AN AUDIENCE RESEARCH REPORT

NON-WHITES ON BRITISH TELEVISION

Introduction

1. This exploratory study sought to determine just how many non-whites appear on British television, on what kinds of programmes, and in what roles. Such a study served several purposes. First, others have speculated about these issues, and we sought quantification rather than hyperbole. Second, should there be any changes in the nature of presentation of non-whites on television, the data gathered in 1971 would serve as a point of comparison. Third, casting directors, producers and others in the creative sphere of television should find such an elaboration interesting, and perhaps useful. Fourth, both the BBC and the ITV have been approached by groups advocating greater presentation of non-whites on television, and no meaningful data exist as to the current practice.

2. In the United States, the proportion of the population which is non-white is 12 percent. In England, the best estimate obtainable from London's Institute of Race Relations is that the non-white population of Indians, West Indians, Africans, and Pakistanis is approximately 2 1/2 percent. A recent U.S. Study (1970) found that from 1967 to 1969, during prime time (7.30-11.00pm), the proportion of advertisements with blacks in them increased from 4 to 10 percent, and the proportion of dramas with at least one black character increased from 34 to 52 percent. Further in the one week of entertainment programmes examined in that study, the number of blacks seen increased from 40 to 70.* It is against this setting that the present study was conducted.

3. Through the BBC's Audience Research Department, an analysis of one week of prime time television on all three channels was undertaken as an initial step toward answering the study's principal questions.

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Methodology

4. For this exploratory study of the incidence and nature of presentation of non-whites on British television, seven consecutive nights of television programmes were analysed from 7.30pm to 11.00pm. The study week, arbitrarily selected, was November 28th - December 3rd inclusive. Coding began at 7.30pm whether a programme was in progress or just starting and ended promptly at 11.00pm. Thus, for 7 nights, each channel was monitored for 3½ hours, or a total of 73½ hours of television programmes was analysed.

5. For each programme, two coders observed independently. Thus two estimates were available for each programme, and inter-coder reliability could be determined. Of the 12 coders used, all but one had served before as a content monitor for the BBC Audience Research Department. A two-hour training session preceded this study.

6. All programmes were examined as one of six content types. The types were: Feature Films, Dramatic Entertainment, Variety Programmes, News Bulletins, Informational and Current Affairs Programmes, and Sports. In addition, all advertisements appearing on ITV were analysed. During the study week, only three sports programmes were seen during the hours analysed, and the Sports category was dropped from the analysis.

7. The total of 73½ hours was divided among the content categories in this manner: Drama, 32% of the total time; Informational and Current Affairs, 19%; Feature Films, 16%; Variety Programmes, 13%; News Bulletins, 12%; Advertisements, 4%; and Sports, 3%.

8. Among the variables coded by the monitors for entertainment programmes, these were the key ones for the present study:

   - Origin of programme (British, U.S., other)
   - Time setting (Past, present (1950-70), future)
   - Total number of white persons seen distinctly*
   - Total number of whites who talked (or danced, played, sang)
   - Total number of non-whites, talking or not
   - Programme channel
   - The age (child, teen-age, adult) and sex of each white and non-white

* Coders were instructed not to count individual people in massed units of 10 or more, but to cite them as groups. Distinctly was defined as sufficient exposure to code on all relevant variables. For some kinds of programmes, and some coders, these instructions were not sufficient.
9. To provide a common reference point as to what was meant by non-whites, the coders were told to consider the following as non-whites for purposes of this study:

- Indians
- West Indians
- Pakistani
- Black Africans
- American Negroes
- Orientals (to include Hawaiians)

10. For each non-white seen, an attempt was made to code certain added characteristics. These included their nationality, social class or occupation, whether the appearance was major, minor or background, whether the non-white appeared with whites, other non-whites, or both, and a verbal description of what the non-white did on the programme.

11. Results which follow are presented separately for each of the programme content categories, with channel breakdowns where the number of programmes warrants it.

12. The a priori choice of any one week is of course subject to its being non-representative. For the present study, there appears to be little evidence which could support such a claim with regard to the entertainment programmes. And the content of news and current affairs programmes are dependent largely on unpredictable factors. However, British television does vary greatly from week to week as well as seasonally, more so than American television, and such a study might well be replicated if further evidence was desired.

Results

Dramatic entertainment programmes.

