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Bringing Diversity and Activism to Media Education through African American–Centered Pedagogical Cases

The Mediation of Ebonics and the NAACP Television Networks Boycott

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This article works to illustrate the manner in which two principal goals of media education can be fulfilled in media instruction. These goals are to create savvy media consumers who are empowered to demystify their mediated worlds and to foster recognition in media consumers that they possess agency to inform their mediated worlds. Toward these ends, the author provides media educators with two case studies—the mediation of Ebonics and the NAACP television boycott—as curricular models. Each case study concludes with suggestions for further inquiry, discussion, and debate. These African American–centered cases also work to evidence how diversity can be brought to media education lessons.

Keywords: *Ebonics; NAACP television boycott; media education*

You know the black guy is going to die.
Black folks are always in the ghetto—waving knives and toting guns.
We're the comic relief—the sassy, head-rolling, finger-waving clowns.[1]

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Hardly amusing and tremendously absurd, the above African American media viewer observations are just a small sampling of the representational clichés that mark African Americans' imagistic mistreatment by mass media. Due to more than a century of stereotyping or exclusions in advertising, print, film, radio, and television, African American media consumers have learned, through necessity, to be a particularly media-savvy bunch. The symbolic dispossession of African Americans, as well as other sexual, religious, racial, ethnic, and political groups who reside at the sociopolitical margins, is well known and documented. Be they individual disaffected media consumers (such as those cited above), groups or communities engaged in protest around media, or members of media watchdog organizations, African Americans regularly steel themselves against the potentially troublesome social and psychic outcomes of mediated cultural attacks. However, being ably conversant in the "here's a stereotype, there's a stereotype" dialogue does not make for a media-educated citizenry.

Contemporary media education describes a field that understands and accepts that media (to include symbols, institutions, and technologies) are an integral, complex part of society's lived experiences. Rather than largely focus on defenses against media's potentially troublesome ideological, cultural, and behavioral impacts, media education works to explore the roles media come to play in our daily lives. These interests include the life lessons media offer, what we already know about media in our society and our interactions with media, the pleasures media bring, as well as the dilemmas media provoke. Conceptually, media education concerns itself with queries around media agencies, categories/genres, technologies, languages, audiences, and representations (Buckingham 1998). Moreover, media education is distinguished by the particular attention placed on pedagogy, practices, and the learning outcomes of media students. Lewis and Jhally (1998) recommended that media educators situate lessons about media within discussions of the institutional, cultural, and economic conditions within which media operate and yield their products. In this approach to media education, a complex interaction between media (production and consumption), economic/material, cultural, and ideological contexts is revealed to the media consumer. Media education aims to move not only students of media but also the public at large (i.e., media consumers), today immersed in a "media culture," toward a critical and analytical understanding of media's formats, content, techniques, corporate/commercial forces, impacts, and meanings.

Media culture describes an ecology in which our activities, experiences, and behaviors are informed by media and their mechanistic, representa-

tional, symbolic, and ideological products. That is, what we attend to in our social world—our leisure, work, and civic duties—and our habits, tastes, and uses can be, to varying degrees, influenced and regulated by media (Lubar 1993; Fisherkeller 2002; Fiske 1987; Means Coleman 2001). Today's postindustrial, new technologies–age American consumers find themselves in an environ where media pervade virtually (today, literally and figuratively) every aspect of their lives. From billboards, flyers, mass transit placards, product branding, video games, and promotional posters to radio, TV, film, cellular technology, and cyberspace, this is a society in which the introduction and presence of media technologies and their mediated symbol systems are a near constant for its citizenry (Means Coleman 2000b). This level of exposure to technologies has the potential to promote in media consumers a sense of familiarity that may be easily mistaken for a knowledge of media as a whole. Expectedly, media consumers (media students, educators, and the public alike) will have ideas and opinions about tastes, content, and even power (e.g., gatekeeping/information dissemination). To be sure, the improved, deepened understanding of this mediated society that media education espouses is not about making the (American) public more efficient or more effective media consumers. In fact, given the overall dismal state of African Americans' (and many other marginalized groups') participation in media, legitimate questions could be raised about if any media consumption is advised (Means Coleman 2000a). Rather, the principal goals of media education are to create media consumers who are, first, capable of demystifying their mediated world and, second, ideally, are moved to action—to change or create their own productions or work to influence and inform media. This article is informed by the research and practices of many media educators, while specifically moving on Lewis and Jhally's (1998) charge to bring cultural contexts to the fore as it asks, How can media education help media consumers to understand the institutional, cultural, and economic contexts that affect and inform African American participation in the media industry? How can media education prompt the media consumer to engage in and even challenge (e.g., activism) this cultural institution that offers up a unique (even peculiar) array of meanings about the African American?

To illustrate how media educators can begin to attend to meanings, impacts, formats, content, techniques, corporatization, commercialization, and consumption while integrating an African American–centered pedagogical experience into their lessons, this article presents two media cases—the Ebonics debate and the NAACP boycott of network television—as curricular models. I offer these exemplars for their heuristic value;

as such, these media cases promote continued debate rather than offer exploration-limiting absolute truths about media as a cultural phenomenon. Toward these educative ends, the following curricular map emerges:

Case	Context	Potential Issues[2]
Ebonics	Cultural Ideological Representational	Struggle Impacts Meanings Content Linguistic
NAACP boycott	Economic Institutional	Impacts Format Production Commercialization Corporatization

In brief, the Ebonics debate, which came to a head and was heavily attended to by media in 1996 with the Oakland School Board's resolution to permit black English's use in the classroom as a teaching tool, is used to reveal ideological struggles and the cultural repercussions of how blackness (a cultural signifier) is presented and talked about in media. The ongoing (1999-present) NAACP boycott of the four major television networks over their lack of diversity in industry operations and programming is used to examine media's corporate, commercial culture and the public's material power (or the lack thereof).

Overall, the goal of this article is to raise the educational bar for media consumers so that an adequate understanding is had, not only of personal relationships with media but of media's practices, economics, politics, and power. Particular African American–centered cases are explored to bring diversity to media education discussions. Exploring media cases and phenomena often raises more questions and debates than provides answers. With this in mind, each case study presented concludes with suggested lines of inquiry for media consumers to pursue.

Case 1: The Mediation of Ebonics

The lessons are as follows: media as a site of ideological struggle, news bias, language, racial myths, and media's cultural products.

