elton 1996). The task is even more difficult for populations defined by race and ethnicity.

Demographics

Although the critical points at which a audience segment will be considered by observers to be too small to be worthy of attention will vary across time and space, the relative size, wealth, and political power of the population within a defined segment is always important.

The problems involved in estimating the size of different racial and ethnic segments are substantial. Government statistics are a primary source of such estimates, but the statistics are far from reliable. Depending upon the ways in which critical questions are asked, very different estimates and projections can emerge. Projections of the US population in 2025 when framed in racial terms, estimate the proportion of Whites at 78% of the total. This estimate is inflated because of the fact that Hispanics are classified racially as White. However, when people are asked to identify themselves in ethnic terms, Whites are projected to be less than 63% of the population in 2025 (Schement 1998) pp. 94-95.

Part of the problem of estimation is to be found in a growing unwillingness on the part of many individuals to accept a biological basis for their classification by race (Gandy 1998), (Ratcliff 1994). At the moment, the desire on the part of the children of interracial unions to reflect the racial heritage of both their parents by identifying themselves as "multiracial" has been subordinated to the realities of identity politics. Articulate representatives of the communities which they may, or may not identify with, have argued successfully that those communities would suffer the loss of "strength in numbers" should these individuals choose to be counted as something other than Black or Asian, or Native American. Recently, the US Office of Management and Budget (OMB) introduced what can only be a stop-gap solution for the 2000 census. They have agreed to allow respondents to mark more than one racial category on their forms (Budget 1998).

Commercial estimates are no more reliable. In many communities, minority audiences remained invisible or poorly conceived because they have been rather poorly measured by the agencies responsible for estimating circulation and exposure to commercial messages. Severe undercounting persists in many of these markets because the leading agencies rely on estimation techniques that have been designed primarily for the mainstream audience.

While some of the undercounting and bias in the measurement of minority audience segments is based the exclusion of eligible respondents from samples because of language, there are other distortions that reflects the influence of aversive racism. Failure to place diaries, or meters because of real, or imagined differences in security, reliability, and maintenance of equipment continues to produce wildly varying estimates of audience size and composition.

Managers of minority media, and those who represented their interests have used a variety of strategies to generate compelling evidence of population size and value. The more successful approaches generally involved contracting for special surveys by highly respected research firms. Even then, most of these surveys remained suspect because of the obvious self-interest reflected in the design of the surveys, and the interpretation of the data. Yet, in the absence of special efforts by mainstream agencies, ethnic minority segments would be inadequately defined.

Tastes and preferences

The identification of minority audience segments represents a classic “chicken and egg” problem. Gathering evidence for the existence of unique audience segments depends in part on the availability of the types of content that would encourage their distribution into different sets of consumers (Barwise and Ehrenberg 1988), (Frank and Greenberg 1980). Early attempts to determine whether revealed preferences indicated the existence of segments within the television audience were constrained by the relatively limited range of program types available at any particular viewing hour. Barwise and Ehrenberg concluded that “in television there is nothing like the striking segmentation which is regularly reported for the readership of newspapers and magazines” (p. 36). At the time of their report, the analyses reported by Frank and Greenberg (1980) represented the most comprehensive study of television audience tastes and preferences, and very little of the variance in revealed preference for different program types was associated with either demographic or lifestyle characteristics of segments. Because the analyses were based on reported viewing of programs that were actually broadcast by American television networks, the amount of variety captured in the program “types” that were validated by factor analysis, the limited success in finding clearly defined segments is understandable.

However, a subsequent analysis performed with the American public broadcasting system in mind (Frank and Greenberg 1982), did make use of these data to demonstrate the potential for programming for Black and Hispanic audience segments. Frank and Greenberg suggested that public broadcasting could serve minority audiences not only by producing Black or Hispanic programming, but also by producing programs that were relatively more successful in attracting members of those population segments. They identified the interest segments that had relatively high numbers of Blacks and Hispanics. They also identified the program types in which a Black or Hispanic viewing index was much higher than that of the overall population. Perhaps because of the linguistic constraint in existence at the time, Hispanics were not as avid viewers of television as were African Americans. None of the index scores for Hispanics exceeded 200. Three program types (music, science fiction, and soap operas) were viewed with comparatively high frequency by Blacks.