13. The analysis of dramatic programmes - the situation comedies, the westerns, the detective shows, the plays - consisted of 34 different presentations, or 5 each evening. The total time involved was 23½ hours, or 32% of the television time examined. Ten of the programmes were on BBC-1, 9 on BBC-2 and 15 on ITV. Results will be broken down by channel before presenting an overall summary.

14. BBC-1. The ten programmes observed on this channel ran for eight hours, ten minutes. Eight of them originated in Great Britain, and the remaining two were from the United States. The setting for seven programmes was the present (1950-1970), with two set in the past and one in the future. Estimates were obtained of both the total number of white persons seen on these programmes, and of the total number who had speaking roles. Both estimates achieved acceptable reliability standards. In all, 197 individuals were observed distinctly by the coders, of whom 96 did some talking.*

* The range of the two estimates for people seen on BBC-1 was 183-210, and for talking roles was 91-101.
15. On 4 of the 10 programmes, 1 or more non-white characters were coded. On The Trouble-Shooters, a Black African waiter was used; on Dixon of Dock Green, a Black African was observed drinking in a bar; on Star Trek, one coder reported 1 Indian, 2 Oriental and 3 Black crew members, of whom two had spoken lines, and the second coder observed 1 Oriental and 3 Black crew members, agreeing that two had spoken. For these three programmes, all non-white roles were very minor ones. On Play for Today, one West Indian messenger boy was coded, and the co-lead in the play was a West Indian man. This last role was a major characterization throughout the programme.

16. For the BBC-1 dramatic programmes:

4 of 10 programmes had non-white actors
4.8% of all characters coded were non-white
4% of all characters who talked were non-white
60% of the non-white characters were on one U.S.- originated programme
1 major character was non-white, on a British programme

17. BBC-2. The 9 programmes extended over 6 hours, 15 minutes. All but one originated in Great Britain. Seven settings were present time, and two from the past. The monitors observed an estimated 152 white characters, of whom 100 had speaking roles.*

18. One programme, The Bristol Entertainment, presented a group of African children playing in a park, as introductory visual material to a sketch. There were 7-10 boys and girls in the brief footage, playing together without any white children. Had such a group of white children been shown, no attempt would have been made to count the individuals. None spoke, and no other programme contained non-whites.

19. Thus, for BBC-2, during the study week:

1 of 9 programmes had non-white persons
No non-whites had speaking roles

20. ITV. This channel presented 15 programmes over 9 hours during the study week, all but one of which were of British origin. Thirteen were set in the present time, and two in the past. The number of individual white characters observed totalled 299, of whom 172 had speaking roles.**

* The range of the two estimates for people seen on BBC-2 was 140-164, and for talking roles was 98-102.

** The range of the two estimates for people seen on ITV was 267-324, and for talking roles was 163-190.
21. On 3 of the 15 programmes, 1 or more non-whites were identified. On the Buses included 1 West Indian bus conductor; The Penn Street Gang displayed 5 West Indian school children at a playground in a programme-opening segment; Hawaii-50 presented 7-9 Hawaiians in specific roles, plus some group shots. Two of the roles - both those of police officers - were considered to be major roles. Of course, the assignment of Hawaiians to the category of non-whites is open to question, but this was done for the present exploratory study.

22. For ITV, during the study week:
   3 of 15 programmes had non-white persons
   5.1% of all characters coded were non-white, but this was 2.2% excluding Hawaiians
   2.8% of all characters who talked were non-white, but was 0% excluding Hawaiians
   60% of all non-white characters were on one U.S.-originated programme
   No major characters on British-originated programmes were non-white

23. Finally, across all 3 channels, the presentation of non-whites in dramatic programmes was:
   8 of 34 programmes contained non-whites
   648 white characters were identified, in comparison with 35 non-whites
   360 white characters spoke, in comparison with 9 non-whites
   Although only 4 of 34 programmes originated in the U.S., they provided 15 of the 36 non-whites

24. Here is the itemized list of non-white presentations for the week:
   1 Black African waiter
   1 Black African drinking in a bar
   4-6 crew members on a space ship
   1 West Indian Messenger boy
   1 West Indian school teacher-spy
   7-10 African children playing in a park
   1 West Indian bus conductor
   5 West Indian school-children in a playground
   9 Hawaiians in a variety of professional, semi-professional and labouring capacities
Feature films.