Media have long been held liable for their discriminatory, troubling treatment of African Americans in their (re)presentations. As the introduction of this article outlines, the assaults on purportedly homogeneous African American habits, morals, ways of life, and actions are particularly devastating. A study of the mediation of Ebonics—an African American variety of oral communication also known as African American vernacular

English or black English—by local and national news reveals how these "serious" and seemingly "unbiased" media outlets similarly rely on stereotypes that work to further marginalize the racial group, specifically their speaking behaviors. An added concern is that due to expectations of accuracy, balance, and trustworthiness on the part of media consumers of news reporting, this genre of media brings with it the ability to produce powerful, lingering myths about a blackness deficiency around language, social class, education potentials, and social contributions.

The term *Ebonics*, an aggregate of the words *ebon* (a deep, lustrous black) and *phonics* (speech sounds), was coined in 1973 by psychologist Robert L. Williams and popularized in his book, *Ebonics: The True Language of Black Folks* (Williams 1975; Fields 1997). According to Williams, Ebonics describes linguistic patterns and codes, with identifiable grammatical and lexicological bases, as spoken by some African Americans. Scholars of linguistics, language, and communication (see Dandy 1991; Daniel and Smitherman 1976; Dillard 1972; Labov 1970; Means Coleman and Daniel 2000; Smitherman 1977, 1981) who are engaged in the study of Ebonics have concluded, first, that cultural interactions took place cross-linguistically among preslavery and enslaved Africans via "bridge-languages" (Dandy 1991) so that members across African nations could communicate. Therefore, second, Ebonics has its very early roots in many African languages (thanks to such creolization practices) such as the Sudanic/Bantu Hausa, Mandigo, Vai, Wolof, Yoruba, and Ibo. In addition, as slave trade routes continued to expand, speech such as Bemba, Swahili, and Rundi entered into this language system. Third, rather than prize the linguistic pluralism that (though tragic) the slave trade and colonialism brought to the world, slave masters impeached African languages, deeming them the gibberish of savages (Means Coleman and Daniel 2000). Fourth, the system of slavery, for purposes of oppression and control, forbade communication and toward this end sought to separate those with tribal affiliations. Last, with it illegal for slaves to communicate or to learn to read and write English, covertly, bridge languages, nonverbal communication, symbols, and the subversion of Christian songs and Bible verses were used by slaves to remedy communicative barriers.

Ebonics was born, then, as a language that reflects its African roots, as well as Euro-English, and particularly white Southern influences. Evelyn Dandy (1991) in her book *Black Communications: Breaking Down the Barriers* devoted a lengthy chapter to detailing the distinctive features of Ebonics (what she called black communication), to include its sounds, structures, and words. For example, she discussed phonemes, the basic unit of sound. A phoneme in Ebonics is comparable in number and logic to standard English; however, it is used differently. To illustrate, *pin* and *pen* become homonyms pronounced p*i*n. In Ebonics, vowels are variously used to indicate

emphasis (e.g., Tina Turner can s*a*ng!), rather than to show subtleties in *pin* versus *pen*, as the meanings of the two words may be obvious based on context and nonverbal cues: Teacher, do you have an extra p*i*n (pen)? I lost my button, do have a p*i*n (pin)? or Did you get the pig back in its p*e*n (pen)? In Ebonics, consonants, too, have distinct sound variability, just as heard among those from Boston or Brooklyn. *Park* becomes p*ah*k; *fort* becomes *fough*t. In each of these cases, the letter *r* is omitted. In response to language ridicule in America, some African Americans hypercorrect the *r* with "arah." The oral spelling of *Robin* becomes "arah-o-b-i-n." Dandy also detailed that in standard English, the "th" sound is emphasized by training speakers to force out a breath of air while the vocal cords vibrate, resulting in *th*is, *th*at, or *th*ese. In Ebonics, this "King's English" practice is more flexible as the relevancy of this sudden rush of air is elusive. More, with no *th* in many African languages, in Ebonics *this* becomes *dis*. Similarly, African dialects have identifiable rules about the presence of final consonant clusters—there are not any. *Desk* and *test* becomes *dess* or *tess*; when pluralized, we hear *desses* or *tesses*, even as these words are written according to standard English. *Ask* becomes *ax*. Though highly ridiculed in the United States, *ax* for *ask* can be heard in midland and southern England as well as in Northern Ireland without the same repudiation. Likewise, while in Russian the verb *to be* is often absent, the different usage (the omission of *to be*) in the United States is seen as a sign of poor English.

To be sure, the rules of Ebonics are just as numerous and detailed as those of standard English and cannot be fully explicated here. It should be emphasized, however, that there are substantiated, largely comprehensible variations of standard English across America and around the world, and so too is Ebonics one of those documented, comprehensible variations of standard English. What sets Ebonics apart from other English dialects is "the political"—the color of the people who speak it, the class of the people who speak it, and the historical circumstances that bore it. For example, white and black middle-class Bostonians will not find their language differences viewed as deficient; however, poor black residents of, say, North Carolina's outer banks will.

The Ebonics Resolution

On 18 December 1996, the Oakland, California Board of Education passed what it called an Ebonics resolution as set forth by the Oakland Task Force on the Education of African American Students. The resolution proposed that African American students' learning achievement could be improved, specifically their standard English proficiency, by employing Ebonics as a teaching tool. The goal was to move African American

students in the Oakland School District toward standard English via Ebonics- to-standard English translation exercises.

According to the task force, such an action was precipitated by their determination that a lack of standard English skills (requisite to measurable achievement in the school district) was a primary reason their African American students had an average grade point average of 1.8 out of 4.0. The task force also uncovered some startling facts about their students, in part: 71 percent of special education students were African American, 67 percent of truant students were African American, and 80 percent of all students suspended were African American. With data showing low levels of student performance in the district, the Oakland School Board mandated that

> effective instructional strategies must be utilized in order to ensure that every child has the opportunity to achieve English language proficiency. Language development for African American students . . . will be enhanced with the recognition and understanding of the language structures unique to African American students. [Our Standard English Proficiency Program] training enables teachers and administrators to respect and acknowledge the history, culture, and language the African American student brings to school. (http://www.ousd.k12.ca.us/oakland.standard.html)

In addition, the financially troubled district proposed exploring the possibility of applying for federal funds under Title 7 for support similar to that available for bilingual programs for Asians and Hispanics.