Historically, neither producers, nor their financial investors, or primary clients have been willing to risk substantial investments in the absence of evidence that an audience actually exists. As the balance between risk and opportunity shifts as a function of increased channel capacity, the opportunity to demonstrate the existence of demographically defined clusters of interest increases. Differential tastes and preferences can only be revealed in the context of a large number of options readily perceived as different.

As the number of distinct options increases, several possibilities for audience response present themselves. Consider the expansion of program options that might accompany an increase in the number of channels available in a market with cable, or satellite delivery. Some members of the audience viewers can be expected to spread their viewing across a greater number of channels and programs. Others may increase their viewing of a subset of the programs available. Increased polarization, or greater intensity of viewing of a

smaller number of program types would be *de facto* evidence of the existence of segments definable by taste and preference ((Webster and Phalen 1997), p. 113). Thus, it would be possible to define segments on the basis of the defining attributes of programs. These might be definable as taste segments (Cantor 1994) .

Racial and ethnic segmentation is based on the assumption that the preference for specific content exhibited by members of one group differs substantially from the preferences exhibited by members of other groups defined by race or ethnicity.

There is convincing evidence to suggest that there are real differences in the media preferences of particular racial and ethnic groups. It seems clear that Whites and African Americans have quite different television preferences, even though members of both groups may be found in substantial numbers in the same audience for any program, or program type. Despite the fact that African Americans watch nearly twice as much television as the national average (in part because they tend to extend their viewing into the late evening hours), when their favorite programs are compared, Black and White viewers had little in common in 1996. Only Monday Night Football was in the top ten lists of both groups in the spring ratings sweep (Schement 1998), p. 109.

Differences in racial group identification are also associated with revealed preferences for Black-targeted media. Younger and more racially oriented African Americans have been observed to spend more time with, and to be less critical of the programming on BET, the only national television network targeted to African Americans (Jones 1990). Bob Johnson, BET's chief executive and majority owner, is betting that the sharpening distinctions between the television preferences of Whites and African Americans will increase his control over the path to this audience segment (1999). As early as 1972, however, communication scholars questioned the usefulness of race as a basis for segmentation and targeting in all media. After noting that the audience for black-oriented radio stations often contained a sizable audience of white youth and college students, Surlin suggested that "listener's behavior is based more on psychological 'blackness' than on physiological 'blackness'" (Surlin 1972), p. 297.

It is a matter of strategy, informed by resources that determines what the relative proportion of an empirical audience needs to be of one race or ethnic group before the genre is associated reliably with a particular audience segment. It is a well-known fact that because of the relative size of the White population, and because of the popularity of rap and hip-hop music among White males, the audience for this music in urban centers often contains more Whites than African Americans. Thus, one can predict with greater confidence that a young African American Male will be a fan of hip-hop music, than one can predict the musical preferences of a young White male. At the same time, the probability that the next purchaser of a hip-hop record will be Black, or even American, is necessarily quite low.

To date, there is only a woefully inadequate body of research that might be used to determine the extent to which audiences differ substantially in their preferences for media content. In the absence of a well-developed body of research on the tastes and

preferences of minority audiences, producers and distributors have to rely on “trial and error” (Wildman and Karamanis 1998).

There are, of course, other ways to determine the relationship between racial and ethnic status and preferences for particular media content. The most obvious, though problematic approach is to ask individuals directly about what they like among existing programs. The strength of this response may be assessed by direct, or comparative weighting, as approximated by asking respondents to rank order programs on some dimension such as “liking.”

One attempt to discover if there were underlying attributes of programs that might be the basis for differential preferences used 68 descriptors to characterize 74 prime time programs, and then to associate those characterizations with different demographically defined segments (Neuman 1991), pp. 121-2). The primary conclusion of this analysis was that there were common perceptions and common motivations governing the viewing of prime time programs.

