

The first step toward lightening THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness. PEAR'S SOAP is a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth as civilization advances, while among the cultured of all nations it holds the highest place.

– Advertisement for Pear's Soap in McClure's Magazine, 1899.

'The White Man's Burden' How global media empires continue

The current globalisation of the world's media amounts to "the re-colonisation of the developing countries," writes **Peter Kareithi**, and further extends age-old racist representations...

WE MAKE SENSE of our world from the stories we are told. From these stories we construct the sense of who we are and, more importantly, who we are not. The construction of that difference – of the 'other' – is crucial to the discourse of race. In post-industrial societies such as the United States, the news and entertainment media tell most of the stories to most of the people most of the time. They not only provide narratives for specific discourses about race, but also a shared experience – a common starting point for such dialogue.

Many of the stories that these media tell largely provide narratives that nurture notions of white supremacy and promote discrimination, exploitation and violence

against people of colour. The rapidly increasing globalisation of such media, and their integration with the exploding communication technologies, has facilitated a corresponding globalisation of these racialised narratives. The result of such globalisation is likely to be increased racial fragmentation within national boundaries, and intensified economic and environmental racism by industrialised nations against the people of developing nations.

'DIFFERENCE' AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

The construction of the 'other' is vital to the construction of the self. We know what 'black' means not because there is some essence of 'blackness', but because we can contrast it with its opposite, 'white'. It is the 'difference' between white and black that signifies, that carries meaning. These binary combinations – white/black, day/night, masculine/feminine, citizen/alien – have the great value of capturing the diversity of the world within their either/or extremes, but also run the risk of reductionism. In everyday life, the marking of difference is the basis of the symbolic order which we call 'culture'.

Culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system. According to Richard Dyer, we are always "making sense" of things in terms of some wider categories. In his essay on stereotyping, Dyer (R. Dyer (ed), *Gays and Film*, 1977) argues that without the use of types, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to make sense of the world. Stereotypes, Dyer argues, get hold of the few "simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized" characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity. Stereotyping reduces, essentialises, naturalises and fixes 'difference'.

Stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power. Power is usually directed against the subordinate or excluded group. One aspect of this power is ethnocentrism – "the application of the norms of one's own culture to that of others" (R. Brown, *Social Psychology*, 1965). In short, stereotyping is what Foucault called a "power/knowledge" sort of game. It classifies people accord-

ing to a norm and constructs the excluded as 'other'. It is an aspect of the struggle for Gramscian hegemony.

From the stories we are told we construct our notions of 'social types', of 'normalcy' and of the 'natural' and 'inevitable' with which we learn to read the world around us and beyond. In a world of increasingly consolidated corporate media, audiences become more dependent on journalists, filmmakers and television producers to provide them with the representations, the signs, of the world by which they can encounter the world's reality. It is in those representations that the audiences find the narratives for their discourses about race.

ORIGINS OF RACIALISED REPRESENTATIONS

What are the typical forms and representational practices used to represent 'difference' in popular culture today, and where did these popular figures come from?

Stuart Hall ("The Spectacle of the Other," in Hall (ed), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practice*, 1997) identifies three major moments when the West (meaning imperial Europe and its extended territories in the 'New World') encountered black people, giving rise to an avalanche of popular representations based on the marking of racial difference. The first began with the 16th century contact between European traders and the West African kingdoms, which provided a source of black slaves for three centuries. Its effects were to be found in slavery and in the post-slave societies of the New World. The second was the European colonisation of Africa and the 'scramble' among the European powers for the control of colonial territory, markets and raw materials. The third was the post-World War II migrations from the 'Third World' into Europe and North America. Hall has argued that Western ideas about 'race' and images of racial difference were profoundly shaped by those three fateful encounters.

The exploration and colonisation of Africa produced an explosion of representations of Africa in Europe (J. Mackenzie (ed), *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, 1986). In Britain, for instance, images of racial difference drawn from the imperial encounter – conveyed through writings, maps, illustrations, oral accounts, advertising, commodities and

Racialised representations of black males as violent

other sources – flooded the popular culture at the end of the 19th century. These images identified Africans with Nature, as symbolising 'the primitive' in contrast with 'the civilised' world.

