

Maya Dorsainvil '24

Ms. Choiniere, Civics (C)

29 April 2024

The portrayal of Black people in the media has and often continues to shape damaging public perceptions of Black people in real life. In several branches of media, such as TV, film, and news, Black individuals and families have often been depicted as aggressive, lazy, poor, ignorant, dishonest and thuggish (Watts 13-18). These stereotypes that have been manifested in the media create problems for members of the Black community beyond misrepresentation and perception. Since we live in an image-literate society, television is a powerful tool to foster self-awareness, and because it has the power to reduce our critical thinking, as a society, we have become more accustomed to believing false statements and stereotypes (Morgan 33). Therefore, because we are so overexposed to and, as a result, consume media that depicts different groups of people

negatively, whether it be through a TV show or the news, as a society we start to believe them and allow these perceptions to influence how we then view those groups of people.

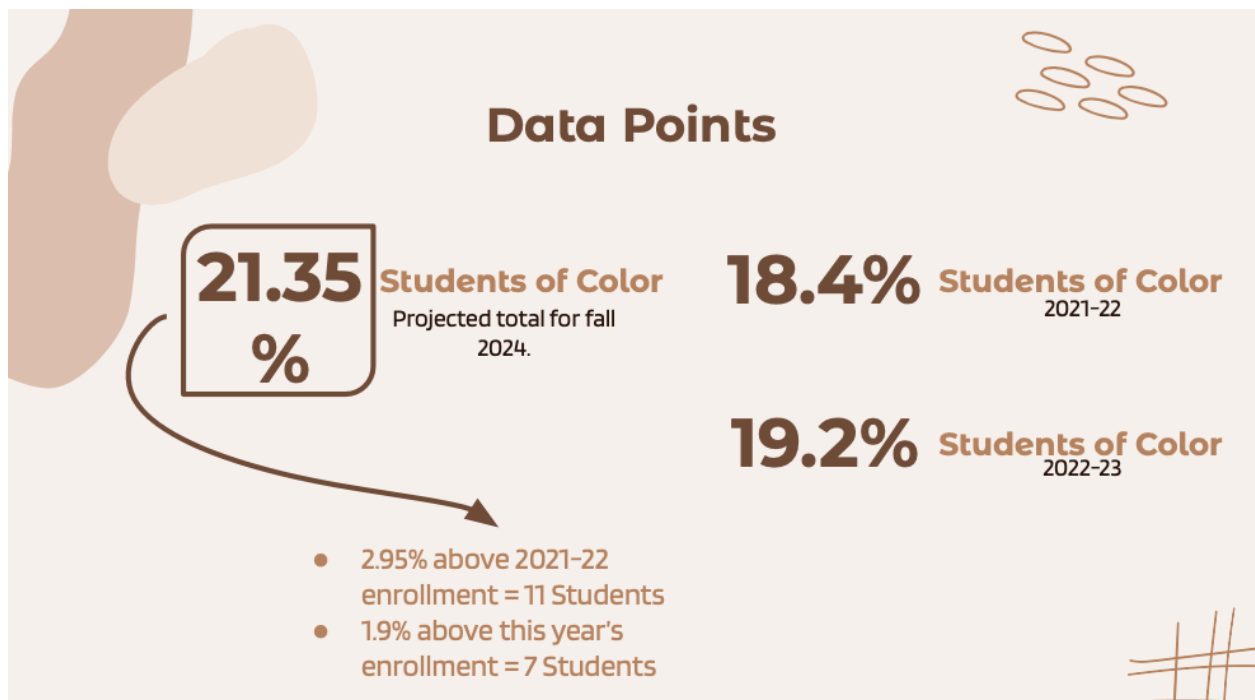
For that reason, in the case of Black people, these stereotypes and negative attributes that have been assigned to them through the media have led to real-life problems such as discrimination, internalized racism, and prejudice. Furthermore, racist stereotyping has produced even more racist representations of violence which feeds into the increasing public outcry on brutal crime bills that are designed to build more prisons and legislate cruel policies with people of color (Jones 13). In terms of news, Approximately 63% of Black adults believe that news about them is frequently more negative than that of other racial or ethnic groups (Pew Research Center). Not only is this a form of discrimination, but as I mentioned earlier, by creating a negative image of Black people in the news more stereotypes and prejudices are perpetuated.

