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Running Contradiction: A Negotiated Reading of Encoding Strategies in the Boondocks Animated Series, 2005-2011

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The University of Southern Mississippi

RUNNING CONTRADICTION: A NEGOTIATED READING OF ENCODING
STRATEGIES IN *THE BOONDOCKS* ANIMATED SERIES, 2005-2011

by

Wesley Tyler French

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2015

ABSTRACT

RUNNING CONTRADICTION: A NEGOTIATED READING OF ENCODING STRATEGIES IN *THE BOONDOCKS* ANIMATED SERIES, 2005-2011

by Wesley Tyler French

May 2015

This study is comprised of a five-point qualitative critical analysis of denotation strategies employed in the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, which aired on United States cable television between 2005 and 2011. The five encoding strategies discussed in this study were selectively employed into each episode by the cast and crew of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. The encoding strategies were employed to facilitate audience accessibility between 2005 and 2011 during *The Boondocks* Animated Series' successful initial run on the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block.

This study focuses on the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, produced under the guidance of franchise creator Aaron McGruder. The three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series that comprise this study's sample aired on the Cartoon Network's late-night Adult Swim programming block in forty-five half hour episodes. The study ignores the fourth season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series due to the lack of creative input from McGruder. Prior to *The Boondocks* Animated Series' truncated finale season, McGruder singlehandedly oversaw production of his singular creative vision between the 1996 debut of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip. McGruder's efforts to translate the source material into *The Boondocks* Animated Series necessitated incorporation of encoding strategies to expand the 1996-2005 audience of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip.

The theoretical and structural framework of these chapters are heavily inspired by critical textual reading model developed by British critical commentator Stuart Hall. Adherence to Hall's Encoding/Decoding model and Hall's Preferred / Negotiated / Oppositional Reading Model frames this study within a framework of existing scholarship that incorporate the tenets of critical race theory. A negotiated reading of encoding strategies incorporated into *The Boondocks* Animated Series is presented across the five chapters that comprise this study.

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A Dissertation
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May 2015

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the cast and crew of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (2005-2011). This study would not exist without extensive production efforts from both the United States based Cartoon Network and South Korea based MOI Studio. Between 2005 and 2011, this international staff facilitated a successful transition from franchise creator Aaron McGruder's nationally syndicated comic strip to a half-hour animated format as serialized television entertainment.

This study is concurrently dedicated to current and future viewers of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Optimistically, this study will offer guidance through increased contextual accessibility to both entry-level and experienced viewers of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. This study is specifically dedicated to the three season arc of *The Boondocks* Animated Series produced as a collaboration between *The Boondocks* franchise creator Aaron McGruder, South Korean animation house MOI Studio, Sony Television Entertainment, and Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block across a rough half-decade between late 2005 and early 2011.

Completion of this study was directly facilitated by the selfless, multi-faceted support of family members Angela Glass French, Bonnie Tyler Crosby, Brian McCormick French, George Tyler French, and Janet Jones French. On a concurrent basis, completion of this study was facilitated by the unwavering support of my fiancé, Ashley Nichole Shaw, who invested a considerable degree of support throughout the production of this study. In closing, I thank close friends Roderick Edmond Gales and Nicholas Martin for their encouragement and feedback throughout the final months of study completion

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study collects and contrasts five chapter-based critical readings of encoding strategies denoted within the first forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Moreover, this study explores encoding strategy incorporation within individual episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series in regard to the series' efforts to bolster audience appeal for the Adult Swim demographic. Stuart Hall's Negotiated Reading model is employed on a recurring basis through a broad analysis of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' implementation of five specific encoding strategies on the production level to increase audience accessibility for series premieres on the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block between 2005 and 2011. This study suggests that the encoding strategies were implemented to increase *The Boondocks* Animated Series' audience appeal with regard to culturally sensitive or controversial thematic content through audience assimilation strategies (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

This study offers a negotiated analysis of production-level denotation and audience assimilation tactics denoted within *The Boondocks* Animated Series throughout the 2005-2011 production of the first three seasons. The main five chapters that comprise this encoding strategy analysis examine (1) *The Boondocks* Animated Series' implementation of stereotype incorporation towards a positive aim, (2) *The Boondocks* Animated Series' implementation of humor incorporation through efforts at a concurrent, cross-brow emphasis on satire and shock, (3) the show's audience assimilation efforts through references to mass media usage, (4) the show's extensive incorporation of popular culture references, and (5) the show's extensive lexicon of references to black

American history. The study is grounded within a framework of seminal scholarship related to (1) Cultural Race Theory, (2) televised portrayals of black culture, and (3) a contextual explanation of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' often curious production history. This study focuses entirely on encoding strategies incorporated into episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series produced by McGruder, aired by the Cartoon Network, and released on home video by Sony Television Entertainment's DVD production subsidiary, Sony Home Entertainment (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The Prologue, Literature Review, Research Question, and Methodology portions of this study establish quintessential context alluded to in the five subsequent chapters. The remainder of the study is comprised of five chapter-based textual analyses of the five aforementioned encoding strategies as incorporated in the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series.

Each of the chapters that comprises this study employs a framework solidified by two bodies of prior scholarship: (1) the 1970s-1980s work of British Critical Race Theorist Stuart Hall and (2) United States Critical Race Theorist Herman Gray's mid-1990s overview of black representation in television programming, *Watching Race* (Gray, 1995; Hall, 1973, 1980). Each of the five aforementioned encoding strategies is examined through a five-point recurring character spectrum incorporated throughout *The Boondocks* Animated Series and situated at the heart of each analysis in this study. This study's examination of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' 2005-2011 encoding strategy incorporation is concurrently inspired by Stuart Hall's Negotiated Reading model and Herman Gray's three-phase representation model as incorporated into *Watching Race* (Gray, 1995; Hall, 1973, 1980).

The study concludes with an epilogue that will ideally offer a basis for subsequent critical analysis of *The Boondocks* Animated Series among active critical scholars.

Bountiful appendices, alluded to throughout this study, will imbue readers with a wealth of streamlined production and referential data for the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. The appendices of this study are intended to facilitate audience decoding of stereotype incorporation, humor incorporation, media usage depiction, pop culture reference incorporation and black history revisionist narrative incorporation throughout McGruder's 2005-2011 production tenure on the series.

Aside from contextual allusions to McGruder's 1996-2006 work on *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, this study will focus exclusively on forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. The episode sample was produced by McGruder under a co-venture between Sony Television Entertainment and the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block. The episode sample examined in this study aired late-night on the Cartoon Network between 2005 and 2011.

In a 2007 interview, McGruder described his decision to shift narrative formats from the two-to-four panels of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip to the half-hour weekly serial format of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. According to McGruder, the initially rocky and eventually successful transition was facilitated by *The Boondocks* franchise creator's desire to expand the text's narrative and creative scope beyond the confines of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, which frequently generated controversy from older audiences due to its controversial thematic content and placement in an unprecedented number of syndicated daily cartoon portions in over three-hundred-and-fifty newspapers across the United States.

The ensuing chapters that comprise this study collectively examine *The Boondocks* Animated Series' implementation of and reliance upon five specific encoding strategies across the first three seasons of production. Throughout production of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons (2005-2011), the five encoding strategies examined in this study were pervasively incorporated by *The Boondocks* Animated Series' cast and crew under McGruder's careful supervision. Across a popular half-decade on the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block, McGruder and his staff implemented the five encoding strategies in an effort to minimize potential controversy. Minimizing controversy towards specific episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series was a quintessential component of McGruder's efforts to increase accessibility among the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block audience, a demographic which was considerably younger and far more demanding than the predominantly middle-aged audience afforded to *The Boondocks* Comic Strip between 1996 and 2006.

This study maintains a five-part focus on encoding strategy implementation as reflected through the five recurring characters of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. This critical analysis of denotation strategies in *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons situates this study within a contextual framework of preceding Critical Race Theory scholarship. Denoted content within respective episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series ostentatiously addresses various problematic aspects of black representation through an array of broadcast media formats with a predominant emphasis on vapid trends in mass culture representation. As early scholarship on *The Boondocks* Animated Series, the examination of encoding strategies among recurring characters

within the first three seasons facilitates replication within subsequent critical analysis of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Gray, 1995; Hall, 1973, 1980).

Following McGruder's purportedly successful decade of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip production through United Press Syndicate, episodes within McGruder's half-decade production tenure on *The Boondocks* Animated Series explored the trials and tribulations of the Freeman family, comprised of a grandfather (Robert Jebediah “Granddad” Freeman) and his two grandsons (Huey Freeman and Riley Freeman). Believing that he's acting in the best interest of his grandchildren, the grandfather whisks Huey and Riley from inner-city Chicago to Woodcrest, a fictional white-collar suburb. McGruder consistently based the series' humor and thematic content on the culture shock that the Freemans face while adjusting to the ethnic, social, and cultural shifts of life in the show's fictional Chicago suburb (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

The Freeman family comprises three of the series' five recurring protagonists: octogenarian “Granddad” Robert Jebediah Freeman, ten-year-old Huey Freeman (a nod to Black Panther Party founder Huey Newton) and his younger eight-year-old brother, Riley Freeman. The first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series also relied on two recurring characters from outside the Freeman family, Uncle Ruckus (new to *The Boondocks* Animated Series) and Assistant Attorney Tom Dubois (a veteran of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip) as vehicles for implementation of the five encoding strategies incorporated throughout the first forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. The five primary recurring characters in *The Boondocks* Animated Series the mass

populace of Woodcrest, the fictionalized suburban locale at the center of *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first three seasons (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Humor incorporation in *The Boondocks Animated Series* (2005-2011) frequently stems from generational gaps between Robert, Huey and Riley, who exist as stereotypes rather than dynamic characters. While Granddad embodies stereotypical ideas of black America, Huey and Riley are intended to represent the duality of contemporary black youth culture. Huey most often represents the sociopolitical views of McGruder himself, while his brother often conducts himself in an antithetical fashion. The two external recurring characters represent a caricature of contemporary black self-loathing fueled by mass media paranoia (Uncle Ruckus) and the classist naivety and vapid cultural sensibilities of black cultural representation within the predominantly white, upper-class status quo (Tom Dubois) (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

Stereotype incorporation in *The Boondocks Animated Series* offered a stark contrast to examples of televised black representation from prior eras, which often lingered on highly problematic depictions of contemporary black society. Between 2005 and 2011, *The Boondocks Animated Series* implemented stereotype incorporation to supplant contrasting views the series' cast of five recurring characters. Dialogue and narrative development within *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first forty-five episodes frequently accentuates the multi-faceted, fluid, dynamic nature of McGruder's personality and sociopolitical agenda as incorporated as recurring creative inspiration throughout *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first three seasons. Stereotype incorporation accentuates ideological clashes between recurring characters within individual episodes, each of

which reflect dialectic critical struggles that exist within McGruder's daily life (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

Each of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' half-hour episodes provided a figurative soap box for McGruder to address specific frustrations with aspects of the contemporary black experience. As a result, each episode of the series teems with frustration towards representation of black culture in its scathing indictment of mass media's treatment thereof. The series' reliance on animation allowed McGruder to freely incorporate likenesses of specific celebrities, who are often employed as scathingly satirical caricatures and perceived threats to black cultural progress. In a diversion from the onslaught of animated precedents from Groening, Parker/Stone and McFarlane, the show's mixture of humor and anger carries bears the weight of a specific agenda: facilitation of dialogue on various aspects of the contemporary black experience (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Production of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (1996-2006) and *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons (2006-2011) collectively comprise McGruder's singular creative vision. Between the comic strip's campus success and the conclusion of McGruder's series work in 2011, the satirist created and oversaw production of the comic strip and Animated Series across a fifteen year span of activity. To understand the cultural and historical context of *The Boondocks*, one must begin with an examination of franchise creator, cartoonist Aaron McGruder (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

McGruder had a great deal in common with *The Boondocks* Animated Series' recurring characters during his upbringing in the northeastern United States. Much like

recurring protagonists Huey and Riley Freeman, McGruder grew up in inner-city Chicago and moved to a Maryland suburb in the years preceding his adolescence. The cultural ambivalence of the Woodcrest population towards such recurring iconography as the ironically dedicated “J. Edgar Hoover Elementary School” echo the cultural frustration McGruder felt while trying to acclimate to a rapid shift in cultural, ethnic, political and social climates (Basile, 2005; Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996).

As an African-American Studies student at The University of Maryland in the mid-1990s, McGruder refined his skills as a cartoonist and as an independent hip-hop DJ on the campus' radio station. McGruder began work on *The Boondocks* comic for the University of Maryland newspaper in 1996. The comic strip was quickly sold for national syndication. As the comic strip grew in popularity, McGruder grew increasingly frustrated with the limitations of the comic strip format (Basile, 2005; Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996).

Even in early promotion for *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, McGruder always saw a weekly serialized entertainment program with production assets of Asian animation as an ideal format to convey the narrative and stylistic tone intended within *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (1996-2006). Between the 1996 debut of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip and *The Boondocks* Animated Series' pilot premiere, Aaron McGruder consistently pitched an animated show to various network and cable outlets and widely publicized his efforts in a series of high profile interviews (Braxton, 2007; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996; Phipps, 1999).

Six years into McGruder's quest to market *The Boondocks* Animated Series, the franchise creator was offered assets for a fifteen-episode production order through Sony Television Entertainment. The pilot premiere of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first season, "The Garden Party," was afforded unprecedented content and narrative constraints as a quintessential component of the Cartoon Network's successful late-night, adult-oriented lineup as supported by the young viewers of the Adult Swim programming block (Barnes & McGruder, 2005).

In late 2005, McGruder quickly realized that *The Boondocks* Animated Series allowed him to reach a new echelon of narrative potential and audience accessibility for *The Boondocks* in a weekly half-hour, TV-MA rated format. By mid-2006, McGruder ceased work on the comic strip and worked exclusively as the show-runner for the Adult Swim across three fifteen-episode seasons (Braxton, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005). Due to production disagreements, McGruder left *The Boondocks* Animated Series in early 2014, leaving cast and crew members of *The Boondocks* Animated Series to produce a ten-episode season that comprises a low point in critical and commercial reception for both Sony Television Entertainment and the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block (Jones, 2014).

As standalone episodes of the first three seasons often eschew cohesive narrative for humor incorporation and message-based critical commentaries. Subsequently, *The Boondocks* Animated Series proves difficult to discuss on a season-by-season basis. This study examines encoding strategies incorporated within a forty-five episode, three season sample of *The Boondocks* Animated Series that premiered in the United States between 2005 and 2011. These strategies were implemented to attract an increasing number of

viewers to Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Between 2005 and 2011, *The Boondocks* Animated Series creator/writer/producer Aaron McGruder employed the five aforementioned encoding strategies on. McGruder sought to increase the audience accessibility of *The Boondocks* Animated Series in comparison to its' precursor, *The Boondocks* Comic Strip. McGruder incorporated encoding strategies in order to facilitate incorporation of stereotypes towards a positive aim, reliance on humor to evade controversy, depiction of black history, commentary on black culture, and audience assimilation through pervasive depictions of media hegemony throughout his forty-five episode production tenure on *The Boondocks* Animated Series.

This study's extensive Prologue is designed to as a broad introduction to *The Boondocks* Animated Series for all audiences, from longtime fans to uninitiated readers. The Prologue of this study offers quintessential context predominantly pertaining to *The Boondocks* Animated Series creator, producer and writer Aaron McGruder. The subsequent section of the Prologue offers a contextual overview of the climate of black representation in twentieth and twenty-first century United States daily newspaper strips and television programming. Discussion of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip is largely confined to the Prologue, which offers insight into McGruder's personal and professional transition from a daily cartoonist employed by United Press Syndicate (1999-2006) to a television program executive employed by Sony Television Entertainment and Adult Swim, a successful young adult focused late night programming block (2005-2011).

note Between 2005 and 2011, McGruder produced *The Boondocks* Animated Series for three seasons with a staff provided by Adult Swim. After resigning from *The Boondocks* Animated Series production during the truncated, poorly-received fourth season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (2014), McGruder remained employed by The Cartoon Network as the producer of *Black Jesus*. After a successful 2014 debut, *Black Jesus* McGruder is presently writing the second season arc for his second season of *Black Jesus*, scheduled to air on Adult Swim in late 2015 (McGruder, 2014).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

An examination of existing Critical Race Theory scholarship on black representation amidst the increase of mass consumption offers quintessential context for negotiated deconstruction of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons, which premiered on the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block between 2005 and 2011. A cursory examination of contemporary black representation, focused predominantly on televised black representation, situates this negotiated analysis of encoding strategy implementation in *The Boondocks* in a niche between existing Critical Race Theory scholarship and (2) Black Representation scholarship.

This Literature Review comprises a central component of analyzing encoding strategy denotation *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Between 2005 and 2011, weekly episodes of the series functioned as a vehicle for McGruder's participation in media studies dialogue. Between 1996 and 1999, McGruder earned a bachelors in Media Studies and African American Studies at the University of Maryland. McGruder sought to improve media representation by imbuing his participation in this dialogue directly into *The Boondocks* Animated Series. In a brief introduction, each negotiated reading in this collection alludes to specific studies mentioned in the Literature Review. Literature discussion will be incorporated selectively and on a thematic basis, as topics apply to the respective theme explored in the corresponding negotiated reading (Bach, 2007; Basile, 2005; Braxton, 2007).

As of 2015, there is an appalling lapse in the amount of critical scholarship pertaining to *The Boondocks* Animated Series. The majority of existing scholarship

focuses on the original comic strip of *The Boondocks*, while critical race scholars have ignored the bold encoded messages of the Animated Series almost entirely. The original comic strip was often banned by large papers before it could reach a wide audience: although the strip lasted longer in other areas, Mississippi's own *Sun Herald* and *Clarion Ledger* quietly banned the strip in late 1999 ("Mississippi Newspaper," 1999). As McGruder himself claimed in 2007 and 2009 interviews, the two aspects of the comic strip that the artist found most frustrating were the limitations on circulation and content of *The Boondocks*. Throughout the comic strip's publication history, McGruder repeatedly attempted to pitch *The Boondocks* as a serialized television program (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Lemons, 2001; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996; Phipps, 1999; Scocca, 2000).

The first critical readings of *The Boondocks* surfaced in 2002. Audience research revealed that readers saw *The Boondocks* strip an angry and inaccessible counterpoint to *Jump Start*, a nationally syndicated comic strip from the same era that also focused on the middle-class black experience (Rockler, 2002). Early critical scholarship praised the show for its' attempt to initiate a bold and progressive dialogue on race relations, yet chastised *The Boondocks* comic strip for its' inaccessible and abrasive treatment of the audience (Dekeen, 2005; Rockler, 2002). In cursory glimpses between 2002 and 2010, critical scholars argued that both incarnations *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (1996-2006) and *The Boondocks* Animated Series (2005-2011) relied upon referential humor to a detrimental degree, as it relied on obscure references that audience members found continually inaccessible (Gussman, King, & Timmerman, 2012; Rockler, 2002; Rucker, 2008). Scholars also noted that controversy towards the show tended to focus on issues of black representation, rather than the show's pervasively explicit language and violence

(Gussman et al., 2012; Rucker, 2008). Despite their reservations over problematic content, existing scholarly analyses of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons negotiate similar conclusions; by almost all accounts, *The Boondocks* Animated Series generated a positive dialogue about long-held racist stereotypes by satirically rejecting their validity (Gussman et al., 2012; Rockler, 2002; Rucker, 2008).

The study works in tandem with recent scholarship on the series, which offered a look at how the series' editors manipulated dialogue, music and humor in an effort to deescalate potential controversy towards sensitive topics (Gussman et al., 2012). This study will address *The Boondocks* Animated Series' efforts to increase broad audience appeal from that of its original medium through a series of broad chapters. This study builds upon existing critical scholarship by exploring *The Boondocks* Animated Series' implementation of encoding strategies to facilitate a young, multi-ethnic audience for a text that predominantly focused on contemporary cultural, ethnic, political facets of the contemporary black experience (Gussman et al., 2012; Rockler, 2002; Rucker, 2008).

It is lamentable that prior generations of scholarship have neglected *The Boondocks* Animated Series' successful three-season, half-decade tenure to such a pervasive extent. This study aspires to guide subsequent analysis of *The Boondocks* Animated Series away from shallow allegations of propagandized racism as implemented through encoding strategy implementation. The study comprises an effort to frame *The Boondocks* Animated Series as a text that could not possibly feel more relevant to contemporary audiences and qualitative media scholars, particularly proponents of Critical Race theory. *The Boondocks* Animated Series acts as its own response to the inequities presented within the following Literature Review. Episodes of *The Boondocks*

Animated Series incorporate satirical depictions of black representation that respond to perceived inequities within Critical Race Theory Scholarship throughout the first forty-five episodes. Of paramount interest to media scholars is the show's groundbreaking treatment of media usage through reference incorporation and satirized depiction of rapidly increasing societal media dependency (Gussman et al., 2012; Rockler, 2002; Rucker, 2008).

Quite surprisingly, few existing studies have offered textual readings of *The Boondocks* Animated Series with correlations to existing CRT scholarship. While McGruder's blend of animation, humor, historical references, cultural references and a satiric portrayal of mass media hegemony throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series seems to beg for deeper analysis, only a handful of existing studies have examined the connotation or denotation of the show as an accessible platform for McGruder's ostentatious dialogue on contemporary black culture. This study focuses on the connotation of encoded messages, rather than audience denotation of the encoded themes. The lack of audience denotation is a result of the lack of data on specific viewership of Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block, facilitating this study's strict focus on denotation in the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides the theoretical framework for this analysis of audience-savvy encoding in *The Boondocks* Animated Series. In *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, critical scholars Richard Delgado and Jean Stefania elaborated on the field's rise to prominence in 1970's and 1980's Western European scholarship (Delgado & Stefania, 2001). CRT began as a movement in Legal scholarship, but quickly spread

beyond the discipline and into the fields of various qualitative and quantitative scholars. Delgado and Stefanie describe the mutual goal of CRT scholarship as exposure of the dynamic relationship between race, racism and power in a given society (Delgado & Stefanie, 2001).

Delgado and Stefanie contend that CRT scholarship formed in the 1970's as a response to the limited cultural gains of the Civil Rights Movement. The introduction cites two New York University Law professors, Derek Freeman and Alan Bell, as the mid-1950's forefathers of CRT rhetoric. Along with Freeman and Bell, other early CRT scholars collectively realized that the overt racism of the 1960's was being maintained in the 1970's through tactics employed by various media outlets, particularly through perpetuation of negative ethnic stereotypes. Delgado and Stefanie suggest that the tenets of CRT were inspired by 1960's minority reform movements, Western European philosophy, American radical tradition, and mid-to-late twentieth century American liberal political ideology. CRT scholarship combined these tactics in a collaborative effort to expose and curtail the comparatively subtle means of preserving an ethnic hegemony in 1970's and 1980's society (Delgado & Stefanie, 2001).

Delgado and Stefanie suggest that early CRT scholars were united through their focus on the Social Construction Thesis as an explicative vehicle for the problematic state of 1970's-1980's ethnic othering in the Western world. Rather than viewing post-1960's racism as a scientific phenomenon rather than a cultural aberration, CRT scholars aimed to point out examples of white hegemony within examples from contemporary Western culture. CRT scholars united under the notion that "whiteness" as a culture construct was integral to social norms in 1970's and 1980's American and Western European popular

culture. According to Delgado and Stefanic, CRT scholars generally felt that racism was fortified within mass culture as a means of advancing conditions for upper-class and working-class white citizens, who saw no reason to eradicate ethnic oppression in large segments of society (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001).

The Social Construction Thesis argued that cultural conceptualization of ethnicity was highly subjective, as it was continually endorsed by majority opinion and mainstream social norms. CRT scholars explored the Social Construction Thesis as an explanation for ethnic hegemony: in short, the subjective nature of ethnic oppression allowed it to be employed selectively through subtle endorsement in mass culture, most often to benefit members of upper-class and middle-class white society. CRT scholars rallied against the notion of unitary identity traits among members of a specific ethnicity, just as they argued that minority status invited assumptions of progressive ideals regarding race-based oppression through hegemonic power structures (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001).

Early CRT scholarship tended to focus on ethnicity-based oppression within Western social structures. According to Delgado and Stefanic, 1970's and 1980's CRT reflected inequities in housing policies, career opportunities, medical care lapses, educational opportunities and employment relegation to menial labor, particularly against blacks and Mexicans in the United States. Delgado and Stefanic claim that the majority of early CRT scholars sought to fuel reform by addressing such oppression in a methodological manner (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001).

Delgado and Stefanic claim that 1970's and 1980's CRT scholars offered an array of perspectives on the significance of socially problematic portrayals of ethnicity,

particularly in the case of mass media outlet perpetuation. On the one hand, one side of CRT scholarship felt that media perpetuation of problematic representation had little effect on the mass populace. On the other hand, contradictory CRT scholars saw the problematic perpetuation as a quintessential component of white hegemony maintenance. To streamline the divergent factors between CRT scholars, Delgado and Stefania divided early CRT scholarship into three camps: Idealists, Realists and Materialists. Whereas Idealists stressed the importance of understanding ethnicity as a cultural construct, Realists devoted themselves to exposing the inequities of ethnically oppressive Western institutions. The third classification, Materialists, suggested that ethnic oppression was the class-based product of physical conditions for minorities (Delgado & Stefania, 2001).

Delgado and Stefania closed on an optimistic note for CRT scholarship, by framing ethnicity as a cultural construct rather than a biological reality. The scholars note that CRT research works towards a positive aim: as cultural constructs are dynamic, problematic representation was open to CRT-inspired reform in subsequent eras. Delgado and Stefania observed that while the vast majority of early CRT scholarship could be classified as stark Realism, a shift to Idealism would offer the most effective approach for CRT scholars who sought to instigate change in the face of problematic oppression. Structural Determinism refers to the marriage of Idealism and Materialism; Delgado and Stefania viewed this as an effective direction for scholars who sought to rally class-based support against problematic ethnic biases in hegemonic societal structures. In closing, Delgado and Stefania called on CRT scholars to expand professional terminology for ethnically problematic aspects of society beyond the idea term “racism,” provided the

term's narrow stigma and hollow conceptualization among Western audiences in the wake of minority reform movements (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001).

Although scholars from various disciplines contributed to the field throughout the 1970's and 1980s, the first CRT research summit was not held until summer 1989 at the University of Wisconsin (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). Roughly a half-decade after the first CRT conference, Aaron McGruder began his academic career in African-American Studies and Media Studies at the University of Maryland. McGruder's eventual passion project, *The Boondocks*, can be viewed as a satirical balance of Idealism and Materialism through Cultural Determinism. By the same token, *The Boondocks* Animated Series applies a starkly revisionist degree of satire to the historical narrative and satirizes ethnically problematic aspects of contemporary society that are informed by the tenets of CRT realism (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001).

The first forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series can easily be construed as McGruder's message-based contributions to a rapidly growing canon of CRT based critical media theory. Between 2005 and 2011, the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series embraced many of the CRT scholarship tenets established in 2001 by Delgado and Stefanic. Almost all of the inequities discussed in early CRT scholarship surface in *The Boondocks* Animated Series' scathing satirical indictment of white hegemony, institutionalized oppression, and black sociopolitical ambivalence (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001).

At a cursory glance, *The Boondocks* Animated Series seems that it would fail due to over reliance on niche appeal. As directly translated from *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, *The Boondocks* Animated Series would cater exclusively to viewers of Cartoon

Network's Adult Swim programming block who were concurrently well-versed in and frustrated by contemporary representation of CRT scholarship tenets, black American history, and lingering tenets of Black Power era radicalism and nationalism. Despite the show's consistent depictions of complex racial dynamics and contemporary cultural frustration, the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series used encoded tactics in an effort to bolster an ethnically and culturally diverse audience for McGruder's vision (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Beyond the cast and crew's efforts to implement denotation strategies to facilitate broad ethnic appeal, *The Boondocks* Animated Series' marketability faced a secondary demographic challenge in the limitations of cable television distribution in United States households. During *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first two seasons of episode premieres, Ted Turner's Cartoon Network was only available through high-end cable television packages through television service providers like DirecTV, Time Warner and Comcast. Provided the price of high-end cable service, access to Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block was predominantly confined to upper-middle-class American homes during the height of popularity for the first two seasons. This study argues that *The Boondocks* Animated Series saw a steady increase in audience resonance as a result of the show's carefully maintained lexicon of encoded efforts to maintain audience appeal between 2005 and 2011 (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Between the 1970s and 1990s, British cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall contributed heavily to the rise of CRT scholarship while holding positions at Birmingham University (1964-1979) and 1980s at England's Open University (1979-1997). Hall's work aims to render Western European-based CRT accessible for cultural scholars around

the world. As the vast majority of European CRT was framed around contextually specific examples from 1970's and 1980's European popular culture, Hall's work served to highlight the possibilities for CRT tactics when applied to media texts produced in the United States. Hall's work focused predominantly on problematic aspects of ethnicity representation in various mass media outlets, specifically in regard to issues of hegemony and use of language in mass media texts. Hall's groundbreaking research on encoded messages within mass media texts lies at the center of this study (Hall, 1973, 1980).

Between 1973 and 1980, Hall consistently published qualitative critical research that refuted the notion of a one-way media transmission model in lieu of a more complex design. In prior transmission-model-based media theory delivered media messages in a linear, one-way fashion from the media producer (sender) to the media consumer (receiver), without any attention paid to audience feedback. Hall's Moment-based, three-phase model of textual analysis helped him to strengthen his 1970's textual Encoding / Decoding research. Hall's Moment-based model also served to provide the template for Hall's three-tiered (Dominant/Preferred / Negotiated / Oppositional) model of critical analysis classification (Hall, 1973, 1980).

To expand on the existing transmission models, Hall introduced a method of critical textual analysis that functioned through three specific "Moments": (1) the Moment of Production, (2) the Moment of the Text, and (3) the Moment of Reception. According to Hall, adherence to this three-phase "Moments" model provided a much deeper insight into producer connotation and audience denotation of mass media texts (Hall, 1973, 1980).

In the first phase of his three-tiered model, the Moment of Production, Hall instead suggested that media texts were encoded with underlying intentions to preserve social and cultural norms. The second phase of Hall's model, the Moment of the Text, refers to analysis of content and potential encoded messages within the text itself that explores a range of potential connotations and denotations of messages encoded into a specific text. The final phase in Hall's model, the Moment of Reception, refers to audience denotation of a text's implicit or explicit messages through public response to message denotation within a specific mass media text (Hall, 1973, 1980).

Hall's research on implicit message connotation and denotation led to the establishment of a two-phase encoding/decoding model in 1973, along with refinement of the design in a 1980 study. In "Encoding/Decoding and the Television Discourse," (1973), Hall offered his first challenge to linear transmission models through two large theoretical shifts. First, Hall suggested that all media texts were encoded by the producers with implicit messages that reinforced social and cultural norms, often in a manner that endorsed ethnic or gender bias. Second, Hall suggested that audiences regularly deciphered and responded to messages in media text, particularly with regard to representation of ethnicity and gender (Campbell, 1995; Hall, 1973, 1980).

Hall's three-tiered model of critical reading classifications fuels the methodology for the sub-studies that comprise this collection. Operating in tandem with Hall's Moments and Encoding/Decoding evolution of the media transmission model, Hall's three critical textual reading classifications offer three potential vantage points for critical analysis of a media text (Hall, 1973; Hall, 1980). Hall's three categories of critical textual analysis offer a spectrum from accordance with the media producer

(Dominant/Preferred Reading) to a focus on exposure of problematic encoded aspects within a text (Oppositional Reading). By incorporating the middle phase of Hall's reading model into five chapter-based negotiated readings, this study situates *The Boondocks* Animated Series within a balanced analysis of the show's encoded intentions and potentially problematic aspects, particularly with regard to pervasively negative depictions of contemporary black society and culture (Campbell, 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Hall's first proposed reading category, the Dominant/Preferred Reading, offers a straightforward analysis of a media text as intended for interpretation during the encoding phase of the Moment of Production. Often referred to as a Hegemonic Reading, the first category of textual analysis accepts a text's encoded messages at face-value and negates implicit messages contained within the text, particularly with regard to social or cultural norms pertaining to portrayals of gender or ethnicity. The Dominant/Preferred reading offers little basis for criticism of a text's challenging and/or problematic aspects, as it offers a degree of support for a media text's encoded messages by way of its' structure (Campbell, 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Hall, 1973, 1980).

