

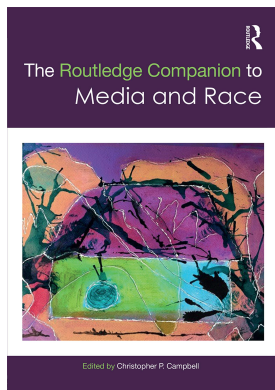
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Christopher P. Campbell

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Frank J. Ortega, Joe R. Feagin

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FRAMING

The Undying White Racial Frame

Frank J. Ortega and Joe R. Feagin

This chapter explores contemporary racial framing as exhibited in today's mass media, particularly racial representations, images, and discourses. We first introduce framing theory as a conceptual social science approach to analyzing media and society. We build on this by adding the white racial frame as a theoretical perspective to assess racism in the media, especially racial depictions and the role of media owners in the reproduction of racial oppression. Framing theory and the white racial frame are then applied to better understand how contemporary portrayals in the mainstream media continue to reproduce damaging racial stereotypes and mischaracterizations of racial minorities.

More specifically, we analyze popular African American and Latina/o images to better understand the ways in which media outlets depict people of color. The first examples demonstrate the replication of racial frames in discourse surrounding black athletes and images of President Barack Obama. Following this, we inquire into the transmission of racial ideologies to youth, using the film *Despicable Me 2* and its Latina/o imagery. We chose these widely circulated examples to illustrate how contemporary media framing regularly influences individual and group interactions. The chapter concludes with a discussion concerning challenges presented by racialized media framing, the great need for accurate racial depictions, and the necessity of a broader critical focus on the mostly white owners and controllers of mainstream media content in regard to racial matters.

Framing Theory

Frames, small and large, organize social reality and construct meanings while connecting individual interpretations to broader structural and ideological processes, including those of major media institutions (Carragee and Roefs 2004). Frames are essential communication components that structure everyday life; they help organize our lived realities as well as develop and reinforce our attitudes and behaviors on many subjects (Goffman 1974; Bateson 1955). Media framing in particular is a central part of U.S. culture and to a substantial degree influences our thoughts and actions. Research on framing has been used in media studies including analyses of news coverage and is significantly used in the fields of communication, anthropology, psychology, sociolinguistics, and social movement studies (Vliegthart 2012; Van Gorp 2007). Sociologists such as Gitlin (2003), Tuchman (1978), and Goffman (1974) have contributed to framing theory and research especially through their constructivist and symbolic interactionist approaches (Vliegthart and van Zoonen 2011; McCullagh 2002).

We recognize that frames and framing definitions vary across these academic disciplines. For our purposes, however, Gitlin (2003) best captures how we and many others view frames; he argues that framing involves “principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (2003: 6). In addition, his useful definition implies that frames have important variations (see also Van Gorp 2007). Thus, frames not only diverge but converge across different issues and events, and impact how the receiver thinks about an issue in a prescribed way. Moreover, we share the view that frames exist largely outside the individual and are clearly organizing forces in institutions like the mainstream media (Van Gorp 2007).

Studying media frames carefully reveals numerous latent assumptions about society that are embedded deeply within dominant cultural perspectives. Socially constructed frames often become repackaged and circulated through important mediums such as newspapers, magazines, billboards, music, social media, television, film, and radio. These frames influence media audiences to recall, evaluate, condense, and interpret an issue in particular ways (Van Gorp 2007). Frames can be obvious, but many are subtle and unnoticed, yet remain fundamental to the ways people construct social reality. They are located in communicators’ minds, the texts, the receivers’ minds, and the larger culture (Entman 1993).

Framing theory offers an analytical pathway to investigate how people process information and use relevant data to interpret society. Media frames accentuate pieces of information, through omission and inclusion, thereby making them more *salient* and meaningful to audiences (Entman 1993). Furthermore, identifying media frames is useful and important in understanding significant social biases. Thus, an empirical news study often involves an analysis of keywords, language of arguments, stock phrases, headlines, images, metaphors, and editorial and other journalistic actors (de Vreese 2012; Matthes 2009; Gamson and Modigliani 1989).