The Infiltration of Racism in News[3]

One day after the decision by the school board to adopt the resolution, a controversy exploded, fed by the news media, which characterized Ebonics as malaprose, the African American community at-large as its illiterate speakers, and the school board as charlatans who wanted to start a trend in declaring all African American students bilingual in an attempt for predominately black schools across the nation to pilfer federal funds. The enormity of national media attention to a local school board matter was astounding, as Means Coleman and Daniel (2000) observed:

> America Online and other Internet chat lines, a plethora of broadcast television and radio talk shows, news programs, and cable networks across the nation engaged in a feeding frenzy related to Ebonics. In addition to countless letters to print media editors, newspapers such as the *New York Times*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *San Francisco Examiner*, *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*; magazines such as *Newsweek*, the *New Republic*, the *New Yorker*, and *Jet*; and educational literature such as *Black Issues in Higher Education* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, all featured discussions on

Ebonics. Short of the O. J. Simpson trials, Ebonics was one of the most mass-mediated phenomena during January and February 1997. (P. 75)

While the quantity of press attention to the resolution was confounding, the tenor and content of the coverage were equally disquieting. The *San Francisco Examiner* challenged whether Ebonics was a worthy educative tool or a "phoney fad" (Ebonics—Key to educational success 1997, A22). *Time*, linking Ebonics to a pickaninny stereotype of yore, presented a column, "Ebonics According to Buckwheat" (White 1997, 62). *The Economist* described Ebonics as a "virus" (The Ebonics virus 1997, 26), while the *New York Times* dubbed it a "trap" (Staples 1997, 20). Here, *The Economist* and the *Times*, by implication, are arguing that African Americans need to be rescued from a cultural trait turned contagion and deadfall. From December 1996 well into February 1997, a parade of "experts" such as civil rights leader Jesse Jackson (a masterful Ebonics speaker), entertainer Bill Cosby, and President Bill Clinton spoke out against Ebonics with little knowledge regarding its historical and linguistic roots, its planned use by the school board, or of more sophisticated sociolinguistic matters. Rather, they erroneously attached Ebonics to street slang. Obvious omissions from the debate were members of the Oakland School Board, the esteemed Linguistic Society of America that deemed the Oakland decision "pedagogically sound" (McMillen 1997, A16), Stanford University linguist John Rickford who helped draft the Linguistic Society of America resolution in support of Ebonics as a teaching tool, or the myriad of scholars (e.g., Asante, Dandy, Daniels, Dillard, Smitherman) who have researched Ebonics to weigh the pros and cons of its appropriateness in the classroom. Instead, news media such as the *New York Times* (McKinley 1996) asked African American high school sophomores to define Ebonics, provide examples of the linguistic pattern, and address whether they suddenly felt bilingual. Means Coleman and Daniel (2000) critiqued this tactic by writing, "It is doubtful that the same reporter would have asked a group of White high school sophomores to demonstrate their use of standard English by defining grammatical concepts such as *case*, *tense*, and *mood*" (p. 79).

Christopher Campbell (1995) in his book *Race, Myth and the News* asked what myths about race are being offered up in news; how do journalism's values, ideology, and traditions contribute to these myths; how does racism surface in news; and why do journalists (of all backgrounds) advance racial myths? Campbell, in the traditions of Levi-Strauss, Barthes, and Fiske and Hartley, described myth, specifically cultural myths, as systems of meaning making that work to elucidate society's attitudes, behaviors, and ideologies, as they reinforce a particular social order. Campbell offered that news stories, particularly those that focus on blackness, are often simplistic in their explanations while ignoring social, cultural, political, economic,

and power complexities. The mediation of Ebonics evidences a rush to judgment (or rush for a sensational story during a slow news period) and an oversimplification on the part of journalists, resulting in the creation of the myth of black language as deviant rather than simply different. The copious reporting failed to attend to a debate, informed by experts, that could reveal what Ebonics is (if anything) and how it should be used in the classroom (if it should be at all or to what degree). More important, what seems to be the real story of how America should deal with poor academic achievement in its classrooms was a glaring omission. By relying, rather one-sidedly, on (largely black) antagonists who were not steeped in the fundamentals of Ebonics, the issue was reduced to a monolithic view of African Americans who are ashamed of and reject the Ebonics signifier. By failing to bring in more schooled experts and by drawing on the "expertise" of New York City high school sophomores, the American public was left ignorant of the debates around Ebonics, Americas schools, education achievement standards, and race and class complexities around education, blackness, and language acquisition. Postman (1985) offered that American news unduly focuses on controversy and sensationalizes events (as he put it, "And Now . . . This"). Extending his notion, there is evidence that a convergence on controversy and sensational stories about black America in the news works to further marginalize and stigmatize the racial group. Hence, a mythical understanding of blackness as different from nonminority groups emerges.

If there was any consideration that the news media was simply being the news media in its controversial, often erroneous coverage of the Ebonics resolution, and not racist—displaying a unique racial bias and insensitivity that work to discriminate against African Americans—one need only continue to map the Ebonics coverage that sank to the depths of absurdity and overt racism. To understand this level of absurdity that news media operated within, it is first necessary to understand that African American language has long been the source of ridicule in mass media. Frank DuMont (1899) in *The Witmark Amateur Minstrel Guide and Burnt Cork Encyclopedia* offered "humorous" dialogue, in the purported delivery style of an African American minister, on "how Adam and Eve turned White," in part: "Don't fool with de Lawd, my friends, else he'll scare you so bad dat you'l be arunnin' around looking foolish, jest same as de mean white trash" (p. 86). Silent film turned its attention to caricaturing black language for the purposes of ridicule quite early on, as witnessed in the infamous 1915 *Birth of a Nation*: "Dem free-niggers f'um de N'of am sho crazy." Furthermore, 1920s radio continued the trend by mocking black Southern dialects in radio programs such as *Sam 'n' Henry* (later *Amos 'n' Andy*) and *Beulah*. For example, "linguistic slapstick" (Douglas 1999, 100) around black language was the driving force behind the radio program *Sam 'n' Henry*: "We ain't gonna

have no luck—I can see dat—'cause Sam ain't lucky and I'se wid him and I gues all dat bad luck's gonna come to us too" (Gosden and Correll 1926, 11). More, 1990s television proved the resilience of situating black language within the aberrant as evidenced by the situation comedy *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*'s play on the word *acclimate*: "Applegate? Yo, that sound like a school word. You know, I don't like school words. I can't *applegate* myself to 'em." Hence, in media, black language is coupled with ridiculous situations to further "Other" the racial group.

American news media differed little from entertainment media's traditional racism around black language. The *San Francisco Examiner* offered "A Proposal for Bobonics" while clarifying that in Spanish *bobo* is a fool (Bonilla 1997, A23). Morse (1997b) joked that *Ebonics* was not even a good word and asked, "Why not go all the way and concoct it from 'onyx' instead of 'ebony' and call it 'onyxonics' " (p. A3)? Morse (1997a, A3) would write another column titled "Beach Blanket BabblEbonics." *The Christian Science Monitor* melded its understanding of Ebonics with street slang as it ran an editorial cartoon with the dialogue, "I be. Or, I don't be. Dat's Whazzup," under the title "Chillin' in Ebonics with My Main Man Hamlet" (Danzinger 1997). In an editorial cartoon, *Newsweek* employed Beavis and Butthead to emphasize dissatisfaction that federal funds may be applied for by the Oakland School Board. As the cartoon duo laugh, they ask for federal funding for "Moron + Phonics = Moronics" (Anderson 1997, 23).