The second of Hall's three textual reading classifications, the Negotiated Reading model of textual analysis, provides a quintessential sense of direction to this collection of textual readings. The chapter model attempts to negate a compromise between support and criticism of a respective text's encoded messages by examining both the media producer's intentions and the potentially problematic aspects of a text. As The chapter provides a middle ground between two Hall reading models that lie in direct opposition,

the Dominant/Preferred Reading and the Oppositional Reading (Campbell, 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Hall, 1973, 1980).

Stuart Hall's third critical reading model, the Oppositional Reading, functions in an antithetical manner to the Dominant/Preferred Reading. The Oppositional Reading often emphasizes socially or culturally problematic aspects of a media text, particularly in reference to portrayals of ethnicity or gender relations within a hegemonic society. Whereas the Dominant / Preferred Reading assumes the viewpoint of the media producer, the Oppositional Reading is most often crafted as an argument against the encoded aims of a media text, as perceived by the author. More specifically, the Oppositional Reading has been consistently utilized by CRT scholars in the past few decades as a model honed to expose problematic media representation of gender and ethnicity. An Oppositional Reading is designed to accentuate problematic aspects of a media text, and the aims of the Oppositional Reading model often contradict the aims of a provided company (Hall, 1973, 1980).

University of Southern Mississippi critical media scholar Christopher Campbell's *Race, Myth and the News* (2005) offers a succinct appraisal of Hall's "Dominant / Preferred / Negotiated / Oppositional critical reading classifications (Campbell, 1995; Hall, 1973, 1980). Campbell discusses the final two classifications, The Negotiated Reading and the Oppositional Reading, as symbiotic entities through their focus on problematic aspects of a text. Campbell suggests that Negotiated and Oppositional readings are linked through criticism of the text's encoded messages, which does not factor into Hall's Dominant/Preferred reading model. This analysis of denotation strategies in *The Boondocks* Animated Series places a stronger emphasis on the

divergence between Negotiated Readings and Oppositional Readings than the one conveyed in the framework for Campbell's analysis of televised news research, *Race, Myth and the News* (Campbell, 1995; Hall, 1973, 1980).

As a means of viewing encoded messages within *The Boondocks* Animated Series in the most objective light possible, this study employs what Hall would refer to as a Negotiated Reading model. Each of The chapters within this collection eschews audience denotation for a focus on the connotation of messages encoded into episodes of the series during the "Moment of Production" (Hall, 1973, 1980). This study diverts from Campbell's analysis of Hall's reading model by accentuating the difference between Hall's Negotiated Reading and Oppositional Reading critical classifications. The lack of audience data forces a focus on producer encoding and textual analysis, thus requiring incorporation of the chapter model over the Oppositional Reading model (Campbell, 1995; Hall, 1980).

Adherence to Hall's Negotiated Reading model offers a quintessential balance to this study that considers the encoded intentions of *The Boondocks* Animated Series ' producers, while simultaneously exploring potentially problematic aspects associated with each set of encoded aims within the sub-studies. In their efforts to examine *The Boondocks* Animated Series ' encoded efforts to bolster audience appeal, this collection of five chapter-based Negotiated Readings offers a series of five thematically organized chapters of the series' forty-five episodes. With regard to Hall as a theoretical framework, this study offers a Negotiated Reading of messages encoded into *The Boondocks* Animated Series during the Moment of Production, along with analysis of their potentially problematic aspects through analysis of the Moment of the Text.

Incorporation of Hall's Negotiated Reading model minimizes bias in relation to *The Boondocks* Animated Series' audience-savvy encoding tactics and potentially problematic aspects (Hall 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The five Negotiated Readings that follow the Prologue section of this study each focus on recurrence of a respective encoding strategy as implemented in *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons. Between 2005 and 2011, McGruder implemented five encoding strategies among recurring characters to strengthen the audience allure of *The Boondocks* Animated Series among the young demographic of Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block. The full study offers a concurrent panorama of implementation across five denotation strategies, each implemented at the production level: (1) perpetuation of stereotypes in lieu of character development, (2) audience assimilation through a satirical and inclusive portrayal of mass media usage, (3) incorporation of shock humor tactics, (4) incorporation of allusions to popular culture, and (5) a vast lexicon of often-satirical references to black history.

A lack of reliable audience data for *The Boondocks* Animated Series limits the possibilities of audience denotation analysis. As a direct result of the viewership data limitation, this study focuses exclusively on the production-level denotation component of Hall's denotation-connotation textual reception model (Hall, 1973, 1980). The only insight into *The Boondocks* Animated Series' viewership lies within the show's Nielsen ratings, which reflected steady growth across the show's forty-five original air dates. The lapse in time lapsed audience data for Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block limits this study to mere speculation on audience connotation of the encoding strategies examined within this study. Moreover, the lapse in audience data effectively

negates two of Hall's three critical classification models, the Dominant/Preferred Reading and the Oppositional Reading. Hall's Negotiated Reading model offers an ideal model for this study's examination of encoding strategies incorporated within the first forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Acting in accordance a methodological framework informed by Stuart Hall, this study of encoding strategies as implemented in *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons builds directly upon the mid-1990s research of CRT scholar and televised representation theorist Herman Gray (Gray, 1995; Hall, 1973, 1980). In 1995, the CRT community set its gaze specifically on black cultural representation in broadcast television with the release of Herman Gray's seminal *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (Gray, 1995). Gray's *Watching Race* focuses specifically on televised black representation on network television during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The texts referenced in Gray's *Watching Race* comprise a brief window of optimism for improvement in the cultural authenticity of black representation, as the shows analyzed within were predominantly produced at the peak of the Afrocentrism movement in American culture (Asante, 1980; Hall, 1973, 1980; Gray, 1995).

Herman Gray's *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* was released in 1995, on the cusp of the first half-decade following the first CRT research conference at the University of Wisconsin (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). Gray's *Watching Race* assumes a link between television programming and human perception of culture, ethnicity, politics and society. The focus on black network representation maintained throughout *Watching Race* contributed to a watershed year in CRT (Gray, 2005).

Throughout 1995, CRT scholars repeatedly underscored the influence of television programming in terms of maintaining existing hegemonic structures through stereotype perpetuation and various forms of cultural, ethnic, political and social 'othering'. Viewed collectively, the CRT scholarship of 1995 emphasized a link between representation of minorities through television and its' respective impact on enforcement (or reinforcement) of learned social behavior among the potential audiences for respective shows (Campbell, 1995; Gray, 1995).

Through scrutiny of the cultural politics of television and race, Gray's *Watching Race* focuses on the impact that the 1980s-1990s black representation increase on broadcast television had within corresponding mass conceptualization of race during the height of Afrocentrism. Gray's comprehensive analysis includes not only network television programming, but the corresponding marketing campaigns and advertising strategies incorporated by media outlets to promote Gray's perceived surge in late 1980s-early 1990s black representation. Gray includes representation in televised advertisements, broadcast news and other bastions of Afrocentrism-era mass culture (Gray, 1995).

According to Herman Gray, televised representation of black culture shaped conceptualization of race among the United States mass populace throughout the mid-to-late twentieth century. Gray's *Watching Race* suggests that programs like *Amos and Andy*, *The Nat King Cole Show* and *I-Spy* offered oppressive constraints for televised black representation that were symptomatic of the cultural climate in which the respective shows were conceived. Gray's analysis of *I-Spy*, a late 1960s weekly program featuring a young Bill Cosby, dovetails nicely into the analysis of televised 1980s-1990s black

representation situated at the center of Gray's *Watching Race* (Correll & Gosden, 1965; Fine & Friedkin, 1965; Gray, 1995; Henry, 1954).

Herman Gray's *Watching Race* focuses specifically on the 1980s-1990s surge in black representation in network television programming. Shows like CBS' *Frank's Place*, NBC's *A Different World* and ABC's *Hangin' with Mr. Cooper* are dissected in tandem with Gray's analysis of the FOX Network's predominant focus on black representation throughout the early 1990s. Gray examines late 1980s-early 1990s improvements in black representation through the singular medium of television programming, while presenting a strong case for the medium's ability to facilitate dialogue or reinforce existing prejudices maintained by twentieth-century American television audiences (Cosby, 1987; Franklin, 1992; Gray, 1995; Wilson, 1987).

As presented in *Watching Race*, Gray's critical analysis of black representation of 1980s-1990s televised entertainment as a counter-balance to negative black representation in Reagan era televised news broadcasts, Gray aspires to explain the rapid improvement of black representation in television programming through cable networks and the debut of the entertainment-fueled FOX Network. Gray argues that 1980s televised news representation created a pessimistic malaise which was countered by an increase in the authenticity of black cultural, ethnic, political and social concerns as reflected through entertainment programming (Gray, 1995).

As argued within Gray's *Watching Race*, televised black representation of the 1980s and 1990s was fine-tuned by a generation of young CRT scholars who were frustrated by the limitations inherent within prior eras of televised black representation. Gray celebrates network accentuation of diversity through series like NBC's *A Different*

World, which offered a veritable panorama of black college life at the height of Afrocentrism, and CBS' *Frank's Place*, in which a successful black professor engages with his family history by moving to southeastern Louisiana as the owner/operator of an inherited restaurant in New Orleans' French Quarter (Cosby, 1987; Gray, 1995; Wilson, 1987).

As conveyed in *Watching Race*, the FOX network's debut stands at the crux of Gray's purported wave of gradual improvement to black representation in late 1980s and early 1990s televised entertainment. Although Gray's Negotiated Reading of FOX's sketch comedy variety program, *In Living Color*, highlights problematic aspects of the series in terms of potential influence over existing prejudices among the young FOX network's multi-ethnic audience. By the same token, Gray sees the FOX Network's ensemble comedy *Living Single*, Martin Lawrence vehicle *Martin*, and Charles S. Dutton-fueled *ROC* as high points for black representation throughout the television medium's comparatively short, half-century history (Bowman, Greenberg & Lawrence, 1992; Gray, 1995; Wayans, 1990).

Gray's book facilitates accessibility with its' thorough dissection of "blackness," or perceived conceptualization of culturally authentic representation of black culture. As *Watching Race* was released in 1995, Gray's study is one of the few bastions of CRT that ends on an optimistic note in terms of black representation. Focusing predominantly on the 1980s and 1990s, Gray's research views network programming during the peak of Afrocentrism as a cause for guarded optimism in regards to post-1994 black representation in network programming. According to Gray, audiences of the 1980s and 1990s formulated assumptions and reinforced their respective conceptualizations of

“blackness” through shared traits emphasized in weekly serial programming on the CBS, FOX and NBC networks. Between 1985 and 1995, Gray argues that each of the three networks (often concurrently) attempted to capitalize on a predominantly black demographic within the chronological window at the center of Herman Gray's *Watching Race* (Asante, 1980; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Gray, 1995).

In the introduction to *Watching Race*, Gray alludes to television's role in regular perpetuation of a link between protection of existing hegemonic structures (i.e., media outlets) through overt or subtle perpetuation of cultural, ethnic, political and social inequality. Gray argues that television's pervasive stereotype incorporation was the most typical vehicle for perpetuation of oppressive social hierarchies throughout late 1980s and early 1990s network television programming. According to Gray, the television programming that coincided with the apex of the Afrocentrism movement was “rich with struggles, debates, and transformations in race relations, electronic media, cultural politics and economic life.” (Gray, 1995)

In *Watching Race*, Gray's analysis of broadcast television's role in perpetuating negative images of black culture amidst the rise of Reagan era conservatism in the 1980s. Gray views black representation in narrative television programming as a counterpoint to negativity perpetuated by such televised news fiascoes as the Willie Horton controversy employed by the Republican Party in George H. Bush's 1988 Presidential campaign. Gray argues that Republican social hierarchy was maintained through a press onslaught of associations between black culture and criminal behavior. This negative balance between televised entertainment and news programming existed in spite of Gray's purported black viewership study (Gray, 1995).

Herman Gray's *Watching Race* presents a three-tiered model to chart the progress of black representation in televised entertainment programming. Through Gray's model, improvements in black representation are visible across a multi-tiered cursory examination of black representation across multiple generations of television. Beginning with *Julia* in the 1960s and ending with Bill Cosby's successful NBC efforts in the 1980s, Gray's three-phase representation model provides a basis for the changes to black representation in late 1980s and early 1990s television programming that are celebrated throughout *Watching Race* (Cosby, 1984, 1987; Gray, 1995; Kanter, 1968).

Gray's first wave of televised black representation was established in the 1960s, as programming assimilated individual black characters into predominantly white casts in programs designed for predominantly white audiences. Black characters were added to programs like *Julia* and *I-Spy* to facilitate rapid growth in black viewership throughout the 1960s and subsequent decades (Fine & Friedkin, 1965; Gray, 1995; Kanter, 1968).

In the second wave of representation, narratives concurrently stressed segregated happiness in separate-but-equal households. In the 1970s and early 1980s, network programs like *Amen*, *Good Times*, *The Jeffersons*, *Sanford and Son* and *What's Happening!!* depicted predominantly black casts, while relegating representation of other ethnicities to marginalized token roles. Black families in Gray's second representation wave faced parallel plot narratives and serialized concerns to those of predominantly white casts in concurrent network entertainment programming (Gray, 1995; Lear, 1972, 1974, 1975; Monte, 1976; Weinberger, 1986).

Despite the mid-to-late 1980s role of NBC's *The Cosby Show* (and spin-off *A Different World*) in facilitating negative stereotype perpetuation as black representation

through televised news, Herman Gray argues that 1980s televised entertainment shifted its focus from economic inequality to accentuation of diversity. In *The Cosby Show* and *A Different World*, along with the short-lived *Frank's Place* on CBS, black cultural authenticity was increased beyond the token basis of Gray's first representation wave or the parallel, universally-applicable serial narratives of Gray's purported second wave of programming. Despite the role of 1980s televised entertainment in facilitating the oppressive agenda of existing hegemonic structures, the increase in cultural authenticity in lieu of a focus on socioeconomic woes paved the way for a progressive window of improved black representation in the 1980s and 1990s (Cosby, 1984, 1987; Gray, 1995; Wilson, 1987).

Gray's *Watching Race* contends that mid-1980s, NBC's *The Cosby Show* stood as a watershed moment for black representation in televised entertainment. According to Gray, the 1980s sitcom of the multi-generational doctor/lawyer Huxtable family offered significance advances in progressive black representation over the token representation of prior eras (Cosby, 1984, 1987). In *Watching Race*, Gray argues that 1980s televised entertainment was produced as an intentional antithesis to avoid accusations of negative stereotype perpetuation in advertising and news representation of 1980s black culture (Gray, 1995). Changes to the television programming landscape in the late 1980s offered young black artists a platform from which they addressed a largely black audience with an unparalleled degree of cultural authenticity (Gray, 1995).

In *Watching Race*, Gray argues that the rise of Critical Race Theory facilitated the first wave of scholarship that combated the precarious balance between black representation in televised entertainment and televised news, paving the way for a surge

in progressive black representation in emerging cable television formats of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Critical scrutiny of black representation across various mediums and formats employed by mass media was embraced by a new generation of cultural studies scholars. These late 1980s-early 1990s scholars concurrently analyzed class, ethnicity and gender representation and its' potential resonance within late 1980s-early 1990s American culture (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Gray, 1995).

The optimism of Gray's *Watching Race* coincides with the rise of alternative television programming formats in the late 1980s. Gray attributes television programming changes in black representation to the rising popularity of cable network programming and the successful late 1980s debut of the FOX network. As a counterpoint to 1980s network programming in the Afrocentrism era, early FOX programming eschewed news coverage to focus on popular weekly serialized entertainment programming (Gray, 1995).

Viewership shifts in the late 1980s offered a new platform for challenges to existing hegemonic structures, particularly in terms of black cultural representation, fueled by programming that launched the careers of numerous young black artists. In the wake of the 1988 presidential election, Gray argues that audiences migrated to alternatives offered by FOX and emerging cable television networks like Ted Turner's Turner Network Television (TNT) in 1989 and Cartoon Network in 1992 (Gray, 1995).

In the concluding remarks of *Watching Race*, Gray suggests that televised black representation stood poised at a moment of optimism. From Gray's argument in *Watching Race*, it seems as if black representation was poised to marginally disrupt existing hegemonic structures and subvert existing audience prejudices at the cusp of a

seemingly upward trend for quality and cultural authenticity of black representation in mid-to-late 1990s television. Gray uses the late 1980s-early 1990s United States Afrocentrism movement as a basis for the concluding optimism presented in *Watching Race*, suggesting that future generations of black artists will continue the trend of black representation improvement (Gray, 1995).

Unfortunately, Gray's optimistic perspective on black representation as alluded to in *Watching Race* alludes to a window of late 1980s-early 1990s optimism that was increasingly neglected and abandoned by television networks amidst the rise of the reality television format and variety programming in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

McGruder's 2005-2011 work on *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons embraces Gray's perception of television programming as a means for initiating dialogue among members of a broad potential viewership. McGruder embraces the televised representation progress elaborated upon by Herman Gray in *Watching Race* as a figurative mission statement. Throughout the first forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, each respective episode makes an individual effort to provoke audiences and facilitate the audience's heightened sociopolitical consciousness in terms of ethnic diversity (Gray, 1995; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Viewed in the context of the pervasively negative contemporary black representation that permeates televised advertisement, entertainment and news programming, each of the first forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series functions as a standalone evocation of many of the predominant themes contained in Gray's *Watching Race* (1995), which presents an optimistic summary of late 1980s-early 1990s improvements to televised black representation. McGruder was a member of the

young black viewership alluded to throughout Gray's *Watching Race*, as both *The Boondocks* Comic Strip and *The Boondocks* Animated Series served to facilitate a platform for boldly satirized critical commentary of contemporary black cultural, ethnic, political and social interests (Gray, 1995; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

As described in Afrocentrism scholar Molefi Asante's *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*, African-American culture represents a hollow facade of United States homogeneity in lieu of cultural diversity accentuation. Proponents of Afrocentrism typically minimize depictions of Eurocentric influence, insinuating opposition to Eurocentric cultural dominance in lieu of scholarly attention to African diversity in various aspects of United States society (Asante, 1980).

Afrocentric scholarship typically tries to trace African-American links to authentic representation of African culture in lieu of western culture, focusing on romantic celebration of authentic African cultural development as an alternative to the African-American marginalization that continually permeates multiple aspects of United States society. Afrocentrism emphasizes the academic, cultural, economic and technological innovation of various African societies as an effort to curtail the umbrella marginalization of African-American cultural homogeneity. Afrocentric revisionist scholars like Asante stress the resonance and significance of traditional African culture in various aspects of United States culture (Asante, 1980).

In both *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (1996-2006) and *The Boondocks* Animated Series (1995-2011), recurring narrator Huey Freeman stresses a traditional Afrocentric position in critical commentary on various aspects of African-American culture, history, politics and society (Asante, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

McGruder's teenage years in Maryland coincided with the peak of the Afrocentrism movement. In the early 1990s, the Afrocentrism movement inspired intelligent incorporation of African cultural influences into various art forms and entertainment mediums embraced by the United States' multi-ethnic populace (Asante, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

As McGruder was exposed to the window of late 1980s-early 1990s improvements in black representation alluded to in the television programming analysis of Gray's *Watching Race*. As was the aim with *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (1995-2006), *The Boondocks* Animated Series (2005-2011) sought to rekindle the brief moment of optimism for black representation in late 1980s-early 1990s television programming examined by Gray in *Watching Race* (Gray, 1995). The five-point character representation incorporated into each subsequent negotiated reading in this study is informed by the three-phase representation spectrum described by Gray as context for black representation improvements facilitated by the debut of the FOX Network and rising popularity of cable network alternatives to major network programming (Asante, 1980; Gray, 1995; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

The first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series frequently targeted problematic representation of black culture through the mass media. The most consistent target of McGruder's scrutiny in both forms is the pervasive association between black culture and criminal activity perpetuated by televised news. As the limited amount of contemporary scholarship reflects, *The Boondocks* Animated Series was the first television show to directly respond to a set of consistently problematic black media representation in a highly satirized manner. Throughout the first forty-five episodes of

The Boondocks Animated Series, McGruder's characters are frequently subjected to problematic portrayals of black culture in televised media that seem informed by the contemporary climate of critical scholarship on black representation and televised news broadcasts (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Existing critical scholarship offers a scathing indictment of black representation on televised news, particularly due to pervasive associations with crime. Scholarship indicates that news broadcasts employ an array of tactics to perpetuate pervasively negative stereotypes of black culture, most often pertaining to violent crime (Campbell, 1995; Dixon, 2006; Entman, 1997). Moving beyond legalities, existing critical scholarship often argued that news broadcasts depict low-socioeconomic-status living in a cold, clinical fashion that feels starkly removed from a generally consistent endorsement of white hegemony (Azocar & Dixon, 2007; Campbell, 1995; Dixon, 2006; Dixon, 2008; Entman 1997).

In both *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (1996-2006) and *The Boondocks* Animated Series (2005-2011), McGruder's skepticism of media outlets frequently exaggerates the findings of CRT televised news analysis for comedic effect. As depicted in *The Boondocks* Animated Series, caricatures of prominent figures from popular mass media outlets frequently offer a tremendously shallow understanding of black culture, along with a perpetual association with violence and cultural menace. The implications of existing critical studies fuel the misinformed and nefarious depiction of televised news which lies at the heart of McGruder's three season production tenure on *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

The Boondocks Animated Series also functions as a response to tremendously problematic representation of black culture in twentieth-century animation (Brabham, 2006; Kotlarz, 1983; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Sammond, 2011). From the dawn of the medium in the 1920s through the recent success of blockbuster films like *Shrek*, animators has consistently perpetuated Jim Crow-era stereotypes in their portrayals of black culture. In prior scholarship, critical scholars examining black representation in animation have focused exclusively on perceived inequities and racist encoding within a century of animated texts (Brabham, 2006; Kotlarz, 1983; Sammond, 2011).

Through five chapters, this comprehensive analysis of encoding strategies incorporated into *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons builds upon prior critical animation scholarship. Through analysis of five encoding strategies, this study evaluates the effectiveness of *The Boondocks* Animated Series as a multi-faceted response to decades of problematic depictions of black representation as conveyed through depictions of culture, ethnicity, politics and societal concerns. By evaluating *The Boondocks* Animated Series as a counter-current to the hegemonic infrastructure endorsement of prior texts, this study focuses specifically on *The Boondocks* Animated Series' 2005-2011 incorporation of recurring narrative conventions within McGruder's firmly established, five-point recurring character spectrum to facilitate a progressive dialogue on contemporary black representation in an array of media formats (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Gray, 1995; Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Between 2004 and 2008, McGruder continually promoted *The Boondocks* Animated Series in interviews that differed tremendously from the negative spin that McGruder faced while producing *The Boondocks* Comic Strip. While publications like

The Los Angeles Times, *The New Yorker* and *The Washington Post* depicted McGruder as an angry rebel facilitating the reckless decline of print media, press coverage quickly adopted warmer framing for McGruder upon receiving news of his 2006 retirement from *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's 350-paper syndication through Universal Press Syndicate (Bach, 2007; Basile, 2005; Braxton, 2007; Cavna, 2008; Farici, 2001; Jacobs, 2008; McGrath, 2004; Rabin, 2005; Scocca, 2000).

Throughout interviews, McGruder insisted that *The Boondocks* Animated Series was designed as standalone critical commentary that reflected his singular-minded creative vision in terms of contemporary cultural, ethnic, political and societal concerns, in tandem with their respectively problematic representation amidst the hegemonic endorsement of existing hierarchical mass media structures that grow increasingly powerful throughout the digital age. Taking this into account, audience accessibility for McGruder's forty-five episode vision for *The Boondocks* Animated Series requires a contextual understanding of contemporary concerns involving problematic televised representation of black cultural, ethnic, political and social interests (Bach, 2007; Basile, 2005; Braxton, 2002; Braxton, 2007; Cavna, 2002, 2008; Farici, 2001; Jacobs, 2008; McGrath, 2004; Phipps, 1999; Rabin, 2005; Scocca, 2000).

Critical scholarship on televised black representation often pursued similar aims to the aforementioned scholarship on black representation in animated texts from prior decades. A focus on scholars' conceptualization of problematic portrayals of black culture that have permeated the medium throughout its' seventy-year history. Through investigation of five encoding strategies in respective chapters, this study situates *The Boondocks* Animated Series within dialogue on black representation in various animated

and live action film, music and television texts (Bush, Hair & Solomon, 1975; Dominick & Greenberg, 1970; 1978; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Stroman, 1986).

Functioning as an episode-based response to existing representations of black culture in American entertainment television between 2005 and 2011, *The Boondocks Animated Series* again acts as an antithesis to existing critical scholarship, as several episodes function as a response to specific contentions of CRT scholars. While existing critical scholarship often focuses on perpetuation of stereotypes towards purportedly negative aims, this study will explore *The Boondocks'* incorporation of stereotypes towards an opposite aim: facilitation of the boldest and most honest dialogue on black television representation in the medium's brief history. As was the case with critical scholarship on animated representation, frustration over black representation in televised entertainment seem to fuel the satirical depiction of black media perception offered in *The Boondocks Animated Series*. The frustration that fuels the scathing satire of the series stems largely from issues over representation that surfaced in 1970s and 1980s. Although an oppositional reading of *The Boondocks Animated Series* would chastise respective episodes' bold satire and pervasive implementation of racial epithets, The Negotiated Reading based encoding strategy implementation readings of *The Boondocks Animated Series* that comprise the heart of this study will celebrate the series for its' unprecedentedly stark and satirical conceptualization of televised black representation (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Gray, 1995; Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Throughout television history, situational comedies have frequently endorsed hegemonic cultural norms in American homes, including problematic portrayals of black culture. As one might anticipate, scholarship on black representation in televised

situational comedies is often depicted as intensely problematic by critical race scholars. As was the case with televised news, critical scholars have argued that the negative stereotypes perpetuated in situational comedies can potentially serve to endorse and facilitate stereotypes pertaining to black culture (Mastro & Topp, 2004; Signorielli, 2009). A 2009 study examined eight years of black representation in prime time situational comedies and noticed a disturbing trend: instead of negative stereotypes, the number of black characters featured in network programming was in a state of gradual decline.

The FOX Network rose to prominence for the popularity of its entertainment programming in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The FOX Network's early years featured groundbreaking sitcoms like *Living Single*, *Martin* and *ROC*, which offered unparalleled transcendence of cultural boundaries forced by prior generations of televised black entertainment. From the network's debut through the mid-1990s, the FOX network grew increasingly popular the 1980s NBC demographic addressed by *A Different World*, *The Cosby Show* and *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* in the late 1980s and early 1990s. FOX sitcoms increased cultural authenticity amidst a climate of Afrocentrism, upon examination of outstanding performance for NBC's spinoff of *The Cosby Show*, Bill Cosby's self-produced pilot for *A Different World*. The success of NBC's *A Different World* among late 1980s audiences fueled production of FOX's *Living Single*, *Martin* and *ROC*, each of which proved increasingly popular among early 1990s FOX viewers (Asante, 1980; Borowitz & Stevenson, 1990; Bowman et al., 1992; Bowser, 1993; Cosby, 1984, 1987; Gray, 1995).

All of the 1990s FOX programs enjoyed multi-season runs and proved increasingly popular within the FOX Network's target demographic. The network's dystopian visions of white mass culture, presented through sitcoms like long running classist satire *Married with Children* (itself evocative of *All in the Family*) or adult-oriented animation frontrunner *The Simpsons* (a spinoff of FOX's own original, *The Tracy Ullman Show*), proved to be phenomenally popular among late 1980s and early 1990s audiences (Gray, 1995). Gray's text concludes with a moment of optimism for black representation that preceded a rapid decline in quantity and quality of culturally authentic representations of black culture (Belson, Brodes, Elson & Perlman, 1987; Gray, 1995; Groening, 1989; Lear, 1971; Leavitt, 1987).

Prior to the debut of the FOX network, Sunday night prime-time television programming offered few concessions in terms of traditional representation patterns within the domestic network television schema of the late 1980s (ABC, CBS, NBC). Between 1989 and 1995, the Wayans family and several other familiar faces collaborated to change the landscape of network television through the format and content evolution of their purportedly edgy sketch comedy show, *In Living Color* (Gray, 1995; Wayans, 1987, 1990). The fact that *In Living Color* appearances successfully launched the careers of Jim Carey, Jennifer Lopez, Damon Wayans, Kimberly Wayans, Marlon Wayans and Kennan Ivory Wayans stands as a testament to the quality of FOX network's early 1990s sketch comedy series.

Along with programs like *The Simpsons* and *Married... with Children*, the network offered a weekly variety show to actor-director-producer-writer Keenan Ivory Wayans, who's prior *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka!* (1987) proved lucrative for the Metro-

Goldwyn Meyer (MGM) studio upon release (Wayans, 1987). The film's satirical survey of Hollywood's short-lived, early 1970s “Black Exploitation” production phenomenon proves just as effective almost three decades after the film's initial release. Wayans' film was produced cheap, as the cast and crew were comprised of Hollywood holdovers who never resumed their careers after the collapse of studio interest in “Black Exploitation” in 1973 (Gray, 1995; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Wayans, 1987, 1990).

As was the case with the Bundy or Simpson households, the Wayans' sketch comedy and music program *In Living Color* offered an audacious, unapologetically edgy sub current of anti-authoritarian humor that proved influential to virtually all black artists who followed the series' 1989-1995 run (Groening, 1989; Leavitt, 1987; Wayans, 1989). Across five seasons, the target audience of the FOX Network's *In Living Color* included viewers like future comedian Dave Chappelle and aspiring cartoonist Aaron McGruder, creator and producer of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Basile, 2005; Jacobs, 2008). The audience resonance of the *In Living Color* cast gradually moved on to Hollywood feature film production (Gray, 1995).

Above all television programming that debuted on the FOX Network in the early 1990s, the series discussed in Herman Gray's *Watching Race* that paved the way for the thematically ostentatious black representation of *The Boondocks Animated Series* was the FOX Network's immensely popular Wayans family collaboration, *In Living Color*. Across five twenty-plus episode seasons, the variety show format and audacious humor of remained popular with American audiences throughout the production of the series' five seasons (Gray, 1995; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Evoking the sketch comedy format introduced in NBC's *Saturday Night Live* in 1975, the FOX Network's *In Living Color* was the brainchild of actor-director-producer-writer Keenan Ivory Wayans. Wayans worked alongside comedian siblings Damon, Kim, Marlon and Shawn, all of whom frequented the early seasons of the *In Living Color* as recurring cast members (Gray, 1995). The Wayans family collectively comprised an emerging comedic talent that resonated with audiences the late 1980s in the theatrical release of MGM's popular Blaxploitation spoof, *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka* (Wayans, 1987). Eschewing the multi-ethnic comedy focus of NBC's *Saturday Night Live* for a multi-ethnic audience amidst a climate of American Afrocentrism, *In Living Color* subsequently launched the careers of cast members like Jim Carey, Tommy Davidson, Jamie Foxx, David Alan Grier, all aligned with the Wayans family as writers and cast members under *In Living Color* show runner Keenan Ivory Wayans, who rarely appeared on-screen throughout the series' 1989-1994 production window (Gray, 1995; Michaels, 1975; Wayans, 1987, 1990).

After the five-season run of *In Living Color*, several of the Wayans brothers pursued independent programming contracts through the UPN and the Warner Brothers television networks. The collapse of *In Living Color* in its' fifth season on the FOX Network was further facilitated by the overnight Hollywood success afforded to almost all of the series' cast members. Jim Carey, Tommy Davidson, Jamie Foxx and David Alan Grier found 1990s and 2000s success in various studio system comedies, most of which proved tremendously popular among audiences upon theatrical release. Damon, Keenan-Ivory, Kimberly, Marlon and Shawn Wayans appeared throughout the 1990s in formulaic comedy fare produced by Harvey Weinstein and released by three Disney-

owned film monikers: Dimension Pictures, Miramax Films and Touchstone Pictures (Biskind, 2000; Gray, 1995; Guerrero, 1999; Wayans, 1990).