Down at the plantation in the Americas, the racialised representations of slaves heavily emphasised the 'historical' case against the black man based on his supposed failure to develop a civilised way of life in Africa. As portrayed in proslavery writing, Africa was and always had been the scene of unmitigated savagery, cannibalism, devil worship, and licentiousness. Also advanced was an early form of biological argument, based on real or imagined physiological and anatomical differences, which allegedly explained mental

to construct 'difference'

and physical inferiority of blacks to whites. There was also an appeal to deep-seated white fears of widespread miscegenation as pro-slavery theorists sought to deepen white anxieties by claiming that the abolition of slavery would lead to inter-marriage and the degeneracy of the race. (G. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind* 1987).

These arguments were organised in a rigid polemical pattern once the defenders of slavery found themselves in a propaganda war with the abolitionists (Frederickson, 1987). Some of these arguments endured almost unaltered through to the closing decade of the 20th century, as demonstrated in laws banning inter-racial marriages in South Africa under apartheid, and in the theorising of Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray in their infamous book, *The Bell Curve*, and other pseudo-scientific works that make claims such as genetic intellectual inferiority of blacks to whites.

Racial theory applied the Culture/Nature distinction differently to the two racialised groups. Among whites, 'Culture' was opposed to 'Nature'. Among blacks, it was assumed that 'Culture' coincided with 'Nature'. Whites developed 'Culture' to subdue and overcome 'Nature'. For blacks, 'Culture' and 'Nature' were interchangeable (Hall, 1997).

The coming of the American cinema provided a new popular medium through which these racialised representations found unprecedented wide circulation, both within the United States and the rest of the world. Cinema intensified old stereotypes of blacks – as being innately lazy, primitive, rightly subservient; or, in some cases, 'noble savages', good Christians and devoted servants; or, occupying an ambiguous middle ground, blacks tolerated but not admired, such as the minstrels and entertainers who cracked mindless jokes, or the tricksters telling tall tales.

American cinema also added new stereotypes. In his study, *Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammies and Bucks: an Interpretative History of Blacks in American Films*, Donald Bogle (1973) identifies the five main stereotypes which, he argues, made the cross-over from slavery to modern film, and later to television: the loyal, submissive 'Toms'; the slapstick, entertaining 'Coons'; the 'Tragic Mulattos', or mixed-race women, cruelly caught between "a divided racial inheritance"; 'Mammies', the prototypical house servants, usually

then on, decade after decade, the parade of black 'characters' continued: in the 30s and 40s, white actors playing in black face and, when black people finally played black roles, they were limited to subordinate roles (jesters, simpletons, faithful servants). Also in the 30s came movies such as Mark Allegret's *Zou Zou*, starring Josephine Baker against a background of savage Africa, a vivid early example of the eroticisation of Africans in cinema (b. hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, 1992). The equation of Africans with Nature as opposed to Culture was captured over and over in such movies as the *Tarzan* series, *King Solomon's Mines* and *Return to King Solomon's Mines*.

The infantilisation of the colonised people by the colonisers, or the slaves by the slave owners, found expression in early cinema and is still common today in the depiction of Third World nations by media in the industrial nations. In *Casablanca* (1942) Bergman asks Bogart, "Who is the boy playing the piano?" referring to Dooley Wilson, an adult black man. On American television, such infantilisation continued in programmes such as *Different Strokes* and *Webster*. Combinations of the infantile and the Coon are evident in the 1970s' black comedies such as *Good Times* and also in the 1990s' programmes such as *Martin*, *In Living Color* and *The Wayan Brothers*.

If the invention of American cinema provided a medium for unprecedented circulation of racialised representations, television technology delivered those representations into every American home and beyond. New technology facilitated a continuous daily dose of common racialised images shared throughout the culture: in the news, in sports, in docudramas, in made-for-TV movies, in situation comedies and in music videos.

