



# Netflix's Perpetuation of the Black-White Binary

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## Introduction

The year 2020 was a turning point in the development of American politics. The increase of social and political movements concerning race and ethnicity opened a nationwide dialogue on the issues racial and ethnic minorities face. One of these many issues concerned the lack of diversity and positive representation of racial and ethnic minorities in the media. This led to pressure from the masses onto mainstream streaming services, like Netflix, for increased diversity and representation. In response, Netflix released a statement in 2021 stating their commitment in “creating opportunities ... for people from all backgrounds and cultures” (Netflix, 2022).

When “Netflix” is searched alongside the phrase “people of color,” Google presents pages of resources directing audiences to television series and films that spotlight strong Black leads. Related searches include “List of Netflix Black films” and “The best Black shows on Netflix.” Netflix’s diversity efforts can be argued as incomplete due to the lacking representation of non-Black minority characters. This research seeks to apply the Black-White binary to the entertainment industry’s misinterpretation of diversity in observing three prominent race and ethnic-based social and political movements’ connection to viewership and Netflix’s approach to Black representation and representation of non-Black racial and ethnic groups.

## Analysis & References PDF



## Analysis of Representation in Netflix

*The public feedback surrounding these social and political movements led to the advocacy for increased diversity and representation within the entertainment industry.*

### Black Representation

- Netflix tweeted, “When we say, ‘Black Lives Matter,’ we also mean ‘Black storytelling matters!’” (Gomez, 2020).
- June 2020: Netflix permanently added a “Black Lives Matter Collection” to its list of genres (Gomez, 2020).
  - Other collections centered around Black creators and characters include: “Black Behind the Camera,” “Black Comedy Icons,” “Black Music Legends,” and “Black & Queer” (Spangler, 2020).
- Common stereotypes among Black characters include Black men portrayed as intimidating criminals and Black women portrayed as loud, angry, or hypersexual.
- The issue of colorism can be observed among Black representation in television and film.
  - Those with lighter skin tones are often cast for more favorable roles.
- Black professionals are twice as likely to be recruited for race-related films than race-agnostic films.

### Asian & Pacific Islander (AAPI) Representation

- May 2021: Netflix temporary added “Celebrate Asian American & Pacific Islander Stories” collection, a commemoration of AAPI Heritage Month (Low, 2021).
  - Aside from the one-minute campaign, “Our Voices, Our Stories: Amplifying Asian American and Pacific Islander Perspectives,” which is not directly found on its streaming website, the collection has been removed from the platform (Nishimura, 2021).
- Viewers are exposed to the misapplication of diversity and representation where Netflix provides a wide variety of Asian content, yet the majority are not produced nor marketed to American audiences and are seen as “foreign” (i.e. Korea’s K-Dramas, China’s C-Dramas, Thailand’s Thai-Dramas, etc.).
- When the “foreign” content gains traction and popularity in the U.S., U.S. Netflix takes direct credit, instead of giving credit to its creators and producers from “foreign” countries like “Squid Games” or more recently “RRR”.
- The root of the U.S. entertainment industry’s high desire of East Asian content over South and Southeast Asian content is due to fetishization of East Asians and colorism.
  - This objectifies and dehumanizes East Asians, while excluding and othering Southeast Asians (almost entirely based on country of origin and physical appearance).

### Hispanic & Latine Representation

- September 2020: Netflix launched the “Celebrating Hispanic Heritage” collection in commemoration of Hispanic Heritage Month.
- There are limited documentaries that show the harsh realities and experiences of undocumented immigrants.
- A variety of immigrant-related films and series surround drug cartels and gang activity.
  - Hispanic and Latine actors are often typecasted as dangerous drug dealers.
- In 2019, the Latine population consisted of an estimated 19% of the U.S. population; however, within the entertainment industry, yet this population was disproportionately underrepresented. About 6% of actors and actresses with speaking parts in films and shows identified as Latine, while only one film director and about 3% of television creators identified as Latine (Faghnder, 2021).
- Colorism is a prevalent issue among telenovelas and Netflix-produced Mexican reality and drama series.
  - Those with lighter skin tones are often cast for more favorable roles (Navarro, 2022).

## The Black-White Binary

According to the paradigm of the Black-White Binary, the American idea of “race” historically focused on the Black community, while non-Black minority groups are succumbed to an “other” category. The experiences of non-Black minority groups are commonly overlooked as Black and white interaction dominates racial discourse.

## Social Movements

### Resurgence of the Black Lives Matter Movement

- The murder of George Floyd by officer Derek Chauvin, which led to raised awareness surrounding police brutality against the Black community.

### Stop Asian Hate Movement

- The spike in hate crimes against Asians that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to increased dialogue about xenophobia and anti-Asian discrimination.

### Immigration Rights Activism

- The political debates preceding and during the presidency of Donald Trump, whose “Build the Wall” campaign worsened the maltreatment of Hispanic and Latine individuals, regardless of their citizenship status.
- The controversy surrounding Trump’s campaign led to the high efforts of activists in furthering the Immigration Rights Movement.

## Conclusion

A “diversity quota” exists in media presentation and casting. Entertainment platforms, like Netflix, increased the on-screen advertisement and representation of television featuring people of color in attempt to appease audience requests and avoid racist accusations. However, guided by the race-binary, the Black community is considered a “prototypical minority group” in which their presence is equated with “adequate diversity” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 77). Due to this disingenuous representation, typecasting and stereotypes of the Black, Asian, and Hispanic and Latine communities are exacerbated, and often manifested through colorist and fetishized content.