Black representation in televised entertainment saw little improvement during or after the premiere of *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first forty-five episodes. Rather than facilitating similarly audacious dialogue within other televised representation, the state of black representation seemed to deteriorate even further during the 2005-2011 premieres of *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first three seasons. A number of critical scholars have focused on representation of black characters within the American reality television genre. Representation of black cultural, ethnic, political and social strife at the mercy of reality television functions as a recurring theme throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series*. McGruder regularly includes references to popular reality shows within the show's onslaught of cultural references. As scholars have indicated, reality television has frequently offered problematic depictions of black culture that employed stereotypes to negative effect. Depictions of reality programming on *The Boondocks* offer an exaggerated version of ethnic oppression by television producers for comedic effect (Gray, 1995; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

Although most studies of contemporary black television portrayals focus on comedy and reality television, one must consider portrayals of black characters within other veins of contemporary television programming. Throughout the late 2000s, network television medical dramas have been chastised by critical race scholars for problematic black representation, particularly in instances of interracial relationships (Washington, 2008, 2012). A 2008 CRT-based study of televised representation showed that black characters were routinely forced into a subservient hierarchy that was undermined by plot

developments concerning white protagonists (Washington, 2008). The 2008 study ends on a tremendously problematic note, as both shows afford minorities healthy sex lives but imbue neither with a desire for marriage or serious romantic commitment (Washington, 2008). Four years later, a study by the same critical scholar revealed little progress for authentic representation of black culture in network dramas (Washington 2008, 2012).

In a genuinely disturbing 2012 continuation of her 2008 scholarship on black medical dramas, Washington found that successful interracial relationships on network medical dramas often ended in violent tragedy, as the minority love interest was eradicated by screenwriters instead of being developed as a legitimate candidate for interracial marriage. The study emphasized the role of minority characters as proverbial magnets for tragedy and lukewarm sympathy among audience viewers. Rather than showing us how much progress portrayals of black culture have progressed in almost seventy years, the 2008 and 2012 studies show us how little progress we've seen for minority representation in live-action television dramas (Washington, 2008, 2012).

In 2007, a critical scholar lambasted the FX network for the content of a reality program called *Black-White*. The short-lived program explored race relations through a faux documentary format and a candid discussion of race relations between black and white Americans. In her article, the scholar cites three specific problems with *Black-White*. First, she argues that racial stereotypes and scripted developments are employed in an obvious manner to emphasize the ethnic diversity of black characters. Second, Mathis views treatment of the show's black characters as a manifestation of social "othering" by white characters. Characters who could not be assimilated under a culturally constructed umbrella of assumed whiteness and identified as black were not offered even-handed

narrative treatment in the FX program. Finally, Mathis takes specific issue with the show's reluctance to explore racial tension from various perspectives (Cutler & Jackson, 2007; Mathis, 2007). Unfortunately, studies on representation of black culture in 2008-2011 reality programming fostered an increasingly bleak outlook for problematic aspects of black representation in the reality television format, particularly in depictions of parenthood and infidelity (Boylom, 2008; Cutler & Jackson, 2007; Mathis, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Park, 2009; Smith, 2008; Tyree, 2011).

A 2011 article by critical scholar Tia Tyree offered a sobering level of insight into how little progress the reality format has made across several years in terms of black representation. Tyree opened with the origins of the reality television format, suggesting that MTV used voyeurism as an allure for American audiences in early 1990s marketing for their trailblazing reality format experiment, *The Real World*. Tyree suggests that the voyeuristic allure of reality programming remained just as appealing to American audiences in 2011 as it seemed in 1991 (Ellis-Bunim & Murphy, 1992; Tyree, 2011).

All ten of the reality shows from Tyree's 2005-2010 sample featured at least one inception of stereotypes like the pervasively angry black woman, the “hoochie” (promiscuous black female), the “hood-rat” (black male obsessed with glorification of criminal culture), the “homo-thug” (hyper emasculated “hood-rat” with homo-erotic overtones), the “sambo” (black character who embraces white subservience) and the “coon” (the lazy, under-educated black character). As insulting and limited as these stereotypes seem, Tyree's study unveils their pervasive implementation in 2005-2010 reality programming. The Tyree results correlate with the 2008 studies and offer little hope for the 2009 Park results, as the article clearly suggests that media producers will

continue to produce reality television programming infused with negative stereotypes of black culture (Bogle, 1972; Ellis-Bunim & Murphy, 1992; Tyree, 2011).

In the early twenty-first century, popular stand-up comedian Dave Chappelle collaborated weekly with Comedy Central and Viacom to produce a weekly sketch comedy program, *Chappelle's Show* (2002-2004), which used both explicit content incorporation and satire to fuel audacious sketches that were combined with live music performances and audience interaction interludes hosted by Chappelle himself. Between 2002 and 2004, Dave Chappelle and his cast/crew implemented humor incorporation as an encoding strategy in a similar manner to that of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Throughout the series' two seasons, highly satirized depictions of American cultural, ethnic, political and social realities were combined with dialogue that stretched the constraints of the TV-14 rating assigned to *Chappelle's Show*. The series' TV-14 rating was particularly surprising in light of the sketches' thematic and content similarities to Comedy Central's TV-MA rated precursor, Matt Stone and Trey Parker's *South Park*, which was often transcended by the brash demeanor of individual episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (2005-2011) (Chappelle, 2002; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Parker & Stone, 1997).

Providing one of the most recent studies of televised portrayals of black culture within the sketch comedy format, *Communication Studies* published L. Perks' "Three Satiric Decoding Positions" in 2012. As the article focused on representation and responses to Comedy Central's imminently successful *Chappelle's Show*, this study has more of a link to McGruder's intended demographic for *The Boondocks* than audiences for network-produced reality programming. McGruder himself claimed that Dave

Chappelle's success on Comedy Central was the catalyst that helped to secure a cable network deal for *The Boondocks* animated program (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Perks, 2012).

In the 2012 study, Perks explores the extent of appeal for satiric and ironic depictions of black culture among prior *Chappelle's Show* viewers. When asked about the shows they recalled from the Comedy Central show most vividly, they remembered the show's hyper-violent, socially appealing depictions of black culture and the comparatively safe, socially awkward depiction of “nerdy” white characters. Black and white respondents in Perk's study seemed to offer strikingly similar, vivid accounts of the stereotypical characters from the 2002-2004 show. Perks' study grew far more intriguing in its exploration of perceived uses for stereotype implementation (Chappelle, 2002; Perks, 2011).

Although black and white audience members recalled the show's stereotypes in a similar fashion, their responses differed when discussing the rationale behind their implementation. Perks suggests that reactions fell into three categories: (1) refusal to acknowledge the ideological implications of the stereotypes, (2) stated support for the show's stereotypes as culturally authentic, or (3) active deduction of higher meanings and insights about race in America conveyed through effective caricatures. In an intriguing parallel, the audience responses seem to echo Stuart Hall's model of Dominant, Negotiated and Oppositional textual readings (Hall, 1973, 1980).

In the closing discussion of his 2012 study, Perks states that he hopes that revelation of these three potential decoding positions will help viewers, particularly viewers of satirical comedy, to see how they can apply a deeper level of insight to

satirical humor that employs purportedly racist stereotypes. Perks also stated that he hoped viewers from all three camps would grow to become more conscious of their own interpretation of stereotypes in satirical comedy (Gray, 1995; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Perks, 2011).

Although *The Boondocks* Animated Series aired its pilot October 2005, Perks' late 2011 conclusions on problematic, comedy-based contemporary televised representation seem to echo McGruder's fondest stated wishes for audience interpretation of his vision for *The Boondocks*. Succinctly stated, both the comic strip and animated inceptions of *The Boondocks* feel tailor-made to appeal to audiences who can decode stereotypes who are employed to comedic effect. Moreover, *The Boondocks* Animated Series (2005-2011) was designed to imbue viewers with the critical thinking skills. McGruder hoped that viewers of the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block would utilize critical thinking skills to generate skepticism towards existing cultural, ethnic, political and social hierarchies (Barnes & McGruder, 2005; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Perks, 2011).

Throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, McGruder incorporates stereotypes of black culture to fuel an alternate agenda. The stereotypical caricatures and pop-culture references of McGruder's animated program serve to communicate the results of existing scholarship (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Mastro & Topp, 2004; Signorielli, 2009). Despite McGruder's parallels with Mastro and Topp's findings, *The Boondocks* Animated Series reveals a use of overt stereotypes as a means to facilitate progressive dialogue pertaining to race (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Mastro & Topp, 2004;).

As the first two seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series respectively premiered on the Cartoon Network in 2006 and 2008, black representation on network and cable television was in a state of perpetual decline (Gray, 1995; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Signorielli, 2009). Although the Animated Series attempted to rectify this imbalance, live-action shows have offered few attempts to increase black representation. Despite *The Boondocks* Animated Series' adherence to a semiotically exaggerated, inherently satirized half-hour animated narrative format, one could easily argue that McGruder had richer messages to black America encoded within *The Boondocks* than most any of the material found on prime-time television (Gray, 1995; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Signorielli, 2009).

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study addresses lapses in existing research, particularly in reference to *The Boondocks* Animated Series' encoded efforts to facilitate audience accessibility through thematically-organized chapters of the series. The five themes addressed in this study were selected to address the following research questions. Each refers to an aspect of the show's encoded efforts to avoid the comic strip's controversial legacy and play to the audience accessibility of the adult-oriented animation format.

- RQ1: In what manner does *The Boondocks* Animated Series utilize stereotypes to maintain a progressive dialogue on the black American experience?
- RQ2: To what extent does *The Boondocks* Animated Series employ satirical or shock-based humor conventions in tandem with potentially controversial or culturally sensitive thematic content?
- RQ3: How does *The Boondocks* Animated Series use portrayals of media usage to build a broad audience from the Adult Swim block's demographic?
- RQ4: Across the first three seasons (2005-2011), does *The Boondocks* Animated Series maintain a pastiche of popular culture references that eventually devolves into kitsch?
- RQ5: To what extent does *The Boondocks* Animated Series incorporate a lexicon of historical references to endorse encoded themes within the show?

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

To facilitate the basis of this study and encourage future research, this study considers the contextual and thematic content of *The Boondocks* in relation to milestones in Critical Race Theory. Although little CRT-based critical scholarship exists on *The Boondocks* Animated Series, this study links *The Boondocks* Animated Series to existing Critical Race Theory through incorporation of a methodological framework inspired by two seminal commentators on black representation in past and contemporary eras of television history; British CRT scholar Stuart Hall (1921-2014) and Herman Gray (*Watching Race*, 1995). The study replicates Hall's model of negotiated technical analysis while exploring said negotiated findings within the context of representation as presented by Gray throughout *Watching Race* (Gray, 1995; Hall, 1973, 1980).

With regard to theoretical framework, this analysis of denotation-based audience assimilation in the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series will heavily incorporate the reading and encoding/decoding models of Stuart Hall, a British CRT scholar who developed a reading model that afforded concurrent analysis of a text's potentially beneficial and detrimental aspects in terms of production-level connotation or audience-level denotation (Hall, 1973, 1980).

Through chapter-based incorporation of Hall's negotiated reading model, this analysis of encoding strategies as implemented into *The Boondocks* Animated Series idealistically aspires to facilitate audience decoding of the three season, forty-five episode production tenure of franchise creator Aaron McGruder. Moreover, adherence to Hall's negotiated reading model throughout this study frames *The Boondocks* Animated Series

within a lexicon of critical scholarship for future research on dialectic terms that consider the hypothetical positive and negative results of encoding strategy implementation throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Gray, 1995; Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Rather than structuring this study by season, this collection of *The Boondocks* Animated Series chapters explores five thematic themes across a forty-five episode sample of the show that aired between 2005 and 2011. Textual analysis will incorporate the tenets of Critical Race Theory, predominantly through chapter-based incorporation of a Negotiated Reading template designed by British critical commentator Stuart Hall (Gray, 1995; Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

A negotiated reading of *The Boondocks'* existing forty-five episode arc addresses a specific lapse in existing critical studies of the show. More specifically, this study examines *The Boondocks* Animated Series' use of narrative diversion and encoded messages through referential humor to avert potential controversy and facilitate a progressive dialogue on broad social, political and cultural themes in relation to the contemporary black experience, while elevating consciousness on the text's historical and cultural lexicon and potentially enhancing the viewer's understanding of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' encoding tactics (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

This study expands existing research on *The Boondocks* Animated Series and black representation on American television in a number of directions. Each of The chapters discussed below addresses a different contextual view of the series' narrative compromises to facilitate audience accessibility among the Adult Swim audience and

target demographic, with expansion of the Adult Swim audience in mind (Gussman et al., 2012; Rockler, 2002; Rucker, 2008).

Each of the five chapters contained in this study take *The Boondocks* Animated Series' lack of narrative development or plot development into account. This study necessitates such an approach, as the show's lack of traditional development allows each episode to address a separate encoded message or theme. Through a thematically organized series of chapters, this analysis of the series will be afforded greater insight into the show's encoded themes and efforts to maintain audience appeal.

The chapters that comprise this study rely on Stuart Hall's negotiated reading model (as opposed to the dominant (a.k.a. hegemonic) or oppositional models of textual analysis) to offer a comparatively even-handed textual reading of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. The lack of available insight into *The Boondocks* Animated Series' viewership demographics removes the fuel for a dominant or oppositional reading of the text (Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

A dominant reading of *The Boondocks* Animated Series would suggest that the show offers few differences to the other adult-oriented programming that compliments it on the Adult Swim programming block. Moreover, an oppositional reading of *The Boondocks* Animated Series would argue that the series perpetuates negative stereotypes, language, and a pervasive lack of reverence for the cultural and sociopolitical state of black America. By offering a series of chapters, this study offers a theoretical balance between the stated aims of Aaron McGruder, the stated aims of Adult Swim and Cartoon Network personnel, and the actual content of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' forty-five existing episodes (Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The first three seasons of *The Boondocks* aired between early 2005 and late 2010. During this half-decade span, *The Boondocks* Comic Strip creator Aaron McGruder obsessively lorded over the production of each episode through collaboration with the actors, animators, producers and writers across a forty-five episode tenure. Episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series premiered on the Adult Swim programming block in three fifteen episode seasons. While the first season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series was aired within weeks of the successful pilot, subsequent seasons of the series frequently faced production woes and air date delays that led to a two year gap before *The Boondocks* Animated Series' second season, followed by a three-year gap prior to the emergence of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' third season (Braxton, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series were released by Sony Home Entertainment and remained in print between 2007 and 2014. All home video releases of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons excise the content censorship incorporated to meet FCC regulations and TV-MA ratings constraints. Moreover, the second season DVD set included episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series that remain banned from the Cartoon Network almost a decade after their initial production (Jones & McGruder, 2005, 2014).

Standalone copies of the first three seasons remain available for sale. Copies of the respective 2007, 2009 and 2011 releases remain available in mass retail outlets (Jones & McGruder, 2007, 2009, 2011). Sony Home Entertainment ceased production of the individual seasons with the release of a comprehensive volume in 2014 (Jones, 2014). The present edition of *The Boondocks* Animated Series available on home video is

available on DVD in a four-season format, forcing fans of the first three seasons to pay a premium price for episodes that were disavowed by the audience, who viewed the series as the singular creative vision of *The Boondocks* franchise creator Aaron McGruder.

Despite production cessation of the original three individual seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, Sony Home Entertainment released a fourth season standalone set in an effort to allure the show's original television audience with the promise of uncensored episode content. Just as the 2009 release of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' second season saw a peak in DVD sales due to the inclusion of two banned episodes, the 2014 release of *The Boondocks* Animated Series Season 04 paled in comparison to the home video sales of the 2005-2011 episodes produced under Aaron McGruder (Jones, 2014; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The Sony Home Entertainment DVD sets of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' forty-five episode, 2005-2011 series arc present uncensored versions of the episodes. Each episode which was censored for explicit language, sexual content and (to a lesser extent) violence upon premiere on Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block. Sony Home Entertainment's three initial releases of *The Boondocks* Animated Series restore content that was censored from episode premieres due to FCC regulations. Upon viewing the uncensored episodes, it seems that each censored episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series was designed with eventual home video sales in mind. In a 2008 interview with Evan Jacobs, McGruder cited DVD sales of *Chappelle's Show*, which employed the same strategy of uncensored content and garnered unparalleled sales success (Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Rabin, 2008).

The season-based home video releases for *The Boondocks Animated Series* on DVD also offer uncensored versions of the show, thus allowing a reading of the series that coincides directly with the artists' original vision for each episode. This study is the first that will offer a negotiated reading of the uncensored episodes, along with the first attempt to decipher the show's encoded messages and narrative conventions. In response to the brevity of present scholarship on *The Boondocks*, the completed version of this study will serve as a much deeper guide to the show's myriad references to popular culture and black history (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

McGruder's collaboration with DVD special features, while plentiful in the 2007 first season, was entirely absent from the season three and season four home video releases of *The Boondocks Animated Series*. Carl Jones, McGruder's co-producer on *The Boondocks Animated Series*, contributed generously to the special features of all four seasons in tandem with voice actors and writers who worked under McGruder between 2005 and 2011. Unsurprisingly, McGruder's response to the fourth season of *The Boondocks Animated Series* was entirely discarded from the home special features, as was the skepticism towards *The Boondocks Animated Series* that was mounting within McGruder during the show's early 2014 release. As with the actual episode content contained within these chapters, *The Boondocks Animated Series* fourth season special features are not considered within the scope of this study (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Jones, 2014).

In all five of the ensuing encoding strategy implementation analyses that comprise this study, consistent emphasis is placed upon a five-point recurring character spectrum that is frequently yet meticulously incorporated in tandem with McGruder's

implementation of denoted audience assimilation strategies in the first three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series*. The five-point spectrum reflects McGruder's critical dialogue as stressed in episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, ranging from Uncle Ruckus as a caricature and controversy safeguard to Huey Freeman as an impossibly optimistic resurgence of black intellectualism that evokes a yearning for the 1980s-1990s peak of the Afrocentrism movement in the United States (Asante, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Uncle Ruckus serves as the primary antagonist throughout McGruder's forty-five episode production tenure on *The Boondocks Animated Series*. Although Uncle Ruckus quickly became an Adult Swim audience favorite due to his envelope-pushing explicit content incorporation, the additional recurring character proved to be one of the most controversial additions to the recurring lineup incorporated from *The Boondocks Comic Strip*. Uncle Ruckus was voiced by Gary Anthony Williams, who McGruder cited as “the only actor capable of conveying warmth while reading Uncle Ruckus' self-loathing dialogue.” (Basile, 2005; Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004).

Uncle Ruckus' use of racial epithets transcended the content of *The Boondocks Comic Strip* through free use of language afforded by the TV-MA rating. Explicit racialized language is one of the predominant character traits of Uncle Ruckus, who strips all endearment from his linguistic incorporation of racial epithets in exchanges with other black characters marginalized within the Woodcrest suburb (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The TV-MA rating directly facilitated incorporation of Uncle Ruckus' potentially controversial character traits into the character spectrum of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Jones & McGruder, 2005). McGruder attempted a brief, concurrent introduction

of Uncle Ruckus in early 2006 runs of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip. Unlike the other four recurring characters in *The Boondocks* Animated Series recurring character spectrum, each of whom were designed specifically for daily strip syndication, Uncle Ruckus stood in stark contrast to the confines of daily cartoon strip content. Moreover, audiences developed expectations in terms of Uncle Ruckus' behavior from *The Boondocks* Animated Series; a sanitized counter-current in *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, according to McGruder, would feel muddled and despondent from developments in *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Basile, 2005; Jacobs, 2008; McGruder, 1996-2006; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

A Dominant/Preferred reading of Uncle Ruckus' recurrences in *The Boondocks* Animated Series would suggest, as McGruder claims in interviews, that the audience appeal of Uncle Ruckus is his relatability. In a 2004 interview with *The New Yorker*, McGruder described the template for Uncle Ruckus as an unprecedentedly self-loathing black character; in McGruder's words, "we all know someone exactly like Uncle Ruckus" (Basile, 2005; Jacobs, 2008; McGrath, 2004; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

An Oppositional Reading of Uncle Ruckus would suggest that the character's vapid reliance on TV-MA convention incorporation ceases to be a satirized conceptualization of prejudice, but instead becomes a groundbreaking ethnic antagonist who pervasively crosses content barriers that were firmly solidified across *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's sole decade of production. Uncle Ruckus embraces his antagonist role by demeaning higher characters within the five-point representation spectrum, which generated a great deal of controversy from longtime fans of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip and audiences who were newly familiar to *The Boondocks*

Animated Series (Basile, 2005; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996).

From “The Garden Party” pilot of *The Boondocks* Animated Series in October 2005 through the season three finale in early 2011, “It's Goin' Down,” Uncle Ruckus represented the embodiment of negative black stereotypes presented as a highly satirized caricature within the recurring character spectrum of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Ruckus works a variety of jobs throughout Woodcrest, facilitating his regular clashes with the Freeman and Dubois families throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Barnes & McGruder, 2005; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Uncle Ruckus is situated as a featured recurring character in episodes across all three seasons of McGruder's 2005-2011 production tenure on *The Boondocks* Animated Series. While the first season introduced Uncle Ruckus to an uncertain public, the second and third seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series offered Uncle Ruckus centered episodes that often experimented with content and thematic constraints that transcended the narrative limitations of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Riley Freeman, the eight-year-old grandson of Robert Freeman and younger sibling of ten-year-old Huey Freeman, comprises the second-to-lowest point within McGruder's recurring character spectrum. Riley incorporates a pervasively negative sense of cultural, ethnic, political and social ambivalence that seems fueled by the media effects savvy encoding of consumerism as perpetuated through Woodcrest. Although Riley is a negative example in many cases, he rarely feels like a raw caricature of self-loathing in the tradition of the spectrum's figurative zero-point, the impossible Uncle Ruckus (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Riley Freeman is depicted in *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first forty-five episodes as a product of mass culture; ambivalent in cultural, ethnic, political or social aspects, Riley represents a satirized worst case scenario for the powerful media effects scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s (Banduras, 1973; Gerbner, 1969). Riley Freeman's continually unsupervised mass media ingestion is played to frequent comedic effect in episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series*. In episodes across all three seasons, Riley Freeman ingests and responds to a highly inappropriate diet of purportedly negative representation of cultural, ethnic, political and social circumstances through a vapid torrent of exposure to adult oriented film, music, television and video games. Antithetical to his older brother, Huey Freeman, eight-year-old Riley Freeman remains highly intelligent yet uses his assets for contradictory aims (also incorporated for comedic effect) (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series* like "Riley Wuz Here," "Let's Nab Oprah," "The Fundraiser," "The Story of Gangstacious (Parts I-II)" and "The Story of Thugnificent," Riley demonstrates a considerably higher degree of intelligence than his adult cohorts. Unlike Huey's reverence for prior eras of black activism, Riley's lack of faith in the gains of prior black activism movements. Riley perpetually acts upon self-gratifying aims, though his worldview is bound by the limitations of mass culture through susceptibility to mass media influence (Barnes & McGruder, 2005, 2006; McGruder & Taylor, 2008; McGruder, 2010).

Throughout the first forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, Riley Freeman lacks the narrative context of his older brother, Huey Freeman. Riley's actions in the first three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series* are the product of

contemporary mass culture influence. Riley feels that he is in constant competition with various aspects of Woodcrest society, a trait often incorporated to comedic effect in *The Boondocks* Animated Series episodes. Riley's affiliation with white Woodcrest war veterans Ed Wuncler III (voiced by *Chappelle's Show* anchor Charlie Murphy) and Gin Rummy (voiced by mass culture cinema bastion Samuel L. Jackson), with whom interaction inevitably involves criminal activity. Riley has no interest in self-improvement or societal progress beyond the present, forcing the young protagonist into the low end of McGruder's recurring character spectrum (Chappelle, 2002; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Tom Dubois represents the Woodcrest black minority, as the Dubois family lives next door to the Freeman's as a reflection of contemporary segregation that still permeates all aspects of suburban society. Named after the titular character from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and early twentieth century black leader W.E.B. Dubois, Tom lives up to the naive white assimilation of his namesake with little consideration to the scathing critical perspective on contemporary culture, ethnicity, politics and society employed by Robert Freeman or Huey Freeman, the two highest points in McGruder's recurring character spectrum (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

One example of Tom Dubois' naivety recurs in two episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, "A Date with the Health Inspector" and "A Date with the Booty Warrior." Tom maintains a consistent fear of prison rape, perpetuated by exposure to programs like MSNBC's prison-based reality television programming. Tom Dubois sees no irony serving as an Assistant District Attorney in Woodcrest, as it never seems to occur to Tom that he has a hand in consigning other black Americans to the same

incarcerated fate that plagues his deepest fears (Barnes & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 2010).

Another example of Tom Dubois' naivety is evident through *The Boondocks Animated Series'* depictions of his relationship to his wife, Sara Dubois. Working as a Woodcrest stay-at-home mother, Sara is a young, blonde, white liberal who often engages in vapid political activism. The daughter of Tom and Sara Dubois, Jazmine Dubois, is a perpetually confused child with serious identity issues in terms of the same cultural, ethnic, political and social perspectives that her hyper liberal parents struggle to shield her from (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

An example of Tom's naive approach to marriage and compromise is evident in the second season's second episode, "Tom, Sara and Usher." Moreover, *The Boondocks Animated Series'* best example of Jazmine Dubois' naivety is reflected through the character's belief in Santa Claus. Jazmine Dubois' belief in the mythological construct is incorporated as an intentionally comedic contrast to Riley and Huey Freeman's respectively materialistic and jaded perspectives on adjusting to Christmas in Woodcrest, as opposed to their native Chicago (Barnes & McGruder, 2007; McGruder, 2005).

Tom Dubois was introduced into the second episode of *The Boondocks Animated Series'* first season, "The Trial of Robert Kelly," as a recurring character. The episode chronicles the Woodcrest Assistant District Attorney's loss against R. Kelly's celebrity attorney, who cites R. Kelly's NAACP Image Award and the ethnicity of Tom Dubois' wife as the supposed rationale behind Kelly's innocent actions framed within the racist social hierarchy of Woodcrest. Often depicted in tandem with Sara and Jazmine, Tom subsequently appears in twenty-two episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series*,

roughly half of the 2005-2011, three season sample examined throughout this study (Barnes & McGruder, 2005).

Robert Freeman represents a higher point in McGruder's recurring character spectrum than Uncle Ruckus, Riley Freeman or Tom Dubois. By the same token, Robert's representation of black contemporary culture represents the legacy of black activism in prior eras. As a World War II veteran and participant in the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Robert moves to Woodcrest at the start of *The Boondocks* Animated Series in hopes of enjoying a retirement surrounded by the creature comforts that remained out of reach in prior eras (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

After a life of hard work, Robert seeks the creature comforts of contemporary suburbia with his grandsons, Huey and Riley Freeman. *The Boondocks* Animated Series episodes often incorporate Robert's feelings of alienation from mass culture as a disappointed outcome of his activism in prior eras. Robert shares a similar degree of frustration with contemporary cultural, ethnic, political and social developments to that of Huey Freeman, the highest point in McGruder's representation spectrum. Robert's forays into dating and leisurely retirement are often juxtaposed with Robert's alienation from mass culture to great comedic effect within *The Boondocks* Animated Series episode narratives (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Huey Freeman represents the highest point in McGruder's recurring character spectrum. Named after Black Panther Party founder Huey Newton, Huey was created by McGruder as a ten-year-old embodiment of critical frustration with cultural, ethnic, political and social considerations amidst the waning popularity of the Afrocentrism movement. Throughout his three seasons as a recurring character in *The Boondocks*

Animated Series, Huey consistently seeks to understand a world of vapid contemporary mass culture in which he feels woefully out of place. Differences between Huey Freeman and his eight-year-old younger sibling, Riley Freeman, are often contrasted for comedic effect throughout McGruder's forty-five episode production tenure on *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

As the show's three seasons often lacked narrative threads or traditional season arcs, this study employs a thematic observation of the show through a series of five thematically organized chapters. The five encoded themes of *The Boondocks Animated Series* included in these chapters are organized in the following manner: (1) incorporation of stereotypes to facilitate audience accessibility, (2) incorporation of shock humor to facilitate audience accessibility, (3) incorporation of mass media satire to facilitate audience accessibility, (4) incorporation of historical references to facilitate audience accessibility, and (5) incorporation of cultural references to facilitate audience accessibility (Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In each of these five sub-studies, a negotiated reading of the series' forty-five existing episodes pertains to a different aspect of the series' textual encoding as a means of rendering the show's messages and political undertones accessible for the Adult Swim audience and the Adult Swim target demographic. In each of these five sub-studies, a negotiated reading of the series' forty-five existing episodes pertains to a different aspect of the series' textual encoding as a means of rendering the show's messages and political undertones accessible for the Cartoon Network audience and the specific younger demographic of the late-night Adult Swim programming block (Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The subsequent Negotiated Readings that comprise this broad study examine encoding strategies incorporated by franchise creator Aaron McGruder into *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons, which were aired on Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block in thirteen-to-fifteen episode increments between 2005 and 2011. Specifically, each of the five chapters in this collection focuses on a specific encoding strategy incorporated into *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Rather than refuting the existing body of qualitative scholarship pertaining to *The Boondocks* Animated Series, this examination of encoding strategies within the first three seasons addresses five specific, perceived lapses in existing readings of the 2005-2011 text. This collection deconstructs *The Boondocks* Animated Series to expose five encoding strategies employed by Aaron McGruder through production financed by Sony Television Entertainment and distributed by the Cartoon Network through the Adult Swim programming block (Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The Prologue and Epilogue of this study situate this analysis collection within the personal and professional context of creator Aaron McGruder's creative vision for *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Through examination of McGruder's extensive promotion and animation-oriented panel framing during UPS syndication, the Prologue offers an examination of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip as a launching pad for McGruder's 2005 pilot premiere. The first Negotiated Reading examines stereotype incorporation as a narrative device and a vehicle for McGruder's message-based cultural, ethnic, political and social commentary. The second Negotiated Reading examines incorporation of two humor approaches, satire and shock humor, as defined on an operative basis through McGruder's 1999-2013 interviews. Negotiated Reading Three observes *The Boondocks* Animated

Series' incorporation of mass media theory as an encoding strategy to facilitate audience assimilation within the Adult Swim viewership. The final two Negotiated Readings that comprise the remainder of this study examine *The Boondocks* Animated Series' respective incorporation of (4) popular culture references and (5) references to historical events (Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

Due to *The Boondocks* Animated Series' long-standing history with delays and erratic scheduling on Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block during the show's first three seasons, each negotiated reading in this study explores a specific theme within the forty-five available episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series with regard to two specific platforms: (1) production level denotation to dissuade controversy over potentially sensitive episode content and (2) the show's efforts to bolster accessibility for the young target demographic of Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

McGruder's creative vision is depicted through concise summaries of the show runner's remarks on corresponding topics in 1999-2013 interviews. McGruder's interviews offer additional insight into his singular creative vision for *The Boondocks* Animated Series, along with the personal and professional circumstances that surrounded his six-year tenure at the head of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. The show's efforts to bolster accessibility are substantiated through specific examples of strategy incorporation throughout the first forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series.

Each of the ensuing Negotiated Readings that comprise this study directly cite McGruder's 1999-2013 interviews to provide contextually relevant, production level insight into McGruder's incorporation of encoding strategies with audience assimilation

in mind. These interviews respectively offer the subsequent chapters a heightened consciousness of McGruder's creative intentions for each respective episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Bach, 2007; Basile, 2005; Braxton, 2007; Cavna, 2008; Farici, 2001; Jacobs, 2008; Lemons, 2001; McGrath, 2004; Phipps, 1999; Rabin, 2005; Scocca, 2000).