The American racial experience, as represented in these media, became the common starting point for the discourse of race all over Europe in those countries with large populations of non-white immigrants from the former colonies. In Britain, in France, in Germany and Italy, these discourses shaped the modes of media representations of West Indians, Pakistanis, Moroccans, Algerians, Palestinians, Turks, Nigerians and a host of other members of racial minorities. Thanks to the recent explosion in new communication technologies, and increasing consolidation in media ownership and content production, these images now threaten to become the basis of a new global culture.

The racialised representations found in cinema and



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entertainment media are just as common in the news – or so-called 'reality' media. Most news coverage of minorities, especially blacks, in the United States focuses on entertainment, sports, poverty and crime. Yes, there are many great black entertainers and superb athletes; just as

there exists much black poverty and crime. But there are also many great black engineers, doctors, educators and statesmen and women whose coverage is minimal. There are also many white criminals and much white poverty and illiteracy, but these do not receive as much attention by the news media. The collective result of these representations over time is to associate these maladies with

blackness in the public psyche.

This tendency to associate blackness with negative social behavior in the public psyche is reinforced by the news media's tendency to exclude blacks when reporting positive social developments. Newsmagazine covers offer a good illustration of the sway of the white image. Consider the following:

On 10 May 1999, *Time* ran a story, "Growing Up Online," which featured a white boy around 12 years old. On 19 October 1998, *Time* ran a story "How to Make Your Kids a Better Student," which featured a white boy about 10 years old. In fact, between 8 January 1996 and 6 September 1999, *Time* ran 30 covers about the 'prototypical' American child or adult. The people in the images were anonymous and the topics ranged from "Too Much Homework," "Taking Risks" and "Taking Care of Our Parents". Every image was of a white person. Between 21 September 1998 and 6 September 1999, *Newsweek* ran 10 covers that required the 'anonymous representation' type of image. All covers showed only whites (R. Entman and A. Rojecki, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 2000).

What all this tells us is clear: When editors think 'an

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fat, bossy and cantankerous, but utterly devoted to their white households; and the big, strong, renegade 'Bad Bucks', "over-sexed and savage, violent and frenzied as they lust for white flesh." There are many traces of this in contemporary images of black youth and representations of black urban inner-city culture.

There have been many twists and turns in the ways that black experience has been represented in American film, but the repertoire of stereotypes drawn from slavery days has never entirely disappeared. One of the most influential films of all time, D.W. Griffiths' *The Birth of a Nation*, introduced these black 'types' to the cinema in 1915, with its rallying to the cause of the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacy. From

American person', they automatically think, 'white'.

News coverage of Africa epitomises the media's association of blackness with negativity. Africa right now is back on the top of prime time news in United States. The story is AIDS. In the 1990s, it was the wars in Somalia and Rwanda. In the 1980s it was famine in Ethiopia. War, famine and disease – the three phenomena every American elementary school child links with Africa.

Media coverage of conflicts in Africa and elsewhere often represents 'the other' as driven by primitive emotion, lacking rationality or intellect. The international coverage of the conflict between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda suggested that the genocide was the result of some innate, inter-ethnic

hatred that had erupted into irrational violence – unlike, for instance, the conflict in Northern Ireland. Muslims around the world are repeatedly cast as bloodthirsty zealots always ready to kill and be killed in the name of Allah. This reductionist representation of the Arab ‘terrorist’ illegitimises in the Western mind any claim to economic or socio-political roots (other than religious difference) to the Middle East violence or the Western conflicts with the nations of Libya, Iran and Iraq.

Consider, too, the case of the US/UN mission in Somalia in 1993. Reporting from Mogadishu was driven not by the plight of the Somali people, but by American interests – those of the journalists, the corporations they worked for, the government policies those corporations defend and, somewhere in there, the perceived interests of the audience. The media ignored the complexity of Somali history, framing the conflict instead in terms of mere anarchy, greed and viciousness, echoing the Mafia wars of the 1920s and 1930s and using language such as ‘warlords’ to describe the leaders of the various political factions.

