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Race, Ethnicity and the Segmentation of Media Markets

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

Constructing the audience

James Anderson (1996) provides a well-developed approach to understanding an audience as a theoretical construct. Anderson's *formal* audiences can be

understood as being encoded within the texts created by authors, as well as being constructed theoretically as analytical audiences for more strategic actors. The *analytical* audiences are especially relevant to the construction of audiences that Anderson defines as *empirical*. The audiences that are created through a process we refer to as 'segmentation' can be differentiated further when viewed from the perspective of different social agents with particular interests in the behaviour of audience segments. We can locate these agents in a variety of settings that range from corporate boards to college classrooms, and we can distinguish between them by means of the linkage between their interests and the interests of segment members.

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

Audience as public

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

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

community's demands upon the wider host community. The heritage of Blacks in the UK is primarily that of immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean; this critical distinction is reflected in the differences in the number and variety of targeted media that have emerged in the UK (Benjamin, 1995).

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

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

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

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

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

More generally, however, when racial and ethnic minority audiences are framed as publics, they can readily be seen as being under-served by mainstream media (Husband and Chouhan, 1985). A variety of responses to criticism,

including expanded programmes of research, have emerged. In the United States, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting initiated a programme of research that it hoped would improve its ability to serve 'the needs and interests of minority audiences' (Myrick and Keegan, 1981). It seems likely, however, that the rapidly spreading efforts to 'reinvent the welfare state' will help to shrink the size of government budgets allocated to the provision of specialized services to groups justified on the basis of some loosely articulated social need (Calabrese, 1997). Increasingly, the commercial market is presented as not only capable, but ultimately more efficient than state-run media in responding to a host of concerns subsumed under a public interest umbrella.

Audience as market

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

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

markets, advertisers rather than consumers pay for the creation and distribution of content to audiences.

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

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

Audience as commodity

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

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

(Owen and Wildman, 1992: 3)

The production of audiences for the market can be understood as an industrial process through which different combinations of inputs (such as scripts, music, talented acting and special effects) can produce audiences with varying degrees of efficiency. The relative importance of particular inputs can be estimated through linear regression where output is measured by ratings or sales, and inputs can be measured in units as precise as the number of acts of violence (Gandy and Signorielli, 1981). The same approach can be applied to the production of audience segments by estimating unique models for each segment. We assume that audience attention is captured by content and that it is attractive to audience members. It is reasonable to expect that different music, settings, actors and outcomes will be more attractive to some types of viewer than others. These types can be thought of as taste segments.

What is crucial to understanding a media system governed by a capitalist logic, is that not all audiences are equally valued in the market. If particular audience segments that are attracted (produced) by particular content are undervalued in the market, advertisers will be unwilling to pay the same ‘cost

per thousand’ they would be willing to pay for more ‘desirable’ audiences. Rational participants in such markets cannot survive by producing audiences that no one will buy, nor can they survive by producing those audiences if the costs of production exceed the income that can be derived from their sale.

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

Audience as victim

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

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

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

Audience segmentation

While segmentation became the dominant approach to constructing the audience as consumer at the end of the twenty-first century, the concept of segmentation actually emerged quite early in the development of consumer culture (Ewan, 1976). While early segmentation was based on gender, rather than race or ethnicity, marketers quickly developed specialized appeals that were designed

to capture the attention and loyalty of women as a segment of the reading and listening audience.

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

Group identification

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

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

Anderson (1996) distinguishes between 'strategic' and 'engaged' audiences on the basis of the extent to which these audiences are formally organized, and engage with each other in mutually dependent relationships. Strategic audiences may be understood in relation to associated concepts of interpretative communities, social locations and cultural capital. Theorists assume that a high degree of common understanding and appreciation of cultural artefacts has been derived from similar experiences. A critical response to media content is assumed to reflect a common ideological perspective. An acknowledged group identity of this type is revealed when a particular group, such as African-Americans 'oppose what they see and hear from an ideological position as harmful, unpleasant, or distasteful media representations' (Davis and Gandy, 1999: 368).

Jorge Schement (1998) has examined the distinctions between racial and ethnic identification in relation to media segmentation. He suggests that the use of race as a category is to the advantage of Whites because, as the dominant group, they can use the language of race to stereotype, and thereby assign members of

groups defined racially to a subordinate status. On the other hand, he sees ethnicity as a matter of choice, as reflecting greater autonomy and self-determination in the realm of identity. At the same time he recognizes that 'in the calculus of modern media, ethnicity has emerged as a potent determinant for organizing market segments' (Schement, 1998: 93).