As incorporated in the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (2005-2011), McGruder's recurring character spectrum relates to the highest to lowest quality of cultural, ethnic, political and social representation in contemporary black culture. The spectrum is continually reinforced throughout the forty-five episodes incorporated through rampant stereotypes. From top to bottom, the five-point spectrum is comprised of Huey Freeman, Robert Freeman, Tom Dubois, Riley Freeman and Uncle Ruckus. McGruder's five-point representation spectrum acts as a common bond, intrinsically linking this analysis of stereotype incorporation to the subsequent four chapters in this collection (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Within the five-point representation spectrum, character analysis is combined with a negotiated reading of creator Aaron McGruder's atypically forceful incorporation of a five-point representation hierarchy in *The Boondocks* Animated Series' stereotype incorporation. The subsequent readings in this study consider this study within the context of stereotype incorporation in allusion to four other predominant encoding strategies: Humor Incorporation, Media Usage Assimilation, Popular Culture Reference Incorporation and Historical Reference Incorporation. This study provides essential context on *The Boondocks* Animated Series' substitution of character development for stereotype incorporation to further facilitate audience accessibility and a purportedly

positive response among the niche demographic of Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block (Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

To facilitate readership for new and old viewers of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, three concise appendices will be included after the References section of this study. All three appendices are designed for reader consultation, as opposed to deciphering the show's encoded themes without a veritable 'guide' to the complex denotation of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three episodes. The guide's incorporation into this study serves two purposes; (1) establishment of context for entry-level readers and (2) exhaustive deconstruction of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' exhaustive encoding strategy incorporation and referential lexicon (popular and historical) designed to facilitate satellite studies in ensuing years. All three appendices are included sequentially at the conclusion of this study, following the subsequent chapters described within this methodology (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The study's first appendix offers an index of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first forty-five episodes. The appendix offers the title, premiere date, premiere sequence, production number, and the official Adult Swim production synopsis for each episodes, separated by season. The first appendix also incorporates user-based audience reception data for *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons. The differences between production numbers and premiere sequence is of particular interest, as it reflects delays to the intended production order with episode topics that fielded potentially controversial themes (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The study's second appendix offers an index of primary characters, secondary characters and celebrity caricatures who appear throughout *The Boondocks* Animated

Series. The second appendix facilitates readability of the five chapters contained in this broad study. The complexity of the show's referential lexicon and staggering number of secondary characters necessitates the inclusion of the second appendix in this study (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The third appendix offers an index of popular culture references in *The Boondocks* Animated Series. The third appendix offers a convenient reference point for Negotiated Reading 4 (Popular Culture Reference Incorporation) and Negotiated Reading 5 (Historical Reference Incorporation). References are organized into several broad categories, including history, film, literature, music and television. The third appendix lists cumulative references from the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

This study offers appendices as a generous starting point for audiences who aspire to develop subsequent critical readings of *The Boondocks* Animated Series which include the series' fourth season devolution into trite, kitsch-based incorporation of encoding strategies alluded to throughout this study. The following chapters of encoding strategies in *The Boondocks* Animated Series focus predominantly on the series' efforts to increase audience saliency through incorporation of five encoding strategies that recur throughout the forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series produced between 2005 and 2011.

CHAPTER V

PROLOGUE

This Prologue imbues the following chapters with a contextually pertinent explanation of Aaron McGruder's professed sociopolitical sensibilities. Moreover, this Prologue conveys the production history, encoded intentions, and concurrent personal and professional histories of series show runner Aaron McGruder. The Prologue focuses on McGruder's personal efforts to explore the respective limitations of the comic strip and animated format. The forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series present McGruder's creative vision and cultural, political and social responsibilities between 2005 and 2011 (Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Throughout *The Boondocks* Animated Series' three seasons, McGruder often used individual episodes of the series as a figurative 'soapbox' for his views on the state of contemporary black culture. Due to the narrative and ideological complexity of each half-hour episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, a brief exploration of McGruder's personal and professional life is a quintessential component of the large study (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Aaron McGruder was born in Chicago, IL in 1974 (McGrath, 2004). He was the second son of young, blue-collar black parents. Between 1974 and 1980, McGruder developed a lifelong sentimental attachment to his original South Side Chicago home (McGrath, 2004; Scocca, 2000). When McGruder was six, his parents accepted job offers in Maine and promptly whisked Aaron away from his childhood friends (McGrath, 2004). Financial conditions improved for McGruder's parents after the move, so the family moved to a newly developed suburb in Columbia, ME. The McGruder family's

1980 shift from a predominantly black society in South Side Chicago to a prosperous, predominantly white Maine suburb was the first of many seeds that fueled Aaron McGruder's creative vision for *The Boondocks* (ScoCCA, 2000).

Despite the improvement in material conditions, Aaron McGruder felt increasingly isolated from the residents of Columbia, ME throughout his late childhood and early adolescence (ScoCCA, 2000). As an effort to improve the quality of Aaron's education, Aaron's parents enrolled him in elementary and junior high classes at a privately funded Jesuit School (McGrath, 2004). During his Jesuit School days, McGruder grew increasingly frustrated with the complete lack of black cultural representation that surfaced within the suburb's predominantly white society.

Throughout his 1970s-1980s upbringing, McGruder's home life lacked dialogue on contemporary black cultural, ethnic, political and social concerns. Although McGruder's parents benefited from employment benefits of the Nixon era's Affirmative Action and Black Capitalism programs, they felt increasingly disjointed from the state of 1980s and 1990s representations of black identity, particularly as depicted through the overbearing exposure to mass culture that permeated their predominantly white Maine suburb. This sense of frustration is echoed throughout *The Boondocks*, as Robert Freeman employed similar motivations as the impetus for the family's move from Chicago, Illinois to Woodcrest, Maryland (Braxton, 2007; McGrath, 2004).

McGruder's Jesuit School elementary and junior high school experiences left the young creator of *The Boondocks* franchise disenchanted with a perceived rift between mass culture's frequently perpetuated representation of black identity and his own desire to identify as an ambitious, intelligent, outspoken student. McGruder's own frustrations

with Jesuit School are echoed in *The Boondocks* through forced adjustment to Woodcrest's "J. Edgar Hoover High School," named after the F.B.I. Director who used COINTELPRO intelligence to assassinate, imprison or neutralize black activists in the 1960s-1970s. Despite being surrounded by improved material conditions, McGruder felt displaced as a black youth within the predominantly white culture of Woodcrest, ME (ScoCCA, 2000). The urban environment of McGruder's Chicago upbringing nestled McGruder firmly within the cultural grasp of Chicago's rich black-oriented culture. After completion of Jesuit School, McGruder's parents allowed him to enroll in a public high school in the early 1990s. The shift brought Aaron into regular contact with other black Columbia residents his age. McGruder's public high school experiences were quintessential components of the cultural, political and social frustrations depicted through the Freeman protagonists in *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The cultural epoch that coincided with McGruder's high school years directly fueled the tone, scope and presentation of *The Boondocks*. The peak of the Afrocentrism movement brought an array of black talent in American entertainment that permeated film, music and television. For the first time since the family's move to Maine, McGruder felt imbued with a sense of camaraderie and social relevance. In a stark reversal of his Jesuit School isolation, McGruder quickly gained popularity among an ethnically diverse group of students in a public setting (Bach, 2007; Basile, 2005; Jacobs, 2008; McGrath, 2004).

At cursory glance, McGruder's personal life suggests a number of parallels with the narrative origins of the Freeman family, the tripartite protagonists at the center of *The*

Boondocks. The Freeman family functions as a makeshift prism; a trifecta that offers McGruder a meticulous structure for denotation of complex messages and themes. The three-tiered protagonist core of *The Boondocks* facilitates dialogue through contrasting viewpoints that permeate the text's scathing indictment of contemporary malaise amidst the inevitable rise of mass culture.

The Boondocks Comic Strip debuted in a 1996 issue of “The Diamondback,” the student newspaper at the University of Maryland. The strip was discovered by “Diamondback” editor Jayson Blair, whom later gained a level of infamy for reporting false or misappropriated information in a subsequent *New York Times* scandal. Although McGruder remained faithful to his original creative vision for *The Boondocks*, the satirist gained a comparable level of notoriety through negative press campaigns and controversy that *The Boondocks* faced at the audience and editor levels. The groundbreaking content of *The Boondocks* rapidly generated audience and editor-level controversy for opposite reasons than Jayson Blair's falsified reporting. McGruder and *The Boondocks*, by contrast, rapidly gained a sordid reputation for brutal honesty and uncompromising, scathing satire of McGruder's own social, political and cultural frustrations (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

When he began his studies at the University of Maryland, Aaron McGruder acted on the impetus imparted to him through the vehicles of early 1990s Afrocentrism and Hip Hop Culture. During a brief tenure as a disc jockey on campus radio, McGruder grew increasingly interested in the critical commentary platform afforded to writers for *The Diamondback*, University of Maryland's student newspaper. McGruder launched the *Diamondback* inception of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip in 1996. Although McGruder

understood the power of comic strips as vehicles for message delivery, the initial inception of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip functioned as a platform for critical commentary of cultural, political and social conditions through the guise of black identity. The *Diamondback* material developed such a strong following that it facilitated the improvement in the paper's popularity among students and local Maryland residents of varying ethnicities (McGruder, 1996).

McGruder's fifteen-year odyssey through print and broadcast media began in 1996. As the *Diamondback* incarnation of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip grew popular among audiences, the narrative and thematic content increasingly reflected McGruder's coursework in Critical Race Theory. In *The Boondocks*, McGruder found an opportunity to reach a wide audience through a channel with little-to-no external creative input. McGruder submitted a portfolio to *The Source*, a popular Hip Hop magazine, in 1997. Between 1997 and 1999, McGruder continually produced *The Boondocks* Comic Strip for *The Diamondback* and *The Source* while completing his education at the University of Maryland (Braxton, 2007; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996).

Aaron McGruder focused heavily on media representation of black identity in his course selections at the University of Maryland. In 1999, he completed his bachelor's degree African American Studies from the University of Maryland. McGruder's Senior Project at the University of Maryland was a finely tuned professional portfolio. The portfolio sample of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip became a quintessential component of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's eventual success, particularly as it piqued interest in national print syndication to the widest potential audience available (Basile, 2005; Braxton, 2007; McGrath, 2004).

The Boondocks Comic Strip was designed by McGruder as a response to a perceived representation void in American entertainment: more specifically, he sought to develop a recurring cartoon strip that featured predominantly black characters while maintaining an aesthetic and humor that facilitated multi-ethnic appeal. Prior to UPS syndication of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, the only other widely syndicated daily cartoon with predominantly black characters was *Little People*, which debuted alongside Charles Schultz's first black *Peanuts* character, Franklin, in the summer of 1968 (McGrath, 2004). McGruder sought to imbue *The Boondocks* Comic Strip with the same level of artistic integrity that fueled the creative height of film, music and television that fueled the relics of McGruder's early 1990s high school years (McGruder, 1996).

Throughout his final year at UMD, McGruder submitted a meticulously curated portfolio of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip to several press syndicates. As he explained in an early interview, McGruder's professional prospects were based entirely upon increasing audience interest in *The Boondocks* Comic Strip. According to McGruder, his initial dedication to *The Boondocks* Comic Strip as a professional satirist was out of an effort to secure employment (Phipps, 1999; Scocca, 2000).

McGruder returned home to Columbia between 1999 and 2002. Adhering to a longtime preference of working alone, the satirist produced *The Boondocks* Comic Strip from the suburban seclusion of his parents' basement (Braxton, 2007; McGrath, 2004). Within three years, McGruder upgraded from a workshop in his parents' basement into a studio apartment in central Los Angeles. McGruder moved to California to personally oversee interview-based promotion of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (McGruder, 1996).

Throughout McGruder's extensive promotion of the comic strip, he remained dedicated to pitches for *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In 1999, Universal Press Syndicate (UPS) contacted McGruder with a formal offer to expand *The Boondocks* Comic Strip to a nationwide audience. UPS was impressed by McGruder's portfolio material and further impressed by audience reception; as an undergraduate college student, McGruder's property had already developed national acclaim through *The Source* syndication (Braxton, 2007; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996; Phipps, 1999).

McGruder was humbled by and respectful of the audience afforded by UPS syndication. Despite his increasing success as a daily cartoonist. In a 2001 interview with Devin Farici, McGruder elaborated on his broad vision for *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, which differed from *The Boondocks* Animated Series in a number of noteworthy ways (Farici, 2001).

In 1999-2000 interviews, McGruder emphasizes maintenance of artistic integrity as one of the highest priorities for *The Boondocks* Comic Strip. In a number of interviews, McGruder cited *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's two-to-four panel format as one of the most stressful aspects of life as a daily cartoonist. Due to the constantly encroaching deadlines, McGruder's efforts as artist on *The Boondocks* Comic Strip was around sixty percent slower than the average production cycle for a daily cartoon. As McGruder mentioned in a 2004 *New Yorker* interview, his output rarely moved in tandem with syndication deadlines enforced by UPS (Farici, 2001; Lemons, 2001; McGruder, 1996; Phipps, 1999; Scocca, 2000).

As surmised by McGruder in a 2000 interview, black identity politics comprised the originally intended scope of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip. An ongoing dialogue on the nature of black identity in contemporary society fueled the strip's earliest printed inceptions, fueling *The Diamondback* and *The Source* with a bold, unapologetic dialogue on the fractured conceptualization of post-Afrocentric black identity in the late 1990s.

In *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's original format, McGruder used dialogue between recurring characters as a platform to discuss Afrocentric identity politics. While producing *The Boondocks* Comic Strip amidst a late 1990s circulation increase, McGruder embraced the daily strip to facilitate a critical dialogue on various facets of the contemporary black American experience (Farici, 2001; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004; Scocca, 2000).

In terms of thematic content, 1996-2001 *The Boondocks* Comic Strip strips remained thematically relegated to internal and external conceptualization of black identity. While *The Boondocks* Animated Series focused on respective protagonist / antagonist tinged rivalries between Huey Freeman/Riley Freeman and Robert Freeman / Uncle Ruckus, the early years of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip focused on a sweet natured relationship between Huey Freeman and his new Woodcrest neighbor, Jazmine Dubois. The comic strip often played on the disconnect between Huey's ostentatiously outspoken sense of black pride and Jazmine's racial confusion, instilled by perpetually her perpetually flawed and ethnically diverse parents, black Assistant District Attorney Thomas Dubois and his white philanthropist housewife, Jazmine Dubois (Farici, 2001; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004; Scocca, 2000).

As 2001 rolled to a close, *The Boondocks* Comic Strip was entering its' third year of successful national newspaper syndication through UPS. Amidst the constant deadlines and disconnect from the average reader base for American newspapers, McGruder found himself plagued with a surplus of writer's block attributable to a drought in creative inspiration (Lemons, 2001; McGrath, 2004). Creative inspiration and the path to *The Boondocks* Animated Series' audience accessibility laid within McGruder's treatment of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (Lemons, 2001; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996).

McGruder's unprecedentedly successful syndication launch of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip forced him to adjust his creative vision to meet audience expectations for the first time. Two years into the strip's UPS syndication, McGruder shifted *The Boondocks* Comic Strip in response to purportedly disturbing commodification of nationalist iconography in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The strip abandoned the original Huey Freeman / Jazmine Dubois dichotomy and shifted focus to a dual character study between ten-year-old Huey Freeman and his eight-year-old younger brother, Riley Freeman (Braxton, 2007; Lemons, 2001; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996).

From late September 2001 forward, *The Boondocks* Comic Strip shifted from an introspective critical mediation on black identity politics to a scathing satire fueled by McGruder's increasingly seething animosity towards hegemonic domestic institutions and the media outlets that correspondingly endorse them through under-handed, racialized encoding across a spectrum of mediums. In a 2001 interview with Thomas Lemmons of *Salon*, McGruder claims that the shift to audaciously stated satirization of cultural, ethnic,

political and social quandaries in the post-September 11th era effectively saved *The Boondocks* Comic Strip by imbuing it with a sense of multi-ethnic appeal (Lemons, 2001; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996).

With its' staunch focus on the Huey/Jazmine ethnic identity dynamic, *The Boondocks* Comic Strip maintained an Afrocentric focus on self-discovery, self-improvement and collective black progress between 1999 and 2001. As the United States prepared for dual campaign in Iraq and Afghanistan, *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's September 2001-May 2006 output comprised the first incorporation of a tremendously successful innovation: depiction of supposed minority opinion as assumed majority opinion within *The Boondocks* Comic Strip reader base. Between 2001 and 2006, *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's evocation of hegemonic disdain and frustration, in tandem with exposure of coincidental, quasi-conspiratorial mass media representation atrocities, brought continued record-shattering syndication numbers for UPS syndication of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip while serving to facilitate McGruder's broad agenda: an adaptation of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip in a rival medium with loosened content constraints (Braxton, 2007; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996; Phipps, 1999; Scocca, 2000).

Although McGruder continually expressed frustration with artistic production of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, the satirist expressed tremendous satisfaction with the artwork in *The Boondocks* Animated Series. According to McGruder, the series' unique demands were incorporated to facilitate audience accessibility of *The Boondocks* Animated Series through the sheer quality and detail of its' hand-drawn artwork (McGruder, 1996; Phipps, 1999; Scocca, 2000).

As *The Boondocks* Comic Strip grew in popularity, McGruder found that his strip ideas were consistently stretching the limit of his own artistic abilities (McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996). As *Doonesbury* creator Gary Trudeau noted, *The Boondocks* Comic Strip started recycling artistic assets (such as backgrounds or character designs) less than a year into McGruder's syndication deal with UPS (McGrath, 2004). As McGruder asserted himself, he felt that his writing abilities far exceeded his sketching skills. Hospitalization for stress related illness and constantly encroaching deadlines forced McGruder to employ external artists in an effort to expedite the production cycle (McGrath, 2004).

In late 2003, McGruder relinquished *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's artistic responsibilities to Jennifer Cheng, a sketch artist chosen by McGruder and approved by UPS (Braxton, 2007; McGrath, 2004). McGruder's focus remained on writing as *The Boondocks* Comic Strip found success within a new medium and format. Throughout McGruder's three seasons on *The Boondocks* Animated Series (2005-2011), he left the series' artistic development to Adult Swim producer Carl Jones (*The Boondocks*, *Black Dynamite*) and South Korean animation producer Song-Yoon Kim. McGruder collaborated with Cheng, Jones and Kim with creative input and compromised as production deadlines approached (McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996).

Between 1999 and 2005, McGruder's enthusiasm towards life as a daily cartoonist waned as his interest in promoting *The Boondocks* Animated Series on United States television increased. After a decade of work on *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, McGruder sought to expand into a new format that afforded a potentially wider, younger audience through the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block. The three seasons of

The Boondocks Animated Series that ensued maintained the assault on mass culture's perpetuation of perceived anti-intellectualism as perceived through McGruder's critical vision (Lemons, 2001; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996; Phipps, 1999; Scocca, 2000).

Throughout the comic strip's tenure, McGruder continually pitched *The Boondocks* as an Animated Series to an array of cable network producers and executives. McGruder was routinely frustrated with the content limitations of the strip's nationally syndicated format, along with the editors' tendencies to ban *The Boondocks* altogether. Prior to working with "Adult Swim," McGruder's prior efforts to pitch *The Boondocks* demanded a regimented format that would confine the show's audacious dialogue through even greater creative restraints (Basile, 2005; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996; Phipps, 1999; Scocca, 2000).

Although *The Boondocks* Animated Series offers the first hand-drawn cable television program featuring a predominantly black cast, the series was preceded by an innovative experiment in stop-motion animation produced by the FOX network amidst the demise of *In Living Color*, *ROC* and *The P.J.'s* amidst waning audience interest . In their 2003-2004 negotiations with Aaron McGruder and Reginald Hudlin, the network rejection of *The Boondocks* Animated Series was likely facilitated by forced adherence to network-savvy content constraints designed to cautiously dissuade controversy among the network's expensive failure with *The P.J.'s*, envisioned as a collaboration with Eddie Murphy. In their 2003-2004 negotiations with Aaron McGruder and Reginald Hudlin, the network rejection of *The Boondocks* Animated Series was likely facilitated by forced adherence to network-savvy content constraints designed to cautiously dissuade controversy among the network's failure with Eddie Murphy across two lengthy seasons

of *The P.J.*'s unprecedentedly expensive production (Daniels, 1991; Gray, 1995; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Murphy, 1996; Wayans, 1990).

As McGruder was attempting to pitch *The Boondocks* as a network production, the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block developed a considerable following through its' consistent marriage of gallows humor, cultural references, and envelope-pushing explicit content. McGruder looked to the Cartoon Network and felt an absence of creative constraints, as he wanted to create something that provoked as audacious of a response as Comedy Central's *South Park* or *Chappelle's Show* did during their respective viewership peaks. As McGruder noted in a 2009 interview, the series' TV-MA rating afforded a lack of creative input from Cartoon Network executives with regard to the content of the series (Bach, 2007; Basile, 2005; Chappelle, 2002; McGruder, 1996; Parker & Stone, 1997).

Although the Cartoon Network offered McGruder a great deal of creative freedom, he discovered a different set of pressures while finishing the series' first season of production (Bach, 2007; Basile, 2005). By leaving the comic strip behind, McGruder was forced to abandon the cultural relevance of a daily syndicated strip. Moreover, he quickly discovered that the production process for *The Boondocks* lasted well over one year for each episode. Despite the sacrifices of the format shift, McGruder decided to end the comic strip in 2006 to focus on the half-hour series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The Afrocentrism movement rose to prominence among African Americans in the 1980s and 1990s. Afrocentrism was conceived as a cultural construct to combat the notion of Pan-Orientalism through micro and macro level analysis of culturally authentic African culture and ideology. Proponents of Afrocentrism claim the movement was

conceived to develop Pan-African culture by accentuating the differences between various cultural, ethnic, political and social considerations (Asante, 1980; Delgado & Stefaniec, 2001; Gray, 1995; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1995).

Between 1996 and 2011, McGruder utilized both daily cartoon strips and a half-hour animated format as a pioneering effort in culturally authentic representation of traditional African culture as a forceful counter-current to the forced hegemonic homogeneity of the African-American cultural construct. In 1999-2001 interviews, McGruder claimed that he hoped *The Boondocks* Comic Strip would inspire similar black artists to create works similar to *The Boondocks* Comic Strip in thematic content, tone and scope across an array of popular mediums laden with sordid histories of misappropriated representation of black culture, ethnicity, history, politics and society (Asante, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996). The legacy of the Afrocentrism movement's 1980s-1990s peak is also evident in the other four characters included in McGruder's recurring character spectrum (Asante, 1980).

Uncle Ruckus functions as a veritable antithesis to Afrocentrism, as his ceaseless sense of self-loathing and lack of ethnic pride are often played to comedic effect, leaving Uncle Ruckus clamoring for a sense of identity as an afterthought to cultural, ethnic, social and political assimilation by the white residents of Woodcrest (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004).

Popular episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series like Season 01's "The Passion of Reverend Ruckus," Season 02's "The Uncle Ruckus Reality Program" or Season 03's "The Story of Jimmy Rebel" and "The Color Ruckus" often turn narrative circumstances against Uncle Ruckus' fundamentally ingrained sense of self-loathing to

exaggerated, comedic effect. Uncle Ruckus' lack of Afrocentric consciousness facilitates *The Boondocks* Animated Series' character's constant search for identity. Ruckus interacts with existing hegemonic structures throughout the forty-five episode sample of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, often as a reflection of the character's own self-loathing (Barnes & McGruder, 2006, 2008; McGruder, 2010).

Riley Freeman has a surface-level fascination with Afrocentrism that reflects a profound disconnect between the eight-year-old Woodcrest residents and a sense of self-worth imbued by African cultural authenticity. Riley Freeman ceaselessly participates in consumerism and mass culture. While Huey Freeman shies away from hegemonic bastions of contemporary mass culture, Riley willfully supports existing hegemonic structures for his own narrow minded consumption and enjoyment (Asante, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

Several McGruder-produced episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (2005-2011) feature Riley as a lead protagonist and narrator. His materialistic, self-serving attitude does not antagonize existing pride in black heritage, making Riley Freeman a much more sympathetic protagonist than the spectrum's intentional zero point. In episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series such as "Ballin'," "Let's Nab Oprah," "Riley Wuz Here," "Shinin'," "The Fundraiser," "The Story of Catcher Freeman," "The Story of Gangstacious (Parts I and II)," "The Story of Thugnificent," "The Trial of Robert Kelly" and "Wingmen," Riley Freeman's self-serving interest fuels the eight-year-old's sense of materialism and affinity for a regressively influential, unsupervised diet of film, music, television and video games (Barnes & McGruder, 2006; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder & Taylor, 2008; McGruder, 2010).

Despite a turbulent prior history of difficulties with *The Boondocks* Animated Series among major networks, Ted Turner's Cartoon Network eventually purchased a season deal from *The Boondocks* Animated Series' parent company, Sony Television Entertainment. Between 2005 and 2011, forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series premiered to a gradually increasing audience of young viewers who watched episodes in late-night Sunday broadcasts on the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block. *The Boondocks* Animated Series' unprecedented production budget, expansive narrative scope and loosened content constraints comprised a successful gamble for the Cartoon Network across McGruder's three season production tenure (Braxton, 2007; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 2005).

In *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's original format, McGruder used dialogue between recurring characters as a platform to discuss Afrocentric identity politics. While producing *The Boondocks* Comic Strip amidst a late 1990s circulation increase, McGruder embraced the daily strip to facilitate a critical dialogue on various facets of the contemporary black American experience (Asante, 1980; Bach, 2007; Farici, 2001; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004; Phipps, 1999; Rabin, 2005; Scocca, 2000).

In terms of thematic content, 1996-2001 *The Boondocks* Comic Strip strips remained thematically relegated to internal and external conceptualization of black identity. While *The Boondocks* Animated Series focused on respective protagonist / antagonist tinged rivalries between Huey Freeman / Riley Freeman and Robert Freeman / Uncle Ruckus, the early years of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip focused on a sweet natured relationship between Huey Freeman and his new Woodcrest neighbor, Jazmine Dubois. The comic strip often played on the disconnect between Huey's ostentatiously outspoken

sense of black pride and Jazmine's racial confusion, instilled by perpetually her perpetually flawed and ethnically diverse parents, black Assistant District Attorney Thomas Dubois and his white philanthropist housewife, Jazmine Dubois (Farici, 2001; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996; Phipps, 1999; Rabin, 2005; Scocca, 2000)..

As 2001 rolled to a close, *The Boondocks* Comic Strip was entering its' third year of successful national newspaper syndication through UPS. Amidst the constant deadlines and disconnect from the average reader base for American newspapers, McGruder found himself plagued with a surplus of writer's block attributable to a drought in creative inspiration (Lemons, 2001; McGrath, 2004). Creative inspiration and the path to *The Boondocks* Animated Series' audience accessibility laid within McGruder's treatment of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (Lemons, 2001; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 2006).

From late September 2001 forward, *The Boondocks* Comic Strip shifted from an introspective critical mediation on black identity politics to a scathing satire fueled by McGruder's increasingly seething animosity towards hegemonic domestic institutions and the media outlets that correspondingly endorse them through under-handed, racialized encoding across a spectrum of mediums. In a 2001 interview with Thomas Lemmons of *Salon*, McGruder claims that the shift to audaciously stated satirization of cultural, ethnic, political and social quandaries in the post-September 11th era effectively saved *The Boondocks* Comic Strip by imbuing it with a sense of mutli-ethnic appeal (Lemons, 2001).

As the United States prepared for dual campaign in Iraq and Afghanistan, *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's September 2001-May 2006 output comprised the first incorporation of a tremendously successful innovation: depiction of supposed minority opinion as assumed majority opinion within *The Boondocks* Comic Strip reader base. Between 2001 and 2006, *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's evocation of hegemonic disdain and frustration, in tandem with exposure of coincidental, quasi-conspiratorial mass media representation atrocities, brought continued record-shattering syndication numbers for UPS syndication of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip while serving to facilitate McGruder's broad agenda: an adaptation of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip in a rival medium with loosened content constraints (Lemons, 2001; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996).

Throughout his 1999-2006 tenure as a daily cartoonist, McGruder worked to market *The Boondocks* Animated Series through pitches to major American television networks. Between 2003 and 2005, McGruder worked with co-producer Reginald Hudlin to develop a pilot for the FOX Network through Sony Television Entertainment. McGruder, Hudlin and FOX executives agreed that the sitcom-esque, formulaic early pilot for *The Boondocks* Animated Series lacked the thematic or artistic scope of McGruder's original vision (Bach, 2007; Basile, 2005; Braxton, 2007; Farici, 2005; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996; Phipps, 1999; Rabin, 2005; Scocca, 2000).

Throughout its nine-year lifespan, McGruder's comic strip was a magnet for controversy that was regularly banned from syndication in local newspapers around the country. Upon observation of the original strips, the rationale behind editors' reluctance to run *The Boondocks* seems jarringly clear. McGruder's comic strip transcended cultural boundaries that had never been approached in prior representations of black culture. As

was the case with the series, McGruder frequently used the strip as a vehicle to air his personal perspective and sociopolitical grievances with contemporary black culture (Farici, 2001; Lemons, 2001; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996; Phipps, 1999; Scocca, 2000).

Throughout the comic strip's tenure, McGruder continually pitched *The Boondocks* as an Animated Series to an array of cable network producers and executives. McGruder was routinely frustrated with the content limitations of the strip's nationally syndicated format, along with the editors' tendencies to ban *The Boondocks* altogether. Prior to working with "Adult Swim," McGruder's prior efforts to pitch *The Boondocks* demanded a regimented format that would confine the show's audacious dialogue through even greater creative restraints (Basile, 2005; Farici, 2001; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996; Phipps, 1999; Rabin, 2005; Scocca, 2000).

Between 2003 and 2004, McGruder focused on pitching *The Boondocks* Animated Series to all five major American television networks (Basile, 2005; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 2007). The FOX network, itself no stranger to adult oriented animation or culturally authentic black comedy, came so close to a production deal for *The Boondocks* Animated Series that Sony Television Entertainment worked with McGruder to produce a network pilot with prime time airing in mind (Braxton, 2007; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996; Phipps, 1999; Rabin 2005).

The Boondocks Animated Series' strict reliance on a recurring character representation spectrum was intended to facilitate implementation of encoding strategies that aimed to facilitate the widest possible viewership among the young demographic of Cartoon Network's late night programming block, Adult Swim (Basile, 2005; Jacobs,

2008; Rabin, 2005). Although *The Boondocks* Animated Series still focused on a spectrum of recurring characters who were unanimously black, loosened creative constraints and the allure of the Adult Swim programming block's young, devoted audience inspired McGruder to employ the five encoding strategies described within the subsequent five chapters that comprise this collection.

As Adult Swim's viral promotion for *The Boondocks* Animated Series' late 2005 pilot circulated among longtime fans of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, many worried that the daily strip's content constraints and constrictive formatting might lose appeal through translation to a half-hour, adult oriented animated program with a TV-MA rating with a marketing campaign that evoked the sensibilities of Comedy Central's gleefully sardonic promotion of *South Park* during Parker and Stone's most critically and commercially successful years (Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996; Parker & Stone, 1997).

As McGruder was attempting to pitch *The Boondocks* as a network production, the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block developed a considerable following through its' consistent marriage of gallows humor, cultural references, and envelope-pushing explicit content. McGruder looked to the Cartoon Network and felt an absence of creative constraints, as he wanted to create something that provoked as audacious of a response as Comedy Central's *South Park* or *Chappelle's Show* did during their respective viewership peaks. As McGruder noted in a 2009 interview, the series' TV-MA rating afforded a lack of creative input from Cartoon Network executives with regard to the content of the series (Braxton, 2007; Chappelle, 2002; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996).

Although the Cartoon Network offered McGruder a great deal of creative freedom, he discovered a different set of pressures while finishing the series' first season of production (Basile, 2005). By leaving the comic strip behind, McGruder was forced to abandon the cultural relevance of a daily syndicated strip. Moreover, he quickly discovered that the production process for *The Boondocks* lasted well over one year for each episode. Despite the sacrifices of the format shift, McGruder decided to end the comic strip in 2006 to focus on the half-hour series (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996; Rabin, 2005).