Ferguson (1998) offered that the structure of news, with little chance to offer analyses or detailed contextualization due to time constraints, is partly to blame when complexities like racial issues are misrepresented in news media. Dates (1990) maintained that the mainstream press has held a long tradition of covering African American life in a "strange, and basically racist" way as it works to reinforce a social order (p. 344). Dates emphasized that it is the black-owned press that should, too, be considered for a view of the African American community in a vastly different light. However, increasingly, the black press is growing scarce, the victim of American economic racism and corporatization. Hence, mainstream news media are left generally unchallenged. As a result, media coverage can lead to the "manifestation of racism and internalized oppression" as is demonstrated in media's attention to Ebonics (Spears 1999, 74). Gordon (1995) posited that language is the place where cultures are most vulnerable as "to express and to be are one" (p. 47). Therefore, those who give meaning and value to language (in the case of Ebonics, the news media) also give meaning and raise myths (as Campbell would argue) about the meaning of who and what we are.

Racist Language and Language Appropriation

Whether the mediation of the Ebonics debate is viewed as overt, traditional racism or modern racism disguised as top-down liberalism ("don't we want something better for these black youth"), what is clear is that an attack on language is an attack on the culture within which it is associated. The exemplars offered, from the coverage of Ebonics to the history of abuse directed toward black language in entertainment media, reveal an inherent racial supremacy that marginalizes African Americans as it thereto informs and reinforces society's views of blackness as peripheral, deviant, and deficient. A clearer understanding of how American media came to unabashedly ridicule black culture requires recognizing that media are housed in a circuit of culture in which identities are produced, represented, and consumed. It is a culture that is often hampered by racism: a racist culture draws on its ideologies as it defines the value of languages and the cultures attached to them; the devaluing of languages and cultures must take place through language. As Toni Morrison (1993) observed, blackness is relegated to the bowels of evil through language. She argued, "Linguistic responses to Africanism . . . can serve as allegorical fodder for the contemplation of Eden, expulsion, and the availability of grace" (p. 66).

Moore (1992) pinpointed such racist allegorical associations in the English language that work to further secure African Americans in America's imagination as subordinate and inferior. For example, Moore offered this play on the words *black* and *white*, revealing the power of language to oppress and marginalize:

> I may become a black sheep (one who causes shame or embarrassment because of deviation from the accepted standards), who will be blackballed (ostracized) by being placed on a blacklist (list of undesirables) in an attempt to blackmail (to force or coerce into a particular action) me to retract my words. . . . In their support, others will be honest and decent—and to them I say, that's very white of you (honest, decent). The preceding is of course a white lie (not intended to cause harm), meant only to illustrate some examples of racist terminology in the English language. (P. 318)

Clearly, Moore's wordplay demonstrates how language can work to promote one group's ethnocentrism while using disguised bigotry and loaded words to victimize others.

The mediation of the Ebonics debate took place over several months. What is notable about the news coverage is that over that period of time, what was said about African Americans, their education, and their language skills changed very little. The public was bombarded with wordplay, such as moron + phonics, but was not availed of other linguistic facts such as the integration of African root words that appear in American English,

evidencing the permeation of some form of Ebonics in standard English. For example, *bambi* appears in Bantu as *mubambi*, which means to adopt a position of concealment like an antelope fawn. *Okay* has widespread usage in West African languages, such as Mandingo *o-ke* and Dogon *o-kay*, all meaning yes, indeed. The Bantu *nguba* that means peanut has become *goober* in English and is used as a brand name for a chocolate-covered peanut candy (Holloway and Vass 1993). That the mainstream press omitted this information appears purposeful, as informed experts (e.g., Molefi Asante, former chair of African American studies at Temple University) were being tapped to offer up such information to the black press (e.g., AM-WHAT, black talk radio, syndicated in Pennsylvania) who were especially eager to gather opinions on both sides of the Ebonics debate.

Wrap-up: Representational, Cultural, and Ideological Implications

This section on the mediation of Ebonics purposefully leads the media consumer to question if there is something unique about how African Americans, as a subordinated racial group, are dealt with in American media. In the micro, the questions that this section raises for the media consumer are, What shall we make of the mediation of Ebonics? and Why did we get the kind of news coverage that was offered during this media event? In the macro, this is a case that calls for speculation around how subordinated/oppressed groups are treated within dominant cultural institutions.

The manner in which Ebonics was introduced through the media to the public reveals that cultural domination remains a dilemma in America. Here, such domination is seen through the representation of blackness, first, by casting it as deficiently different and, second, by reducing the culture to the ridiculous. Consensus around what is worthy, central, and good (e.g., language, cultural practices) was built by not interrogating the normative structures that prize standard English, by overlooking the sociocultural and historical dimensions of language, and by not seeking commonalities between the languages of the African diaspora and English. Hence, separation along dominant versus subordinate lines prevailed. Hall believed there are ways to offset this kind of separatism and subjugation through knowledge, as he wrote,

> One needs to know how different racial and ethnic groups were inserted historically, and the relations which have tended to erode and transform, or to preserve these distinctions through time—not simply as residues and traces of previous modes, but as active structuring principles of the present organization of society. (Quoted in San Juan 1992, 339)

Without such an insertion into the public discourse, misinformation will continue to plague discussions about subordinate groups (from mocking their language to negative stereotypes), and more specifically, media will find themselves maintaining the status quo around cultural order.

It is also useful for the media consumer to query. Is it even within the purview of news to monitor, and even transform, the social discourse? How can it be brought to light that American news may, indeed, propagate certain myths about race and racial order, and what can be expected of news by way of change? If we are to assume that the role of news is, in part, to provide the public with the information it requires so that its members may operate in their own democratic interests, then it is up to news media to reevaluate if its practices are truly in the public interest for all its publics. As Campbell (1995) put forth, as news overlooks

> life outside of middle-American/dominant culture parameters, it contributes to an understanding of minority cultures as less significant, as marginal. . . . When the news sustains stereotypical notions about nonwhite Americans as less-than-human, as immature, as savages, as derelicts, it feeds an understanding of minorities as different, as "other," as dangerous. (P. 132)

Therefore, the question to put to (news) media becomes, How can the presentation of minority/subordinate communities be offered up without contributing to further marginality? The Ebonics case reveals the press relies on dominant ideologies about what is central and good as a shorthand, commonsense approach to reportage. It may serve news media well to move away from entering into debates through a lens that fails to even question the ideological, historical, political, and structural conditions that bear social and cultural events. How different, or at least more balanced, would the coverage of the Ebonics debate have been if media questions had at some point focused on why Ebonics exists (as there was no question that it, in fact, existed), its role in some African American communities (rather than singularly questioning its value), and what information can be gathered, from a variety of perspectives, that can contribute to a better informed media consumer about languages and cultures.