Generally speaking, media information that audiences receive is selective in nature and presented through frames that represent the interests of those choosing them (McCullagh 2002). Those with the power to construct and circulate frames, e.g., the decision-makers in the news industry, mostly emphasize specific facts to sway audiences to particular points of view (Carragee and Roefs 2004; Ryan et al. 2001). Thus, news stories are always affected by journalists’ and editors’ perceptions and biases, which in turn can shape audience perceptions and biases (Powell 2011). Media producers, consciously and unconsciously, highlight issues that reflect certain social interests (not others) and that are mostly in line with established ways of thinking (Entman 1993; Gamson 1989). The result is that subtle changes in media messages can dramatically alter how audiences interpret important societal events.

In addition to these commonplace features of framing, we should note the importance of how the media set particular agendas and primes. Media agenda-setting structures the amount of attention and importance that most people in media audiences adhere to, such as those societal events and issues accented in the media (McCombs and Shaw 1972). The related process of priming involves media decision-makers subtly calling attention in audience members’ minds to certain limited aspects of a societal event or issue, and thereby ignoring often important aspects (Iyengar et al. 1982). On a regular basis, framing, agenda-setting, and priming are tools used to benefit those who create, control, and maintain the society’s dominant economic, political, and other social frames.

However, we must remember that audiences, in part or as wholes, are not necessarily passive vessels ready to be filled with biased frames and subframes. Some, or most, people constantly challenge certain recurring frames. Moreover, the mainstream media is only

one avenue through which people come to understand the world, since they often draw on frames generated by their own or their families' experiential knowledge (Gamson 1992). In addition, some audiences, especially those who have been victims of societal oppression, frequently make use of *counter-frames* to contrast and resist negative framing in the mass media (Feagin 2013).

Clearly, the process of framing is an integral part of human societies. Frames and the processes of framing have tremendous power over people's responses to regular media communications (Entman 1993). Framing theory offers valuable sociological insights into communication frames in accordance with how the mass media reflects, shapes, and influences social reality. Adding to this theoretical structure, we now discuss a broad societal frame termed the "white racial frame," which we use as a valuable tool in examining racialized worldviews as produced and circulated via the U.S. mass media.

The White Racial Frame

Racial oppression remains foundational to U.S. society. It takes the form of the political, economic, and other social subjugation of Americans of color. This reality is seen in the historical white construction and maintenance of the society's racial hierarchy, which so adversely affects Americans of color. Whites are positioned atop the hierarchy and thereby benefit from major material and non-material advantages. The dominant ideology of white racial superiority and others' racial inferiority is a central part of the *white racial frame* (Feagin 2013). The white racial frame includes a centuries-old pro-white subframe and anti-black and anti-Other subframes. All these subframes are composed of racialized stereotypes, images, emotions, language accents, and inclinations to discriminate. Assessing this commonplace white framing of society involves evaluating both the anti-Other subframes and the pro-white (e.g., "white savior") subframe. The white racial frame is part of the racial oppression that is foundational and systemic in U.S. society, and evaluating it is necessary to fully explaining the continuing societal dominance of whites, of white power and privilege. The anti-Other and pro-white subframes are important theoretical concepts to consider when analyzing the racialization of people of color in the mass media and other major institutions.

Why do the anti-black frame and anti-Other subframes exist? The early white racist frame originated during first contacts with indigenous and African populations and was adopted to justify and legitimize (especially in white minds) whites' extraordinarily oppressive actions toward these groups. Anti-Other subframes became widely used in the seventeenth century and have remained part of the popular white imagination ever since (Feagin 2013). The anti-Other subframes were created to rationalize white mistreatment of people of color, whereas the establishment of a pro-white subframe verified and justified white superiority in the minds of whites—and often in the minds of those oppressed (Feagin 2013). For centuries these pro-white and anti-Other subframes have operated through all major institutions, thereby actively sustaining the mistreatment and racialization of Americans of color. These highly racist frames continue to negatively affect the lives of people of color.

The effects of historical white oppressions, such as anti-American Indian genocide and African-American enslavement, have had a profound impact on the formation of the U.S. racial hierarchy and, consequently, on the life chances of people of color (Bonilla-Silva 2010). In addition, the many manifestations of *systemic racism* beyond the white racial frame (for example, concrete racial discrimination) continue to subjugate and marginalize

people of color while simultaneously providing whites with huge psychological, social, and economic gains (Feagin 2006). Today, some systemic racial oppression operates at a more covert level, yet in all its blatant and hidden forms it continues to have devastating economic, political, and social effects on the lives and communities of all Americans of color. The mainstream mass media remain highly complicit in people's understanding of societal racial matters. Racist media images, largely controlled by white media company owners and their top executives, require deep probing to uncover and disrupt their racist and other biased group misrepresentations (Hall 1981). Better theoretical concepts, such as the white racial frame, can help social science researchers to investigate more thoroughly how the mainstream media construct and maintain the still prevalent visual and non-visual racial characterizations of people of color.