Few studies have focused specifically on attributes that one might expect racial and ethnic preferences to be revealed. Not surprisingly, Frank and Greenberg (1980) did find that Blacks were more likely to view programs that included African American performers and situations. Given the segregated character of television programming, this may also explain the revealed preference for music program in which African American talent was most likely to be found.

It is also important to consider the extent to which members of the target community develop and maintain a sense of confidence or trust in the content provider. Despite their use of mainstream media, African Americans have historically expressed a higher level of trust in Black-targeted media in matters specifically related to the interests of African Americans (Gibbons and Ulloth 1982).

Market value

The construction and pursuit of minority audience segments is governed in large part by the logical calculus of expected value. Information about the expected value of any segment is at least as unreliable as the information about its size and demographic composition.

Advertising agencies play a critical role in determining the perceived value of audience segments defined by race or ethnicity. The incentive for an agency to promote the value of the segment is to be found in their claim of special competence in reaching that segment. The value of the segment may be inferred, in part from the number and visibility, and reported billing of agencies that claim expertise in reaching particular segments. Some entrepreneurs have chosen to specialize on ethnic audiences in particular, developing divisions that target Hispanics and Asians as well as African Americans. In 1988, seventeen agencies, with billing in excess of \$235 million, were listed as specializing in advertising to African Americans (Wolseley 1990), p. 335.

While it has long been argued that advertisers assign a lower value to Black and Latino audiences, it has been difficult to gather evidence in support of such a claim. In a rare moment, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) financed an analysis of advertising rates and audience shares (Ofori 1999). By comparing the share of advertising revenue to shares of audiences captured by different radio stations, different “power ratios” could be computed. If stations within a given market received a share of revenue equal to their share of audience, the power ratio would be equal to 1. If the ratio for segments of the market were less than one, a reasonable conclusion would be that their audiences were perceived to be less valuable to advertisers, or of interest to a smaller number of advertisers. The evidence is clear. Minority format stations had an average power ratio less than 1.0, while non-minority format stations had an average power ratio that exceeded 1.0. Other evidence of distortions in the market suggested that minority-owned stations had an even lower average power ratio than similarly targeted stations that were owned by Whites.

Evidence of the existence of “reasonable racism” abounds in this market (Armour 1997). From time to time, advertisers have been accused of instructing their representatives not to “make ethnic buys.” A variety of rationales might be offered as the basis for making “reasonable” or legitimate business decisions to avoid media that attract members of particular racial and ethnic groups. In the absence of knowledge from experience or from research, stereotypes about the members of racial and ethnic groups leads advertisers to assume that the costs of producing a customer from within this group would exceed the additional revenue to be gained. Ignorance of the consumer leads to avoidance. A similarly uninformed rationale suggests that minority consumers can be reached just as easily and effectively through mainstream media channels.

There are also decisions that are based on fear of the racialized consumer. This fear has two related dimensions. Both have a basis in racial prejudice: traditional aversion, and a modern form of reasonable racism (Armour 1997). Aversive racism is assumed or projected upon the White consumer (Dovidio and Gartner 1986). It is assumed that Whites will not want to eat or shop in the company of African Americans. It is even assumed that White consumers will not want to be associated with commodities known to be preferred Blacks or other ethnic group members who occupy lower rungs on the ladder of social status. Thus, a store owner, or product manager is unwilling to risk trading the White customers they already have for the minority consumers they might attract through targeted ads.

The reasonable racist avoids the minority consumer because they believe that Blacks and Hispanics will steal, tip less generously, or otherwise prove to be less valuable customers (Armour 1997), (Ofori 1999). Avoiding such customers is seen to make good business sense.