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

Measurement

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

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

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

The political economy of segmentation

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

Differences between media

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

It is unwise to think about communications technology independently of the regulatory systems and market structures that govern access to and control of production and distribution resources. For example, while it may be technologically feasible to dramatically increase the number of distinctly programmed channels it may not be economically or politically feasible to do so. The costs of owning and operating broadcasting entities have meant, historically, that members of minority groups have been excluded from positions of administrative authority. However, because operational control can be separated from ownership, members of minority communities have still been involved in the production of specialized content. Where the technology of networking makes it possible to consolidate small, isolated communities into an economically or politically viable segment, minority group members may be called upon, or invited, to produce and distribute targeted programme material. In the United States 'Black radio networks allowed blacks to write, produce, and broadcast news, sports, information, and entertainment exclusively for blacks' (Johnson, 1993/94: 183).

Of course, elitist assumptions about programme standards may serve to limit the involvement of racial and ethnic minority group members in the production of specific content within certain media. In Australia, ethnic radio broadcasters employed large numbers of individuals from targeted linguistic communities in the production of programmes, yet responsibility for the production of 'multicultural' programmes for the television service was reserved for professional organizations managed by Whites. Assumptions about differences in the skills required justified these distinctions (Patterson, 1990).

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

While the economics that characterize the production and distribution of print media include incremental costs of paper, ink and fuel, which may still be a constraint on diversity, the economics of distribution for the Internet are quite different. This rapidly developing network makes it possible to imagine, develop and sustain a system of global distribution for any number of diasporic communities (Zhang and Xiaoming, 1999). Here the primary constraints are the economic limitations on access to minority audiences described as 'the digital divide' (Bikson and Panis, 1995; Ervin and Gilmore, 1999). The maximum size of the target audience is limited because most of its members have not invested in the equipment necessary to access the content. However, attempts to project the size, rate and extent of participation in the markets for new technology are both expensive and unreliable, even for the mainstream audience (Carey and Elton, 1996).

Demographics

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

The problems involved in estimating the size of different racial and ethnic segments are substantial. Government statistics are a primary source of such estimates, but these figures are far from reliable. Depending on the way in which critical questions are asked, quite different estimates and projections can emerge. When framed in racial terms, projections of the US population in 2025 put the proportion of Whites at 78 per cent of the total. This estimate is inflated because of the fact that Hispanics have been classified racially as White. However, when people are asked to identify themselves in ethnic terms, Whites are projected to be less than 63 per cent of the population in 2025 (Schemm, 1998: 94-95).

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

agreed to allow respondents to mark more than one racial category on their forms (1998).

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

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

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

Tastes and preferences

The identification of minority audience segments represents a classic 'chicken and egg' problem. Gathering evidence for the existence of unique audience segments depends in part on the availability of the types of content that would encourage their distribution to different sets of consumers (Barwise and Ehrenberg, 1988; Frank and Greenberg, 1980). Early attempts to determine whether revealed preferences indicated the existence of segments within the television audience were constrained by the relatively limited range of programme types available at any particular viewing hour. Barwise and Ehrenberg (1988: 36) concluded that 'in television there is nothing like the striking segmentation which is regularly reported for the readership of newspapers and magazines'. At the time of their report, the analyses reported by Frank and Greenberg (1980) represented the most comprehensive study of television audience tastes and preferences. Very little of the variance in revealed preference for different programme types was associated with either demographic or lifestyle characteristics of segments.

However, a subsequent analysis performed with the American public broadcasting system in mind (Frank and Greenberg, 1982) made use of the data to demonstrate the potential for programming for Black and Hispanic audience segments. Frank and Greenberg suggested that public broadcasting might serve minority audiences by producing programmes that were relatively more successful in attracting members of those population segments. They identified the interest segments that had relatively high proportions of Blacks and Hispanics; they also identified several programme types for which a Black or Hispanic viewing index was higher than that of the general population.

Historically, neither producers nor their primary clients have been willing to risk making substantial investments in programming in the absence of evidence

that a sizeable audience segment exists. The balance between risk and opportunity shifts as a function of increased channel capacity, yet differential tastes and preferences can only be revealed in the context of a large number of options that are readily perceived as different.