Early on in the international reportage came one of its most powerful images: the representation of Mogadishu as a black ghetto. This resonated well with American audiences, for it provided them with images common in domestic news – of ‘inner-city’ black neighbourhoods infested with crime and drugs. The media focused on young Somali

males on Mogadishu’s streets, armed and willing to shoot to kill at little or no provocation. These young males were shown stealing from food convoys, from white relief workers, from rival gangs and from each other – not unlike common depictions of inner-city American youth. American journalists regularly reported how most of these youths were always high on a local ‘narcotic’ drug called khat (miraa) – very much like the black American youths regularly portrayed as high on crack. The absurdity is that throughout most of the areas where khat is used, it is considered no stronger than coffee.

In keeping with its scenario, the media cast General Aidid in the image of paramount gang leader ordering contracts on the lives of cops (the killing of the Pakistani troops and subsequent deaths of American GIs) and leaders of rival gangs – as a kind of modern-day Al Capone. A massive manhunt was ordered for Aidid, complete with a \$250 000 reward posted on streetcorners in cities all over Somalia (‘Wanted Dead or Alive’). The American GI was cast in the image of John Wayne, hunting down and putting the ‘bad guys’ out of business.

REPRESENTATION AND POWER

Over time, such stereotypical representations shape the attitudes of media audiences on a wide range of important social issues, creating an enabling environment for contin-

ued or intensified discriminatory policies. In the United States, for instance, such representations are closely linked to retrogressive policies in areas such as welfare reform and affirmative action, and to the justification of continued discrimination against blacks, Hispanics and other minorities in areas such as employment, housing, education and access to health care. The racist ideology bred by such representations ignores the huge quantities of tax breaks and subsidies going to corporations (corporate welfare) while casting the poor as leeches who live off public largesse.

Racialised representations of black males as violent and inclined to crime have provided social justification for white state violence against black men in the most horrible ways imaginable. The LA police officers’ violence against Rodney King has been replicated in countless similar episodes across the country.

The policy of targeting black people through a lopsided administration of justice – what is often called ‘racial profiling’ – has devastated black communities all over the United States. The nation’s prisons are jammed with black men. One out of three young African American men is under criminal justice supervision. More than 56% of 18- to 35-year-old African American males are either in prison, jail, on probation or parole, or being sought on warrants on any

given day. Nine out of 10 people on death row in American prisons are black. Throughout the evening news, blacks are profiled in the usual degrading postures: in handcuffs, stretched out on the ground, spread-eagled against a wall, in court, marching off to prisons and drug wards. These images are recycled over and over in the news, in music videos, in entertainment television and in cinema.

GLOBAL MEDIA, TECHNOLOGY AND THE DISCOURSE OF RACE

With the death of Soviet communism and the US’ emergence as the unchallenged superpower, American-European capitalism has embarked on a third phase of imperialist expansion, following the conquest of the Americas and the colonisation of Africa and Asia. Facilitating this third phase is the recent explosion in new communications technologies, whose emergence coincided with the death of the Soviet empire. If the manifestations of the first and second phases of European imperialist expansion were conquest and colonisation, the manifestation of this third phase is economic and cultural globalisation. Consumerism, not Christianity, is the religion of this latest phase of imperialism, and global media are its missionaries.

Prior to the 1980s and 1990s, national media systems were largely organised around domestically owned radio, television and newspaper industries, although there were major import markets for films, TV shows, music and books

that tended to be dominated by US-based firms. All of this is changing rapidly. The global media market has come to be dominated by a few multi-national corporations. Tops among them are Disney, AOL-Time Warner, Sony, News Corporation, Viacom, Vivendi and Bertelsmann. Of these, only three are truly US firms, though all of them have core operations in America. Between them these companies own the major US film studios and all but one of the US television networks. They control 80-85% of the global music market; the preponderance of satellite broadcasting worldwide; a significant percentage of book and commercial magazine publishing; all or part of most of the commercial cable TV channels in the US and worldwide; and a significant portion of European terrestrial (traditional over-the-air) television. (R. McChesney, ‘Global Media, Neoliberalism, and Imperialism,’ *Monthly Review*, Vol 52, No 10, 2001).