Ideology

The creation of minority audience segments is almost by definition a process of racial formation (Omi and Winant 1994). As Omi and Winant suggest, racial categories are the products of a socio-historical process that reflects the differential power and influence of

identifiable interest groups. Members of these groups are engaged in a number of goal-oriented racial projects that are concerned with shaping the distribution of social and economic resources along racial lines. Roberta Astroff argues that efforts to define and then capture a Latino market required the subordination of racial distinctions among the Latinos living in the United States (Astroff 1988-89). This strategy was particularly important because of the link between race and social class that finds Black Hispanics among the poorest members of this group. "When race, language, and culture are collapsed into each other, their social nature and origins can be safely ignored" and this is precisely what occurred in the formation of the Latino segment in the United States (Astroff 1988-89), p. 169.

Nationalism is another ideology that often provides an important influence on the construction of audience segments. For immigrant groups, there is some period of time during which they are expected to overcome their characterization as foreign. In many cases, the children of migrant laborers, even though they are born in the host country, are still treated by members of the dominant community as immigrants. In Britain, the children of Asian, African, and Caribbean migrants have consistently been conceived as "aliens within" by White Britons (Husband and Chouhan 1985).

Racism, nationalism, and xenophobia come together to shape the ways in which the social demography of these groups develops (Baumgartl and Favell 1995). The concentration of newcomers into urban ghettos or enclaves is a commonplace. The racial hierarchies that distinguishes among immigrant groups enables some to become more diffused into suburban communities, while Blacks, especially African Americans, remain highly segregated (Denton and Massey 1993).

The political leaders in those nations whose recent history has been marked by substantial immigration have been repeatedly forced to choose between integrationist and pluralist national models. In many cases, an explicit policy in support of multiculturalism has been expressed and implemented. Such policies reflect an effort by the nation-state to overcome the crippling influence of xenophobic opposition to economic and political claims made by ethnic minorities (Baumgartl and Favell 1995). As one observer puts it, "Ethnic radio and multicultural television did not just happen because they seemed like a good idea at the time" (Jakubowicz 1989), p. 109. The move toward multiculturalism in Australia was in part a reaction to anxieties generated by news of racial strife in Britain. The national broadcasting system was called upon to help maintain some semblance of social cohesion in a nation of immigrants.

In other cases, a multicultural policy evolves as a reflection of an underlying ethos of the broadcasting establishment. "The ideological virtue of multiculturalism is that whilst it allows for the recognition of cultural difference it ignores relations of power and domination" (Husband and Chouhan 1985), p. 285. As a result, however, the programming content that is provided falls far short of expressing the full range of anger and resentment that members of minority groups are bound to feel.

To a great extent, the minority press has traditionally been an oppositional press. Often, its critical function has been to provide an alternative construction of the challenges and opportunities faced by its primary audience. This oppositional stance has been part of a continuing "war of images" between Blacks and Whites (Dates and Barlow 1993). Not only African Americans, but a broad array of persons of color who came to the United States as slaves, indentured laborers, or immigrants, have been subjected to biased and distorted representation in the news media (Keever, Martindale et al. 1997), and the ethnic press has sought to set the record straight.

The decision to increase the supply of content to meet the interests and perceived needs of minority communities has often meant increasing the participation of members of these communities in critical production decisions. This has meant increasing their employment, and more critically, increasing their operational control through ownership. In the United States, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) initiated a policy encouraging minority ownership of broadcasting facilities in 1978. The general assessment of this policy is that it has failed, and in the wake of the Reagan counter-revolution, has actually slipped back toward the social conditions that marked its origins (Ofori, Edwards et al. 1997).

A critical issue that is rarely addressed, is whether a policy in support of the development of Black or Brown Capitalism should have been expected to produce a result in the market that would be genuinely different from that which the existing market provides. Is it likely that minority capitalists could be more successful than Whites in squeezing profits out of the market. If they could, would it be because they possessed specialized knowledge of minority segments that was gained from their own experience of minority status. In the absence of irrationality (and inefficient racism) we would have to assume that if this specialized knowledge exists, it would be available to White programmers through the market (Wildman and Karamanis 1998). Evidence that the real, rather than the idealized market devalues whatever expertise that minority programmers might have, suggests that limits on the supply of content of interest to minority segments will continue to be the rule, rather than the exception (Ofori 1999),(Siegelman and Waldfogel 1998).