According to Stephanie Robbins Troutman, a scholar at the University of Arizona, there are more options for individuals to connect with diverse and nuanced stories about the Black experience and Black stories as a result of cable networks and internet platforms like Netflix or Hulu (Harwood). This is critical since the media we consume everyday is an incredibly powerful tool that can shape our perceptions and behaviors towards different groups of people, so seeking platforms to learn more about the Black experience and Black stories can be very beneficial in dismantling these damaging perceptions and bettering the lives of Black individuals and communities throughout this country.

While there has been progress, history has shown us that *again* the representation of Black communities in the media has led to negative stereotypes and perceptions. Now, it is impossible for me to single-handedly dismantle the negative perceptions of Black people. However, the main idea of this capstone project is to use what I've learned about *how* the negative portrayals and representations of Black people in the media has changed over time, along with *how* the perception of Black individuals and communities has then shifted over time, and use that information to answer the question: How do we change the perception of how Black people and communities are portrayed in today's media, **specifically- what can we do here at Ursuline?**

As a Black student myself who knows what it's like to be shown one reality when exploring a predominantly white school's media platforms, but experiencing another when actually attending the school, I have been working towards a tangible outcome for this project. I wish to answer this question by using data on the current state of media representation at Ursuline by diving into its social media platforms and website, as well as conducting surveys and interviews to learn more about the students and faculty's thoughts and experiences on Ursuline's media representation compared to past years. I have interviewed Dr. Sessoms from the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Department, Ms. Graves from the Marketing Department, and Ms. Solomon from Admissions. Based on my conversations with them, it is clear that there has been a positive change in Ursuline's state of accurate media representation of its students of color. During these interviews, amongst many other things I also learned that students' perspectives would be a key part of my project. So, with the help of Ekene Okoye '24, the leader of Racial Justice Club, I sent a survey to a select group of Ursuline's students of color, asking them if/how they believe Ursuline has been able to change the perception of how its students of color are portrayed within its media

today. Based on the results of this survey, for the most part, students believe that by starting to amplify the voices of its students of color, diversifying campus further, and allowing students of color to decide how they are represented and perceived, Ursuline can continue to improve how students of color are portrayed within its media. I believe that as long as our campus continues to grow in its diversity and portray its students of color as eager to learn, active, and important members of the community, its showcasing of diversity will be increasingly organic, and its students of color can be perceived the same way every other student at Ursuline is.



In terms of my initiative, I have asked that this research be published on Ursuline's DEI page for (prospective) students of color. By doing so I hope the process of deciding where to spend the next four years of their lives will be made easier for these prospective students of color because at the end of the day, as people of color we more often than not can tell if an institution is being made to appear more diverse than it actually is. So, they will have my perspective to consider as

a reminder that they have a place at Ursuline filled with growing representation and opportunity. As for the students that already attend Ursuline, I hope that my writing provides them with a sense of knowledge and awareness about this issue that they may not have been familiar with prior to reading it.

So, to clearly answer the question: How do we as **a community at Ursuline** change the perception of how people and communities of color are portrayed in today's media? We familiarize and educate ourselves about the issue, and put in the work to dismantle it within our community by amplifying the voices of those who are impacted most, the students of color.

If I have accomplished anything through this project, I hope that it's been fostering both an inclusive environment and a sense of belonging for Ursuline's students of color, as well as spreading awareness amongst Ursuline's student body and community about this issue.

Works Cited

“Black Americans’ Experiences with News.” Pew Research Center’s Journalism Project, Pew Research Center, 26 Sept. 2023, www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2023/09/26/black-americans-experiences-with-news/.

Jones, John E. *Does the Portrayal of African Americans in Film Have a Direct*, scholarworks.calstate.edu/downloads/gm80hw03b. Accessed 21 Mar. 2024.

Morgan, Donald. “Black situational comedies: a legacy of stereotypes, ideology, and hegemony.” *Journal of Culture, Arts, Literature, and Linguistics (CaLLs)*, vol. 2, no. 2, 24 Feb. 2017, p. 25, <https://doi.org/10.30872/calls.v2i2.695>.

“The Evolution of Black Representation on Television.” University of Arizona News, 9 Mar. 2022, news.arizona.edu/story/evolution-black-representation-television.

Watts, Caroline. *The Portrayal of African Americans in Situation Comedies*, mals.camden.rutgers.edu/files/C_Watts.pdf. Accessed 7 Feb. 2024.