Questions for Further Inquiry

Buckingham and Sefton-Greene (1994) warned that media educators should not presuppose that most media consumers, in the classroom or out, are ignorant of media practices. Recent audience reception studies reveal that (American) media consumers are especially attentive to media content and their resultant social meanings and impacts (see Bobo 1988; Inniss and Feagin 1995; Jhally and Lewis 1992; Orbe and Cornwell 2002). Recognizing

media consumers' interpretive abilities, media educators should not view their encounters with media consumers as the imparting of information to the naive. Also, media educators are, themselves, concurrently media consumers. Therefore, an approach to media education may be one that is transactional and dialogic, a pedagogical strategy in which all (media educators and consumers) become involved in the learning encounter through exchanges that deepen understandings about media in an emergent and hermeneutic manner. What is key for the media educator to possess is a developed, sophisticated knowledge of media and media's presence in society. With this advanced appreciation, lessons and discussions can be rigorously probative. Silverblatt (1995) suggested media educators and consumers interrogate media processes, contexts, frameworks, and production values. Bazalgette recommended inquiries such as the following:

- Who is communicating what and why?
- What type of text is this?
- How is it produced?
- How do we know what it means?
- Who may receive it and what sense can they make of it?
- How does it present its subject? (Quoted in Buckingham 1998, 39)

Indeed, such questions serve the aim of media education to move the citizenry toward a more comprehensive understanding of media. In addition, in the interest of expanded inquiry, the following specific questions serve as guides for educators to lead a discussion that deals more pointedly with the Ebonics case study presented here.

1. News media, like entertainment media, in America is a for-profit business. The image of the news audience is one that has a growing tolerance for the sensational and controversial. How does the dominant view of racial minorities in the media work to support media's capitalist structure?
2. How blackness (or any other subject, for that matter) is talked about in news raises questions around a myriad of issues, such as how journalists are selected, diversity in the newsroom, the relationship between reporters and newscasters and their audiences, and the increasing corporatization of news, which leads to a lack of perspectives in reporting, the daily deadline schedule, the "dumbing down" of American news, and a turn toward sensational (news "lite"), ratings-earning stories and news-selection practices. Why did we get the kind of news coverage seen during this media event?
3. Implicit in this discussion is how racism is manifested and power is distributed in America. This section also implies that one remedy to cultural domination is improved, balanced information that challenges commonsense approaches to discussions about social order. Where are the sites for resistance and struggle by those subordinated to power? As a start, what is the role of the black press?

Case 2: The NAACP Boycott of the Four Major TV Networks

The lessons are as follows: media's inequality of cultural production, how media's power (e.g., conglomerates, concentrations, wealth) contributes to this inequality, the material conditions of African American media consumers, and the political economy of media.

In July 1999 at the ninetieth annual NAACP national convention held in New York City, the organization's president, Kweisi Mfume, scolded the top four commercial network television executives at ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX, calling their fall 1999 programming lineups a "virtual whitewash." Mfume was calling attention to the networks' move to air more than two dozen entertainment series but none with a racial minority in a starring role. Mfume vowed that such exclusions would no longer be tolerated, nor would the networks' past ineffectual promises to improve minority hiring in front of and behind the camera. In an effort to effect swift change, viewers, racial minorities in particular, were encouraged to stop watching the offending networks—what Mfume called a "brownout"—and to cease buying the products advertised in commercials on these networks. Six months later, the "big four" networks each entered into an unprecedented agreement with the NAACP to diversify their workforces and programming. At that time, Mfume hailed the diversity contracts as "real, meaningful, and lasting change." In August 2001, Mfume conceded that despite the networks' signed diversity pacts, all had failed to improve their racial minority participation.

In its continuing role as media watchdog, the NAACP hopes to draw on its considerable public reputation, its ability to garner the attention of the press, and a $1 million budget set aside to pursue the issue of media diversity, to enforce change in television. Their strategy is to discipline, through a boycott, those networks that fail to meet up to a measurable standard[4] of improvement. It is the NAACP's hope to produce what Herman and Chomsky (1988) called "flak." Flak describes the generation of negative responses or demands by individuals, lobbyists, or organizations of the media regarding its programming or practices. It may take the form of communications (letters, e-mails, calls), petitions, boycotts, lawsuits, congressional bills, or other outlets for counteraction. The goal of the NAACP is to put media on notice to effect some sort of change by employing tactics that are threatening to media operations. To date, the NAACP has focused on tarnishing television's public image by holding news conferences that identify which networks are racially discriminatory. The organization has also sought to threaten the television industry's profit-making potential by calling for media consumers to boycott problematic networks and their commercial sponsors, with the hope ratings will plunge and program

sponsorship will be lost. According to Herman and Chomsky, the key to producing such damaging flak is the possession of power.

In the case of the NAACP, the daunting task of effecting a large-scale social transformation requires not only an arsenal of coercion, dynamism, and sanctioning capabilities but also an understanding of the nature of power—the organization's own, in which suzerainty is constantly challenged, and that of media's, in which, comparatively, dominance and authority reign. In the macro, this understanding of puissance potential becomes recognition of the inherent political nature of social civil action. It requires a consideration of opposition/accordance, social order/ marginalization, and strengths/limitations. In the micro, such a transformative effort means studying the more obvious political threat— the goliath media oligopolies that possess a myopic focus on profits and pay less attention to social conversions and the similarly profit-driven advertisers (often in a synergistic relationship with media). It also means attending to the seemingly nonpolitical in this equation, the public or, in this "power to the people" effort, those that the NAACP assumes it already holds political and ideological sway over.