In a 2005 interview with Donald Rabin, McGruder alluded to a few perceived differences between network and cable television programming. According to McGruder, network programming imbues a heavy set of creative limitations that simply disappear as the audience and advertising revenues correspondingly decrease. According to McGruder, "It's impossible to produce something daring or bold in terms of content with such a regimented structure as that of network programming." McGruder found that advertising revenues dictated content limitations, in lieu of the TV ratings system that the FCC incorporated in the 1990s (Rabin, 2005).

Under the guidance of Sony Television Entertainment, *The Boondocks Animated Series* eventually landed in a late-night time slot for a late 2005 premiere. "Adult Swim," an adult-oriented, animated programming block on the cable-based Cartoon Network, optioned a fifteen-episode initial season of *The Boondocks Animated Series*. As McGruder stated in 2005 interviews, late-night cable afforded much more creative freedom through the TV-MA rating (Rabin, 2005). As stated by McGruder in a 2005 interview with Nancy Basile, "late-night cable is the only place on television where you

can be honest and still have fun!” (Basile, 2005; Braxton, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Despite increasing readership and newspaper syndication of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, McGruder's strip was surprisingly short-lived. The full canon of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip spans from McGruder's 1996 debut in the University of Maryland through the conclusion of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's 350 paper syndication through UPS in May 2006 (Braxton, 2007). This analysis Collection focuses on the primary basis of McGruder's early departure from his daily cartoonist platform, *The Boondocks* Animated Series, which McGruder personally guided through production across a rough half-decade between 2005 and 2010 (Farici, 2001; McGrath, 2004; Scocca, 2000).

As McGruder noted in a 2008 *MovieWeb* interview with Evan Jacobs, the franchise creator personally oversaw every aspect of production in an effort to render *The Boondocks* Animated Series accessible to the young, ethnically diverse viewer demographic of Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block (Jacobs, 2008). Throughout a forty-five episode production tenure, McGruder's approach to humor incorporation through satirization and explicit content incorporation permeated each of forty-five standalone episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Between 2005 and 2011, McGruder approached standalone episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series as respective platforms for the franchise creator's mediations on cultural, ethnic, political and social inequities within contemporary American society. McGruder hoped the encoding strategies incorporated into *The Boondocks* Animated

Series and elaborated upon in this study would help to assimilate a broader, comparatively optimistic, forward-thinking generation of young potential activists. As perceived by McGruder, the audience shared *The Boondocks* Animated Series' lack of tolerance and surplus of frustration and disdain towards contemporary American ambivalence in the face of much-needed societal reform, as heavily satirized across a half decade of *The Boondocks* Animated Series production (Bach, 2007; Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Between 1996 and 2006, *The Boondocks* Comic Strip gained a following without the loosened creative constraints granted by Sony Television Entertainment and Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block. From the 2005 pilot forward, the series presented a number of changes that would prove highly problematic in dedicated Oppositional Readings of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Along with *The Boondocks* Animated Series' pervasive stereotype incorporation on the cusp of stereotype perpetuation, the satirization and shock based humor incorporation strategies employed by McGruder and his transnational cast/crew of actors, animators, producers and writers proved immediately polarizing among longtime fans of the black identity dialogue maintained in the early years of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (McGruder, 1996). Audiences who viewed *The Boondocks* Animated Series were largely unfamiliar with *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's content constraints, which alleviated almost all explicit content. Between 1999 and 2006, the daily cartoonist deadlines forced McGruder to incorporate vicious prose in lieu of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' pervasive incorporation of profane dialogue as a vehicle for satirization of various facets

of contemporary cultural, ethnic, political and social frustration (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

An example of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' expansion upon *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's framework is evident in the fourth episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first season, "Granddad's Fight" (Barnes & McGruder, 2005). Huey Freeman's narrated episode prologue offers an operative definition of the 'Nigga Moment,' itself a rumination on the Flip Wilson quote cited by McGruder in his 2004 interview with *The New Yorker* (McGrath, 2004). While the undeniably funny prologue embraces problematic language and content to humorous effect, the prologue is only surface-deep. Why does Huey Freeman refrain from elaboration upon the history of the term? Furthermore, what were the cultural, ethnic, political or social conditions that led to the purported truth behind Huey's observations? Why do subsequent episode prologues in "Stinkmeaner Strikes Back" (season 02) and "Stinkmeaner III: The Hateocracy" (season 03) play on humor incorporation while neglecting expansion of the operative 'Nigga Moment' definition established by Huey Freeman through exploration of its' cultural, ethnic, political or social relevance in contemporary society? Examples such as this surface throughout McGruder's three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. While episodes consistently generated laughs from audiences, they often lacked the nuanced introspection of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, the latter of which was produced under constrictive content regulations enforced by United Press Syndicate (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996).

Cartoon Network brought *The Boondocks* Animated Series to the late-night Adult Swim programming block in 2005. Sony Television Entertainment and Adult Swim

president Mike Lazzalo afforded McGruder unprecedented degrees of responsibility and meticulous production input into each episode of *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first three seasons. In early 2005, McGruder was contacted by Lazzalo mere weeks after the series' pilot veto at the FOX Network. The collaboration between Cartoon Network and Adult Swim afforded McGruder an unprecedented degree of creative freedom for the emerging Adult Swim programming block, as *The Boondocks Animated Series* was the first TV-MA rated original production and the first Adult Swim original production to be granted a half-hour narrative format. To maintain a consistent Anime style, animation responsibilities were managed by Carl Jones, lead producer of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Bach, 2007; Basile, 2005; Braxton, 2007; Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

As an alternative to American studio mimicry of Anime production techniques, hand drawn animation work for each episode of *The Boondocks Animated Series* was outsourced to the South Korean MOI Studio. Unlike the majority of rival Japanese animation studios, MOI Studio had previously collaborated with Sony Television Entertainment in the first outsourced Anime program, the HBO adaptation of Todd McFarlane's *Spawn: The Animated Series*. According to McGruder, MOI Studio was selected by Sony Television Entertainment in hopes that a four-year history of HBO's prior outsourced correspondence would expedite the average production time for each episode of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Basile, 2005; Cooper, 2013; Jacobs, 2008). According to McGruder, fifteen-episode orders for *The Boondocks Animated Series* seasons came from Sony Television Entertainment (Braxton, 2007). The cast and crew of

The Boondocks Animated Series faced continual pressure, as each episode's total production time was around eighteen months (Basile, 2005).

From McGruder's early days in *The Diamondback* and *The Source* through *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's record-shattering national syndication, McGruder carefully constructed the messages of each daily strip through a combination of masterful comedic timing and sharp, succinct prose. Throughout his decade of work on *The Boondocks* Comic Series, McGruder was often frustrated by the lack of room for creative elaboration afforded by the constraints of the two-to-four panel daily syndicated cartoon strip (Basile, 2005; Braxton, 2007; Farici, 2001; Jacobs, 2008; McGrath, 2004; Rabin, 2005).

McGruder was continually mindful of an Animated Series as a long-term goal for *The Boondocks*. Throughout early interviews, McGruder continually asserts that the nationally syndicated incarnation of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip was initially developed as a template for animation. McGruder alluded to a pending deal for *The Boondocks* Animated Series as a prime-time animated serial, co-produced by two entities with highly problematic ties to representation dilemmas: Black Entertainment Network programming director Reginald Hudlin (*Bebe's Kids*, *Boomerang*, *CB4*, *House Party*) and the FOX Network (*In Living Color*, *Living Single*, *Martin*, *New York Undercover*, *The PJ's*, *Roc*). McGruder and Hudlin spent several years developing a network-ready pilot for *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Bowman et al., 1992; Bowser, 1993; Daniels, 1991; Gray, 1995; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Murphy, 1996).

In early 2004, the FOX Network passed on the McGruder and Hudlin pilot of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Braxton, 2007; McGrath, 2004; Jones & McGruder, 2005). Despite lacking a network slot, the show retained the production support of Sony

Television Entertainment, primary financier for McGruder's three seasons on *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005). Conversely, the FOX Network collapse ended collaboration and friendly interaction between Hudlin and Aaron McGruder (Braxton, 2007; McGrath, 2004). Despite Hudlin's withdrawal from *The Boondocks* Animated Series, his early creative input commands a share of royalties and an Executive Producer credit at the end of each episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Rabin, 2005).

The Anime-inspired aesthetic of *The Boondocks* Animated Series represents McGruder's ideal vision for the show. As McGruder claimed in 1999-2001 interviews, the original art style for *The Boondocks* Comic Strip was designed with translation to animated format in the Eastern Anime style instead (Lemons, 2001; McGruder, 1996; Phipps, 1999; Scocca, 2000). From the 1970s to present, Anime conventions have concurrently generated enthusiastic niche audience appeal in both Eastern and Western markets (predominantly the United States in the latter case). To maintain the Anime format and feel of shows like Sunrise Studio's groundbreaking Cowboy *Bebop* (itself instrumental to the Adult Swim programming block's original success), McGruder sought production funding from Sony Television Entertainment to outsource the show's animation and lend it a sense of Asian authenticity (Watanabe, 1998). To facilitate McGruder and Sony Television Entertainment's ambitious production design and replicate McGruder's potentially lucrative recipe audience appeal, *The Boondocks* Animated Series had a much higher budget, longer production cycle and larger episode format than any preceding show in the history of Cartoon Network's Adult Swim

Programming Block (Bach, 2007; Basile, 2005; Braxton, 2007; Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

McGruder's first challenge in his transition from daily cartoonist to cable network show runner was thinking outside of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's limited narrative scope. In a 2005 interview with Nancy Basile, McGruder described the challenge of transcending his own “mental barriers regarding scope and content.” (Basile, 2005). *The Boondocks* Animated Series' format and style were heavily influenced by three factors: (1) Early 1990s Hip Hop culture, (2) Western-centric trends in Japanese animation and (3) continual envelope-pushing in televised sketch comedy programming (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

Despite the Adult Swim block's impressive 2001-2005 Nielsen record, *The Boondocks* brought the highest Nielsen ratings of the block's four-year history. As audiences started to discuss the show, *The Boondocks* Animated Series consistently served to increase the devout young following that the Adult Swim block continues to enjoy in 2013 (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Jones, 2014).

The series' October 12, 2005 premiere offered some of the highest ratings in the programming block's history (Barnes & McGruder, 2005; Basile, 2005; Jacobs, 2008). The second week only served to strengthen the show's ratings share, which placed twelfth in the top fifty programs aired during the same time-slot (Dekeen, 2005). The show's gradual increase in Adult Swim demographic appeal is evident through the series' gradually increasing success. In 2010, the third season premiere, “It's a Black President, Huey Freeman,” gathered an unprecedented 2.55 million viewers (Cooper, 2013; Dekeen, 2012). As a result of the original forty-five episode arc's critical and audience reception,

the Cartoon Network initiated production for a twenty-episode final season in late summer 2013. The final season of *The Boondocks* premiered in spring 2014 without the production input of franchise creator Aaron McGruder (Jones, 2014).

Upon cursory glance, one might presume that the Adult Swim programming block offered little access to what one might predict as *The Boondocks*' ideal audience: black, progressive-thinking young adults. As of 2013, the show is accessible on the Cartoon Network for around eighty-five percent of cable television subscribers. This study chronicles *The Boondocks* Animated Series' efforts to assimilate a dedicated audience among Adult Swim viewers. In a curious twist, McGruder has consistently avoided discussion of the series audience's ethnic composition. The audience that McGruder aspired to build incorporated a broader scope: educated, politically liberal young adults, compared to the older and purportedly conservative audience for the original comic strip (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996).

When asked about his level of personal satisfaction with the series' audience in late 2007, McGruder curiously substituted discussion of audience age in lieu of audience ethnicity (Braxton, 2007). In a 2005 interview with Nancy Basile, McGruder freely admitted that the short-lived comic strip inception of *The Boondocks* failed to reach its intended audience (Basile, 2005). In reference to the show's first season, McGruder claimed that he was pleased to see the Animated Series reach a younger audience than the original format, which was routinely pulled by newspaper editors across the nation. This stance presents a curious phenomenon: McGruder's neglect of the series audience's ethnic composition. While exploring the intersection of McGruder's stereotypes towards a

progressive aim, this study will also explore *The Boondocks*' successful attempt to build an audience for the series through incorporation of carefully encoded messages (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

It is impossible to measure or attribute agency to the Animated Series ' audience. Although they hint at the show's popularity, Adult Swim Nielsen ratings for *The Boondocks* merely reflect a gradual increase in the viewership of the Animated Series. Succinctly, this study focuses on encoded audience accessibility tactics for a program that seemed like a tremendous gamble for the Cartoon Network. This study examines five types of encoded content employed by *The Boondocks* Animated Series to avert controversy and bolster appeal among the existing teen-to-adult audience for “Adult Swim.” Although the Nielsen ratings reflect a gradual increase in *The Boondocks* Animated Series ' viewership, they allude exclusively to the show's popularity among the broad Adult Swim audience (Cooper, 2013; Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Although audience data remains limited for *The Boondocks* Animated Series, McGruder remained outspoken about audience discussion in interviews between 1999 and 2011. McGruder's observations offer a window of insight into the audience as perceived by the creator of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. While audience data for Adult Swim between 2005 and 2011 remains sparse, McGruder's insights offer a production-level glimpse of the franchise's intended audience. McGruder's observations in terms of audience values and content constraints permeate all five chapters of this study on corresponding levels. McGruder's insights remain confined to production-level intent, thus carrying an inherent sense of bias. Despite adherence to McGruder's

perspective, his insights are employed to bolster evidence provided by limited Nielsen data and DVD sales figures for *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jacobs, 2008).

In a 2008 *MovieWeb* interview with Evan Jacobs, McGruder alluded to a central issue addressed by McGruder in *The Boondocks* Animated Series: alleviating concern among *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's audience that the Cartoon Network iteration of *The Boondocks* Animated Series would change the “ostentatious, anti-authoritarian dialogue” addressed through *The Boondocks* Comic Strip. Although *The Boondocks* Comic Strip was produced under precarious content constraints during UPS syndication, longtime fans feared that production of *The Boondocks* Animated Series under Ted Turner's Cartoon Network and Sony Television Entertainment would eschew the anti-authoritarian perspective established in 1996-2004 incarnations of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (Braxton, 2007; McGrath, 2004).

The pilot of *The Boondocks* Animated Series aired in late 2005 with a marriage of TV-MA explicit content incorporation, mass culture satirization and Anime stylistic flourish (Jones & McGruder, 2005). According to McGruder, these conventions were incorporated into *The Boondocks* Animated Series pilot to alleviate the strip fan's censorship concerns while facilitating growth among members of the program's target demographic (Basile, 2005; Rabin, 2005). The 2005 pilot episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, “The Garden Party,” introduces four of the five recurring characters alluded to in McGruder's five-point spectrum: Huey Freeman, Riley Freeman, Robert Freeman and Uncle Ruckus, a new addition to the recurring cast introduced in *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (Barnes & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004). The middle point of McGruder's five-point representation spectrum, Assistant District Attorney and

Woodcrest Freeman neighbor Tom Dubois, was subsequently introduced in *The Boondocks* Animated Series' second episode, "The Trial of Robert Kelly." (Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The pilot opens soon after the Freeman family's initial move from Chicago to Woodcrest and prominently features Huey Freeman in the series' opening moments (Barnes & McGruder, 2005). Huey's initial remarks on the show, "Jesus was black, Ronald Reagan is the devil, and the government is lying about 9/11," provoke riot between the rich, predominantly white residents of the Woodcrest suburb. The pilot prologue ends as Robert Freeman wakes Huey Freeman from "the dream where you make all the white people riot," stressing an ethnic disconnect that was never stressed in *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (Barnes & McGruder, 2005). Whereas *The Boondocks* Comic Strip focused on Huey's anti-authoritarian antics, the opening of *The Boondocks* Animated Series punishes Huey for embracing the same world perspective that Huey continually promoted throughout *The Boondocks* Comic Strip. This episode sets a precedent for explicit content and satire based humor incorporation that recurs throughout McGruder's forty-five episode, three season production tenure on *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996).

CHAPTER VI

STEREOTYPE INCORPORATION

The Stereotype Incorporation chapter explores perpetuation of stereotypes in lieu of character development across the forty-five existing episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series*. The first reading opens with an examination of existing critical scholarship, as the scholarship universally focuses on the problematic aspects of stereotype perpetuation in black representation. Stereotypes in *The Boondocks Animated Series* are incorporated for an antithetical aim: maintenance of a progressive dialogue on the state of the contemporary black experience. Moreover, the first reading examines how *The Boondocks Animated Series* incorporates stereotypes as static examples, used to increase the accessibility of McGruder's own views for the Adult Swim audience and target demographic (Hall, 1973, 1980; Gray, 1995; Gorham, 1999; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The first chapter in this study specifically focuses on the effectiveness of stereotype incorporation as a production-level encoding strategy in the first three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (2005-2011). More specifically, this analysis of stereotype incorporation in *The Boondocks Animated Series* closely examines a spectrum of five recurring protagonists within McGruder's three season, half-decade production tenure. As in other chapters in this collection, the spectrum was incorporated as a narrative device and encoding strategy by Aaron McGruder (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The Boondocks Animated Series incorporated stereotypes in a manner that differed from preceding (or often concurrent) representation of black culture in television programming. McGruder's series presents an exception to the rule; in comparable

television shows, stereotype incorporation often facilitates stereotype perpetuation or affirms preexisting audience prejudices through incorporation of hegemonic norms. Between 2005 and 2011, Aaron McGruder employed *The Boondocks* Animated Series as a vehicle for message-based delivery of his own cultural, ethnic, political and/or social ideas. The first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series meticulously navigate a cautious balance between pervasively incorporated, continually contrasting stereotypes. Stereotype incorporation is a quintessential encoding strategy denoted by McGruder throughout his three season production tenure on *The Boondocks* Animated Series. By imbuing each recurring character in *The Boondocks* Animated Series with continually perpetuated templates of black cultural, ethnic, political and social typification, each episode offered a free-standing template for incorporation of McGruder's critical commentary, which pulsed at the heart of the first forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. McGruder's work on *The Boondocks* Animated Series incorporated stereotypes towards optimistic aims, countering the majority of early stereotype-based CRT scholarship (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Gray, 1995; Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

As defined by CRT scholar Bradley Gorham, stereotypes are “Often viewed as false over-generalizations made by socially dominant groups about socially oppressed groups.” In Gorham's article, “Stereotypes: So What?,” the CRT scholar explored a pair of questions pertaining to mass media outlet perpetuation of ethnic stereotypes and their potential societal effects. In his article, Gorham ponders (1) why stereotypes are important to acknowledge within American mass media and (2) why audiences should actively care about the perpetuation of stereotypes through mass media outlets.

Throughout his work, Gorham frequently chastises mass media outlets for their perpetuation of stereotypes to bolster support for American white hegemony (Gorham, 1999).

Gorham argued that stereotypes are perpetuated so frequently by American mass media outlets that many media consumers assume (through prolonged exposure) that widely perpetuated ethnic stereotypes are grounded in a degree of truth. According to Gorham, stereotypes functioned as a form of symbolic expression in mass media that continually served promote ethnic and cultural hegemony (Gorham, 1999).

Gorham noted that although stereotypes were often cited and disavowed by viewers, but claims that the future of CRT research lies within analysis of stereotypes and their impact on the American populace. Gorham notes that stereotype research is important for two reasons: (1) what the stereotypes effectively accomplish within society and (2) what the stereotypes effectively symbolize within society. Gorham notes that the effects of stereotype perpetuation remain unexplored in CRT research, as most existing stereotype-based research explored the problematic aspects of perpetual minority typification and its' potential long-term impact on audience cognition (Gorham, 1999; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Specifically with regard to CRT research, Gorham suggested that contemporary scholarship focuses on the use of stereotypes to consistently endorse hegemonic power relations within a given society. Gorham argued that CRT media scholars collectively assume that (1) media structure and belief formation are integral, (2) that there's no room for individual interpretation of media content, and (3) that stereotypes serve to instigate a learning process among consumers of a specific media text. Moreover, Gorham

contended that CRT scholars collectively viewed the media as a window into societal values, thus discounting the impact of immediate surroundings on the audience member's perception (Gorham, 1999; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Gorham addresses the significance of stereotype research by exposing a number of problematic aspects of media stereotype perpetuation. According to Gorham, the problematic aspects of stereotype perpetuation imbued relevant CRT research with a degree of immediacy. Gorham noted that racial stereotypes through mass media outlets could influence audience interpretation of content and endorse racial myths in consistent support of hegemonic societal structures. Moreover, Gorham argued that stereotypes could fuel problematic audience assumptions about minorities or ethnic groups without a sense of realism or scholarly context. Gorham argued that stereotypes shape audience perception upon initial exposure, thus priming the minds of media consumers with stereotypical assumptions as a broad first impression (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Gorham, 1999; Gray, 1995; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Lippmann, 1922).

In his conclusion, Gorham cited a number of ways that CRT scholars could work to slow the prevalence of stereotypes in mass media. Gorham suggested vigilant exposure of media stereotypes, CRT scholar suggestions for alternatives to stereotypes, and an increase in critical interpretations that challenge mythic assumptions. Gorham optimistically noted that values change with each respective generation of media consumers, so CRT scholarship will prove particularly valuable to future generations of media producers and consumers (Gorham, 1999).

With regard to stereotype incorporation, *The Boondocks* Animated Series functions as a veritable anomaly. On the one-hand, McGruder's series eschews character

development for a focus on stereotype perpetuation. On the other hand, *The Boondocks* Animated Series avoids character development to focus on themes, as endorsed through consistently perpetuated stereotypes, which maintain a bold and progressive dialogue on the state of contemporary race relations. *The Boondocks* Animated Series plays to Gorham's stated belief that audiences are capable of deciphering mass media stereotype perpetuation, although it often hides potentially controversial themes behind a guise of audaciously satirical stereotype perpetuation. The second chapter in this collection examines stereotype perpetuation in *The Boondocks* Animated Series towards a positive aim. Once again, *The Boondocks* Animated Series feels like a response to CRT scholarship through its meticulous incorporation of audacious ethnic stereotypes towards socially progressive aims (Gorham, 1999; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Contemporary content-based stereotype research stands in stark contrast to the antipathy-focused research of Baly, Katz and Lippmann. Today's models reflect the "Warmth" and "Competence" based 2002 example. Critical Race Theory scholars suggest that stereotypes can achieve sympathetic and empathetic aims across a spectrum that considers positive and negative attributes of extra-group typification.

American mass media outlets have fueled a long-standing reputation among Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholars for using stereotypes as a device to perpetuate mythic associations between violence and black identity (Campbell, 1995; Entman, 1995; Gorham, 1999; Gray, 1990; Zelman, 1994). The broad Literature Review at the opening of this study offers a broader perspective on prevalent issues among contemporary CRT scholars in terms of representation in network or cable based television programming.

The term “stereotype” surfaced in United States scholarship as incorporated into research by research by Social Psychologists. Viewed collectively, related scholarship defines a stereotype as a “thought that can be adopted about specific types of individuals or certain ways of doing things.” Although this definition is accepted by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), this definition of the term is intentionally broad. The APA definition of “stereotype” embraces the few common bonds between research on the social impact of stereotype perpetuation. All operative definitions of the term “stereotype” are predicated on the broad APA definition. Scholars adjust operative definitions of the term “stereotype” to meet the respective aims of their research (Gorham, 1999; Lippmann, 1922).

In the early twentieth century, American journalist Walter Lippmann incorporated the term “stereotype” in the modern psychological sense for the first time. Lippmann incorporated the term to describe inter-group and extra-group behavior in “Public Opinion,” which Lippmann published in 1922. Following the term's resurfacing in Lippmann “Public Opinion,” researchers from the 1930s forward built upon the APA's intentionally broad definition. Researchers expanded on ideas debuted in “Public Opinion,” predominantly by exploring the perpetuation and incorporation of stereotypes into common social practice (Gorham, 1999; Lippmann, 1922).

Throughout the initial waves of stereotype research in 1930s Social Psychology, scholars developed a longstanding association between stereotypes and two related aspects of social oppression: (1) prejudice and (2) discrimination. Despite their seemingly open-ended definition, typification often forms the basis for prejudicial or discriminatory ideals within the mass populace (Gorham, 1999; Lippmann, 1922).

Stereotypes are often viewed as a subconscious process, predicated on cognition of patterns. Prejudice is viewed as the affective component of stereotyping. On the other hand, discrimination is viewed by scholars as a quintessential behavioral component of prejudicial relations. The tripartite interplay between stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination stands firm as a cornerstone of contemporary stereotype research (Gorham, 1999; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Scholarship traditionally views stereotype perpetuation as a passive activity, although it forms the basis for cognitively active forms of oppression. According to the first wave of stereotype scholars, stereotypes could influence subconscious human perception of shared traits within a niche ethnic or social group that is different from one's own group. Subconscious stereotype perpetuation is often viewed as the basis for the active processes of prejudice and discrimination.

Social Psychology scholars Daniel Katz and Kenneth Braly suggest that shared ideas about a group can exist independently of prejudice or discrimination, as the latter two concepts require are based on active (rather than passive) human cognition. Katz and Braly argue that stereotyping only leads to racial prejudice through collective group mentality. Associations between stereotypes and prejudice or discrimination are predicated on emotional response to the shared traits between typified groups (Braly et al., 2001; Fiske, Glick & Xu, 2002; Gorham, 1999).

Critical Race Theory scholars agree that stereotypes can potentially influence prejudicial human behavior on three levels. First, stereotype perpetuation facilitates justification of existing societal prejudices, which are often laden with social bias. Secondly, stereotype perpetuation can facilitate stability of prejudices, thus reducing

willingness of affected audience members to reconsider their attitudes towards stereotyped groups. Finally, Critical Race Scholars often agree that stereotype perpetuation can prevent members of stereotyped groups from transcending boundaries to succeed in atypical activities or social roles (Fisk et al., 2002).

Critical Race Theory scholars tend to focus on the attributes assigned to a group through stereotype perpetuation, rather than the meanings and rationale behind such perpetuation. In 2002, Critical Race Theory scholars developed a two-by-two model to predict the relationship between stereotype perpetuation and hegemonic encoding from media outlets. The Fiske scale offers a convenient two-by-two model of traditional stereotype incorporation within media texts. The scholars noted that stereotype perpetuation was predicated on “low” and “high” presence of two variables, “Competence” and “Warmth.” The 2002 model offers four potential models for stereotype perpetuation (Fiske et al., 2002).

The first group model, the “Admiration” stereotype, combines “High Competence” and “High Warmth” to represent the 2002 scale's best-case scenario within a typified, perpetuated schema. Members of this group are perceived as holding concurrent high status and a lack of threat to the existing social order. The “Admiration” stereotype almost exclusively consists of former existing members or allies to a member of a specific in-group (Fiske et al., 2002). Fiske's second model, the “Paternalistic” stereotype, combines “Low Competence” and “High Warmth.” Members of this group are perceived as non-competitive, despite their low social or economic status. Members of the Fiske model's first group include housewives, elderly people, and disabled people (Fiske et al., 2002).

Fiske's third scenario, the "Contemptuous" stereotype, combines "Low Warmth" and "High Competence." The group is perceived as low status and ambitious, thus representing an active threat to the existing social order. Members of this group are generally oppressed through problematic representation amidst hegemonic stereotype perpetuation. Members of the "Contemptuous" group include welfare recipients and citizens of low socioeconomic status (Fiske, 2002). Fiske's fourth model, the "Envious" stereotype, combines the traits of "High Competence" and "Low Warmth." The group represents a concurrent threat with the "Contemptuous" extra-group, though competition from a higher status is often perceived as a greater threat than common members of the "Contemptuous" group. The "Envious" stereotype scenario often applies to religious or ethnic groups as they hold social or economic control within specific regions. Examples of members from the "Envious" stereotype model includes Jewish people (economic threat), Asian people (intellectual threat), rich people (socioeconomic threat) and feminists (threat to existing paternal social order) (Fiske 2002).

The protagonists of *The Boondocks* Animated Series who comprise said stereotypes represent separate considerations within the vacuum of a singular creative vision: that of franchise creator and show runner Aaron McGruder. Rather than using stereotype incorporation in *The Boondocks* Animated Series to perpetuate negative perceptions of black culture, McGruder implements stereotypes in lieu of character development to reinforce the show's dialogue on the sociopolitical state of black culture.

Secondary characters are employed as recurring stereotypes in *The Boondocks* to fuel some of the show's most pessimistic cultural observation. The Freeman's Woodcrest neighbor, Tom Dubois (a play on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and early twentieth-century black

leader W.E.B. Dubois), is an Assistant District Attorney in Chicago with a white wife and a perpetual fear of incarceration; Tom sees little-to-no irony between his work as a lawyer and his personal views on incarceration. Another secondary character from the show, “Uncle Ruckus,” often appears in the series as a venomous counter-point to Robert Freeman's well-intentioned transition to suburban life for Huey and Riley. Across the forty-five episode arc, dozens of characters appear, yet none see traditional character development. Much like the Freeman family, recurring characters in *The Boondocks Animated Series* traditionally exist as stagnant stereotypes in narratives that directly reflect McGruder's own sociopolitical views (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Unlike other portrayals of black culture that facilitate stereotypes with comparatively problematic intentions, *The Boondocks Animated Series* incorporates and regularly perpetuates stereotypes. In *The Boondocks Animated Series*, McGruder relies heavily on a five-point spectrum of stereotype depictions, ranging from positive to negative depictions of contemporary cultural, ethnic, political and social aspects of contemporary black identity (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In lieu of character development in narratives from traditional animated programming, *The Boondocks* incorporates and solidifies stereotypes as vantage points for contrasting aspects of McGruder's cultural, historical, political and social perspective through scathing satirical critical commentary. This study of stereotype incorporation in *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first three seasons connects to the other four textual readings of encoding strategies in *The Boondocks Animated Series* through a focus on production-level denotation strategies. Future research should strive to strengthen our

limited understanding of audience saliency and stereotype incorporation within the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Unlike other portrayals of black culture that facilitate stereotypes with comparatively problematic intentions, *The Boondocks* differs in its implementation of stereotypes. Rather than using stereotypes to perpetuate negative perceptions of black culture, McGruder implements stereotypes in lieu of character development to reinforce the show's dialogue on the sociopolitical state of black culture. By allowing firmly-grounded stereotypes to intersect, McGruder fuels a personally nuanced commentary on the state of contemporary black culture. The show's characters (each representing a respective stereotype) often disagree, offering contrasting views on problematic aspects of black history, media representation, and varying aspects of frustration or satisfaction with mainstream black popular culture (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Despite the fourth season's devolution into low-brow cultural kitsch, McGruder's three season tenure with *The Boondocks* Animated Series comprise a singular creative vision. Viewed collectively, the ideas encoded within McGruder's forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series stand in firm, staunch opposition to the overwhelmingly negative scope of contemporary stereotype perpetuation scholarship among CRT proponents. The majority of existing stereotype focuses on the long-term effect of stereotype incorporation; stereotype perpetuation, particularly in reference to negative ideals. CRT proponents of stereotype perpetuation towards negative aims frequently accentuate the problematic aspects of television as a medium for perpetuating associations between stereotypes and myth (Jones, 2014).