Targeting Blacks

The history of the African American segment may serve as a model for other segments based on race or ethnicity. African Americans were ignored by the mainstream, served primarily by an alternative press motivated by a social mission. The emergence of African Americans as consumers following World War II also marked the beginnings of large commercial interest in the segment. The success of the civil rights movement brought about a degree of integration and assimilation of African Americans into the dominant culture that was nearly matched by the assimilation of African American culture into the mainstream. In what might be considered to be the twilight of a rather long day in the life of American media history, considerable uncertainty remains about the status of an African American audience segment.

It is clear that American advertisers are faced with a quandary. Marketing to African Americans has become a serious problem. The industry is unsure about “whether to see them as a separate cultural entity, like Hispanic Americans, or to target them with the white population according to distinctions in income, gender, age, and other characteristics” (Turow 1997), p. 80. To a considerable extent, it was Black media executives, and the managers of advertising agencies that specialized in the African American market, who had been complaining about the “mainstreaming” of Black America. There was also evidence that newly emerging television networks had merely “used” the African American viewer as a way to establish themselves within the industry, and then abandoned the segment in order to move on to more lucrative markets (Carter 1996), (Trescott 1996), (Wynter 1998). It wasn’t always this way.

For my people

The Black press in the United States has traditionally been understood as having provided both leadership and support for African Americans in their continuing struggle for civil rights (Wolseley 1990). The flagship paper, Freedom's Journal, and some 50 other Black newspapers were established between 1827 and 1865 in support of the abolitionist movement (Brie 1977-78). Even during the 20th Century, the Black press seemed to rise in response to increases in the oppression of its target population. Reginald Owens examined the correlation between the numbers of African American publications, their circulation, and a variety of measures of oppression, including lynching, executions, and infant mortality. The number of Black publications was higher during periods when the level of oppression was highest (Owens 1996).

For the most of their history, the publishers of African American newspapers, and periodicals were motivated by service, rather than profit. Neither circulation, nor advertising could be relied upon to finance these publications, and the publishers used income from donations and from other employment to sustain the enterprise (Brie 1977-78). Of course, there were exceptions, such as Robert Abbott's Chicago Defender, which reported a national circulation of 200,000 by 1917. It wasn't until the 1940s, however, that the Black press evolved into a cornerstone of Black capitalism along with funeral parlors and insurance companies, and beauty product suppliers.

Magazines, highly dependent upon advertising for their success, developed an editorial stance that was designed to attract the Black middle class. John Johnson, publisher of Ebony magazine, claimed a special, non-confrontational role for his magazine. From its earliest days, Johnson's publications revealed an editorial preference for stories that accentuated the positive, and "happier" aspects of Black life in the United States (Hirsch 1968).

When surveyed in 1989-90, managers of African American newspapers varied in their estimates of the factors that would determine their continued existence. Contrary to expectations, competition from either African American, or mainstream newspapers were not perceived as the primary threat to these weekly publications (Lacy, Stephens et al. 1991). In the view of its managers, the Black press remains an alternative, rather than a

directly competitor of mainstream newspapers, and few publishers believed that the need for a racially identified black press would disappear in the foreseeable future.

Market value

Advertisers have never considered the African American consumer to be a very important segment. Several primary reasons have been articulated (Wolseley 1990), pp. 338-9:

1) African Americans are poor, and are therefore not a viable market, 2) African Americans are consumers of mainstream media, and can be reached efficiently through those sources, 3) Association with African Americans is frowned upon by Whites, the primary market, and attracting Black consumers risks offense, and loss of those more valuable consumers, 4) Media targeted to African Americans are likely to contain more confrontational, and non-traditional content, that is generally of low quality. As a result, these media represent an unacceptable environment for mainstream products. The fact that most of these reasons are based on uninformed racial stereotypes does little to soften their impact on behavior toward this audience segment.