As the number of distinct options increases, several possibilities for audience response present themselves. Consider the expansion of programme options that might accompany an increase in the number of channels available in a market with cable or satellite delivery. Members of the audience can be expected to spread their viewing choices across a greater number of channels and programmes. Others may increase their viewing of a subset of the programmes available. Increased polarization or greater intensity of viewing of a smaller number of programme types would be *de facto* evidence of the existence of segments definable by taste and preference (Webster and Phalen, 1997: 113). These might be definable as taste segments (Cantor, 1994).¹

Racial and ethnic segmentation is based on the assumption that the preference for specific content exhibited by members of one group differs substantially from the preferences exhibited by members of other groups defined by race or ethnicity. There is convincing evidence to suggest that there are real differences in the media preferences of particular racial and ethnic groups. It seems clear, for example, that Whites and African-Americans have quite different television preferences, even though members of both groups may be found in substantial numbers in the same audience for any programme or programme type. When their favourite programmes were compared in 1996, Black and White viewers had few programmes in common. Only *Monday Night Football* was in the top ten lists of both groups in the spring ratings sweep (Schemant, 1998: 109).

Differences in racial group identification are also associated with revealed preferences for Black-targeted media. Younger and more racially oriented African-Americans have been observed to spend more time with, and to be less critical of, the programming on BET, the only national television network targeted to African-Americans (Jones, 1990). Bob Johnson, BET's chief executive and majority owner, is betting that the sharpening distinctions between the television preferences of Whites and African-Americans will increase his ability to exploit this audience segment (Black power, 1999).

As early as 1972, however, communication scholars questioned the usefulness of race as a basis for segmentation and targeting in all media. After noting that the audience for Black-oriented radio stations often contained a sizeable audience of White youth and college students, Surin suggested that 'listener's behaviour is based more on psychological "blackness" than on physiological "blackness"' (Surin, 1972: 297).

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

To date, there is only a woefully inadequate body of research that might be used to determine the extent to which audiences differ substantially in their preferences for media content. In the absence of a well-developed body of research on the tastes and preferences of minority audiences, producers and distributors have to rely on 'trial and error' (Neuman, 1991; Wildman and Karamanis, 1998).

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

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

Market value

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

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

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

torptions in the market suggested that minority-owned stations had an even lower average power ratio than similarly targeted stations that were owned by Whites.

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

There are also decisions that are based on fear of particular consumers. This fear has two related dimensions – both have a basis in racial prejudice. Aversive racism is assumed or projected upon the White consumer (Dovidio and Gartner, 1986). It is assumed that Whites will not want to eat or shop in the company of African-Americans. It is even assumed that White consumers will not want to be associated with commodities known to be preferred by Blacks or other ethnic group members who occupy lower rungs on the ladder of social status. Thus, a store owner or product manager is unwilling to risk trading the White customers he already has for the minority consumers he might attract through targeted ads. The reasonable racist avoids the minority consumer because he believes that Blacks and Hispanics will steal, tip less generously or otherwise prove to be less valuable customers (Armour, 1997; Ofori, 1999). Avoiding such customers is seen to make good business sense.

Ideology

The creation of minority audience segments is almost by definition a process of racial formation (Omi and Winant, 1994). As Omi and Winant suggest, racial categories are the products of a socio-historical process that reflects the differential power and influence of identifiable social groups. Members of these groups are engaged in a number of goal-oriented racial projects that are concerned with shaping the distribution of social and economic resources along racial lines. Roberta Astorff argues that efforts to define and then capture a Latino market required the subordination of racial distinctions among the Latinos living in the United States (Astorff, 1988/89). This strategy was particularly important because of the link between race and social class that finds Black Hispanics among the poorest members of this ethnic group. 'When race, language, and culture are collapsed into each other, their social nature and origins can be safely ignored', and this, she argues, is precisely what occurred in the formation of the Latino segment in the United States (Astorff 1988/89: 169).

Nationalism is another ideological influence that helps to shape the development of audience segments. For immigrant groups, there is some period of time during which they are expected to overcome their characterization as foreign. Yet, in many cases, the children of migrant labourers will continue to be treated as immigrants by members of the dominant community. In Britain, the children

of Asian, African and Caribbean migrants have consistently been conceived as 'aliens within' by White Britons (Husband and Chouhan, 1985).

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

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

In other cases, a multicultural policy evolves as a reflection of an underlying ethos of a broadcasting establishment that favours celebration over conflict. The ideological virtue of multiculturalism is that whilst it allows for the recognition of cultural difference it ignores relations of power and domination' (Husband and Chouhan, 1985: 285). As a result, programming falls far short of expressing the full range of anger and resentment that many minorities feel.