The White Racial Frame and the Media

In Europe and the United States, whites used this white racial frame in viewing social worlds and to make sense of racial matters within their everyday interactions and lives. The mass media make use of “anti-Other” and “pro-white” subframes, in programs that demonize people of color and reaffirm the virtues of whites (Feagin 2013; Hall 1981). Who benefits from this arrangement? Who owns the most influential mass media? Media ownership, particularly of television and radio companies, is largely in the hands of elite white men. For instance, television broadcast company ownership among people of color has remained extremely low: Latinos/as (3.0 percent) (see Dávila 2012), African Americans (0.6 percent) and Asian Americans (1.4 percent). This compares to 77.2 percent for white ownership (FCC 2014). Clearly, Americans of color have little control over U.S. television content. This lack of media ownership and control among Americans of color results from several factors: historical white control (emerging during Jim Crow segregation), mergers and conglomerate ownerships, elite-biased deregulation, and the Federal Communications Commission's reluctance to follow certain court rulings (Carolyn 2013).

In addition, elite white executives, mostly men, oversee the five major U.S. television networks: NBC, ABC, CBS, FOX, and the CW. As primary decision-makers, these elite white men, and their mostly white senior managers, are primarily responsible for the racist and gendered framing of racial minorities. Intentionally or subconsciously, the white media owners and their executives perpetuate an old anti-Other framing with inaccurate and/or racist portrayals of people of color that serve the social interests of whites. As a result, blacks, Latinos/as, and other Americans of color are frequently misrepresented in negative terms and are also underrepresented in positive settings. All whites benefit from this arrangement as it regularly reinforces the primary rationalization for the dominant racial hierarchy in the US along with the inherent white privileges it produces.

Most importantly, the racial characterizations only work if influential people and their major social institutions such as the mainstream media regularly perpetuate the white racial frame with its implicitly negative mental images and explicit racist messages about Americans of color (Entman and Rojecki 2000). The result of perpetuating such systems is that much of the public remains left out of media production and lacks significant control over its processes, and the voices, views, and interests of people of color are often ignored altogether. In our view we need a critical national dialogue concerning elite white hegemony in the production and reproduction of racist framing via the mass media. We would also benefit from better funding models for alternative media, particularly public media, as one possibility for creating a counter-discourse to these frames and narratives.

The Anti-Other Subframe: African Americans

The anti-Other subframes of the dominant white racial frame have persisted over long periods of time and have regularly surfaced in the mass media, where they are manifested in countless racist constructions and depictions of people of color. Most anti-Other subframes are similar across groups of color but have been developed and articulated by whites in numerous forms depending on the historical setting and the past or present political and economic status of the particular group. Nonetheless, negative framing of people of color remains central to this country's systemic racism, including white people's desire to preserve the racial status quo. The effect is that these subframes shape the lived outcomes of people of color and have taken many variations such as those accenting "foreign-ness," "criminality," and omnipresent "inferiority" (for example, biological, intellectual, and cultural inferiority). The following two sections present examples from newsprint, film, and Internet sources illustrating the reality of white racial framing in regard to African Americans and Latinos/as in particular.

The sports arena is one segment of society where race and racism continue to be pronounced and relatively obvious. For example, consider these depictions and treatments of black athletes out of the anti-black subframe: (1) blacks as "thugs"—e.g., negative media portrayals of black football star Richard Sherman's post-game speech about his abilities (Plaschke 2014); (2) blacks as "deceitful and manipulative"—e.g., white basketball GM Danny Ferry's incendiary comments describing an African player as a liar and cheater (Joseph 2014); (3) blacks as (slave-like) commodities to be controlled—e.g., the comments of white basketball owner Donald Sterling (Cacciola and Witz 2014); and (4) the racial name-calling experienced by black athletes from white sports fans and media commentators (Chen 2012; Katzowitz 2014). These are just a few examples of how black athletes are racially framed as "thugs," "gangsters," and "deviants" in mainstream institutions including in the mainstream media.