While there is some debate regarding the historical moment at which the African American consumer was seen to be worthy of any attention by mainstream advertisers (Brooks 1995), (Pride and II 1997), the process through which this market was assessed, and then constructed discursively is not much different from the process that characterizes the exploitation of other ethnic markets. The first stage always involves efforts to estimate the size and cumulative value of the market. The African American market, estimated at \$4.8 million in 1942, was by that time being discussed in the trade press as a market that ought not be ignored.

Eventually government statistics, such as those produced by the Department of Commerce, and the Bureau of the Census, would be relied upon in estimating the size and quality of the African American market. But specialized market research was needed to generate initial interest in this segment. The publisher of the Afro-American newspapers, in cooperation with the Urban League, contracted for the first comprehensive assessment of the Black consumer market in 1945. Also important were middle-men who were able to bridge the gap between the two communities. William Ziff, a White entrepreneur who later became the head of the Ziff-Davis publishing empire, served as an agent who specialized in obtaining advertising for the Black press (Pride and II 1997).

The purchase of advertising with media targeted specifically to the Black audience by a major advertiser was a reliable indicator that the segment had achieved a new status. At that point it became worthy of special attention, and a targeted approach. A decision by the Hoover Company to advertise its vacuum cleaners in Ebony magazine in 1951 was precisely that kind of marker (Brooks 1995). The geographic concentration of African Americans in Northern cities following a war-time migration of Blacks from the rural South, further enhanced the perceived value of this market segment in the eyes of advertisers.

Black Radio

The history and contemporary status of radio programming targeted to African Americans underscores the critical intersection between racism and the political economy of media in the United States (Newman 1988). Because of the economics of radio, and historic limitations on the accumulation of wealth among African Americans, radio programs designed to appeal to Blacks was produced largely under the control of Whites for much of its history in the United States.

The development of a Black radio audience, built largely on the basis of Black on-air talent, and recordings of Black performers was financed initially by a small, but growing number of advertisers, expanded markedly following World War II. White owners of Black-format stations had been led into this market by periodic reports and columns in the trade press, that also provided guidance for these “adventurers.” One source, *Sponsor* magazine, was especially helpful in reporting surveys of the African American audience, and providing lists of “do’s and don’t’s” for success (Newman 1988).

It seems ironic that during a period in which the United States was just beginning to dismantle for formal structure of racial segregation, increased involvement and control of black-oriented radio by African Americans actually sharpened the extent of segregation within the radio audience. The heightening of Black racial identity and pride coincided with an appreciation of the economic value of audience segmentation. Black radio programming, including popular rhythm and blues music, helped to reinforce racial pride, and the salience of racial identity that would reach a historic peak in the 1960s and 70s.

The establishment of interconnected networks was the best way to create a dispersed audience into a segment that might be of interest to advertisers. Although it was short-lived, a National Negro Network was established by a Black entrepreneur, Leonard Evans, in 1953. Tobacco marketer, Philip Morris, was among the network’s primary sponsors (Johnson 1993/4). A news service, the Black Audio Network, was established in 1968. The network relied on Black journalists, and emphasized African American newsmakers and during its heyday, it convinced upwards of 90 stations to carry its reports.

Changes in FCC policy toward minorities produced a rapid expansion in the number of radio ventures by and for African Americans. The Mutual Black Network, the National Black Network, and Sheridan Broadcasting emerged during the 1970s. Not long afterwards, however, a decline in government support, in addition to changes in the organization of media industries in the US led to consolidation of several independent Black networks.

During this period when the dramatic growth in Black networks supplying targeted programming occurred, there were only 13 stations that were actually owned by African Americans. By 1995, in response to a shift in FCC policy, African Americans had come to own some 203 radio stations. The majority of these stations were targeted to Black listeners. The stations owned by African Americans represent only a fraction of the stations that maintain Black oriented program schedules. Additionally, these stations

capture an even smaller share of the revenue derived from marketing this segment to advertisers (Ofori, Edwards et al. 1997). Following the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 which allowed for an expansion in the number of stations that could be owned in any broadcast market, the numbers of stations owned by African Americans declined sharply. The profitability of those remaining under Black control has been threatened severely by aggressive, direct competition by group-owned stations whose conglomerate status allowed them to share in the increasing good fortune being enjoyed by the industry (Ofori 1999). The movement of White entrepreneurs more actively into Black radio may be taken as evidence of an increased valuation of the audiences produced by Black-format radio. The fact that the perceived value of Black audiences produced by Black-oriented television has declined suggests that the political economy of audiences is far more complex than we had assumed.