Rather than perpetuating stereotypes for commercial purposes, *The Boondocks* Animated Series substitutes stereotypes for traditional narrative development. Reliance upon stereotypes shifts the audience's expectations with regard to traditional character development, thus allowing *The Boondocks* to explore broad cultural and historical themes in a humor-infused capacity within a half-hour televised format, which is encoded with messages to maximize audience accessibility (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

McGruder incorporates stereotypes in lieu of traditional character development or narrative continuity. Through ostentatious dialogue between heavily perpetuated stereotypes, McGruder's three season run with *The Boondocks* Animated Series was designed to provoke audience discussion. According to McGruder, the series was designed to deliver streamlined messages, each of which were designed to facilitate external audience dialogue. Across forty-five episodes, McGruder used stereotype perpetuation as a denotation vehicle. Dialogue remains largely confined McGruder's five-point character hierarchy. This character spectrum's dialogue cautiously insinuates controversial topics and audacious themes conveyed through *The Boondocks* Animated Series' semiotic seduction and heavy reliance on brash, highly satirized political commentary (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

By allowing the five point spectrum of McGruder's firmly-grounded stereotypes to intersect, *The Boondocks* Animated Series fuels a personally nuanced commentary on the state of contemporary black culture. The show's characters (each representing a respective stereotype) often disagree, offering contrasting views on problematic aspects of black history, media representation, and varying aspects of frustration or satisfaction with mainstream black popular culture (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

This analysis of stereotype incorporation in *The Boondocks* Animated Series considers the show's incorporation typification as a form of audience assimilation. To build a culturally diverse audience for McGruder's sociopolitical platform, *The Boondocks* Animated Series incorporated typification to render black radicalism palatable for the culturally and ethnically diverse Adult Swim demographic. Moreover, *The Boondocks* Animated Series incorporated stereotype perpetuation in lieu of standard sitcom staples like character development, narrative continuity and plot development (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Throughout his 2005-2011 production tenure on *The Boondocks* Animated Series, McGruder relied on stereotype incorporation as a means of streamlining *The Boondocks* Animated Series' TV-MA rated, half-hour animated format with audience saliency and critical message delivery in mind. Throughout McGruder's five-point representation spectrum, each recurring character presents a singular perspective on a complex or controversial subject at the heart of each episode narrative (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The first chapter explores perpetuation of stereotypes in lieu of character development across the forty-five existing episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. The first reading opens with an examination of existing critical scholarship, as the scholarship universally focuses on the problematic aspects of stereotype perpetuation in black representation. Stereotypes in *The Boondocks* Animated Series are incorporated for an antithetical aim: maintenance of a progressive dialogue on the state of the contemporary black experience. Moreover, the first reading examines how *The Boondocks* Animated Series incorporates stereotypes as static examples, used to increase the accessibility of McGruder's own views for the young viewers of the Cartoon

Network's Adult Swim programming block between 2005 and 2011 (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In a direct sense, *The Boondocks* Animated Series functions as a response to problematic aspects of ethnic representation in contemporary mass media. Across the initial half-decade of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' production, McGruder continually presented a mulch-tiered counterpoint to the heavily perpetuated, pervasively negative stereotypes of black culture that permeate representation within negativity-laden contemporary scholarship on stereotype incorporation. Instead of perpetuating broad stereotypes, McGruder's five-point stereotype hierarchy allows him to carefully negotiate the central message of each episode by fine tuning the dialogue of each character (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In the Fiske 2002 model of stereotype incorporation, “Warmth” and “Competence” within stereotype perpetuation are predicated upon the presence or lack of two factors: “Competition” and “Status.” These variables allow scholars to predict specific content and encoded signifiers that frequently surface through media outlet stereotype perpetuation. Regardless of the reason, extra-groups that do not compete with an in-group for the same resources or social privileges are perceived as “High Warmth”. Conversely, extra-groups that do compete directly within a group for the same status and resources are most often perceived as having “High Competence” (Fiske et al., 2002; (Jones & McGruder, 2005)).

Stuart Hall's negotiated reading model offers a reference point for McGruder's five character spectrum of stereotype incorporation in *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Throughout McGruder's three-season arc, his five-point encoding strategy incorporates

Uncle Ruckus as a zero point; a caricature of black self-loathing that was supposed to offer an impossibly low standard of representation. The Fiske 2002 model's two-by-two design offers a firm platform for textual analysis of encoding strategies involving Huey Freeman (highest), Robert Freeman (high), Tom Dubois (medium) and Riley Freeman (low) in terms of stereotype incorporation (Fiske et al, 2002; Gray, 1995; Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

This analysis of McGruder's incorporation of stereotypes as an encoding strategy offers a look at one of five audience assimilation tactics imbued into forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Through examination and negotiation of potentially problematic aspects of stereotype incorporation from the dual vantage points of producer-level denotation and audience-level connotation. By maintaining a concurrent focus on denotation and connotation, this study offers a broad evaluation of stereotype effectiveness as an encoding strategy as implemented throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The first season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series offers the most prevalent implementation of stereotype incorporation as an encoding strategy within the first fifteen episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. As surmised by McGruder, the first season placed a heavier reliance on message delivery than humor incorporation and risked audience disdain through use of occasionally heavy-handed narrative conventions. Reliance upon McGruder's five-point representation spectrum facilitated the efforts of *The Boondocks* Animated Series cast and crew in developing strong recurring characters who seemed concurrently rational and relatable to broad segments of the Adult Swim programming block's young demographic (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

McGruder's second season of *The Boondocks Animated Series* represents McGruder's purported narrative peak within his fifteen-year production tenure between *The Boondocks Comic Strip* and *The Boondocks Animated Series*. In contrast to the first season of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (2005-2006, McGruder's second fifteen-episode season of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (2007-2008) incorporated lessons from perceived mistakes from the series' turbulent initial season of production and afforded McGruder a first season template, which was honed into a refinement of production ideas and encoding strategies incorporated into *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first season. In both the second and third seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, McGruder effectively implemented stereotype incorporation as an encoding strategy to concurrently facilitate audience accessibility and episode structure designed to meticulously balance McGruder's message-based narratives through the conclusion of *The Boondocks Animated Series*' third season in 2011 (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

With regard to stereotype incorporation, McGruder's five-point representation spectrum acts in tandem with encoding strategies discussed in the subsequent chapters that comprise this study. Offering a spectrum that ranges from impossibly negative caricature (Uncle Ruckus) to impossibly positive representation example (Huey Freeman), each *The Boondocks Animated Series* episode is designed to facilitate relatability and resonance within the young, multi-ethnic Adult Swim target demographic (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

This analysis of stereotype incorporation in *The Boondocks Animated Series* (2005-2011) examines implementation of stereotype incorporation as an encoding strategy throughout the first forty-five episode, three season sample produced under the

guidance of Aaron McGruder, creator of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip and lead producer on *The Boondocks* Animated Series between 2005 and 2011. Stereotype incorporation was implemented into *The Boondocks* Animated Series episode as an effort at middle-brow appeal, as McGruder remained concurrently mindful of low-brow appeal and high-brow appeal while implementing encoding strategies across his three season production tenure on *The Boondocks* Animated Series.

An examination of stereotype incorporation across McGruder's five-point character spectrum offers this analysis a common structural bond with the subsequent chapters that comprise this study. As is the case in subsequent chapters, this study offers an analysis of recurring character evocation of stereotype incorporation across McGruder's recurring character spectrum (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The recurring character spectrum is also incorporated as a central device in the subsequent readings that comprise this study. Episode and season based content and thematic evidence will be employed selectively, to reflect the extent of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' reliance on stereotype incorporation as a strategy to facilitate audience accessibility throughout McGruder's 2005-2011 production tenure (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

McGruder implemented stereotype incorporation throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series as an effort to build multi-ethnic audience appeal for a show predominantly situated within a black critical perspective on contemporary satirization of cultural, ethnic, political and social frustration. Incorporation of stereotypes in tandem with McGruder's five-point recurring character spectrum dissuades potential controversy through incorporation of the Uncle Ruckus

caricature as an impossibly negative stereotype in contrast to the reality-based stereotype incorporation associated with recurring characters with a higher placement than Uncle Ruckus within McGruder's recurring character spectrum (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Stereotype incorporation in *The Boondocks* Animated Series takes precedent over plot and character development throughout McGruder's three season. By implementing stereotype incorporation to facilitate multi-faceted, culturally authentic perspectives on contemporary frustration with cultural, ethnic, political and social concerns, McGruder's first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series aspire to elevate consciousness on inequities within contemporary black culture throughout the young viewership afforded to *The Boondocks* Animated Series episodes by the traditionally loyal viewership of Cartoon Network's late-night Adult Swim programming block. In lieu of traditional narrative development, episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series that rely heavily on stereotype incorporation permeated the first season and comprised the strongest effort on McGruder's behalf to rally audience's behind his own frustration with contemporary culture, ethnicity, politics and society (Fiske et al, 2002; Gorham, 1999; Gray, 1995; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

American media has a long-standing reputation among critical scholars for using stereotypes as a device to perpetuate mythic associations between violence and black identity (Gorham, 1999; Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder 2005). McGruder's series stands staunchly opposed to contemporary stereotype scholarship, which frequently accentuates the problematic aspects of television as a medium for perpetuating associations between stereotypes and myth. Rather than perpetuating stereotypes for commercial purposes, *The Boondocks* Animated Series substitutes stereotypes for

traditional narrative development. Reliance upon stereotypes shifts the audience's expectations with regard to traditional character development, thus allowing *The Boondocks* to explore broad cultural and historical themes in a humor-infused capacity within a half-hour televised format, which is encoded with messages to maximize audience accessibility (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Secondary characters are employed as recurring stereotypes in *The Boondocks* to fuel some of the show's most pessimistic cultural observation. The Freeman's Woodcrest neighbor, Tom Dubois (a play on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and early twentieth-century black leader W.E.B. Dubois), is an Assistant District Attorney in Chicago with a white wife and a perpetual fear of incarceration; Tom sees little-to-no irony between his work as a lawyer and his personal views on incarceration. Another secondary character from the show, "Uncle Ruckus," often appears in the series as a venomous counter-point to Robert Freeman's well-intentioned transition to suburban life for Huey and Riley. Across the forty-five episode arc, dozens of characters appear, yet none see traditional character development. Much like the Freeman family, recurring characters in *The Boondocks* traditionally exist as stagnant stereotypes in narratives that directly reflect McGruder's own sociopolitical views (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The five-point representation spectrum implemented in this analysis of *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first three seasons incorporates the same regimented, hierarchical structure of the four subsequent chapters of encoding strategies in *The Boondocks Animated Series*. The spectrum presents an array of perspectives on the state of contemporary culture (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Uncle Ruckus' perspective representing the effective 'zero point' of McGruder's five-point spectrum. Ostracized from *The Boondocks* Comic Strip due to content constraints, Ruckus was added to *The Boondocks* Animated Series. As McGruder expanded into the constraints of the FCC's TV-MA rating and the half-hour (22.5 minute) format in lieu of the comic's panel constraints, Uncle Ruckus functioned as a figurative lens into McGruder's creative process while adjusting to a number of production concerns (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Uncle Ruckus was intended as an exaggerated caricature; a satire of black contemporary culture's worst-case-scenario, as envisioned by McGruder himself. As a vehemently self-loathing and outwardly spiteful black man, Ruckus acts as a counterpoint to intellectual development and thusly functions as the primary recurring antagonist. In a 2004 *New Yorker* interview with Benjamin McGrath, McGruder plainly stated that Uncle Ruckus' character served to improve the status of other characters in light of plot developments within respective episodes (Cooper, 2013; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004).

The pilot episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, "The Garden Party," offers a first impression of Uncle Ruckus as a chronically inebriated buffoon who resents the sense of pride instilled within Robert Freeman and his two grandsons, Huey and Riley Freeman. Uncle Ruckus' behavior in the pilot results in an effort to structure a song around pervasive racial epithets, after which Ruckus trips over a microphone cord and passes out drunk (Barnes & McGruder, 2005). Ruckus' impromptu "song" for Edward Wuncler's entertainment, "Don't Trust Them New Niggers Over There," offers a cursory

glimpse of the highly satirized self-loathing incorporated into Uncle Ruckus (Barnes & McGruder, 2005).

The subsequent episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, “The Trial of Robert Kelly,” expounds on Uncle Ruckus' self-loathing by revealing the extent of his affinity for white people, particularly the Caucasian residents of Woodcrest (Barnes & McGruder, 2005). In the first season's “Return of the King,” a historicized flashback sequence reveals Uncle Ruckus' self-loathing as a multi-era phenomenon that caused him to hurl a brick at nonviolent Civil Rights Activist Martin Luther King. The first season of *The Boondocks* ends with “The Passion of Reverend Ruckus,” in which Uncle Ruckus is visited in a dream by the visage of Ronald Reagan with promises of assimilation into “white heaven” (Barnes & McGruder, 2005).

The second season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series continue the template of negativity developed for Uncle Ruckus throughout the first season. The intended second season finale, “The Uncle Ruckus Reality Program,” focused on the Black Entertainment Network's intended exploitation of Uncle Ruckus' unprecedented self-loathing. In the unaired episode (withheld due to threatened legal action from BET executives), network executives remain optimistic that Uncle Ruckus' self-loathing will lead to diminishment of standards in terms of black mass culture (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The third season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series further develops the self-loathing stereotype incorporated through Uncle Ruckus within McGruder's recurring character spectrum. In the season's fourth episode, “The Story of Jimmy Rebel,” Uncle Ruckus follows his dreams by seeking out and collaborating with Jimmy Rebel, a caricature of 1960s Mississippi folk singer Johnny Rebel. The third season's fourteenth

episode, “The Color Ruckus,” accentuates Ruckus' desire to identify within a different ethnic group to comedic effect through satirized melodrama (McGruder, 2010).

Riley Freeman represents the second plateau of McGruder's stereotype incorporation spectrum in *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Throughout McGruder's fifteen-year career, Huey Freeman's eight-year-old younger brother Riley was broadly envisioned as a societal lens. Whereas Huey used media literacy and platform into the potentially harmful influence of stereotype incorporation through perpetuation of negative iconography through mass media outlets across varying mediums (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In terms of stereotype incorporation, Riley offers a bleak (if honest) glimpse of youth culture laid to waste through consumerism and mass media consumption. Riley Freeman's unsupervised diet of film, music, television and video games reduces the eight-year-old character to a vehicle for McGruder's skepticism of media effects as conveyed through the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005). Riley's intelligence and taste for musical integrity often eclipses that of his adult cohorts in frequent interaction with occasional recurring characters like rappers Gangstalicious, Macktastic and Thugnificent or Woodcrest war veterans Edward Wuncler III and Gin Rummy. This interaction is demonstrated through Riley's interaction with adults in episodes like the first season's “Let's Nab Oprah,” “Riley Wuz Here” and “The Story of Thugnificent,” season two's “The Story of Thugnificent” and “The Story of Gangstalicious (Part II),” and the third season's “Bitches to Rags,” “Smoking with Cigarettes” and “The Fundraiser” (Barnes & McGruder, 2005, 2006, 2007; McGruder & Taylor, 2006, 2008; McGruder, 2010).

Throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, Riley Freeman is frequently depicted in tandem with negative stereotypes involving young black males and exposure to mass culture. Riley's interaction with his older brother, Huey Freeman, offers a stark contrast to Huey's paranoid black radicalism. As with the other encoding strategies implemented into *The Boondocks Animated Series*, Riley's susceptibility to negative film, music, television and video game influences are often played to stereotypical effect in tandem with incorporation of satire or explicit content based humor incorporation in the first forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Tom Dubois represents the status quo for mainstream black culture amidst scant minority representation within the fictional suburb of Woodcrest. Tom offers a stereotype of American ambivalence. Raised during the late 1970s and early 1980s, Tom Dubois was the product of the very same cultural, historical, social and political ambivalence that fueled Robert Altman's bicentennial musical *Nashville* (1976) Christopher Lasch's *Culture of Narcissism* (1977) and the aggression towards declining cultural standards that fueled Jimmy Carter's 'national malaise' speech in 1979 (Altman, 1976; Lasch, 1977).

In terms of stereotype incorporation, Tom Dubois presents a compelling middle-point for a number of reasons. The development of Tom's stereotype within the audience's eye was a product of meticulous encoding throughout McGruder's forty-five episode arcs in *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Tom debuted in *The Boondocks Animated Series*' second episode, "The Trial of Robert Kelly" (Barnes & McGruder, 2005). Tom's naivety towards his dedication to an Assistant District Attorney career, ambivalence towards cultural perception of his multi-

ethnic family and assumption of assimilation into the predominantly white, upper middle class majority of Woodcrest, MD. Tom's naivety is incorporated for comedic effect in his second episode debut, just as Tom's ambivalence and naivety would serve as a basis for humor in *The Boondocks Animated Series'* subsequent forty-three episodes produced under franchise creator Aaron McGruder.

The seventh and fourteenth episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series'* first season, "A Huey Freeman Christmas" and "The Block is Hot," reflect Tom's ambivalence and naivety in terms of multi-ethnic parenting for his ten-year-old daughter, Jazmine Dubois. In "A Huey Freeman Christmas," Tom's forced adherence to Santa Claus mythology in Jazmine's upbringing is contrasted for comedic effect with the self-centered narrative arcs of brothers Huey and Riley Freeman, both of whom face comparatively little parental supervision. In "The Block is Hot," Tom allows Woodcrest entrepreneur Edward Wuncler, Sr. to take advantage of Jazmine through corrupt management of her neighborhood lemonade stand; much like Robert Freeman, Tom Dubois refrains from a clash with Wuncler's financial and social influence within Woodcrest as one of the affluent community's few black citizens (McGruder, 2005; McGruder & Taylor, 2005).

The second season's "Tom, Sarah and Usher" and "Stinkmeaner Strikes Back," in tandem with the third season's "It's a Black President, Huey Freeman" further elaborate on the upper-middle-class stereotype evoked by Tom Dubois throughout 2005-2011 production of *The Boondocks Animated Series*. In both episodes, Tom Dubois reflects tremendous insecurity in terms of his wife's connection to the episodes' respective top forty soul singer and United States President (Barnes & McGruder, 2007).

Tom Dubois' stereotypical responses to his wife's respective interactions with Usher and Barack Obama reflect the recurring character's feelings of inadequacy. Although Tom Dubois functions as Woodcrest's district attorney, he is limited by self-conceptualization of his own masculinity in terms of the stereotypical brash, dominant black male. In "Tom, Sarah and Usher," Tom hires A Pimp Named Slickback (voiced by comedian Katt Williams) to help him gain and retain a sense of control in his marriage congruent with that of a dominant, stereotypically abrasive black male typification (Barnes & McGruder, 2007).

In "Stinkmeaner Strikes Back," voice actor Cedric Yarborough evokes his role as secondary antagonist H.M. Stinkmeaner as conveyed through possession of Tom Dubois. The episode's use of Tom Dubois satirizes the lack of desire to create new episode art at MOI studios, the outsourced animator of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons. Tom's possessed form employs the truncated epithet 'nigga' over seventy times in the episode's twenty-four minutes. While possessed by Stinkmeaner, Tom reacts violently to other characters and sexually ravages Tom's white wife, Sarah Dubois, in a caricature of black sexual aggression relatable to the cultural climate of the nineteenth-century Reconstruction era or twentieth-century Jim Crow era (Barnes & McGruder, 2007).

Throughout *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons, Tom Dubois' stereotype reflects cultural ambivalence, ethnic confusion, political naivety and societal exploitation of the recurring Woodcrest district attorney. Tom Dubois maintains the naivety of the recurring character as originally conceived in *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (1999-2006) and reaps the material gains of a profession that consigns others to his

recurring fear of sexual assault in a prison scenario. Tom's contradictory flaw is featured in two of McGruder's episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series; both the first season's "A Date with the Health Inspector" and the third season's "A Date with the Booty Warrior." As frequently implied in *The Boondocks* Animated Series, Tom Dubois reaps the benefits of incarcerating a predominantly black prison population while maintaining a paralyzing fear of sexualized prison violence (Barnes & McGruder, 2006; McGruder, 2010).

Between 2005 and 2011, Robert Freeman appeared in episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series to evoke the stereotype of a financially privileged, morally entitled, romantically deprived black male who recently moved from Chicago to the affluent Woodcrest community. Robert Freeman represents a higher echelon than that of Tom Dubois within McGruder's inherently paternalistic, meticulously streamlined, hierarchical representation spectrum. Of the series' recurring protagonists, Robert had the largest impact within the course of twentieth-century activism. As a veteran of the Tuskegee Airmen flight unit in World War II and an activist participant in the nonviolent era of the Civil Rights Movement, Robert Freeman feels confused and disassociated from the malaise of cultural mediocrity that surrounds him in Woodcrest (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Three episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series focus on Freeman's efforts to meet a young black woman with his newly affirmed Woodcrest status. Across three seasons, Robert plays into sexual stereotypes associated with older black males and recently affirmed by rising use of social media and dating services in the digital age (Rifkin, 2000). In the first season's "Guess Hoe's Coming to Dinner," the second season's

“The Attack of the Killer King-Fu Wolf Bitch,” and the third season's “The Lovely Ebony Brown,” Robert attempts to balance a carefree dating life with haphazard guardianship of grandsons Huey and Riley Freeman (Barnes & McGruder, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2010).

In all three episodes, Huey and Riley's rationale eclipse Robert's exaggerated libido. The first season's romantic interest, Cristal, happens to be a prostitute and associate of recurring secondary character A Pimp Named Slickback. The second season's love interest, Luna, proves mentally unstable and quickly becomes a physical threat to characters throughout the recurring character spectrum. The third of Robert's love interests, Ebony Brown, evokes critical response to the show and gains a universally positive response from all five characters in *The Boondocks Animated Series'* recurring character spectrum (Jones & McGruder, 2005). Each of Robert's love interests evoke a spectrum-wide response to comedic effect, although none end in the outright humiliation of Robert Freeman. Each of the respective episodes ends with the evicted Cristal (season one), the eviscerated Luna (season two), or the emancipated Ebony Brown (season 3) (Barnes & McGruder; 2006, 2008 2010).

Robert Freeman's fight with black elderly antagonist H.M. Stinkmeaner comprises a three-part saga that spans all three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series*. Throughout all three episodes, Robert demonstrates behavior in tandem with a stereotypical, upper-middle-class, aggressive black male. In the first season episode “Granddad's Fight,” Robert beats Stinkmeaner to death without realizing the antagonist is blind. The sequel episodes, “Stinkmeaner Strikes Back” and “Stinkmeaner III: The Hateocracy,” offer subsequent incarnations of Stinkmeaner that force Robert to

recurrently exhibit aggressive stereotypical traits with the guidance of his grandsons (Barnes & McGruder, 2008; McGruder, 2010).

Huey Freeman represents the peak of McGruder's recurring representation spectrum throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Jones & McGruder, 2005). In *The Boondocks Animated Series'* 2005 pilot, "The Garden Party," Huey Freeman is established as the predominant narrator of *The Boondocks Animated Series* episodes. Throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, Huey Freeman remains (1) antagonistic of anti-intellectualism, (2) critical of negative cultural, ethnic, political, and social trends among his fellow recurring character spectrum members, and (3) skeptical of assimilation into Woodcrest mass culture (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In many senses, Huey Freeman's immediacy and connection to black radical activism of prior eras evoke an antithetical relationship between the ten-year-old and his younger sibling, eight-year-old Riley Freeman. In "The Garden Party," Huey Freeman learns a valuable lesson: affluent Woodcrest residents remain forcibly ambivalent to the criticism of contemporary cultural, ethnic, political, and social regression evoked by the perpetually pessimistic, Schultz-inspired peak of McGruder's recurring character spectrum. In the first season's "Wingmen," Huey faces a purported challenge through his Chicago best friend Dewey's supposed connection to black radical activism. As with many other predicaments throughout McGruder's production tenure on *The Boondocks Animated Series*, Huey finds himself disappointed at the close of "Wingmen" by the lack of a cohort willing to subject himself to the same rigorously disciplined outlook on contemporary culture, ethnicity, politics, and society (Barnes & McGruder, 2005).

In the first season finale, “The Passion of Reverend Ruckus,” Huey Freeman employs his activist tendencies in an unsuccessful effort to save a purportedly innocent man, Milton Berle Al-Shabazz, from a death sentence in a Maryland prison (Barnes & McGruder, 2006). The penultimate episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' second season, “The Hunger Strike,” offers a look at Huey's dedication to improvement of contemporary black representation (Barnes & McGruder, 2008). Huey embraces the activism of prior eras in his boycott of BET due to corrosion of contemporary black standards due to corrosive exposure to the assimilation afforded by representation in mass culture. Huey's boycott of BET collapses due to the fair-weather yet indelibly public participation of Reverend Rollo Greene, a caricature of *The Boondocks* Animated Series opponent Reverend Al Sharpton voiced by popular black music crossover sensation Cee-Lo Greene. Greene, who rose to prominence as a member of Georgia's “Goodie Mob” on the *Soul Food* and *Still Standing* albums in the late 1990s, offers a cynical contribution that invests as much legitimate interest in Sharpton's protest as McGruder did in his 2007 promotion panel for *The Boondocks* Animated Series' second season at the 2007 San Diego Comics Convention (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007).

More so than lower characters on the recurring character spectrum in *The Boondocks* Animated Series, Huey Freeman evokes the utilitarianism and camaraderie of independent Hip-Hop artist Asheru's opening credits theme for the first three seasons. Huey Freeman views assistance of other black characters within *The Boondocks* Animated Series' recurring character spectrum with a sense of personal duty. Throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, Riley is depicted as a mildly subservient entity to his ten-year-old sibling, Huey Freeman. In episodes like the second

season's "Ballin'" and "Home Alone," Huey gladly provides influence to Riley, who typically shies away from Huey's devotion to intellectualism and the activism rhetoric of prior eras. Huey Freeman's antagonist stance towards Uncle Ruckus is offered a single exception in the third season premiere, "It's a Black President, Huey Freeman," although their plot to move to Canada is foiled by Huey Freeman's immaturity and Uncle Ruckus' chronic, reliable sense of ineptitude. Contradicting Huey Freeman's willingness to help others within the representation spectrum, is a testament to the implausibility of Uncle Ruckus' self-loathing, incessantly recurring characterization throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Barnes & McGruder, 2006, 2008).

McGruder's work on *The Boondocks* Animated Series was afforded a half-hour, TV-MA rated format that comprised an unprecedentedly expensive collaboration between the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block and Sony Television Entertainment (Braxton, 2007). The frequent reliance upon stereotype incorporation as implemented by McGruder throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series presents a few potentially problematic aspects, most of which are avoided by the Adult Swim programming block's decision to relegate *The Boondocks* Animated Series to late-night viewing (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Reliance on stereotype incorporation in *The Boondocks* Animated Series shatters the constraints of good taste to comedic effect. McGruder's implementation of stereotype incorporation throughout his recurring character spectrum could easily be construed as stereotype perpetuation that fuels existing prejudices, acting in tandem with the negative effects of stereotype perpetuation as described in preceding CRT research on the dangers of stereotype incorporation (Gorham, 1999; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

While *The Boondocks* Comic Strip' recurring character spectrum was closely guarded by content constraints, the creative freedom afforded to McGruder with his 2005-2011 shift to *The Boondocks* Animated Series afforded increased humor incorporation, a strategy discussed in the following negotiated reading that comprises this study. The recurring character spectrum's intended zero-point caricature, Uncle Ruckus, used explicit language designed to appeal to the cable television demographic, which was considerably younger than the perceived reader base for *The Boondocks* Comic Strip during syndication. Recurring characters represent stereotypes that are often juxtaposed to comedic effect, resulting in satirized and pessimistic depictions of culture, ethnicity, politics and society that could easily lose their satirized connotation among entry-level audiences (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Despite the series' potentially problematic forays into stereotype perpetuation, episodes within the first three season, forty-five episode sample of *The Boondocks* Animated Series implements stereotype incorporation as an encoding strategy to facilitate critical dialogue among the young viewers of Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block. McGruder implemented stereotype incorporation as an encoding character across a recurring, five-point character spectrum that reflects McGruder's multi-faceted critical concerns. The potentially problematic reception aspects for *The Boondocks* Animated Series are resolved by the show's incorporation of the TV-MA rating, relegation to the late-night Adult Swim programming block, and network censorship of explicit language that has never been aired uncensored by the Adult Swim programming block, in tandem with FCC regulations (Bach, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In all three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, the recurring character spectrum was inundated with stereotype incorporation as a means of facilitating a platform for McGruder's critical, satirized dialogue on the contemporary state of various cultural, ethnic, political and social considerations. Interaction between the starkly defined recurring characters allowed audiences to develop a semblance of logic between the recurring characters, followed by a sense of relatability that was improved through audience exposure to subsequent episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

On a season-by-season basis, the comparatively heavy, message based fifteen episode arc that comprises *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first season featured the most prevalent use of stereotype incorporation in lieu of traditional narrative or character development, offering McGruder a platform for message-based episode structure that evoked ideas which originally surfaced in *The Boondocks Comic Strip*. In 2005 and 2007 interviews, McGruder admits that the lack of time for a learning curve during the production of Season 01 resulted in the episodes feeling preachy and figuratively ham-fisted, particularly in comparison to McGruder's favored third season of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Jones & McGruder, 2005). Seasons two and three of *The Boondocks Animated Series* eased off the stereotype incorporation as an encoding strategy to facilitate implementation of the other four encoding strategies imbued into *The Boondocks Animated Series* episodes and discussed in the subsequent chapters that comprise this study.

CHAPTER VII

HUMOR INCORPORATION

The sixth chapter that comprises this study focuses on *The Boondocks* Animated Series' incorporation of explicit content and shock humor as a means of rendering McGruder's purportedly radical political sensibilities accessible for the Adult Swim demographic. Falling in line with its' precursors in adult-oriented animation like *The Simpsons*, *South Park* and *Family Guy*, *The Boondocks* Animated Series incorporates shock humor on a strategically encoded basis. With regard to *The Boondocks* Animated Series, the show employs shock humor as a means of softening depictions of McGruder's political sensibilities to facilitate accessibility among both the Adult Swim audience and the potential Adult Swim target demographic.

As *The Boondocks* saw a great deal of audience controversy during the comic strip's 1995-2006 syndication, McGruder used the creative freedoms afforded by Adult Swim to encode explicit content into *The Boondocks* Animated Series. In many instances, explicit content and shock humor are employed by the show as a means of shielding the show from controversy over its' exploration of potentially controversial themes (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

As in the subsequent four chapters, McGruder implements a representation hierarchy through *The Boondocks* Animated Series' stereotype incorporation that facilitated interaction between well-developed perspectives throughout a meticulously crafted, five-point narrative hierarchy. McGruder fuels a personally nuanced commentary on the state of contemporary black culture. The show's characters (each representing a respective stereotype) often disagree, offering contrasting views on problematic aspects

of black history, media representation, and varying aspects of frustration or satisfaction with mainstream black popular culture (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In a 2008 interview with *Washington Post* reporter Michael Cavna, McGruder offered a basic conceptualization of the word 'satire.' To maintain a focus on McGruder's singular creative vision as a consistent current through *The Boondocks* Animated Series' three-season, five-year, and forty-five episode production arc. Every celebration, condemnation and ensuing conversation incorporates *The Boondocks* Animated Series' purportedly satirical scope; satire lies at the heart of the dialogue *The Boondocks* Animated Series is striving to facilitate Opponents to *The Boondocks* Animated Series write McGruder's efforts off as futile in the wake of his negative impact on contemporary black television representation, yet they respect the series' comprehensive satire of black contemporary cultural, ethnic, political and social overtones. Few negotiated, oppositional or preferred readings of *The Boondocks* Animated Series neglect the series' effective incorporation of cultural, ethnic, political and social satirization as an undeniably respectable component of McGruder's creative vision for *The Boondocks* Animated Series throughout its' forty-five episode tenure (Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

With regard to humor incorporation, one of the largest influences on *The Boondocks* Animated Series was McGruder's original decade run of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (1996-2006). McGruder's original strip placed a much larger emphasis on satire incorporation than explicit content incorporation to facilitate humor incorporation as an encoding strategy. The daily cartoon strip maintained a day-to-day critical commentary on various issues pertaining to American culture, ethnicity, politics and

society. In his 2008 interview, McGruder claimed that the influences for satire incorporation in *The Boondocks* Comic Strip were predominantly culled from four of the young artist's daily cartoonist predecessors: Berkeley Breathed (*Bloom County*), Charles Schultz (*Peanuts*), Garry Trudeau (*Doonesbury*) and Bill Watterson (*Calvin and Hobbes*) (Cavna, 2008). In a 2004 interview with *The New Yorker*, McGruder claimed that the only two daily cartoonists to win the Pulitzer Prize, Berkeley Breathed and Garry Trudeau, had the most direct influence on satire incorporation strategies in *The Boondocks* Comic Strip and, subsequently, *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004).