Traditional white racist framing of African Americans includes emotionally loaded stereotypes such as the Mammy, Uncle Tom, Coon, Buck, and Jezebel. These are often shaped, nuanced, and repackaged in mainstream media to justify white dominance. The white racial frame used by most mainstream media commentators on U.S. athletics often designates black players as naturally gifted or "[bred] to play" (Hughes 2014). The biological references and breeding metaphors maintain the logic of racism inherent in the system of chattel slavery. However, this commonplace white framing reduces the black athletes to a source of white entertainment, as physically worthy but not intellectually worthy of human dignity, and usually fails to acknowledge a given athlete's strong dedication and thousands of hours of hard work. Furthermore, racist imagery targeting blacks is widely available on the Internet, including in the negative framing of black athletes and of President Barack Obama. The substantial time and effort whites dedicate to racially frame and admonish blacks is a testament to how ingrained the white racial frame has become in the minds of whites and other Americans.

Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to study race in the United States without making an honest examination of the often racialized politics within professional sports (Carrington 2013). The subordinated position of blackness in the realm of these sports remains transfixed in a process of commodification, no matter what their incomes might be. The modern black athlete has been described as a "million dollar slave" (Rhoden 2006), largely because the institution of slavery has many parallels to the ways in which powerful whites have exploited black players. In most professional sports institutions, for

example, whites are the primary owners and beneficiaries of black labor. For this reason, whites have framed and rationalized their exploitation of blacks by pointing to their pay but simultaneously devaluing their (human) worth. Note that white men are usually the organizational decision-makers who enact sports team policies that are reinforced by officials, fans, and the wider public and amount to the constant policing of black players and their professional and personal lives. For instance, these athletes are often viewed, periodically and publicly, by white owners and sports fans as animalistic, thereby providing more white validation of white power and control of blacks in the sports arena. This, in turn, forcefully preserves white profiteering through the exploitation of black labor. The historical and contemporary economic injustice of black Americans continues to be carried out through the white racial frame.

Moreover, professional sports often provide a moral, socioeconomic, and political battleground where whites pass explicitly and implicitly racist judgments and make racist commentaries in the now extensive realm of social media. One of the views asserted in the Internet version of this white racial framing is an elaborated animalizing imagery (Saminaden et al. 2010). In many different areas besides sports, whites have often portrayed blacks as “monkeys” and “apes” (Nederveen 1995). This old racist logic often implies that blacks, similar to large animals, must be contained and controlled by superior whites, which effectively solidifies the racial hierarchy. These portrayals suggest that people of African descent are subhuman, irrational, and instinctive, traits linked to biological frames and animal characteristics (e.g., aggression, speed, and strength).

Recently whites have used this monkey imagery (for example, photos) and mocking symbols such as bananas to systemically denigrate black Americans, specifically the country’s first black president Barack Obama and his family. Carefully crafted images of the Obamas as monkeys, apes, and chimpanzees, together with elaborate photo-shopped backdrops and hate speech captions, appear in the millions on the Internet. Such white racist framing again accentuates, often rather emotionally, the old racist view that blacks are genetically and categorically unequal to whites. This recurring strategy of biological and social distancing allows whites to again justify their dominant hierarchical position in society.

During their years in the White House, Obama and his family endured a constant barrage of racist aggression. Anti-black sentiment against Obama often took the form of racist ape or monkey images reproduced online. The Internet provides people with an easily accessible outlet to express themselves anonymously and un-anonymously. This is the case in an Internet search of the phrases “Obama and monkey” or “Obama and ape,” which retrieves hundreds of thousands of racist images. The likely white-generated images usually contain altered or photo-shopped pictures of the Obamas as monkeys and apes. These images fall into various categories, including the Obamas portrayed with monkey ears or mouths or with faces superimposed on monkey or ape bodies. They also include pictures of monkeys or apes represented as the Obamas (e.g., cartoon character Curious George dressed as President Obama) or unaltered pictures of the Obamas with significant changes to the background or the inclusion of props and messages to animalize and mock them.