The trend toward megamedia is also true in developing countries – in what are often called ‘second-tier’ companies. Mexico’s Televisa, Brazil’s Globo, Argentina’s Clarin and Venezuela’s Cisneros, for example, are among the world’s 60 or 70 largest media corporations. These firms tend to dominate their own national and regional media markets, which have been experiencing rapid consolidation as well. In Africa, South African media groups are rapidly spreading

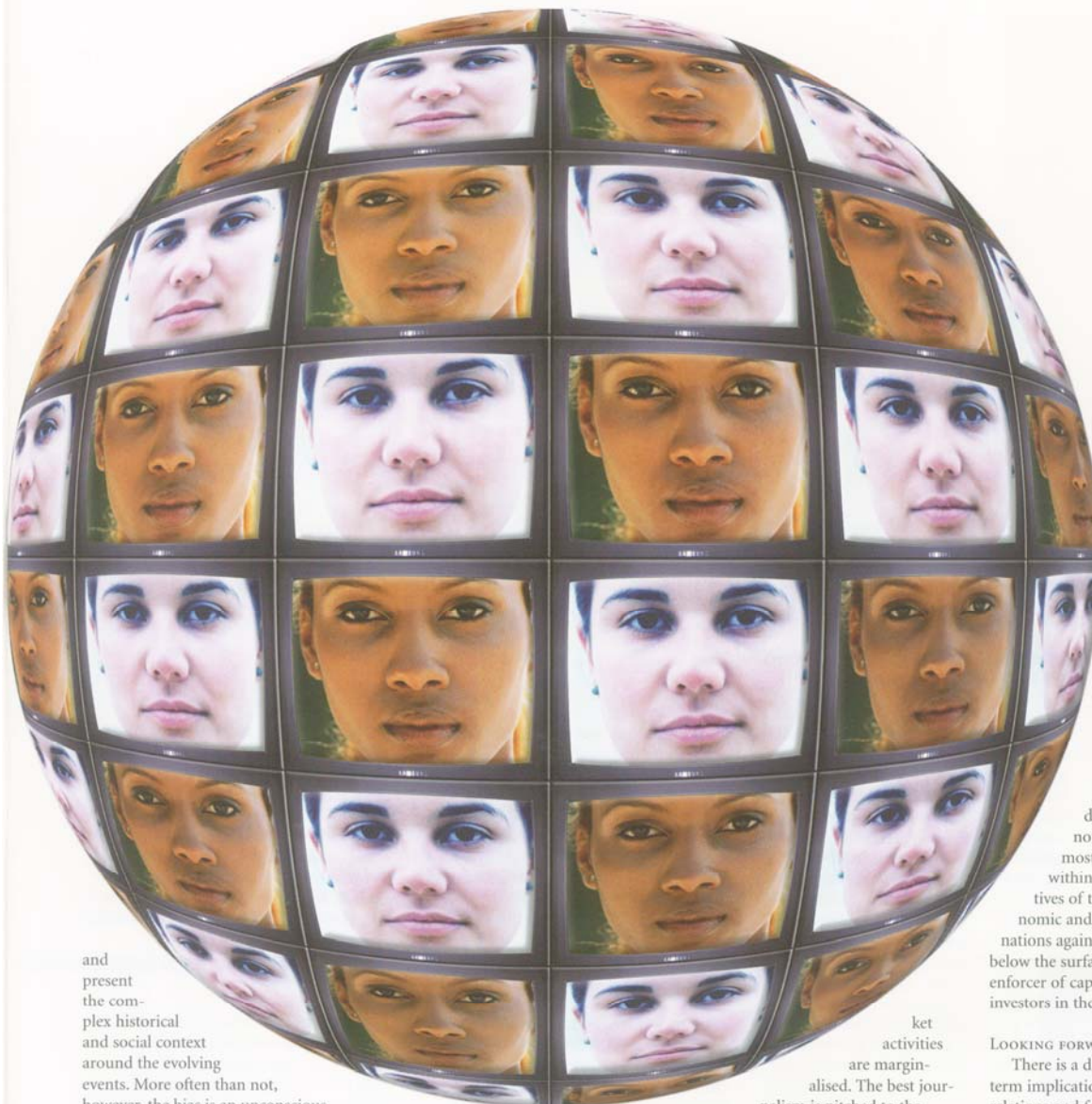
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their influence and control over southern Africa and beyond. These second-tier companies generate much of their revenue from multi-national corporate advertising, and they have extensive ties and joint ventures with the largest media multi-nationals, as well as with Wall Street investment banks.