In terms of influential satire that shaped the course of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, McGruder cited highly satirized coverage of the 2008 presidential election from Bill Maher (*Real Time with Bill Maher*, HBO) and Steven Colbert (*The Colbert Report*, Comedy Central). Claiming that both Colbert and Maher “comprise what any good satirist aspires to be,” McGruder noted that the respective hosts put a tremendous amount of effort into preparation for their respective daily (Steven Colbert) and weekly (Bill Maher) cable television broadcasts. While McGruder praised the sheer volume of information that Colbert disseminates to develop *The Colbert Report* satire, he praised Bill Maher as a master of humor incorporation in tandem with a message that was usually comprised of critical commentary in line with concepts perpetuated in *The Boondocks* Animated Series. According to McGruder, satirized election coverage like that of Colbert or Maher kept audiences engaged in a worthwhile alternative to the spin manipulation tactics and routine bias incorporation of national news services (Cavna, 2008).

Throughout the entirety of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (1996-2006) and during the first two seasons of production for *The Boondocks* Animated Series (2005-2007), McGruder told Cavna that the easiest part of satire was finding a message, founded within cultural, ethnic, political or social contemporary commentary. The greatest challenge McGruder faced was maintenance of a humorous, satirical scope to facilitate audience accessibility. McGruder achieved this by employing the encoding strategy of humor incorporation through his operative definition of satire, particularly while combining explicit content with his aspirations as a satirist while producing *The Boondocks* Animated Series (2005-2011) (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

McGruder understood that unlike the audience for *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, the younger audience of *The Boondocks* Animated Series required consistent incorporation of effective humor to maintain investment in the standalone narrative of each respective episode. Just as McGruder abandoned artistic responsibilities on a day-to-day basis with the UPS outsourcing of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip art in 2003, he concerned himself with writing to personally oversee the humor incorporation through dual vehicles: conventions of traditional satire (as defined above) and incorporation of explicit content to facilitate 'shock humor' in lieu of potentially controversial presentations or representations of contemporary black American society (Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

To maintain the balance between humor incorporation and message-based cultural, ethnic, political and social commentary, McGruder relied almost exclusively on humor incorporation to ease the potential preachiness of heavy-handed message delivery (Cavna, 2008). McGruder risked the loyalty of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' young,

devoted fan base if and when specific episodes offered a heavy-handed emphasis on message incorporation over humor incorporation as an encoding strategy to facilitate audience appeal. “While the message is the easy component,” McGruder surmised, “the vehicle is humor, which is the most difficult aspect of production.” (Cavna, 2008).

Without the humor of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, McGruder felt audiences would shun the show entirely, spelling financial ruin for an unprecedentedly expensive co-venture between the Cartoon Network and the series' longtime production associate and home video distributor, Sony Television Entertainment. In McGruder's 2008 *Washington Post* interview, he described some of the greatest challenges he faced as a satirist during production of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Cavna, 2008).

First and foremost of McGruder's tenets, he noted that satire remains the least commercially viable form of contemporary comedy. Such is particularly the case with the young Adult Swim demographic that eventually rallied to support McGruder through three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series*. In McGruder's words, the satire of *The Boondocks Animated Series* “must be funny, clear and consistent to avoid feeling preachy in it's' message delivery.” (Cavna, 2008). As was the case with *The Boondocks Comic Strip*, McGruder maintained high standards of artistic integrity for every aspect of production across *The Boondocks Animated Series'* initial half decade of airtime (Cavna, 2008).

On the other side of the spectrum, McGruder felt compelled to note that satire is comprised of more than well-written jokes and masterful comedic timing. *The Boondocks Animated Series* needed to maintain effective humor incorporation to sustain audience appeal; in McGruder's words, “it's entirely indulgent to avoid audience interest

or engagement by skipping humor.” As is often the case with *The Boondocks* Animated Series' younger audience, McGruder found that the second inception of his creative vision could quickly grow indulgent by focusing on message-based critical commentary instead of effective humor incorporation. As McGruder proclaimed in his 2008 *Washington Post* interview, *The Boondocks* Animated Series is “never all about the jokes; I'm not just a comedian, I have a message.” (Cavna, 2008). A meticulous balance of McGruder's message-based creative vision and humor incorporation strategies lies at the heart of each episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series produced under McGruder's guidance. According to McGruder, one of the greatest challenges behind the satirical tone of *The Boondocks* Animated Series was incorporation of humor to avoid berating members of the young Adult Swim demographic with message-based morality tales that would feel comparatively devoid of humor (Cavna, 2008).

Due to the content constraints that McGruder faced with *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, McGruder claims that adjustment to a younger audience stopped him from simply transferring story arcs directly from *The Boondocks* Cartoon Strip to *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Incorporation of explicit content, facilitated by Adult Swim's unprecedentedly generous weekly half-hour format and TV-MA rating (as opposed to the programming block's standard TV-14), allowed McGruder to develop satire for a younger audience by imbuing a second humor incorporation based encoding strategy to facilitate audience assimilation for *The Boondocks* Animated Series with incorporation of explicit content, primarily through use of explicit language to render dialogue culturally authentic and the use of highly satirized, thematically mature subject material at the heart of each

standalone episode in *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The Boondocks Animated Series builds on the explicit content guidelines set by preceding adult-oriented animated television programming. Matt Groening's *The Simpsons* (1989 -) on the FOX network, Matt Stone and Trey Parker's *South Park* (1997 -) and Seth McFarlane's network and cable success with *American Dad*, *The Cleveland Show* and *The Family Guy* respectively incorporated explicit language and mature themes, particularly upon the advent of a television content ratings system in the early 1990s.

Much like the animated programming that preceded them, the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series production regularly incorporated the TV-MA rating, particularly in the culturally authentic dialogue and scathing, unapologetic humor as employed within standalone episodes. Like Groening, McFarlane, Parker and Stone before him, McGruder employed humor incorporation as an encoding strategy to facilitate audience accessibility within two predominant avenues: explicit content incorporation and satire incorporation. Both of these strategies were routinely employed throughout McGruder's forty-five episode production run on *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Through incorporation of explicit and satirical content, the show maintained an edgy yet consistently humorous demeanor that met audience expectations for the successful animated programs produced by Groening, McFarlane, Parker and Stone (Groening, 1989; Jones & McGruder, 2007; 2009, 2011; Parker & Stone, 1997).

When referring to humor incorporation in the first season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, McGruder suggests that he had little time to maintain the standards of

artistic integrity from *The Boondocks* Comic Strip while learning to hone his singular vision through a transnational cast and crew of actors, animators, producers, writers and other personnel placed at McGruder's disposal immediately after agreeing to produce *The Boondocks* Animated Series through the Cartoon Network and Sony Television Entertainment (Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

According to McGruder, the original vision for *The Boondocks* Animated Series demanded that each episode's humor incorporation remain successful even if the episodes were viewed in a different order than their original broadcast air dates. As succinctly described by McGruder, 2005-2006 production of the *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first season served as “a crash course that nearly killed me and everyone around me” during the transition from *The Boondocks* Comic Strip to *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Cavna, 2008). While McGruder felt that *The Boondocks* Animated Series fell far below his own artistic and creative standards, the lessons learned were well implemented into the fifteen episodes that comprised *The Boondocks* Animated Series' second season (2007-2008) (Cavna, 2008). As noted by *Los Angeles Times* interviewer Greg Braxton, McGruder seemed to view the second season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series as the culmination of his finest work with the franchise (Braxton, 2007; Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

McGruder's blend of cultural, ethnic, political and social commentary in both *The Boondocks* Comic Strip and *The Boondocks* Animated Series was designed to expose, lampoon and rebuke various aspects of contemporary popular culture. Although the extensive referential lexicon of *The Boondocks* Animated Series comprises the final two chapters within this collection, the commodification of hollow mass culture relics with

mass consumption as a goal imbued McGruder with a sense of personal duty in terms of the satire incorporation across the first three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

McGruder's *Washington Post* interview on contemporary satire offers a glimpse at McGruder's cultural outlook, which could be described as an affront to McGruder's perceived climate of shameless, wanton anti-intellectualism that surfaced during the past few decades. "In 2008," McGruder proclaimed, "music, film and popular culture are stupid and laden with pervasive anti-intellectualism." (Cavna, 2008). McGruder saw the 2008 climate of anti-intellectualism as a tremendous creative impetus for each episode of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Cavna, 2008).

To surpass what McGruder perceived as "universally mediocre expectations" amidst rival texts for both *The Boondocks Comic Strip* (1996-2006) and *The Boondocks Animated Series* (2005-2011), humor incorporation within the latter sought to instill cross-brow appeal through a combination of humor incorporation tactics involving both satire and explicit content incorporation (Cavna, 2008). In his *Washington Post* interview, McGruder suggested that while the historical and obscure cultural references denoted within each episode are imbued with high-brow audience appeal, *The Boondocks Animated Series'* highly satirized depictions of contemporary issues in black film, music and television are designed to appeal to young Adult Swim demographic members across a spectrum of high-brow to low-brow humor incorporation. McGruder listed satirization of contemporary rap music as a prevalent theme in *The Boondocks Season 2* (and, to a lesser extent, within the first and third seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series*). As surmised by McGruder in 2008, "we reach young audiences with relevant satire that

reaches from low-brow Rap Music to high-brow historical references, like [*The Boondocks* Animated Series' highly satirized caricature of] iconic Montgomery Bus Boycott participant Rosa Parks (Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

According to McGruder, satire incorporation as an encoding strategy in *The Boondocks* Animated Series faced a number of pitfalls from angles that remained safe with the larger, older newspaper audience for *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (Cavna, 2008). According to McGruder, the young audience of the Adult Swim programming block was raised with a degree of skepticism towards 'very special episodes' of situational comedies from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Few of these message-based 'very special episodes' incorporated the signature humor of their traditional shows, much to the chagrin of younger audiences who saw Arnold (Gary Coleman) converse with First Lady Nancy Reagan on *Different Strokes*, or Tim Taylor (Tim Allen) confront his son over his freebase cocaine habit in *Home Improvement*. McGruder understood Adult Swim audience cynicism towards this straightforward style of message delivery, as the humor incorporation in *The Boondocks* Animated Series uses satire to accentuate (among other aspects) the inherent flaws within a humor-free, message-based structure for a standalone episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. The 2004 FOX network collapse of McGruder's sitcom-formula-savvy pilot of *The Boondocks* Animated Series offered the franchise creator free reign over humor incorporation, including micromanagement of both satirical content incorporation and explicit content incorporation through use of profane language and thematically mature subject matter (Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block came to fruition through strict reliance upon a fifteen-minute format and virtually universal adherence to the tenets of the TV-14 rating. Prior to *The Boondocks* Animated Series' pilot premiere in fall 2005, Adult Swim had developed a young, predominantly male niche audience through production of late-night series like *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*, *Robot Chicken*, *Sealab 2021* and *Squidbillies*. All of the early Adult Swim shows offered variations of the formula that fueled the programming block's first original production, *Space Ghost: Coast to Coast* (1997-2001). *The Boondocks* Animated Series was afforded two luxuries to facilitate the transition to message-based satire for a younger audience: (1) a TV-MA rating and (2) a half-hour weekly episode format, both of which were firsts for Adult Swim in what appeared to be a large gamble for the Cartoon Network in the wake of McGruder's late 2004 failure to secure a prime-time network slot for *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Reginald Hudlin, an Ivy League educated Black Entertainment Television (BET) programming executive, severed ties with McGruder as Sony Television Entertainment agreed to co-finance the show while McGruder shopped for an ideal cable network home for *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Adult Swim's budget for *The Boondocks* Animated Series represented an exponential increase over the programming block's prior existing programming. Beyond a cast of actors, writers and producers, the show encapsulated McGruder's original standard for artistic integrity that he failed to meet at any point during publication of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

According to McGruder, one of the most ambitious goals upon starting production for *The Boondocks* Animated Series was maintenance of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's fundamentally unaltered cast of recurring characters, including both the Freeman family and the Woodcrest residents who they interacted with (Braxton, 2007; Cavna, 2008; McGruder, 2007). Maintenance of a static character platform facilitated satire incorporation throughout McGruder's three-season production tenure with *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In his *Washington Post* interview, McGruder noted that each episode had to retain a unique feel despite the stagnant incorporation of character development as a platform for McGruder's singular creative vision for *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Cavna, 2008). This platform allowed a blank template for incorporation of satire that matched McGruder's creative vision for *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Between 1995 and 2005, the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block offered an increasing amount of originally produced serialized entertainment content. Within the first decade of original programming, Adult Swim programming executive Mike Lazzalo and his executive cohorts focused almost entirely on humor incorporation to facilitate audience appeal, McGruder sought to imbue *The Boondocks* Animated Series with a degree of satire, balancing an episode-based message delivery with consistent episode-based humor incorporation (Cavna, 2008). According to McGruder, the satire of *The Boondocks* Animated Series relied entirely on four audience factors: "(1) who we are, (2) where we are, (3) what we see and (4) how we see it." The satire that permeated McGruder's forty-five episode production run on *The Boondocks* Animated Series was

based on the four aforementioned contextual considerations, thus facilitating a spectrum of Preferred and Oppositional textual readings that correlated with the potentially problematic humor incorporation encapsulated within each standalone episode of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Furthermore, McGruder noted that effective satire was often the product of artists who networked with critical thinkers to pull creative inspiration from mass media representation of contemporary issues involving American culture, ethnicity, politics and society. In this regard, McGruder looked to the audience as co-conspirator in an effort to produce intentionally audacious contemporary satire that appealed to young Adult Swim viewers in a manner that *The Boondocks Comic Strip* could not, regardless of the daily strip's circulation numbers as giddily documented by *The Boondocks Comic Strip's* most prolific national distributor, United Press Syndicate (UPS). As UPS offered a home to controversial cartoons like Berkeley Breathed's *Bloom County* and Garry Trudeau's *Doonisbury*, the syndicate seemed to offer an appropriate home for McGruder's pervasively satirical creative vision as depicted through *The Boondocks Comic Strip*. "Great satirists strive to pull inspiration from the world around them," McGruder surmised. In the case of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, satirical form allowed McGruder to facilitate audience saliency and rewatchability due to the meticulous balance between humor and message incorporation within each of the first forty-five episodes in *The Boondocks Animated Series'* initial production run (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In a 2005 interview with *The Onion A.V. Club's* Nicholas Rabin, McGruder freely admitted that both *The Boondocks Comic Strip* and *The Boondocks Animated Series*

preyed upon the American semiotic association between purportedly 'cute' aesthetic properties as an ideal platform for humor incorporation through explicit language, particularly in the form of racialized language. According to McGruder, Huey and Riley Freeman were kept cute, young and (most importantly) stagnant to dissuade audience controversy towards *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Rabin, 2005).

In his 2008 interview with Evan Jacobs, McGruder commented briefly on the reliance upon explicit content as an audacity-based, shock humor tinged encoding strategy. In terms of explicit content incorporation, *The Boondocks Animated Series* episodes' flow and audience appeal required careful manipulation to facilitate audience accessibility through concurrently ostentatious and scathing cultural, ethnic, political and social satire. As stated by McGruder, the audience “accessibility [of each episode] requires a dangerous balance between ignorance and intelligence.” (Florino, 2008; Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Throughout his three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series* production across a half-decade time span, McGruder remained consistently mindful that over-reliance on explicit content could scare away audiences seeking message-centric episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series* with content of substance in terms of cultural, ethnic social or political commentary (Bach, 2007; Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005). As McGruder stated in a 2007 interview, *The Boondocks Animated Series* “is a really complex show, so a lot can go wrong in facilitating accessibility!” McGruder relied on the TV-MA to enhance the humor of *The Boondocks Comic Strip* as an encoding strategy for shock humor incorporation in *The Boondocks Animated Series*. According to

McGruder, *The Boondocks* Animated Series' marriage of TV-MA explicit content and McGruder's singular vision in terms of message-based critical commentary was only achievable through the extensive assistance afforded to him by Adult Swim and Sony Television Entertainment (Bach, 2007; Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The vast majority of shock humor incorporation in *The Boondocks* Animated Series relies on incorporation of culturally authentic dialogue through a consistent vehicle of cross-brow humor that appealed to the young demographic of Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

McGruder described incorporation of humor as a quintessential encoding strategy in terms of audience accessibility in *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005). Without successful incorporation of relevant jokes and meticulous comedic timing, McGruder worried that young viewers of *The Boondocks* Animated Series would dismiss the show as an exercise in ham-fisted, heavy-handed, moralistic social commentary (Bach, 2007). The balance of a specific episode's intended message was counteracted with consistently funny delivery through McGruder's five-character spectrum of recurring characters (Huey Freeman, Robert Freeman, Tom Dubois, Riley Freeman, and Uncle Ruckus). According to McGruder, the young audience of the Adult Swim programming block had far less patience for the cultural, ethnic, political and social commentary of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, which resonated among older audiences for its' broad message in lieu of its' edgy humor. McGruder viewed *The Boondocks* Animated Series audience as a cohort. According to McGruder, *The Boondocks* Animated Series was successful because audiences “shared the

skepticism and cynicism denoted within the show” (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The Boondocks Animated Series builds on the explicit content and shock humor that helped to render prior adult-oriented animated programs appealing to mainstream audiences: bold or controversial thematic content, frequent use of profanity, and exaggerated depictions of violence. As in the case of other adult-oriented animated programs, the show frequently employs content that strives to earn *The Boondocks* Animated Series '“TV-MA” rating in each episode (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Although they focused on cultural satire, prior adult-oriented animation to *The Boondocks* Animated Series avoided bold discussion of ethnic representation or allusions to potentially controversial minority portrayals. As a stark contrast, *The Boondocks* Animated Series differentiates itself from prior successes in the adult-oriented animated format through its focus on discussion of black representation. This difference is visible through the show's ethnically diverse cast of primary and secondary characters, incorporation of racial epithets, and bold discussion of black representation within a satirized view of American culture (Jones & McGruder, 2005)..

As a means of avoiding the controversy that *The Boondocks* comic strip faced, the humor of the adult-oriented animated format allowed *The Boondocks* Animated Series to enter production under the guise of a harmless comedic satire. In a 2007 interview, McGruder noted that prior shows like *The Simpsons*, *South Park* and *Family Guy* facilitated an idea that adult-oriented animation, while seeped in adult-oriented content, was often dismissed by audiences as harmless comedy. Succinctly stated, *The Boondocks*

Animated Series' encoding of explicit content and shock humor allowed McGruder to address sensitive cultural and sociopolitical themes through a format that had been previously dismissed as vapid satire (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The third chapter explores the show's encoding of explicit content and shock humor as a means of averting controversy over bold discussion of the contemporary black experience. The show's humor is imbued with the sensibilities of comedians like Richard Pryor and Chris Rock, both of whom used humor as a vehicle to facilitate a bold discussion of the contemporary black experience. As McGruder noted himself, *The Boondocks* Animated Series functioned as an anomaly for the adult-oriented animated format: as *The Simpsons*, *South Park* and *Family Guy* worked to avoid discussion of ethnicity, audiences did not expect bold discussion of race within the format. Just as black comedians had done in prior decades, McGruder used a format where audiences sought to laugh at thematically explicit or audacious content as a platform for his sociopolitical agendas. In the case of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, precedents in adult-oriented animation facilitated a platform for Adult Swim that afforded bold discussion of black representation. *The Boondocks* Animated Series presented this dialogue in a manner that remains unmatched by contemporary portrayals of black characters on television (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

This analysis of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons explores humor incorporation as an encoding strategy implemented by show runner Aaron McGruder during his 2005-2011 production tenure on the show. This analysis offers full context for McGruder's strategically denoted humor incorporation, offering a lexicon of

influences that each stimulated McGruder's creative vision for *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005)..

Explicit content is a quintessential cornerstone of humor incorporation within the 2005-2011 episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Adult Swim and Sony Television Entertainment offered McGruder free reign of the TV-MA rating, which allowed *The Boondocks* Animated Series to incorporate encoding strategies from existing texts outside the realm of adult-oriented manner (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Between 2005 and 2011, *The Boondocks* Animated Series was one of the few television programs that offered an array of highly satirized cultural, ethnic social and political commentary. This energy was maintained through *The Boondocks* Animated Series cast and crew's dedication to a singular creative vision: that of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip creator and *The Boondocks* Animated Series show runner Aaron McGruder (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Cavna, 2008; Cooper, 2008; Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In a 2008 interview with Evan Jacobs, McGruder elaborated on the incorporation of satire in *The Boondocks* Animated Series. According to McGruder, the specific goal of humor incorporation as an encoding strategy in *The Boondocks* Animated Series was audience assimilation through production of an energy that McGruder described as “Contemporary Black Political Satire,” despite *The Boondocks* Animated Series' intrinsic commentary-based links to culture, ethnicity and society (Cavna, 2008; Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Throughout *The Boondocks* Animated Series, humor incorporation often lampoons Tom Dubois throughout single episodes as the epitome of his namesake, itself a

dual reference to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and controversial early twentieth-century black activist W.E.B. Dubois, frequent counterpoint to Booker T. Washington's oft-maligned 'talented tenth' ideology. As a clear-cut example of black capitalism and affirmative action at work. (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

As a dedicated Democrat, elected official and a graduate student who has attained life's tangible 'rewards' through vapid, upper-middle-class luxury, Tom Dubois offers a portrait of contemporary ambivalence and malaise in place of appropriate and proactive frustration (as embraced by McGruder, and his conceptualization of *The Boondocks* Animated Series ' target audience) (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In 2007, McGruder promoted *The Boondocks* Animated Series through a question-and-answer panel at the 2007 San Diego Comic Convention (SDCC). In an SDCC interview with *Los Angeles Times* humor columnist Greg Braxton, McGruder elaborated on his intended audience for *The Boondocks* Animated Series. McGruder noted that one of the greatest challenges in shifting to *The Boondocks* Animated Series was a personal transition from *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's daily newspaper audience towards a younger demographic (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Beyond the allure of a thematically relevant daily format, *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's national syndication offered a large potential audience through United Press Syndicate. Unfortunately, McGruder felt that the appeal of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip contradicted the average daily newspaper reader base, which was predominantly comprised of white males in their early-to-mid fifties (Braxton, 2007). Few fans of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip migrated to Adult Swim for *The Boondocks* Animated Series; by the same token, few fans of *The Boondocks* Animated Series were familiar with *The*

Boondocks Comic Strip By comparison, the audiences who frequented *The Boondocks* Animated Series on Adult Swim were often in their twenties or thirties and comprised the audience of McGruder's successful SDCC panel (Braxton, 2007; McGrath, 2004; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

According to McGruder, the key to *The Boondocks* Animated Series' phenomenal success on Adult Swim was connection to a younger audience. To facilitate broad audience appeal, the audience resonance of fan-favorite *The Boondocks* Animated Series episodes was meticulous attention to topics which remained relevant to the Adult Swim programming block's young, predominantly male demographic (Braxton, 2007). To facilitate *The Boondocks* Animated Series audience appeal, McGruder sought to nurture a balance between the intended message and audience-savvy, humor based encoding strategies that were incorporated into *The Boondocks* Animated Series on an individual episode basis (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

McGruder claimed that *The Boondocks* Animated Series built an audience through a single assumption, which McGruder credited as the singular “secret” to *The Boondocks* Animated Series' successful audience encoding. As was the case with *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, McGruder offered cultural, ethnic, political and social critical commentary that operated around a simple assumption. Rather than assuming dissenting opinion and frustration were rare audience traits, *The Boondocks* Animated Series episodes were designed to facilitate audience appeal by treating the audience's dissenting opinions with the status quo as a common bond between the viewers and the cast/crew of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. (Bach, 2007). In McGruder's words, “*The Boondocks* [Animated Series] connects with the part of people out there that are frustrated and

wondering what's going on when life doesn't really seem to 'make sense' or 'add up' [in terms of culture, ethnicity, politics and/or society].” (Bach, 2007) The sense of discontent alluded to by McGruder acted as the target audience for humor incorporation as an encoding strategy to facilitate *The Boondocks Animated Series*' audience accessibility within the Adult Swim programming block (Bach, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

One of the largest frustrations that McGruder faced while producing *The Boondocks Comic Strip* was the degree of censorship and format adherence demanded by syndication constraints. Upon re-envisioning *The Boondocks Comic Strip* as *The Boondocks Animated Series*, McGruder incorporated shock humor as a specific encoding strategy that would prove alluring to the young, predominantly male viewers of the Adult Swim programming block (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007). While tremendously effective among audience members, this encoding strategy demanded loosened content constraints beyond those of daily cartoon strip syndication in national newspapers (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005)..

Although McGruder's transition from strip syndication to series production presented tremendous creative possibilities, the franchise creator was afforded little time to think about the creative ebb and flow of *The Boondocks Animated Series* during the initial transition from strip to screen in 2004 and 2005. As McGruder concurrently worked with Jennifer Cheng (Boston artist) to produce *The Boondocks Comic Strip* in early 2005, Adult Swim and Sony Television Entertainment approached McGruder with an opportunity to shift the format of his franchise (McGrath, 2004).

Through his quick shift from *The Boondocks Comic Strip* to *The Boondocks Animated Series*, McGruder was forced into an overnight transition from the creative

medium with the most corporate control and sanitization to television's TV-MA rating, a comparative 'no man's land' in terms of external censorship. The shift from *The Boondocks* Comic Strip to *The Boondocks* Animated Series provided a veritable antithesis and a concurrent cornucopia of possibilities for sardonic audience assimilation through humor incorporation as an encoding strategy in *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Braxton, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004; McGruder, 1996).

Although the expanded content constraints of *The Boondocks* Animated Series might seem to soothe McGruder's production woes from *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, the actual circumstances proved antithetical. As expressed in his 2007 interview with Josephine Bach, McGruder saw *The Boondocks* Animated Series encoding strategies as a higher priority than vapid incorporation of TV-MA regulated explicit content in line with concurrent programming on the Adult Swim programming block (Bach, 2007). To maintain a recurring television audience, explicit content was sparingly incorporated to avoid marring the central message of each *The Boondocks* Animated Series episode in terms of cultural, ethnic, social or political commentary (Bach, 2007). The content constraints of the TV-MA rating and incorporation of explicit content forced McGruder to adopt *The Boondocks* Animated Series' five character spectrum, offering an accessible template for encoding strategies, particularly through incorporation of shock humor conventions as facilitated through the expanded creative freedom of the TV-MA rating (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

According to McGruder, one of the most ambitious goals upon starting production for *The Boondocks* Animated Series was maintenance of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's fundamentally unaltered cast of recurring characters, including both the Freeman family

and the Woodcrest residents who they interacted with (Braxton, 2007; Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005). Maintenance of a static character platform facilitated satire incorporation throughout McGruder's three-season production tenure with *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In his *Washington Post* interview, McGruder noted that each episode had to retain a unique feel despite the stagnant incorporation of character development as a platform for McGruder's singular creative vision for *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Cavna, 2008). This platform allowed a blank template for incorporation of satire that matched McGruder's creative vision for *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005)..

Throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, Uncle Ruckus consistently eclipses other characters as a vehicle for explicit content incorporation. Although he started development on Uncle Ruckus in 2001, McGruder waited until the 2005 premiere on Adult Swim to incorporate Uncle Ruckus' unique blend of internal and external discontent in constant pursuit of assimilation into Woodcrest mass culture. According to McGruder, Uncle Ruckus was intended as a selective recurring character; due to the character's audience resonance, he appears in all but one episode of *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first three seasons (Bach, 2007; McGrath, 2004; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Throughout the first three seasons, Uncle Ruckus recurrences offer the most pervasive incorporation of explicitly linguistic content in *The Boondocks Animated Series* episodes. Depicted as a pervasive antagonist of his cohorts within the recurring character spectrum. In season one, Uncle Ruckus clashes with the family as a groundskeeper at the

Wuncler Estate in the pilot episode, “The Garden Party,” Uncle Ruckus emerges three minutes into the episode with a tirade of profanity and racial epithets upon initial introduction to Huey, Riley and Robert Freeman. “Return of the King” generated controversy from Ted Koppel’s *Nightline* and Al Sharpton due largely to Uncle Ruckus’ jaded, abrasive treatment of Martin Luther King during a 1960s flashback and a contemporary dinner meeting at the Freeman residence (Barnes & McGruder, 2005).

Uncle Ruckus appears in a similarly antagonistic capacity in the second season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. The second season premiere, “...Or Die Trying,” depicted the other four characters in the recurring character spectrum united in a cartoonish brawl at a local multiplex, where Uncle Ruckus is employed as an antagonistic usher (McGruder & Taylor, 2007). The DVD-only second season finale, “The Uncle Ruckus Reality Program,” depicts a satirized BET reality program hosted by Uncle Ruckus and designed by network personnel to facilitate the cultural, ethnic, political and social decline of the United States’ black populace (Barnes & McGruder, 2008).

The third season opening, “It’s a Black President, Huey Freeman,” depicts Ruckus’ reflections on Barack Obama as a corollary to his first season contextual history with Martin Luther King. Ruckus stops short of hurling a brick at the United States President, though he combines forces with black radical Huey Freeman in a failed effort to migrate to Canada after the 2008 Presidential Election (McGruder, 2010).

“The Story of Jimmy Rebel” substitutes Ruckus for Riley in the typical musician episode template, yet finds a common ground between the two hate-fueled musicians that reflects a bizarre sense of warmth; Rebel represents Ruckus’ only pleasant interaction throughout three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (McGruder, 2010).

In McGruder's penultimate episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, "The Color Ruckus," Uncle Ruckus' ethnicity is explored (yet never uncovered) in a chronicle of Ruckus' long history of abuse, which facilitated his sense of self-loathing. In both episodes, Ruckus' back story is playfully explored in tandem with satire and explicit content based humor incorporation. McGruder's denoted back story for Ruckus prior to departure from *The Boondocks* Animated Series represents the franchise creator's closest brush with fan service (McGruder, 2010).

Throughout McGruder's three season production tenure on *The Boondocks* Animated Series, Riley Freeman and Huey Freeman can be viewed as different sides of the same coin in terms of humor incorporation. While Riley Freeman's older brother, Huey, frequently appears in episodes that rely heavily on satire incorporation, Riley's consumption of inappropriate mass media texts is often incorporated in tandem with explicit content based humor incorporation (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Season one's pilot episode, "The Garden Party," depicts Riley Freeman as a figurative mass culture casualty; Riley Freeman is influenced by a steady unsupervised diet of film, music and television, each of which bears a subsequent negative impact on the eight year old's behavior (Barnes & McGruder, 2005). In episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series like the two-part "The Story of Gangstalcious" and "The Story of Thugnificent," Riley's interaction with mainstream rap artists evokes concurrent humor incorporation through explicit content and satire of some of the Hip-Hop genre's most glaring criticisms (Barnes & McGruder, 2006, 2007).

Other episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series play Riley Freeman's criminal shenanigans to comedic effect. In the first season's "The Real," Riley convinces his

grandfather, Robert Freeman, to feign blindness in an effort to win a restoration of his prized vehicle through rapper Xzibit and his popular MTV television program, *Pimp My Ride*. In episodes like “Thank You for Not Snitching” and “Let's Nab Oprah,” Riley Freeman interacts with Edward Wuncler III and Gin Rummy, often displaying a higher degree of influence than his white war veteran cohorts, both of whom are obsessed with the illusion of glorified criminal activity (Barnes & McGruder, 2006, 2007). In the third season, Riley's criminal schemes are played for satirical effect as a central humor incorporation vehicle in two concurrent episodes, “Smokin' with Cigarettes” and “The Fundraiser” (McGruder, 2010).