One infamous image of President Barack Obama as an animal was propagated nationwide through Sean Delonas’ political cartoon in a 2009 issue of the right-wing *New York Post* (Paterniti 2009). The cartoon depicts a murder: two police officers (one with a smoking gun) standing over a dead chimpanzee. One officer says, “They’ll have to find someone else to write the next stimulus bill,” a reference to Obama’s economic

legislation and to a chimpanzee who had recently been shot dead after attacking a woman. Clearly, the cartoonist is portraying Obama in the imagery of a chimpanzee and invokes the “black criminal” framing while simultaneously playing on the fear of black men as “physically threatening” and “rapists.” Shortly after publication of the cartoon, Delonas defended his work and “called the controversy ‘absolutely friggin’ ridiculous. Do you really think I’m saying Obama should be shot? I didn’t see that in the cartoon,’ Delonas told CNN. ‘It’s about the economic stimulus bill’” (CNN 2009). Operating out of the white racial frame, Delonas failed to acknowledge his white privilege and ignored the national black community’s objection to his racist cartoon. Delonas and the *New York Post* editors suffered no substantial repercussions for their actions; this form of racism continues to appeal to the fear of a white majority that continues to feel it needs to protect white women from threats like Obama. In other words, there is a gendered/sexual politics that is attached to this imagery that facilitates acceptance of this form of racism.

Animalistic anti-black framing is integral to maintaining white supremacy in America and this precise framing mechanism continues to scare white America into complicity with white power structures. This is evident in the many ways black athletes are constantly animalized and racialized. And even the country’s highest office does not protect a person of color from viciously animalizing white attacks. The sanctity of the White House holds scant protection from the onslaught of dehumanizing. Such degrading and hurtful images in the mainstream media and the social media indicate that such white racial framing remains a prominent fixture in this society.

The Anti-Other Subframe: Latinos/as

Mainstream movie and other media images of Latinos/as include those of “illegal” immigrants, criminals, and sexualized Latino/a figures. For example, Latino male actors are regularly cast as gangsters, drug traffickers, or “illegal aliens” (Mastro and Behm-Morawitz 2005; Berg 2002). Such characterizations of Latinos were reprised in the successful animated children’s film, *Despicable Me 2* (2013). It was one of Universal Studios’ highest grossing films (IMDb 2014) and was so popular that spinoffs have been made (*Minions* and *Despicable Me 3*). The film *Despicable Me 2* follows the adventure of Gru, a white villain turned hero, as he tries to find the person responsible for a stolen mutagen, a potential weapon of mass destruction. The two Latino characters are Eduardo, a Mexican restaurant owner and father to the other Latino character, Antonio.

Three scenes illustrate how the contemporary anti-Latino subframe of the white racial frame works. One scene represents Antonio as a “Latin lover.” He is the love interest of Gru’s adopted daughter, Margo. However, this relationship is unrealistic. Antonio is a ladies’ man (i.e., unfaithful), is a good dancer (i.e., a good lover), and has an indifferent but debonair persona. Gru’s greatest fear as a white father is realized when he finds the pair on a date:

- Antonio:* “And my dream is to one day play video games for a living” [Spanish accent, grabs cookie nonchalantly]
Margo: “Wow you are so complicated” [smiling, leaning toward Antonio]
Gru: “Margo, what is going on here” [Margo quickly turns in fear]
Margo: “Oh Gru, se llama Antonio, mi llamo Margo”
Gru: “Me llama lama ding dong, who cares, let’s go.”

Audience members are supposed to find Gru's overreaction humorous, while sympathizing with his predicament. They should laugh but understand why Gru is visibly upset that things are moving progressively fast between the interracial young couple, Antonio and Margo. The white-oriented moviemakers are implying that Antonio only wants a sexual relationship. He is a threat to Margo's white purity and represents what white fathers fear in a boyfriend: mixed-race children and the threat to white racial purity in a racist system that operates on the "one-drop" rule. Gru uses mock Spanish to separate himself and his family from Antonio. This Spanish-mocking technique is very frequently used by a great many whites in numerous settings to emphasize their dominant racial position over Latinos (Hill 2008). This also reduces Spanish (as a language) and Spanish-speakers, who in the context of the US are predominantly Mexican, to unintelligible subjects. This is important not only in asserting the dominance of English as one marker of identity and signaling the superiority of white Americanness, but also because in a white racial frame that is constituted by a white-black binary, Latinos/as are symbolically, socially, and racially unintelligible.