Moving Criticisms of Media into the Public Sphere

In its attempt to generate flak, in 1999 the NAACP named a new task force—the Television & Film Industry Diversity Initiative—that was charged with the task of monitoring how well media reflect America's racial makeup. According to the task force, the television networks are especially fraught with problems. For example, for the fall 1999-2000 season, none of the (then) twenty-seven new comedies and dramas appearing on the top four networks had a minority in a leading role, and few series had racial minorities in support roles. Mfume criticized that with African Americans making up 13 percent of the nation's population, "we think our presence should be appropriately reflected both in front of as well as behind the cameras" (NAACP slams TV, firearms industries, www. caller.com/1999/July/13/today/national/3147.html). Quite similarly, seven years earlier Atkins (1992) in his analysis of prime-time television series with minority leading characters observed that the rising population figures for African Americans (as well as those for Hispanics and Asians) demand that a closer look be taken at the symbolic representation of race (see also Ferguson 1998). Atkins continued that concerns over minority participation have long been linked to civil rights efforts and that black leaders have expressed concern over the prevalence of unflattering media portrayals and the self-fulfilling prophecy potential the representations may have in their communities.

To their credit, social, civil organization leaders have accomplished what the study of media often fails to do—move media criticism out of the classroom, as well as beyond academicians, journalists, pundits, and the like, and into the public sphere where people work to become agents of change through political action that has the potential to shape cultural institutions. It is an approach to human agency that lies between the structural/ organizational and the voluntary (Sewell 1992). Therefore, in its attempt to involve "the people" in this effort to remedy media industry inequality, a national call was made by the NAACP to challenge media consumers to become part of an important social civil rights movement. Those willing to engage in a boycott of the networks were implicitly promised the reward of challenging the status quo of inequality and racism by resisting their media situations.

However, any measurable avoidance of the networks or its advertisers, to date, has been neither seen nor felt.[5] More, according to its own 2001 online poll (www.naacp.org/polls/results.php), 56.2 percent of 242 respondents indicated that they would not support a boycott of TV networks that lack diversity. This paucity of overt public support may be attributed to the NAACP erroneously considering the public as "nonpolitical" entities rather than as a powerful faction whose individual, local role must be clarified within the large-scale, national movement. Atkins (1992) noted that, in part, for American society, important concerns and considerations about minority participation in media include, first, the risks racial minorities may encounter due to industry inequities and how somewhat more troublesome these inequities are for minorities over how the American public is generally treated and, second, whether improvements in the media industry will lead society toward a more racially harmonious place. Negligently, in its forty-six-page report summarizing its ongoing (1999-present) media diversity initiative, the NAACP attends to wide-ranging issues, such as stereotypy, networks' financial interests and syndication rights (i.e., fin-sin rules), and minority hiring numbers, but fails to speak directly to media consumers about issues such as identifying their specific roles in and contributions to the movement, the potential benefits, or the risk of the continued status quo (e.g., minorities as the focus for stereotyping, stereotypical representations becoming internalized). Without specific communications to media consumers, doubts and helplessness can arise among the public, as evidenced by this skepticism, shared with the NAACP, reveals:[6]

> No, I would not support a boycott of TV networks, it would be a waste of time. All that would happen is that they would find some "negro" to put in front of the camera to satisfy the boycotts. However, what I would support is an all out effort to help Black-owned radio, television and cable networks compete in the global communication markets. (Stanley Bailey)

I don't see "what's on TV" as a priority. (William B. Johnson)

There are many, many, many more important issues to focus on for African-Americans [such as] upgrade the education system. (John C. March Jr.)

The bottom line is, yes, I personally would support a national boycott, but I think the NAACP needs more information on how go about making this an effective effort. (Reel Queen)

These comments remind us that the real lives and human conditions of "the people" and their attention to media should not be overlooked as flak is being sought. According to an Initiative Media study tracking African American and Hispanic viewing habits from January 2000 to May 2001, African American television viewers watched significantly more television—73.6 weekly hours—than whites or Hispanics. African Americans identified all six broadcast networks as contributing to their top twenty favorite prime-time series, and CBS leads among black households—this despite NBC and FOX nearly doubling their African American representations (often supporting or minor roles in ensemble casts) over the past two years. More, the rejections of the big four networks the NAACP is calling for leave only UPN and WB for African American viewers to turn to. These networks provide more hours of programming (black situation comedies) that target black audiences; however, controversy abounds about the content of these black sitcoms—programming that the NAACP has not endorsed (wisely) as suitable alternate programming during the boycott. African American viewers are left to speculate as to where to turn for their entertainment and news, be it cable, PBS, or the rare (formerly) black-owned station such as Black Entertainment Television, which has sustained attacks over its own stereotypical programming (much of it older, syndicated network programming). African American media consumers have expressed their frustrations over dilemmas of where to turn for programming:[7]

I wish that more Blacks would watch PBS, there are some very interesting shows on PBS. I mean you name it, from the Negro Leagues, to the first Black to play football, to the Movements in Philadelphia. (Joshua Calvin)

Truthfully, if it were left up to me, I wouldn't like to see [Black portrayals]. If it were left up to me, I really wouldn't. Because, everyone I think about I can't see nothing really positive. (Calvin Edwards)

In a way, TV has a great impact on culture, so probably TV needs to be careful. Actually, the truth is, I wish there was no TV. I think TV is a medium that's out of control. (Jennifer Faith)

Hence, one important consideration in the generation of flak, to promote social and civil change, is to first attend to media consumers' interactions with media products and the material realities of their media world.

Media Industry Economics and Culture

The NAACP's Television & Film Industry Diversity Initiative continues to focus much of its media reform efforts on impressing on the industry (thus far, specifically TV) that continued racial inequities in front of and behind the camera will, ultimately, adversely affect its monied interests. The NAACP is optimistic that over time the flak it generates through its very public boycotts and press releases will evoke distaste in American viewers toward the industry. As a result, they anticipate that media consumers will cease to support industry offerings, thus damaging media's capital. The NAACP recognizes, correctly, that the media business is high finance, with billions of dollars at stake each day, and that economic pressure (over promptings of civic social duty) is the single most important factor in commanding media industry practices and products.

However, it is also important for the NAACP, and other potential flak generators, to understand that media are not big businesses simply because they ably maximize huge profits while seeking to contain costs (e.g., the use of reruns, syndication, and reality shows). Rather, the economic culture of the media industry is a complex web oriented toward corporate mergers and maneuvers that confer on media owners tremendous power over the production process, media content, and human agency. Such power is secured, first, through corporate concentration—when a very few powerful companies exercise market control over a segment of the marketplace. For example, the four major networks wield significant control over the commercial sector of TV, with upstarts UPN, USA, PAX, and WB at the margins.[8] Bagdikian (2000) in *The Media Monopoly* observed that such concentrated ownership "was in broadcasting's corporate genes" with broadcasters, he wrote, "enjoy[ing] a 'natural monopoly' in the sense that there is a limited number of frequencies available in each community and the government protects each station's channel from competition" (p. 13). More, according to Bagdikian, the result of such regulatory sheltering is that television ratings are used to determine who gets what share of the nearly guaranteed high-profits pie. Therefore, while concentration is a lucrative business trend for the media industry, within the public sphere concerns emerge around what this sort of monopoly means for (African American) programming, hiring/firing, and corporate decision making.