25. During the study week, nine feature films were broadcast for approximately 12 hours. Five were of U.S. origin, three from Great Britain, and the remaining one from Sweden. Five were in contemporary settings, and the other four were set in the past or pre-1950 period. Two each were shown on BBC-1 and BBC-2.

26. The estimate of the total number of people seen in these films was not too reliable. Some coders attempted to count the members of large groupings, e.g., armies, mobs and others, and estimated that there were 375 different white characters; others concentrated on major characters, and yielded a total sum of 275 whites. However, there was excellent reliability in the two estimates of the total number of whites who spoke. For the 9 films, one estimate was 154 talking parts and the second indicated 146 such roles.

27. Three of the feature films depicted non-whites. In one, Bandido, (BBC-1) a Mexican rebel leader had a major acting role.* In a second, A Child is Waiting, (ITV) one Black American adult and two Black school-children - in a home for the mentally retarded - all had background roles, with one of the children speaking as a performer in a school play. The third programme, Spare the Rod, (ITV) had a brief depiction of two West Indian parents (with the father in his bus conductor's uniform), and their teenage daughter. All spoke as the child introduced them to her teacher. The roles were minor or background ones.

28. In summary then:

3 of 9 feature length films contained one or more non-whites
2 of the 3 films were of U.S. origin
2.5% of all people shown in the films were non-white
3.2% of all people who talked in the films were non-white
1 non-white person was seen for every two hours of programmes

Variety programmes.

29. For the seven nights of monitoring, all or portions of 16 programmes were coded in the category of variety. Five were based on music formats, five were non-story comedies, and the remainder came from quiz programmes, a ballet, and similar content. These programmes were seen for 9 1/2 hours. Eight of the programmes were on BBC-1, seven on BBC-2, and just one on ITV. All were of British origin.

* Mexicans were not in the definition of non-whites used; included here inasmuch as 1 coder responded as if it were a non-white.
30. An average of the two independent coding estimates of the number of white people seen produced approximately 373 individuals. This excludes attempting to count the members of large groups, e.g. the London Symphony Orchestra. Further reliability came from the estimates of the number of such people who sang, danced, talked, or otherwise performed, either individually or in small groups. One coding estimate was 250 and the other was 255. We shall base our comparisons on the lower estimate.

31. On four of the programmes, non-white performers were seen. On The Old Grey Whistle Test* (BBC-2), an American Negro trio performed, including a male singer and two instrumentalists. On Top of the Pops (BBC-1), an American Negro male singer was featured, as was a singing group of 3 American Negro women and 4 Negro men. On What Scat? (BBC-1), a young black man and a young black woman made brief comments on Scotland. And on Cat Stevens in Concert (BBC-2), an American Negro musician played as part of a group.

32. To characterise these data:

4 of 16 variety programmes contained one or more non-whites
3.6% of all persons seen distinctly were non-white
5.3% of all performers were non-white
One non-white was seen during each half hour of programming

Advertisements.

33. For the study week, each advertisement which showed one or more people was analysed. This excluded advertisements which depicted cartoon characters, or showed only arms, legs, etc. It also excluded sound-only advertisements. In all, 284 advertisements were coded between 7.30-11.00pm, with a range of 39-44 advertisements for each of the seven evenings.**

34. In this collection of advertisements, the coders tallied more than 850 white persons who were shown distinctly, of whom 283 had a talking role. For each advertisement then, an average of three white people were shown, and one of them talked.

35. As to the appearance of non-whites, a maximum of 7 advertisements contained one non-white individual. No advertisement contained more than one non-white. The 7 codings represented 6 different advertisements. Of the 7 non-whites seen, 1 had a talking role.

* This programme began at 10.50pm, and therefore was observed only until 11.00pm.
**The estimates from our second set of codings for all advertisements indicated a total of 280 advertisements, with a range of 34-46 for the seven nights, and six advertisements with non-white persons.
36. The frequency of occurrence of non-whites in advertisements may be summarised in this manner:

- 23.4% of all advertisements with people contained a non-white person
- 8.6% of all people shown in advertisements were non-white
- 4.6% of all people who talked in advertisements were non-white

37. The six different advertisements and the non-white representations were:

- an Oriental child in a food advertisement
- a Black schoolboy in a soft drink advertisement
- an Oriental dancer in a tea advertisement
- a Black female in a soap advertisement
- an African slave in a sweets advertisement
- an African or dark Asian female in a food advertisement

News programmes/bulletins.