To a great extent, the minority press has traditionally been an oppositional press. Often, its critical function has been to provide an alternative construction of the challenges and opportunities faced by its primary audience. This oppositional stance has been part of a continuing 'war of images' between Blacks and Whites (Dates and Barlow, 1993). A continuous stream of persons of colour – who came to the United States as slaves, indentured labourers or immigrants – has been subjected to biased and distorted representation in the news media (Keever *et al.*, 1997), and the ethnic press has sought to set the record straight.

The decision to increase the supply of targeted programming to meet the interests and perceived needs of minority communities has often meant increasing the participation of members of these communities in critical production decisions. This has generally meant increasing their employment through the enforcement of 'equal employment opportunity' regulations. Less often, policies sought to increase their operational control through greater ownership of communications facilities. In 1978, the US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) initiated a policy encouraging minority ownership of broadcasting facilities. The general assessment of this policy is that it has failed to achieve its goals. Indeed, in the wake of the Reagan counter-revolution, minority ownership has actually slipped back towards the conditions that marked the origins of the policy (Ofori *et al.*, 1997).

A question that is rarely addressed is whether a policy in support of the development of capitalism along racial or ethnic grounds should have been

expected to produce a result in the market which would be any different from that which the existing market provides. Should we expect that minority capitalists would be more or less successful than Whites in squeezing profits out of the market? If they did, would it be because they possessed specialist knowledge of minority segments that had been gained from their own experience of minority status? In the absence of irrationality (and the inefficiencies associated with racism), we would have to assume that this specialized knowledge would also be available to White programmers within the market (Wildman and Karamanis, 1998). However, the best evidence suggests that the real market devalues whatever expertise minority programmers might have. Thus, restrictions in the supply of content designed specifically for its minority segments will continue to exist (Ofori, 1999; Siegelman and Waldfogel, 1998).

Targeting Blacks

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

It is clear that American advertisers are faced with a quandary. Marketing to African-Americans has become problematic. The industry is unsure about whether to see them as a separate cultural entity, like Hispanic Americans, or to target them with the white population according to distinctions in income, gender, age, and other characteristics' (Turow, 1997: 80). To a considerable extent, it was Black media executives, and the managers of advertising agencies that specialized in reaching the African-American market, who have been complaining about the 'mainstreaming' of Black America. Critics suggest that newly emerging television networks had merely 'used' the African-American viewer as a way to establish themselves within the industry. These networks quickly abandoned the segment once they were able to move on to more lucrative markets (Carter, 1996; Trescott, 1996; Wynter, 1998). It wasn't always that way.

For my people

The Black press in the United States historically provided both leadership and support for African-Americans in their continuing struggle for civil rights (Wolseley, 1990). The flagship paper *Freedom's Journal* and some fifty other Black newspapers were established between 1827 and 1865 in support of the abolitionist movement (Brie, 1977/78). Even during the twentieth century, the

Black press consistently rose to the challenge of defending its readers against oppression (Owens, 1996).

The Black press in the United States has been motivated by service rather than profit for most of its history. Because neither circulation nor advertising could be relied upon to finance these publications, the publishers used income from donations and from personal employment to sustain the enterprises (Brie, 1977/78). Of course, there were exceptions, such as Robert Abbott's *Chicago Defender*, which reported a national circulation of 200,000 by 1917. It wasn't until the 1940s, however, that the Black press evolved into a cornerstone of Black capitalism.

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

When surveyed in 1990, managers of African-American newspapers differed in their views regarding the factors that might determine their continued existence. Contrary to expectations, competition from either African-American or mainstream newspapers was not perceived as the primary threat to these weekly publications (Lacy *et al.*, 1991). In the view of its managers, the Black press will remain an alternative, rather than a direct competitor of mainstream newspapers. Few publishers believe that the need for a racially identified Black press will disappear in the foreseeable future.

Market value

Advertisers have never considered the African-American consumer to be an especially important market segment. The following reasons (Wolseley, 1990: 338-39) have been given for this assessment:

- African-Americans are poor, and are therefore not a viable market
- African-Americans are consumers of mainstream media and can be reached efficiently through those sources
- association with African-Americans is frowned upon by Whites, the primary market, and attracting Black consumers risks offence and loss of those more valuable consumers
- media targeted to African-Americans are likely to contain more confrontational, and non-traditional content that is generally of low quality; as a result, these media represent an unacceptable environment for mainstream products.

The fact that most of these reasons are based on ill-informed racial stereotypes does little to soften their impact on the behaviour of advertisers towards this audience segment.