Second, media power is ensured through corporate conglomeration— when companies with varied interests and activities are assembled under a

single corporate umbrella. Most notable is the 2001 merger of AOL and Time Warner. The transaction, valued at approximately $350 billion as measured by the stock market, is to date the largest corporate U.S. merger, and it formed the largest media conglomerate. AOL Time Warner's ownerships (including joint ventures and partial ownerships) number more than four hundred media companies, which include American Online, CompuServe, Time Life Books, Little, Brown and Co. (United Kingdom), HBO (United States, Asia, Hungary, etc.), Cinemax, CNN, Warner Bros. Studios, Sports Illustrated, Asiaweek, DC Comics, Elektra, TBS, TNT, New Line Cinema, and often televised sports ventures such as the Atlanta Braves and the Goodwill Games (see http://www.aoltimewarner.com/about/index.html and http://www.cjr.org/owners/aoltimewarner.asp). Such vertical and horizontal company integration brings with it a synergistic promotion of corporate interests that, through the concentration of resources and influence (read as corporate power), promotes corporate interests, controls information, and, subsequently, has hegemonic influence over our media culture. Such changes in media ownership can mean that media content becomes a mechanism for the corporate owners as evidenced by the often recounted story of General Electric chair Jack Welsh specifying that NBC *Today Show* weather reporter Willard Scott should mention GE light bulbs during the morning news program (Husseini 1994, as cited in Croteau and Hoynes 2000) or, in another acquisitions case, when the vocal, political, and social activist and cultural critic Tavis Smiley was abruptly fired from his news talk show on Black Entertainment Television after the black-owned cable station was purchased by conglomerate Viacom. The demands made on Scott (and on news content) and the firing of Smiley reveal a stifling of creative human agency (e.g., expression, input, resistance) among multimedia firms' employees.

Such corporate restrictions reveal the challenges organizations such as the NAACP must face as they seek to advance claims against the media industry. They are not only contending with ABC but with Disney, NBC and GE, CBS and Viacom, FOX and News Corp., and all of their affiliate companies. For example, should the NAACP take issue with the (coming) rendering of Batman as an African American by DC Comics, it must also realize that this most certainly means contending with the character's cross-promotion (often media projects are more attractive if they have great cross-promotion potential) in theme parks, television, publishing, film, breakfast cereals, toys, and the like. Though the challenge to improve the industry's diversity is compounded, it may not be insurmountable. The question for media educators and consumers to work through becomes, Within the public sphere, when it seems that structure is dominant over human agency, while also being interrelated (remember, we live in a media culture), how can social transformation take place?

Wrap-up: The Complex Relationship between Industry, Public, and Consumption

For civic organizations such as the NAACP, identifying the impetus that precipitates the generation of flak is the easy part. In the case of African American treatment in and by the media, and as evidenced by the above discussions around the Ebonics debate, improvement is long overdue and is necessitated by the presence of real and tangible harm to a society that witnesses such treatment. The more crucial and abstruse aspect of effecting change within an industry that profits from its status quo practices is for watchdog organizations to recognize and address the complex, often entangled relationship between the media industry, the public sphere, and consumption practices. Confronting these linkages between media, capitalism, and the people may call for an aggregated attack that attends to, first, the relationship between the economic side of the industry and culture and, second, the media consumer.

In the first instance, the NAACP works "within," seeing the networks as key in this crisis, thereby hoping to influence change within the media industry. However, a full attack on an industry as multitudinous as the media industry may be only one viable tactical decision. Rather, the NAACP may be well served to adopt a factional approach within its task force so that all aspects of media industry relations are attended to. For example, one subcommittee may oversee a drive (in the form of boycotts, protests, negotiations) directed toward the parent companies of media (e.g., Disney, GTE), while another committee deals with the networks and their programming inequities, and still another committee tackles hiring practices behind the cameras and microphones. More, in this most recent effort, the NAACP has yet to attend to the benefits of government lobbying and informing industry policy through legislation—a task for yet another committee. While correctly assessing that the media are moved most by their drive for profits, it may be plausible for the NAACP to prompt networks to take advantage of their diversity advances by encouraging the networks to toot their own horns (thereby cashing in on their diversity progress) when they are the leaders or the best at diversifying their lineups. For example, in August 2001, *USA Today* sent a "diversity poll" to a sample of the paper's readers asking them to respond to questions about the racial diversity of its paper and where improvement was needed. One strategy to incite media industry participation in diversity initiatives is for media such as *USA Today* to be encouraged to "advertise" its improvements, such as "we lead the way in Latino/Hispanic hiring" or (as yet not achieved) "winner of the Edward R. Murrow award for reporting on Asian American families." In addition, working for change in the media industry does not necessarily mean working singularly on the large corporations. Smaller,

independent media and cable television should be given the opportunity and, when merited, praise for diversifying their products and practices. By permitting alternate media to be privileged, this also works to provide media consumers with choices for their news and entertainment, rather than a sweeping "just say no" approach to media consumption. Finally, in considering strategies to deal with the industry directly, the NAACP should be reminded that the industry sees itself with much to lose in the way of profits should it take on social change and everything to continue to gain if it maintains its course. That means the media industry should not be expected to either go along quietly with the demands of the NAACP or recognize the flak generated as truly meritorious.[9] Thus, the NAACP must expect to be engaged in a prolonged battle with the networks that will yield results over time. For all-too-real political, publicity, and morale purposes, the NAACP can set up deadlines for more easily achieved triumphs that are a result of a targeted, concerted effort. For example, a subcommittee could lean heavily on ABC to add an African American on-air personality to its news programming and to adopt a black and/or multicultural drama. With a check in its "win" column, the committee would then move on to FOX and so on. These individual efforts should take place simultaneously with the larger NAACP diversity efforts.