38. Here, the analysis focused on the straight news programmes for the three channels.

39. The characteristics coded for programmes in this category and that of informational programmes in the next section differed from those for entertainment programmes. Coders were asked to tally the frequency of white and non-white commentators, the frequency of white and non-white persons interviewed, and the frequency of whites and non-whites seen, but not interviewed. The last of these did not yield reliable estimates. In all 26 programmes were examined which totalled 8½ hours. Results will be summarised by channel.

40. **BBC-1.** The seven programmes of 9 o'clock News involved 37 white commentators and no non-whites. Thirty individual whites were interviewed, in addition to three non-whites, during the two hours of news. The interviewees were Mrs. Gandhi, an Indian Army officer, and a Pakistani Army officer. In the week, about a dozen additional non-whites, plus two large groupings of non-whites were also shown. These were all in connection with the Indian-Pakistan conflict.

41. **ITV.** Seven versions of the 10 o'clock News were analysed. These lasted approximately three hours. Some 39 white commentators or interviewers appeared, but no non-whites. Approximately 26 whites were interviewed, and 6 non-whites. Several large groupings of non-whites were observed, again all in connection with the Indian-Pakistan war. Interviewed were two Indian Army officers, and two Pakistani military personnel. On one programme, there was an interview with a Black Rhodesian about that country's political situation.
42. **BBC-2.** Thirteen programmes were analysed from BBC-2, primarily from News on 2 and Newsroom during the study week. A total of 3 hours, 40 minutes was coded. The 44 white commentators had no non-white counterparts. For the 50 whites interviewed, 3 non-whites were interviewed. These were 1 Indian and 1 Pakistani soldier, and a Black African political leader. About 30 additional non-whites were shown, but did not speak, and several large groupings of Indian and Pakistan soldiers.

Informational programmes, news features and documentaries.

43. This is largely a residual grouping of programmes, after the news bulletins were treated as a separate content category. It included 24 Hours, Panorama, World in Action, and Cinema, among others. 27 programmes were included in this category, totalling 14 broadcast hours. Thirteen of the programmes were on BBC-2, 7 on ITV and 7 on BBC-1. Results will be presented for each channel.

44. **BBC-1.** The seven programmes on BBC-1 ran for 4 hours. A total of 20 white commentators participated, and no non-white commentators. Averaging the two coder estimates indicated that 76 whites were interviewed and 13 non-whites. The non-whites appeared on three of the programmes. On two of these, Panorama and 24 Hours (December 3), 5 of the non-whites appeared. All were Indian or Pakistani political figures. On Last Minute to Choose, a programme about drug addiction in the United States, 7-9 American Blacks were interviewed with regard to their drug usage. In addition, one Black doctor was shown tending medical assistance.

45. In toto:

- 4 of seven programmes presented non-whites
- 0% of the commentators were non-white
- 15% of the interviewees were non-white

46. **BBC-2.** These 13 programmes were seen over 6½ hours during the evenings studied. There were approximately 20 white commentators or moderators and nil non-whites; there were 53 whites who were interviewed or had commentary, and nil non-whites. On four of the programmes, the monitors reported that some non-whites were seen, but none spoke.

47. **ITV.** The seven ITV programmes ran for 3½ hours. There were seven commentators, all white. An estimated 40 whites were interviewed, and 5 non-whites. All 5 appeared on World in Action, and were Vietnamese and Laotian soldiers commenting about the war. On only one other programme were any individual non-whites seen, a musician on *A Gift for Music.*
Summary

48. The report is brief and section summaries appear throughout. It seems useful to include here only a capsule picture of the incidence of non-whites across the three entertainment programme categories - Drama, Variety and Feature Films. These consisted of 59 programmes during the study week, over 44 television hours.

... For 1296 whites observed, there appeared 56 non-whites, 40 of whom appeared on programmes of British origin.

... For 768 whites who had speaking roles or performed on a variety programme, there were 28 non-whites who talked or performed.

... Non-whites appeared on 15 of the 59 programmes.

... Four non-whites had what could be termed leading roles in the dramatic and film categories. One was a Mexican, two were Hawaiians, and one was a West Indian. Only the last was on a programme produced in England.

49. This study was conducted by Professor Bradley S. Greenberg of Michigan State University as part of a consultancy with the BBC. Miss Gayle Dyckoff served as a research assistant.

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