A second notable scene takes place at the headquarters of the anti-villain league between Gru, Silas Ramsbottom, and Lucy Wilde. Gru tries hard to convince his partners Lucy and Silas, the director of the anti-villain league, that Eduardo is actually the villain El Macho. As the conversation continues, Antonio remains at the forefront of Gru's accusations. Playing the role of the protective father, Gru continues his case against Eduardo to Silas:

Gru: "Yes, but there has been a new development, and I'm telling you: This is the guy! You need to arrest him immediately and [raises voice] his deviously charming son! I'm pretty sure the son is involved too. The son . . . also, you got to get the son."

[Gru moves closer and whispers]: "I think that the son is the mastermind, there is a look, there's a devilish look in his eyes, and I don't like it."

Then, the two argue about the lack of evidence for Gru's concerns. Still, Gru remains fixated on Antonio, who has no evident connection to Eduardo's (El Macho's) intentions. Gru describes Antonio as creepy and devilish, suggesting that he deserves to be in prison in spite of a lack of evidence. Similar to the "black criminal" frame discussed previously, the Latino male is also a perpetual criminal suspect in the eyes of many whites, a figure that any white father should object to as a mate for his daughter. White supremacy, then, is maintained in large part by literally controlling the processes of reproduction. Furthermore, the fascination with (and fear of) mixed-race couples also corresponds to white-constructed myths about men of color and their "predisposition" to rape white women. Indeed, this white racial framing of the sex-crazed brown-black male Other has been used to gloss over many white men's sexual desires for, and illicit (often forced) sexual relationships with, women of color during slavery, the Jim Crow era, and even the contemporary time period. Thus, the white racial frame is constantly reinventing itself and repeatedly overlaps with multiple forms of oppression across various settings as evident in the *Despicable Me 2*'s updated animated version of Latinos/as as deviant working-class males (Feagin 2014). The film takes a dramatic twist when the identity of El Macho is finally revealed. The hardworking small business owner Eduardo is the international terrorist El Macho. The moniker El Macho tries to poke fun at the negative

stereotype of hypermasculinity and patriarchy that the white racial frame ties “inherently” to Latino male identity to maintain white male rule as the “nicer” alternative. In this case “macho” or a hypermasculine Latino is the threat to humanity and Gru, as the alternative and representation of a “benign” white masculine “protector” is inherently superior.

The scene innocently takes place at Eduardo’s house during a Cinco de Mayo party. Gru pursues Eduardo through an underground maze where El Macho suddenly appears:

- El Macho:* “You have not lost your tttoucchh my friend” [with mock Spanish accent, and dressed in a Mexican wrestler costume with beige lace pattern, red and black star cape, and face mask; costume allows for chest hair, mustache, and gold chain with the letter “M” to show]
- Gru:* Haha, I knew it! You are El Macho! [mock Eastern European accent, fist pump, excited]
- El Macho:* “That’s right!” [in a loud voice, arms out, sound of the customary drum jingle] . . .
- El Macho:* [Speaking to Doctor Nefario, Gru’s former partner, but now his evil partner] “Haha . . . I merely faked my death, haha, but now it’s time for me to make a spectaacular return to evil! Doctor, I think it’s time we show Gru what we’re up to here.” [smiling, arm around Gru, El Macho moves hands devilishly]

Gru is ecstatic to confirm his view of the easy-going restaurateur as the evil mastermind that the anti-villain league has been tracking. More importantly, however, this scene sends several racially framed messages. First, there is the fear of the subversive brown immigrant, connoting that many Latinos/as, even businesspeople, are plotting against whites to inflict harm. The caricatures of the Latino wrestler as evil villain and the embellished fake Spanish accents are negative and racialized portrayals of all Latinos/as—even successful Latinos/as. Second, the racially framed narrative also concerns the extreme lengths that the villain El Macho takes to deceive his friends and community. He tricks Gru, relishes his faked death, and proudly presents his new crime partner, Doctor Nefario, Gru’s former partner. In this scene the white-oriented moviemakers signify that El Macho has no moral compass and has an obsession with spreading terror. Ultimately the movie racially mocks Latinos/as and reinforces an anti-Other, anti-Latino frame.