There is some debate regarding the precise historical moment when the African-American consumer was seen to be worthy of any attention by mainstream advertisers (Brooks, 1995; Pride and Wilson, 1997). Yet, the process through which this market was assessed, and then constructed discursively, is not much different from the process that characterizes the exploitation of other

ethnic markets. The first stage always involves efforts to estimate the size and cumulative value of the market. The African-American market, estimated at \$4.8 million in 1942, was by that time being discussed in the trade press as a market that should not be ignored.

Eventually government statistics, such as those produced by the Department of Commerce and the Bureau of the Census, would be relied upon in estimating the size and quality of the African-American market. But specialized market research was needed to generate initial interest in this segment. The publisher of the Afro-American newspapers, in co-operation with the Urban League, contracted for the first comprehensive assessment of the Black consumer market in 1945. Also important were agents who were able to bridge the gap between Black and White communities. William Ziff, a White entrepreneur who later became the head of the Ziff-Davis publishing empire, served as a publisher's representative who specialized in obtaining advertising for the Black press (Pride and Wilson, 1997). The purchase of advertising with media targeted specifically to the Black audience by a major advertiser could be taken as an indicator that the segment had achieved an improved status. A decision by the Hoover Company to advertise its vacuum cleaners in *Ebony* magazine in 1951 was precisely that kind of historical landmark (Brooks, 1995).

Black radio

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

The Black radio audience was built largely on the basis of Black on-air talent and recordings of Black performers. Its development was financed initially by a small, but growing, number of advertisers. The market expanded dramatically following the Second World War. White owners of Black-format stations had been led into this market by periodic reports and columns in the trade press that also provided guidance for those 'adventurers' who might take a chance in this market. One source, *Sponsor* magazine, was especially helpful in reporting surveys of the African-American audience and providing lists of special 'dos and don'ts' for success with this segment (Newman, 1988).

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

The establishment of interconnected networks was the most effective way to transform a widely dispersed audience into a segment that might be of interest to advertisers. Although it was short-lived, the National Negro Network was established by a Black entrepreneur, Leonard Evans, in 1953. Tobacco marketer, Philip Morris, was among the network's primary sponsors (Johnson, 1993/94).

A news service, the Black Audio Network, was established in 1968. The network relied on Black journalists and emphasized African-American newsmakers. During its heyday, it convinced upwards of 90 stations to carry its reports.

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

During this period when the dramatic growth in Black networks supplying targeted programming took place, there were only 13 stations that were actually owned by African-Americans. By 1995, in response to a shift in FCC policy, African-Americans had come to own some 203 radio stations. The majority of these stations were targeted to Black listeners. At the same time, however, the stations owned by African-Americans represented only a fraction of the stations that reported Black-oriented programme schedules. Those Black-owned stations captured a comparatively smaller share of the revenue derived from marketing this segment to advertisers (Ofori *et al.*, 1997).

Following the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 that allowed for an expansion in the number of stations that could be owned in any broadcast market, the numbers of stations owned by African-Americans declined sharply. The profitability of those remaining under Black control was also threatened severely by aggressive, direct competition from group-owned stations (Ofori, 1999). The movement of White entrepreneurs into an improved position may be indicative of an increased assessment of the value of the audiences produced by Black-format radio. However, the conclusion that the market value of the audiences produced by Black-oriented television has declined (Wynter, 1998) suggests that the political economy of audiences is far more complex than one might assume.

Linguistic segmentation: American Hispanics

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

Demography

Advertiser's interest in that aspect of the Hispanic market defined by Spanish language usage has increased dramatically since the 1960s. Despite the problems

inherent in estimating the size of the Hispanic population, the US Census Bureau continues to report and to project dramatic growth in the Hispanic population. Since 1980, the Hispanic population has been seen to increase at five times the rate of the general population in the United States (Goodson and Shaver, 1994). While estimates of the date at which the boundary would actually be crossed differ, few doubt that the size of the Hispanic population will have exceeded that of African-Americans by not long after the turn of the century (Soruco, 1996).

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

The geographic distribution of Hispanics in the United States into ethnic enclaves is reflected in concentrations of groups from different regions of the Americas into particular urban centres. The circumstances that led to the migration of Hispanic groups over time helps to explain their concentration in different regions. Over 50 per cent of the Latino population is concentrated in California and Texas (Downing, 1992). Large concentrations of Puerto Ricans can be found in New York City and in the surrounding region. Miami became the centre of life for Cuban immigrants to South Florida, while Los Angeles houses the largest group of Mexican-Americans.