Linguistic Segmentation: American Hispanics

There is a large and growing body of literature on the development of Spanish language media in the United States. Attention within the scholarly community does not match, but clearly reflects the growing interest in this segment being shown by investors, advertisers, and others who might benefit financially from its exploitation [Gutierrez, 1977 #94]. Commercial interest in the Hispanic market reflects its present size, its rate of growth, its geographic concentration, and its primary distinction from other segments on the basis of language. There has also been considerable historical interest in the development of the Spanish-language television because of the unique role that Mexican investors played in shaping the American policy response.

Demography

Advertiser interest in that aspect of the Hispanic market defined by Spanish language usage has increased dramatically since the 1960s. Despite the problems inherent in estimating the size of the Hispanic population, US Census Bureau continues to report, and to project dramatic growth in the Hispanic population. Since 1980, the Hispanic population was seen to increase at five times the rate of the general population in the US (Goodson and Shaver 1994). While estimates of the date at which the boundary would actually be crossed, few doubt that the size of the Hispanic population will exceed that of African Americans not long after the turn of the century (Soruco 1996).

The fact that this market was growing rapidly was most often cited (82% of respondents) among the reasons given for targeting Hispanics by Spanish-language advertisers in 1986. An even larger majority of these advertisers were confident that the market would “continue to grow and become more important in years to come” (Albonetti and Dominguez 1989), p. 14. In addition to estimates of the size and amount of disposable income available to this segment as a whole, it was also important for those governed by market considerations, to be able to estimate the costs of reaching this audience. Population density is critical component of those costs.

The geographic distribution of Hispanics in the United States into ethnic enclaves is reflected in concentrations of groups from different regions of the Americas into particular urban centers. Differences in the circumstances leading to the migration of

Hispanics to the United States explains their concentration in different regions. Over 50% of the Latino population is concentrated in California and Texas (Downing 1992). Large concentrations of Puerto Ricans can be found in New York City and in the surrounding region. Miami became the center of life for Cuban immigrants to South Florida, while Los Angeles houses the largest group of Mexican-Americans. One result of this concentration of Latinos has meant that the radio station with the largest audience in Los Angeles would be a Spanish-language station with a Ranchero format (Schement 1998).

Linguistic sleight of hand

Although there are substantial scale economies or efficiencies that make reaching audiences that are as highly concentrated as Hispanics in the United States profitable, even greater efficiencies can be realized through network distribution across several population centers. In the case of Latinos in the US, this has required programmers to erase, or ignore many of the linguistic and historical distinctions that would ordinarily set these communities apart.

There is considerable diversity among those who speak Spanish. A small number, primarily recent immigrants, speak only Spanish. A far larger number, perhaps 50%, speak Spanish only part of the time. There is also a not insignificant number of people who are identified as Hispanic by heritage, who have almost no knowledge or competence in Spanish (Aquirre and Bustamente 1993). Differential linguistic ability and preference has been identified as an important predictor of whether an individual will be a regular user of Spanish language media (Faber, O'Guinn et al. 1986).

Rodriguez (1997) suggests that the decision to produce a idealized Hispanic that would be attractive to mainstream advertisers required the invention of a panethnic Spanish language. The resulting "Walter Cronkite Spanish" that came to characterize the widely viewed newscast, Noticiero Univisión, was stripped of distinguishing accents and intonations that might otherwise identify the national origin of the speaker. To the degree that the creation of a Hispanic segment depended upon the creation of a Hispanic identity, this linguistic invention also contributed to that goal. In the absence of cues to the contrary, members of the audience would readily identify the newscaster as having come from their own region, if not from their own social class. In addition, the journalistic scripts were crafted with a common identity in mind. The choice of collective personal pronouns like "ustedes" and "Nosotros" was strategic. For Rodriguez, "Univisión's use of collective, personal pronouns signal that journalists and panethnic audience together are the insiders, the legitimated actors" in the newscast (Rodriguez 1996), p. 66.