In the second instance, the NAACP must get the people on its side. As argued here, the organization has largely taken the support of the people (which does not appear to be solidified) for granted. First and foremost, the NAACP needs to adopt a media education council that informs the public about practices and policies of media, as well as encourages critique. An educated media consumer is more likely to understand the importance, in this case, of a media diversity movement and its complexities and thereby be more willing to participate in a sustained effort. A media-educated citizenry will also come to understand the importance of working not only "within" but also outside the media system. The public, as should the NAACP, should see the merit in uniting with other organizations that have similar media reform interests. Certainly, a movement for media diversity becomes more powerful when publics and organizations such as the Screen Actors Guild, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting, the National Association of Black Journalists, and Ralph Nader's constituency come together. More, a joint task force more ably divides efforts so that the resources of one organization are not depleted as it pursues the multiple avenues required to effect improvement. Overall, the NAACP must negotiate a very complex relationship with the industry and with the public, which are both situated within the realities of contemporary capitalism (e.g., the drive for profit, consumption practices, commercialism). Moving criticisms about the industry and its economic interests from the rhetorical into activism and the public sphere

can provoke a more engaged, proactive civil society and can begin to chip away at one of this nation's more damaging social ills.

Questions for Further Inquiry

The NAACP network television boycott case provides rich fodder for media educators who seek to explore issues of human agency and activism, media content and commercialization, and media ownership structures. More than deepening our understanding of media in society, this case also raises important considerations about what actions we can take to see that our media culture works in the public interest. The hallmark of a democratic society is one in which its citizens have their say and are heard. The question media educators can and should raise with media consumers is, What is beyond awareness and understanding? Like the NAACP, media education has an interest in activism for the good of the public. How then can the media educated effect change from within the public sphere? From the American black, women's, and gay liberation movements, history has shown this single important question has sparked action, changed social and political landscapes, and earned some measure of social justice. Media educators and social change initiators, such as the NAACP, can join forces to consider the following:

1. What are the implications for organizations such as the NAACP and their activities to employ the media, specifically the mainstream press, to disseminate their public information that opposes these very media?
2. Media content is today considered "lite," that is, nonpolitical, entertaining, and middle of the road, to attract the maximum audience who will in turn buy the products advertised. How may this dynamic affect media diversity initiatives?
3. What are the merits, if any, of a national media education initiative (Britain and Australia have one), and what does it mean for media education if it is sponsored by the U.S. government, instituted within the public school system, or organized by civic organizations such as the NAACP?

Conclusion

A rudimentary analysis of the events presented here—the mediation of the Ebonics resolution and the NAACP boycott of network television—is one that concludes that media are "bad." Indeed, concerns around media products, whether they are racist, intolerant, or marginalizing, are real and relevant and should be fully interrogated and challenged. In fact, one of the strengths of media studies as a discipline has been its long attention to media's social functions and the meanings and impacts of representations in contemporary society. Media studies has reinforced a consideration of the political, economic, ideological understanding of the complex ways in

which media operate, to include more specifically, as the above two cases reveal, normalizing social orders and securing capitalism. In some ways, media studies has done its job too well, as it offers up an agenda of criticism that those outside of its boundaries can too easily anticipate and possibly reject. In short, media studies in some ways runs the risk of "preaching to the converted." I believe media education, drawing on the strengths of media studies, can move one step beyond criticism and critique, as found in media studies, by challenging students of media to become activists in their thinking—to question media products alongside their own roles as media consumers (be it resistance, appropriation, reliance on, enjoyment, or needs). For example, what are the many "readings" that we can come up with for our selection of news sources or our potential unquestioned acceptance that Ebonics is a sort of bastard vernacular because African Americans such as Bill Cosby and Jesse Jackson said so. Or how much confidence do we have in the NAACP's ability to effect network-level change, and how do we make sense of our investment or disinvestment in this effort? Media education demands that we not just view ourselves as media users who observe, take in, and, at times, interpret. Nor is it just about pressing the well-known notion that we, as attendees to media, are "active." Media education is also about action and accountability, that is, stressing that media criticism must be moved outside of the classroom and into public practices where there is a constant engagement with ourselves and others over the production, meaning, consumption, technology, representation, and political and economic values of media. There is an urgency for us to have our say, be heard, and effect change now, as media represent a more unified, corporate voice and as alternative, independent media continue to disappear.

The selection of these two cases is also used to remind those that strive to be media educators that they must carefully consider their pedagogical goals and outcomes. For example, do their course outlines and goals for learning work to reinforce dominant-subordinate hierarchies by employing discussions of blackness (or other minority group issues) as a separate "special topic" that cannot be used more centrally to inform instruction on politics, economics, consumption, and institutional practices? Often, media students remark that after a good media criticism class, they never look at media the same way again (some even say such courses "ruin" media for them). Is our goal to simply disturb students' peace around media so that they no longer simply "take it in," or can cases like the Ebonics controversy and NAACP boycott be used to show the real-life consequences of media production and consumption and the urgency for our own agency? Media educators should be cautioned not to promote a new, critical viewing style that students still just "take in" that is simply an alternative interpretation of a media presentation. Rather, media education

should encourage students to recognize media's practices, conditions, and constraints, as well as teach them to challenge its systems within and outside of the media institution. Lessons around ideological struggle, myths, representations, and political economy are just the first step toward encouraging media students to attend to media's roles in society. The next important step is for these students to consider how their own feelings about media and their acts of media consumption can be moved outside of the classroom and into communities to effect social change. The cases of Ebonics and the NAACP are not just about media, but also they are about our social world—race relations, class, capitalism, corporatization, and the like. One mantra of education is "knowledge is power." For media educators, the most important question their students will have to answer is, Once empowered as a media-educated citizen, what will you as an individual do with it?

Notes

1. Participant responses were gleaned from an audience ethnography exploring African American representations on television (see Means Coleman 2000a).

2. These are just some of the possible educative moments that may arise from these cases.

3. Some of the media exemplars presented in this section are data that were first offered in Means Coleman and Daniel (2000).

4. What this standard of improvement is (e.g., content diversity, on- and off-screen employment, executive/corporate hiring, ownership, etc.) remains undefined by the NAACP.

5. Though the NAACP called for a brownout and the press widely reported this call, no start or end date was provided. No protest communiqués to the networks on the part of the public were sought. In August 2001, Mfume reported that little change had been effected.

6. On 16 August 2001, the NAACP posted an online poll on its web site (http://www.naacp.org/polls) asking, "Would you support a boycott of TV networks because they lack diversity?" Respondents were given the opportunity to click "yes," "no," or "not sure." After voting, one could post comments to the poll comment page, if so choosing. Overall, fifty-four voters opted to leave comments. There is no way to ensure that the names given are real or that those responding are African Americans.

7. These participant comments were collected during dissertation research (Means 1996) and were gleaned in response to queries around effecting change in media.

8. Another example is Gannett Company, Inc., which, as of 1998, holds seventy-four newspapers in thirty-eight states, as well as the national daily *USA Today* and the *Pacific Daily News* in Guam (Croteau and Hoynes 2000).

9. At the NAACP's first planning meeting with the networks to draft a diversity resolution, only CBS sent a representative.

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