Overall, anti-Latino frames in movies and other mass media are varied in terms of setting, nationality, class, and gender. *Despicable Me 2* covers only a few of the major contemporary racialized images foisted by whites onto Latinos/as including the sneaky immigrant, stateside terrorist, Latin lover, and dangerous foreigner. Perhaps the most shocking portrayal of *Despicable Me 2*’s anti-Latino frame is another scene in which Eduardo (El Macho) makes a mutagen-induced transformation on-screen. Desperate to defeat Gru, he drinks the mutagen and changes into a grotesque purple monster. At last, the movie suggests, the inner evil Latino is unleashed in full view; the metamorphosis is stunning as the restaurateur-turned-terrorist turns again into a monster. Eventually Gru prevails, and the movie ends on a positive note, as a children’s story. Yet the racial damage is done. Children of all backgrounds around the world are exposed to a savagely racist framing that positions Latino males as sexually threatening, physically menacing, and violent or, simply, as “macho.” These white racist impressions of Latinos/as are now implanted in the subconscious of viewers, young and old. At an early age, then, many children will learn that Latinos should be treated with suspicion, fear, and hostility.

Conclusion

As a research paradigm, framing theory and the white racial frame can greatly inform social science scholarship by examining racialized representations of people of color in the mainstream media. The impact of explicit and implicit racist framing extends and reinforces existing racial inequalities. The centuries-old anti-black subframe and more recent anti-Latino/a subframe are often difficult to fully see because racialized assumptions about people of color are inherently part of the deeply ingrained popular white racial framing. Note that, in contrast, the pro-white subframe depicts whites as virtuous saviors, heroes, and controllers of individual and group destiny, yet the dominant white ownership of the mainstream media and the legacies of anti-Other framing remain powerful allies in keeping the white racial frame dominant in society.

As we have seen, the dominant group exhibits privilege through broad ways of media representation. White roles range from villains to heroes to saviors without serious repercussions, whereas nondominant groups are perceived in predictably stereotyped roles as criminals, comic relief, and sexual objects. The pro-white and anti-Other subframes therefore work in tandem to legitimize racial oppression and continue to separate whites from people of color. As a result, the images of whites and people of color become distorted fantasies of a dominant American society but with real consequences. What are the ramifications for whites? There are relatively none that are negative in comparison to the dehumanization people of color often simultaneously internalize and resist daily. Mainstream racialized images articulated in the framing of people of color promote distinct and deadly social dichotomies, not only white and others but also poor and rich, male and female, and heterosexual and homosexual. In the white racial frame, white men hold the normative “real American” status against which all others are judged. White hegemony over popular culture remains one of the dominant realities in the U.S. mass media.

Framing often works in multiple and intersecting ways. For example, both Latinos/as and blacks are often marked as threats to white America. Race, ethnicity, nationality, language, economics, and citizenship work in combination to exclude those deemed in the white racial frame to be inferior. Media framing is used in combination with other similar societal framing to explain racial dynamics and rationalize racial inferiority and discrimination. If we are ever to meet the standard of fairness and “justice for all,” white media owners and associated media decision-makers must end the constant barrage of racist framing by implementing creative and accurate programming of people of color instead of lazily employing the old racist frames. Furthermore, counter-frames and reframing of current white racial framing should be inaugurated and emphasized across the country to combat racist white framing. We see this in the creative ways people use counter-frames on the Internet and in social media to challenge white racism through positive images, videos, blogs, and culture jamming. However, the negative racial framing of people of color, as chronicled through our white-controlled media examples, indicates that the anti-Other subframes of the white frame are very difficult to eradicate and effective remedies must be part of long-term change projects.

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Further Reading

- Feagin, J. R. (2013) *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge. (The dominant worldview and racial meanings white Americans and others consciously and unconsciously ascribe to people of color.)
- Goffman, E. (1974) *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York: Harper and Row. (The quintessential interactionist inquiry into frame analysis in relation to framing and human interactions.)
- McCullagh, C. (2002) *Media Power: A Sociological Introduction*. New York: Palgrave. (An overview examining the complexities of power in the mass media, particularly production, content, and reception.)
- Vliegthart, R. and van Zoonen, L. (2011) "Power to the Frame: Bringing Sociology Back to Frame Analysis," *European Journal of Communication* 26(2): 101–115. (The article provides an in-depth review of frame and framing research across several academic fields including an investigation of mass media processes, distinctions, and effects.)