The global media system is significant to the formation and expansion of global and regional markets for goods and services, often sold by the largest multi-national corporations. But the emerging global media system also has significant cultural and political implications, specifically with regard to democracy, imperialism and the discourse of race. The global commercial media system is radically bourgeois in that it respects no tradition or custom if it stands in the way of profits. Ultimately, once capitalist relations have become pre-eminent, the global corporate media system is politically conservative and potentially racist – because the media giants are significant beneficiaries of the current social structures around the world, and any upheaval in property or social relations is not in their interests.

Sometimes the bias is explicit; other times it is subtle and due purely to commercial concerns. It is easier, and cheaper, to tell stories based on simplistic, stereotypical themes that resonate with a conditioned audience than it is to research

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and present the complex historical and social context around the evolving events. More often than not, however, the bias is an unconscious propagation of what has been 'normalised' and 'naturalised' over centuries, but the record of such 'naturalisation' has been erased from the public psyche.

As Dyer observes, "the establishment of normalcy (ie, what is accepted as 'normal') through social- and stereotypes is one aspect of the habit of ruling groups ... to attempt to fashion the whole of society according to their own world view, value system, sensibility and ideology. So right is this world view for the ruling groups that they make

market activities are marginalised. The best journalism is pitched to the business class and suited to its needs and prejudices. As McChesney puts it, "the journalism reserved for the masses tends to be the sort of drivel provided by the media giants on their US television stations" (McChesney, 2001). Media conglomerates gradually weed out public sphere substance in favor of light entertainment, thereby promoting a deep and profound de-politicisation.

The global media giants are the quintessential multinational firms – with shareholders, headquarters, and opera-

is nothing short of the re-colonisation of the developing countries by the United States and its European allies. The first two phases of European-American imperialism were structured in racial inequality, and there is no reason to believe the third will be any different.

The American racial experience, as represented in the American media and reproduced in the new global media, threatens to become the common starting point for the discourses of race everywhere, even in nations not structured in racial inequality. That will most likely lead to increased racial fragmentation within national boundaries. The economic objectives of the globalisation project imply intensified economic and environmental racism by industrialised nations against the people of developing nations. Not far below the surface is the role of the US military as the global enforcer of capitalism, with US-based corporations and investors in the driver's seat.

LOOKING FORWARD

There is a desperate lack of public discussion of the long-term implications of current media developments for race relations and for democracy in general. Corporate media have the advantage of controlling the very channels where citizens would expect to find criticism and discussion of media policy in a free society. But resistance is growing.

Grassroots movements are sprouting up in many countries, including in the United States and much of Europe, with an agenda to push for structural media reform such as breaking up the big companies, recharging non-profit and non-commercial broadcasting and creating a sector of non-profit and non-commercial independent media under popular control. These efforts are beginning to attract broad-based support. Other activists are developing independent and so-called 'pirate' media – using the Internet for everything from e-zines to radio broadcasting and video streaming – to counteract the corporate system.

With the corporate media consolidating, one thing is clear: As the struggle for the sign intensifies, organising for democratic media must be part of any strategy that expects to have a chance of success in combating racism.

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it appear (as it does appear to them) as 'natural' and 'inevitable' – and for everyone – and, in so far as they succeed, they establish their hegemony" (Dyer, 1977).

With greater concentration, media firms acquire more ability to extract profit from their activities. Ad spending in developing countries has grown at more than twice the rate of GDP growth in the past decade as global media have penetrated those economies. Latin American ad spending, for example, was expected to increase by nearly eight percent in both 2000 and 2001 (McChesney, 2001). This hyper-commercialism generates an implicit political bias in media content. Consumerism, class and racial inequalities and so-called 'individualism' tend to be taken as natural, even benevolent, while political action, civic values and anti-mar-

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