Linguistic sleight of hand

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

There is considerable diversity among those who speak Spanish. A relatively small number, primarily recent immigrants, speak only Spanish. A far larger number, perhaps 50 per cent, speak Spanish only part of the time. There are a relatively large number of people who are identified as Hispanic by heritage who have almost no knowledge or competence in Spanish (Aguirre and Bustamante, 1993). Differential linguistic ability and preference has been identified as an important predictor of whether an individual will be a regular user of Spanish-language media (Faber *et al.*, 1986).

Rodriguez (1997) suggests that the decision to produce an idealized Hispanic who would be attractive to mainstream advertisers required the invention of a pan-ethnic Spanish language. The resulting 'Walter Cronkite Spanish' that came to be used in the widely viewed newscast, *Noticiero Univisión*, was stripped of the distinguishing accents and intonations that might otherwise identify the national origin of the speaker.

To the degree that the development of an economically viable Hispanic segment depended upon the creation of a common Hispanic identity, this linguistic invention may have contributed to that goal. In the absence of cues to the contrary, members of the audience identified the programme's newscasters as having come from their own region, if not from their own social class. In addition, the journalistic scripts were crafted with a common identity in mind. The choice of collective personal pronouns like '*ustedes*' and '*Nosotros*' was strategic. For Rodríguez, '*Univisión's* use of collective personal pronouns signals that journalists and pan-ethnic audience together are the insiders, the legitimated actors' in the newscast (Rodríguez, 1996: 66).

The creation of a pan-ethnic identity in order to achieve some criterion size for the Hispanic news audience has parallels in other media markets. Mahan (1995) discusses the 'Latinization' of New York Puerto Rican salsa as part of a marketing strategy developed by Fania Records. The Cuban heritage of the music, as well as its oppositional character, was lost as its commercialization progressed.

The loss of ethnic/cultural distinctions within the United States as a result of the implementation of a marketing strategy shares an ironic relationship with the historic expression of concerns about cultural imperialism that identified US-based media as the primary threat.

Internal colony

Around the time that many in the community of nations were organizing their resistance to the domination of American media products (Read, 1976), and many were demanding a New World Information and Communication Order (McPhail, 1987), a group of American policy scholars struggled to bring public attention to bear on an unusual counter-example. Félix Gutiérrez claimed that the Spanish International Network (SIN) had established a dominant position in the Spanish language television market in the United States in the 1960s. SIN moved beyond its primitive status as a 'bicycle' network that shuttled imported Mexican programmes from station to station, to an unparalleled position of power on the basis of direct satellite feeds from Mexico City (Gutiérrez, 1979). The Latino market had generally been ignored by domestic advertisers who tended to think of people who spoke Spanish in the United States as both foreign and poor in comparison with Hispanics in Latin America. Mexican entrepreneurs saw this same segment as a relatively wealthy population that could serve as a secondary market for Mexican film and video (Rodríguez, 1997).

While this example was presented to scholars and policy actors as a unique example of media imperialism (Gutiérrez and Schement, 1981 and 1994; Sinclair, 1990), the case of SIN also demonstrates the important role played by technology in developing the vital chain of supply that links immigrants to their homelands.

Market value

Astloff (1988/89) describes the process of transforming Chicanos and other Latino communities into valuable commodities as one marked by challenges and difficulties that went far beyond definition and measurement. She notes that

the changes in the ideology of broadcast regulation in the 1980s made it difficult, if not impossible, to support the development of Spanish-language broadcasting on either cultural or political grounds. Instead, 'Latinos had to be presented as a lucrative and untapped market' (Astloff, 1988/89: 160). Article after article in the market-oriented press presented wildly optimistic and greatly varying estimates of the size and collective wealth of this market (Downing, 1992). At the same time, it was necessary for the advocates of this market to create a convincing image of Hispanics as consumers. Initially, some rather innovative stunts were used to convince advertisers of this fact. KCOR, a Spanish-language station in San Antonio Texas, asked its listeners to send in box tops, empty containers and other proofs of purchase in order to convince national advertisers that there were loyal customers who should not be ignored (Schement and Flores, 1977). In the process of enhancing the commercial value of this segment, reliance on traditional stereotypes of Latinos meant that 'all cultural values and experiences were translated into consumer preferences and behaviours' (Astloff, 1988/89: 163). What had been criticized as stubborn traditionalism became an enhancement when it was reconfigured strategically as an assurance of brand loyalty.

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

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