The creation of a panethnic identity in order to achieve a marketable scale for the audience for news has parallels in other media markets. Mahan (1995) discusses the "Latinization" of New York Puerto Rican salsa as part of a marketing strategy developed by Fania Records (Mahan 1995), p. 21. The Cuban heritage of the music, as well as its oppositional character, was lost as its commercialization progressed.

The loss of ethnic/cultural distinctions within the United States as a product of a marketing strategy, shares an ironic relationship to historic concerns about homogenization and cultural imperialism that identified US-based media as the primary threat.

Internal colony

At the same time that many in the community of nations were organizing their resistance to the domination of American media products (Read 1976) and demanding a New World Information and Communication Order (McPhail 1987) in the hope that global policy could reverse the one-way flow of cultural materials, a group of American policy scholars were bringing public attention to bear on an unusual counter example. Félix Gutiérrez claimed that the Spanish International Network (SIN) had established a dominant position in the Spanish language television market in the US in the 1960s. It had since then moved beyond its primitive status as a “bicycle” network that shuttled imported Mexican programs from station to station, to an unparalleled position of power on the basis of direct satellite feeds from Mexico City (Gutiérrez 1979). While the Latino market had generally been ignored by domestic advertisers who tended to think of people who spoke Spanish in the US as both foreign and poor, in comparison with Hispanics in Latin America, Mexican entrepreneurs saw this segment cumulatively as a relatively wealthy population that could serve as a secondary market for Mexican film and video (Rodriguez 1997), p. 288.

While this example has been presented to scholars and policy actors as a unique example of media imperialism (Gutiérrez and Schement 1981), (Gutiérrez and Schement 1984), (Sinclair 1990), the case of SIN also demonstrates the important role of technology in developing the chain of supply that links immigrants to their homelands.

Market value

Astroff (1989) describes the process of transforming Chicanos and other Latino communities into valuable commodities as one marked by challenges and difficulties that went far beyond definition and measurement. She notes that the changes in the ideology of broadcast regulation in the 1980s made it difficult, if not impossible to support the development of Spanish-language broadcasting on cultural, or political grounds. Instead, “Latinos had to be presented as a lucrative and untapped market” (Astroff 1988-89), p. 160. While the social reality of life in the United States had placed Hispanics very near the bottom the economic ladder, individual poverty could be made to disappear when the segment is framed as a market. What becomes relevant to marketers is collective income, or wealth (Gutiérrez 1977). Article after article in the market oriented press offered wildly optimistic, and greatly varying estimates of the size of this market in dollars (Downing 1992).

Not only was it necessary to distinguish this group from the mainstream, in order to justify the investment in the creation of specialized appeals, it was necessary for the advocates of this market to construct a convincing image of them as consumers. Initially, some rather innovative stunts were used to convince advertisers of the existence of a consuming segment. A Spanish-language station in San Antonio Texas, KCOR, appealed

to its listeners to send in box tops, empty containers, and other proofs of purchase to convince national advertisers that there were loyal customers who were being ignored (Schement and Flores 1977). In the process of enhancing the perceived value of this segment, reliance on traditional stereotypes of Latinos meant that “all cultural values and experiences were translated into consumer preferences and behaviors” (Astroff 1988-89), p. 163. Stubborn traditionalism became an enhancement when it was reconfigured strategically as an assurance of brand loyalty.

The Hispanic audience segment continues to be defined and differentiated by class, and linguistic preference across media, markets, and category of consumer goods. What remains to be seen is the extent to which the process of assimilation that marks the dissolution of ethnic segments in general, will determine the future of the Hispanic segment, and the Asian segment that is just beginning to be defined.

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