Of all five recurring characters within McGruder's representation spectrum as incorporated in *The Boondocks* Animated Series, Tom Dubois represents a sardonic, disappointing middle-point in his representation of a token minority within the upper-middle-class competitive consumerism of Woodcrest. Frequently depicted with his wife (Sara Dubois, a blonde white woman) and their daughter Jazmine (a girl Huey's age with confused notions of racial identity, due in large part to poor parenting), Tom Dubois (as the patriarch of the Dubois family) is designed as a satire of token representation within the status quo of McGruder's fictionalized, predominantly white fictional suburb, Woodcrest (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In most episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series featuring the Dubois family (Tom, wife Sara and daughter Jazmine), respective humor incorporation reflects a tinge of misanthropy in McGruder's frustration with contemporary cultural, ethnic, political and social malaise. Much of the humor relies on Tom and Sara's unwavering devotion to the Democratic Party; both pride themselves as vehemently progressive liberals, yet

humor incorporation in *The Boondocks* Animated Series often suggest that Tom and Sara's liberal values offer a hilariously detrimental counterpoint to traditional, tested parenting tactics (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The Dubois family exists within a vacuum of mainstream cultural exposure. Throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, the failed 2005 prosecution of Robert Kelly, the sudden and seemingly forced 2007 career height for musician Usher, and contradicting levels of investment in the 2008 Barack Obama Campaign (Barnes & McGruder, 2005, 2006). In the third season premiere of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, "It's a Black President, Huey Freeman," the episode's faux documentary format suggests that Barack Obama equates to an "inherently talented, exponentially better looking" version of Tom (McGruder, 2010). In the second episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' second season, "Tom, Sara and Usher," Tom suspects his wife Sara of infidelity with Usher, thus concurrently ruining Tom's anniversary plans with Sara and Sara's efforts to schedule an Usher appearance at Jazmine Dubois' tenth birthday party (Barnes & McGruder, 2007).

If nothing else, Tom Dubois and his family members are designed to reflect the hypocrisy and identity-based, rampant confusion of upper-middle-class black assimilation into a fictionalized suburb like Woodcrest, itself a replica of the Columbia, MD suburb that McGruder moved to from Chicago as a young child (McGrath, 2004). Throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, Tom Dubois is a black Assistant District Attorney who daily consigns criminals to the very same prisons that he remains phobic of throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. The fact that this discrepancy never explicitly occurs to Tom Dubois offers a shining

example of the character's implementation of shameless naivety towards the American prison system throughout *The Boondocks Animated Series'* first three seasons, throughout which Dubois remains a recurring character who seems designed by McGruder to reflect the hyper-liberal mentality of token black representation within upper-middle-class suburbs like *The Boondocks Animated Series'* fictional Woodcrest, MD suburb (Jones & McGruder, 2014).

Humor incorporation throughout the first and third seasons play on Dubois' irrational fear of prison rape (as perpetuated by media exposure to HBO's "Oz" (1998-2004), the brainchild of former David Simon collaborator and 1990s NBC show runner Tom Fontana (*Homicide: Life on the Street*). Tom's skepticism of sexualized prison violence is exacerbated through his exposure to programs like MSNBC's "Lock Up" (2005-Present) and The Learning Channel's "Scared Straight" reboot (2007-2009), which offered an antithesis to potentially glamorized depictions of incarceration from contemporary black film and music (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Grandfather Robert Freeman's humor incorporation throughout *The Boondocks Animated Series* relies more heavily on satire incorporation than explicit content incorporation. Robert's adventures across three seasons satirize his efforts to assimilate into privileged suburban consumer culture and his efforts to meet a love interest through an array of mass media formats (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The pilot episode of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, "The Garden Party," offers a satirical look at Robert's desire for acceptance within Woodcrest mass culture (Barnes & McGruder, 2005). Robert's dating escapades frequently incorporate explicit content through depiction of Robert's love interest, particularly in the first season's "Guess Hoe's

Coming to Dinner” and the second season's “Attack of the Killer King-Fu Wolf Bitch” (Barnes & McGruder, 2007).

Unlike his younger brother, Huey Freeman's humor incorporation in *The Boondocks* Animated Series is highly contingent upon satire incorporation in lieu of the explicit content incorporation most typically associated with Riley Freeman. Huey Freeman offers a mass culture antithesis to that of Riley, as he finds no gratification in the support of negativity through an unsupervised diet of film, music, television or video games. Huey Freeman is typically incorporated as a satirical counterpoint to other members of the recurring character spectrum, particularly low-end members Uncle Ruckus and Riley Freeman (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In “The Garden Party,” Huey Freeman's efforts to adjust his oratory demeanor to meet the audience demands of the predominantly white, wealthy Woodcrest mass populace as encountered at the Wuncler Estate are played to highly satirical comedic effect. After dressing like Fidel Castro to stir audience furor, Huey discovers that his plan to expose a government conspiracy and mass media discontent has little-to-no effect over the audience. Wuncler's friends repeatedly dismiss Huey as “well spoken” and “adorable;” the opposite of Huey's intended results. As Huey mentions to Robert of the Woodcrest residents, “these people will smile and clap through anything” (Barnes & McGruder, 2005). Huey's initial encounter with Wuncler's associates in *The Boondocks* Animated Series pilot set the template for Woodcrest resident behavior throughout the subsequent forty-four episodes produced under Aaron McGruder (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Huey Freeman's somber demeanor and revisionist approach to black history is subsequently satirized in the first season's "A Huey Freeman Christmas." In *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first holiday episode, one of Huey's new professors at J. Edgar Hoover Elementary School allows Huey full creative freedom over the writing and production of the Woodcrest Christmas Pageant. Huey takes his responsibilities so seriously that he attempts to hire an array of black actors, musicians and production designers to bring his ensuing vision, "Black Jesus," to a live stage performance that spirals out of his irresponsible teacher's control (McGruder, 2005).

Huey Freeman's efforts at social activism are satirized in tandem with *The Boondocks Animated Series*' unaired depiction of BET behind the scenes in the banned second season episode "The Hunger Strike." Huey Freeman launches a hunger strike against BET in an effort to stop the network from perpetuating negative perceptions of black cultural, ethnic, political and social concerns. Huey's efforts to curtail BET behavior have little effect, particularly when the hollow support of a vanity-obsessed religious official, Rollo Goodlove, causes Huey's movement to collapse. The subsequent unaired episode of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, "The Uncle Ruckus Reality Program," offers a condemnatory look at BET that employs explicit content based humor incorporation through a day in the life of Uncle Ruckus' character, edited throughout the episode in reality television format (Barnes & McGruder, 2008).

Aaron McGruder felt that the first season of *The Boondocks Animated Series* focused too much on the take-away message; critical commentary on the cultural, ethnic, political or social state of affairs in the contemporary United States. Moreover, McGruder noted that the humor in the first season relied far too little on the constraints of

the TV-MA rating for incorporation of humor as an encoding strategy to facilitate audience accessibility (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Cavna, 2008; Farici, 2008; Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Rabin, 2005).

In terms of humor incorporation, Season 02 (2007-2008) remains McGruder's favored season in terms of yet another encoding strategy. In a 2008 interview with *Washington Post* columnist Michael Cavna, McGruder noted that the second season of *The Boondocks Animated Series* represented the culmination of his favorite work on *The Boondocks Comic Strip* or *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005). McGruder's satisfaction with *The Boondocks Animated Series'* second season was largely the result of incorporated lessons from the show runner's turbulent initial year in television production (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Cavna, 2008; Farici, 2008; Jacobs, 2008; Rabin, 2008).

McGruder elaborated further on humor incorporation as an encoding strategy throughout the first two seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series'* production in a 2008 interview with Rick Florino (Florino, 2008). "Each script's secret is consistently funny, palatable dialogue and timing; nobody would watch the show if we were just presenting messages and points of view." McGruder explained. "The show absolutely has to be funny" (Florino, 2008). To ensure the effectiveness of *The Boondocks Animated Series'* audience-beloved humor incorporation as an encoding strategy, McGruder confined development of *The Boondocks Animated Series'* first three seasons to a dedicated production philosophy elaborated upon in the 2008 Florino interview: "The formula is simple: phase in as much humor into each episode as you possibly can! If the audience isn't laughing at the satire, it isn't the show's fault!" (Florino, 2008). Elaborating further

on *The Boondocks* Animated Series' reliance upon humor incorporation as an encoding strategy, McGruder noted that the series' humor incorporation, much like *The Boondocks* Animated Series' other encoding strategies, demanded cross-brow appeal (within a low-to-high dynamic). The cast and crew of *The Boondocks* Animated Series worked with McGruder to “earn juvenile, low-brow humor with intelligent, high-brow points in each episode” of McGruder's 2005-2011 production tenure (Florino, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

As is the case with the other encoding strategies discussed in this study, humor incorporation is regularly intertwined with McGruder's five-point recurring character spectrum. While the high-brow satire in *The Boondocks* Animated Series is traditionally delivered through the upper tier of the spectrum (Robert and Huey Freeman), the low-brow humor is frequently associated with the lower end of McGruder's representation spectrum (Uncle Ruckus, Riley Freeman), with Tom Dubois focusing as a narrative 'straight man' and concurrent 'everyman' to facilitate audience accessibility. Throughout *The Boondocks* Animated Series ' 2005-2011(Jones & McGruder, 2005) production tenure, the Dubois family encounters adventures that frequently satirize the family's vapid consumption of contemporary media texts (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

CHAPTER VIII

MASS MEDIA SATIRE INCORPORATION

Between 1995 and 2011, McGruder relied on pervasive incorporation of mass media satire across forty-five episodes and three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series*. As was the case with stereotype incorporation and humor incorporation, *The Boondocks Animated Series* (2005-2011) frequently implemented depictions of mass media effects and usage in a satirized manner to pervasive comedic effect, in tandem with the show's consistent reliance on satirized humor incorporation discussed in the prior negotiated reading (Hall, 1973, 1980; McGruder, 2005).

The third chapter of this study examines mass media usage, frequently depicted in a satirized light, across McGruder's five-point character spectrum and through the first forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series*. As was the case with stereotype and humor incorporation, McGruder's satirization of mass media in the digital age embraced supposed minority skepticism as a consensus view in *The Boondocks Animated Series*' 2005-2011 satirization of mass media's increasing prevalence in regards to various aspects of American culture, ethnicity, politics and society (Cavna, 2008; McGruder, 2005).

More specifically, this chapter argues that McGruder appealed to the younger Adult Swim programming block's audience through satire of purportedly haphazard dependence on mass media formats in the digital age. Incorporation of mass media satire in *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first three seasons represented an effort on McGruder's behalf to build audience appeal through extremely cynical, unanimously pessimistic depictions of rising mass media consumption rates. The 2005-2011 success

of *The Boondocks* Animated Series among Adult Swim audiences was a testament to the successful substitution of supposed minority criticisms of contemporary culture, ethnicity, politics, and society (Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The satirized depiction of media dependency that characterizes the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series plays on audience paranoia. This paranoia emphasis is predominantly accentuated through a reversal of supposed associations between majority conformity and minority dissent in terms of vapid mass media consumption through an array of twenty-first century formats. In *The Age of Access: New Media in the Digital Age*, Jeremy Rifkin alludes to the commodification of mass media content as a postmodern alternative to the tangible symbols of wealth that characterized the modern era. Rifkin argues that emerging digital formats offer rapidly shifting access to broad bodies of mass media content. Throughout *The Age of Access*, Rifkin notes that the recently created content of the digital era was continually imbued with semiotic signifiers of wealth iconography (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Rifkin, 2000).

Despite the chronological distance from Rifkin's study, *The Age of Access* has only increased in relevance in the fifteen years since the book's original printing. As is the case with black representation and McGruder's five-point character spectrum in *The Boondocks* Animated Series, each episode is filled with allusions to media theory and concurrent references to mass media relics. Audiences build context to revisit *The Boondocks* Animated Series through an array of content that is continually rendered available to contemporary audiences through the streaming media services of the digital era (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Rifkin, 2000).

The Boondocks Animated Series comprised the Cartoon Network's first foray into media savvy audience incorporation as a consistent encoding strategy to facilitate gradually increasing viewership numbers. The programming block prepared for Rifkin's figurative 'Age of Access' in the late 1990s with *Space Ghost Coast to Coast*, the first show to incorporate internet-based audience interaction between Cartoon Network personnel and the audience, facilitated through BBS-based communication that stood at the cutting edge of late 1990s technology (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Rifkin, 2000).

The individual episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series produced by McGruder often function as standalone satirical mediations on intended hyper-caricatures designed to reflect a despicable sense of cultural, ethnic and political and social ambivalence that was permeating all aspects of society during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Viewed exclusively on the merits of *The Boondocks* Animated Series episodes' incorporation of mass media satire, the series is most effective as a bitter, sardonic representation satire that harbored venomous disdain for black celebrities who relied on wholly problematic hegemonic endorsement for purposes of independent financial gain (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Satire in *The Boondocks* Animated Series episodes is often informed by mass communications theory, deriving humor from their relevance to increasing reliance on emerging digital media formats in contemporary society. Powerful effects media studies theories such as Gerbner's Mean World Syndrome, Banduras' Social Learning Theory and Frankfurt School scholars Horkeimer and Adorno's conceptualization of popular culture as a synonymous entity with mass culture are frequently satirized to comedic effect in

McGruder's recurring character spectrum (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944; Banduras, 1973; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Gerbner, 1969).

McGruder focused on mass communication coursework throughout his University of Maryland "African American Studies" program (1996-1999), building the lexicon of media analysis depicted to satirical effect throughout McGruder's three season production tenure on *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Between 2005 and 2011, McGruder meticulously crafted each episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series as a qualitative critical response to a perceived lack of progress on behalf of film, music, print media, television or emerging digital media formats. Individual episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series are comprised of a message-based structure designed to concurrently facilitate humor and delivery of McGruder's scathingly critical commentary on various aspects of contemporary cultural, ethnic, political and social frustration (Basile, 2005; Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004).

The third chapter contained in this study examines satirization of society's increasing reliance on mass media in lieu of traditional social interaction. More specifically, this analysis examines media usage across a recurring character spectrum introduced in *The Boondocks* Animated Series by McGruder and contained in each of the subsequent chapters that comprise this study (Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

This study offers a qualitative, spectrum-based examination of mass media satirization while maintaining a concurrent focus on McGruder's efforts at audience assimilation through implementation of denoted mass media dependency satirization. As was often the case with other encoding strategies in *The Boondocks* Animated Series episodes, mass media satirization assumed minority dissent as the majority opinion as

reflected in *The Boondocks* Animated Series episode narratives. In terms of the character spectrum, dissent towards mass media usage is predominantly conveyed through Huey Freeman, the highest point in McGruder's recurring character spectrum. The chapter concludes with an examination of potentially problematic aspects of mass media satirization and measures implemented by McGruder and the staff of the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block to dissuade problematic reception through implementation of the other encoding strategies discussed in the other four chapters that comprise this study. While this specific negotiated reading examines implementation of mass media satirization in *The Boondocks* Animated Series as an encoding strategy to facilitate audience assimilation, this encoding strategy was often concurrently implemented with stereotype incorporation, humor incorporation, popular culture reference incorporation and historical reference incorporation as a means of facilitating audience accessibility for the young, loyal viewers of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, both during the series' 2005-2011 debut on Adult Swim and through the popular uncensored DVD releases published by Sony Home Entertainment (Jones & McGruder, 2007, 2009, 2011).

Beyond McGruder's innovative incorporation of humor and static character archetypes as meticulous encoding strategies, *The Boondocks* Animated Series functions as contemporary critical dialogue on the state of black representation in popular, widely circulated mass media texts. Between 2005 and 2011, McGruder collaborated with *The Boondocks* Animated Series' cast and crew to offer consistently satirical portrayals of media literacy and the effects of irresponsible mass media consumption. McGruder's satirical perspectives on media control. In an effort to unite an audience for the show

from its Adult Swim roots, McGruder boldly expects a degree of media literacy from the show's audience. Media usage plays a much larger role in the series than the comic book, as McGruder's consistent focus on it represents an effort to build a multicultural audience for what could seem dismissive to Adult Swim viewers as an angry, inaccessible program (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Episodes from the series place larger demands on the audience's media literacy and familiarity with popular culture than the Groening, Parker/Stone and McFarlane precursors. On the one hand, audience denotation of *The Boondocks'* myriad references demands a familiarity with a complex lexicon of black history, culture and current events. On the other hand, the Freeman's are rendered familiar to the Adult Swim audience through their respective responses to the digital age. In the series, Riley Freeman an eight-year-old with a TMZ addiction, Huey Freeman a ten-year-old with an internet-fueled understanding of black radicalism, and Robert Freeman as a man confused by problematic portrayals of black culture in the media, particularly in the wake of activism that occurred during his formative years (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The characters' media usage often fuels debates between characters that lie at the center of full episodes. While Huey often attempts to harness the power of mass media for social progress, Riley often facilitates negative stereotypes through his devotion to the pages of *The Source* as a substitute for “that thing (his) brother Huey calls the news.” While Huey is often inspired by the rhetoric of black leaders, Riley is often seduced by the glorification of violence and criminal culture in mainstream American film, television and music. Although both Huey and Riley consume texts that are far beyond their traditional age demographic, Robert remains too busy trying to orient himself in a mass-

media-dominated world to monitor the media consumption habits of his grandchildren (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Adult Swim and Sony Television Entertainment executives worried that the show would prove inaccessible to the Adult Swim block's loyal demographic of middle to upper-middle class, 18-30 year old American males. McGruder's strategic avoidance of audience ethnicity paints a strong case for the series' assimilation of a young audience through its satire of mass media, as incorporated into the first forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, which aired between late 2005 and early 2011 (Basile, 2005; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004).

Produced through Sony Television Entertainment and without the assistance of longtime co-producer Reginald Hudlin, McGruder's pilot episode of *The Boondocks Animated Series* premiered on the Cartoon Network in October 2005. The few carry-over *The Boondocks Comic Strip* fans likely felt isolated by *The Boondocks Animated Series* pilot, which relied on an entirely different character hierarchy and humor incorporation as encoding strategies for audience assimilation (Braxton, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004)..

Given the price and generous format afforded to the first season of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, Cartoon Network and Sony Television Entertainment executives worried that the multi-faceted satire and sly shock humor incorporation strategies of their gamble on Aaron McGruder would fail to resonate with the young audience of Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block. If Adult Swim viewers failed to support *The Boondocks Animated Series*, the series would have been canceled after fulfillment of Adult Swim's original fifteen episode, initial season order for new episodes of *The*

Boondocks Animated Series, scheduled to premiere through late 2005 and early 2006 (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

McGruder incorporated a much higher degree of cultural commentary in *The Boondocks* Animated Series than that which was contained in *The Boondocks* Comic Strip during the Strip's national syndication between 1999 and 2006. As was the case with satire and shock humor incorporation, McGruder's risky substitution of minority and majority opinion lent individual *The Boondocks* Animated Series episodes a pervasive, scathing sense of mass media satire. As McGruder was often claim of responding in interviews, he preferred to let his artwork speak for itself by avoiding over-explanation in the press. As standalone entities, *The Boondocks* Animated Series episodes offer deeply analytical satire of mass media outlets with a cynical, conspiratorial perspective on their sinister connection to commoditized mass cultural malaise which permeated all aspects of American society. Rather than imbuing audiences with new ideas about mass media hegemony, McGruder's work on *The Boondocks* Animated Series simply assumed that audiences shared a single trait in regards to common cultural, ethnic, political and social traits: a fear of mass media manipulation (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

Throughout 2005-2008 interviews promoting the first two seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, McGruder routinely addressed the series' audience as a multi-ethnic, significantly younger cross section of American society than the audience which followed *The Boondocks* Animated Series during its' initial syndication. To appeal to a younger, ethnically diverse demographic, McGruder relied on the series' humor incorporation lessons and once again treated supposed minority views of cultural, ethnic,

political and social malaise as assumed frustration that was shared with the audience (Braxton, 2007; Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004).

In terms of mass media usage satire, *The Boondocks* Animated Series employed the encoding strategy in an effort to gather the young, multi-ethnic demographic of the Adult Swim programming block under a cynical, scathing satire of the problematic relationship between mass culture and its' commodification through multiple aspects of contemporary mass media. As Cartoon Network built the Adult Swim programming block's young following through such early inceptions as the Bulletin Board Service (BBS), which was incorporated as a cornerstone of Adult Swim's formative *Space Ghost: Coast to Coast* and a consistent basis for marketing throughout the programming block's early years.

It is an odd twist of fate that McGruder was a longtime fan of the Adult Swim programming block prior to the advent of Adult Swim. Just as original programming like *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*, *Robot Chicken*, *Sealab 2021* and Cartoon Network's maiden production effort, *Space Ghost: Coast to Coast* incorporated media usage as an encoding strategy, McGruder sought to incorporate the encoding strategy with a deeper degree of personal relevance. As McGruder was an actively, willingly devoted viewer of the programming block from its' late-1990s inception forward, the daily cartoonist turned show runner's decision to explore Cartoon Network and the Adult Swim programming block seemed to make even more sense as *The Boondocks* Animated Series pilot was dismissed by the FOX Network, initiating the collapse of McGruder's relationship with co-producer Reginald Hudlin (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGrath, 2004)..

The success of *The Boondocks* Animated Series easily eclipsed the series' precursors as it shattered viewership records for Cartoon Network's young adult audience. In yet another substitution of supposed majority and minority ideals, McGruder sought to gear *The Boondocks* Animated Series towards a young audience that felt similar feelings of jaded cynicism when viewing the cultural, ethnic, political and social aftermath of mass media's commoditized endorsement of existing hegemonic social structures (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In *The Boondocks* Animated Series episodes' assumption of minority frustration with mass media representation of culture, ethnicity, politics and society, the show seems tailor-designed for the young, privileged, media-savvy Adult Swim viewers, many of whom are the first to adopt and employ new formats and mediums for access to mass media content. The broad format and medium satire of mass media representation in *The Boondocks* Animated Series relied almost entirely on existing media literacy and comfort with pervasive use of mass media formats in the digital age (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Rifkin, 2000).

Across forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, McGruder's incorporation of mass media satire focuses predominantly on black representation in contemporary film, music, literature, social media and television. Throughout all five avenues of critical commentary, the same frustration with aspects of contemporary cultural, ethnic, social and political concerns unwaveringly fueled McGruder's creative vision for *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Viewed as a collective whole, the depiction of advertising's prevalence within mass culture is a predominantly satirized theme throughout the McGruder produced

episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. The pervasively cynical tone of advertising satire incorporation views black representation as a figurative pawn within a larger effort to support hegemonic structures through participation in the various economies of cross-brow mass culture accessible to American audiences within the 2005-2011 air date span of McGruder's three season production tenure on *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

As McGruder surmised in a 2000 interview with journalist Anthony Scocca, the daily cartoonist felt genuinely blessed with the fifty-million potential audience members for *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's national syndication in daily newspapers. Furthermore, the 2000 Scocca interview asserts that McGruder saw the success of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip as a veritable call-to-arms for a figurative renaissance across various platforms. In the early days of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip's daily production, McGruder sought to inspire other artists towards a common goal. In tandem with other black artists who were similarly dissatisfied with contemporary culture, McGruder sought to mobilize unapologetic satire which was laden with exposure of problematic mass media representation. As was the case with *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (and eventually *The Boondocks* Animated Series), McGruder sought to inspire other young black artists to direct common frustration at contemporary cultural, ethnic, political and social considerations (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Scocca, 2000).

As the early leader of a makeshift renaissance in black representation, McGruder's initial platform of choice was the daily cartoon panel, a format which had proven problematic in terms of black representation throughout the twentieth-century history of daily cartoon strip syndication. As stated in the 2000 Scocca interview, McGruder's early

The Boondocks Comic Strip submissions were designed to inspire artists to make a similar impact to that of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip across other mediums amidst a climate of increased mass media consumption in tandem with the innovations of the digital age (Scocca, 2000). Although McGruder promoted his *The Boondocks* Animated Series adaptation intentions across his 1999-2008 media campaigns, he never lost a concurrent degree of respect for the representation opportunities afforded by the unprecedentedly warm syndication reception to *The Boondocks* Comic Strip among a consistently growing, continually enthusiastic audience (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

It is important to consider that *The Boondocks* Animated Series was the vision of a star student in Critical Media Studies from the University of Maryland, itself a school that champions its' own contributions to minority studies on an interdisciplinary basis. McGruder's topical emphasis as a University of Maryland student, African American Studies, offered *The Boondocks* Animated Series creator with context that filled McGruder with an unwavering sense of cultural, ethnic, political and social discontent (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Throughout his 1999-2008 interviews, McGruder frequently alluded to the intellectual climate of his upbringing, the early 1990s. "I grew up in the last cultural epoch where it was cool to be smart and informed," McGruder surmised in his 2013 promotion of *Uncle Ruckus: The Live Action Movie* (McGruder, 2013). As his high school years coincided with a nurturing climate for young black artists, McGruder's creative vision for *The Boondocks* was the product of an era where film, literature, music and television functioned as insightful commentary on the cultural, ethnic, political and

social conditions of the world around him (Cooper, 2013; Lemons, 2001; McGruder, 1996; Phipps, 1999; Scocca, 2000).

McGruder's contrast to contemporary mass media analysis of content in early 2013 reveals a degree of yearning for the culture climate of intellectual celebration that punctuated his high school and college years in the early-to-mid 1990s (Cooper, 2013). In the digital age, McGruder claims that mass media consumption has an opposite effect to that of his high school days. As McGruder proclaimed in his 2013 Kick starter promotion for *Uncle Ruckus: The Live Action Movie*, "The more you follow mass media, the dumber you get!" (Cooper, 2013). McGruder claimed that the 2012 election coverage forced him to turn off and avoid mass media outlets. "People are easily manipulated by emotional cues, so one must remain vigilant to avert manipulation," McGruder surmised. "Mass media outlets like Fox News [television channel] or Rush Limbaugh [radio personality] pervasively exploit audiences with their manipulation tactics." (Cooper, 2013)

When McGruder entered mass media production in 1999 as a nationally syndicated daily cartoonist, he had little familiarity with the personal toll that the pace and deadlines of said career can potentially take (or, in measures, took) from McGruder's *The Boondocks* Comic Strip influences like Breathed, Schultz, Trudeau and Watterson. Although each maintained a daily cartoon strip for several years that reflected pertinent daily satire, each found that the job took a personal toll that left them feeling agoraphobic, misanthropic and introspective to a universal fault (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

As alluded in the prologue, McGruder entered print media with UPS syndication with broader aspirations to eventually produce *The Boondocks* Animated Series for American television. According to McGruder, his five predominant influences offered the only worthwhile reason to read daily cartoon strips. Throughout his 1999-2008 interviews, McGruder routinely asserted that he refused to read the daily strips of his peers. While producing *The Boondocks* Comic Strip for UPS in 2004, McGruder alluded to the competition between existing cartoonists that he encountered at a 2003 dinner and subsequently sought to avoid (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Phipps, 1999; Scocca, 2000).

McGruder's frustration with daily cartoon strips expanded into his taste film, music, periodicals and television programming (Phipps, 1999). A lifelong fan of the *Star Wars* film franchise, McGruder saw George Lucas' haphazard treatment of the prequel trilogy as a bastion of a trend that designed media for thoughtless, vapid mass production that openly endorsed hegemonic cultural, ethnic, political and social norms while gaining ambivalent praise from a confused mass populace. Although McGruder routinely avoided new cultural relics throughout his fifteen-year stretch with *The Boondocks* Comic Strip and *The Boondocks* Animated Series, he claimed that he regularly “revisited [his] influences instead of buying into the new stuff” (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Scocca, 2000).

In his 2005 *Onion A.V. Club* interview, McGruder elaborated on perceived shifts to network television programming, claiming that the presentation was directly comparable to that of professional wrestling. “Representation in TV news is ridiculous,” McGruder concluded, “but I can't fix it alone.” McGruder's 2005 statements fall in accord with his prior stated perception of increasing societal reliance on mass media. In a

2008 interview with *Washington Post* reporter Michael Cavanaugh, McGruder claimed that 2008 presidential election coverage tempted him to remove cable television from his home to avoid exposure to its' potentially negative influence (Cavanaugh, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In a 2007 interview with Josephine Bach, McGruder further elaborated on this point: "today's popular culture treats people like they're stupid." In McGruder's eyes, *The Boondocks* Animated Series episodes aspired to unite audiences in common frustration as a last ditch effort to instigate a broad resurgence in production integrity for film, music, print media and television programming. While *The Boondocks* Comic Strip helped McGruder to discover that he was far from alone in his sense of cultural, ethnic, political and social disdain, *The Boondocks* Animated Series proved tremendously rewarding by uniting a younger audience than that of the syndicated *The Boondocks* Comic Strip under a cohesive and meticulously organized balance of humor and message-based critical commentary (Bach, 2007; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Between 1999 and 2001, one of McGruder's most pervasively expressed grievances towards contemporary black representation was the supposed notion of a figurative, invisible wall, behind which cultural boundaries remain confined to their respective ethnic communities. According to McGruder, "all mass media is developed for multi-ethnic mass consumption," covering a broad spectrum of audience ethnic backgrounds with the valid risk of instilling audience bias. "There's no such thing as dirty laundry anymore," McGruder surmised to Anthony Scocca. "Any representation of black culture intended to be kept within members of the black community can be

expected to transcend ethnic boundaries in the age of digital distribution.” (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 2006; Scocca, 2000).

Interviews with Aaron McGruder provide essential context to understand incorporation of mass media satire as an encoding element intended to facilitate audience accessibility of *The Boondocks* Animated Series throughout his half decade of production with the series. More specifically, 2001 interviews shed light on the greatest shift in the transition from *The Boondocks* Comic Strip to *The Boondocks* Animated Series: the comic's shift to brass, relevant yet unapologetic satire that echoed the cultural, ethnic, social and political frustrations of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' audience (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In late 2001, *The Boondocks* Comic Strip offered such envelope-pushing fare as Huey Freeman attempting to report Ronald Reagan for aiding and abetting terrorism to a Christmas conspiracy involving Al Qaeda, the Illuminati, Santa Claus and a flag-making conspiracy that purportedly endorsed hollow patriotism while funding an anti-American agenda fueled by funds from the same source (Lemons, 2001; McGruder, 1996; Rabin, 2005). Although the cartoon gained followers and remained shocking, McGruder's depiction through spin changed drastically on the basis of the Strip's direct response to the September 11th terrorist attacks.

As *The Boondocks* Animated Series is the product of McGruder's singular creative vision, the franchise creator's perception of the mass media is as contextually pertinent as the shifts mass media's portrayal of Aaron McGruder within the 1999-2008 interview sample. Mass media coverage of the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks inspired McGruder to shift the focus of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip from black identity dialogue

to cultural, ethnic, social and political satire. Just as McGruder's late 2001 shift served to facilitate increased readership for *The Boondocks* Comic Strip from the fifty-million reader circulation, the shift also comprised a key component of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' saliency within the Adult Swim programming block's younger, multi-ethnic demographic (Lemons, 2001; Rabin, 2005).

Through the brazen cynicism of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' three seasons, McGruder effectively depicts the marriage of mass culture and mass media as a cornerstone of the decline of Western civilization. Within the universe of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, mass media is depicted as the central force that perpetuates negative representation through advertising, film, music, print and social media outlets. As stated by McGruder, "Mass media perpetuates a lack of honesty, transparency and public interest in federal affairs." (Rabin, 2005).

According to McGruder, the September 11th attacks initiated a relationship between the federal government and mass media outlets that evokes memories of the Office of War Information (OWI) control over American entertainment production throughout the World War II era (Rabin, 2005). McGruder sees both entities as equally responsible in a conspiracy designed to perpetuate a persistently marketable, thematically hollow sense of patriotism as endorsed by top-tier elected officials through a per-negotiated, meticulously controlled strata of mass media manipulation. Furthermore, McGruder briefly described solution to the sense of disdain reflected in his 2005 interview with *The Onion A.V. Club*: "The shallow mass populace wanted to buy into the mass media's continually perpetuated lie. I feel the country is guilty. We should be ashamed, reconcile, find a way to make peace. People allowed themselves to be duped

by mass media in a sloppy manner. People chose this as an alternative to making peace with the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.” (Rabin, 2005). From late 2001 forward, McGruder's views on mass media changed after viewing outlets' alleged cover-up of federal responsibility in terms of the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks. (Rabin, 2005)

According to McGruder, “Mass media and government were intertwined in perpetuation of the “War on Terrorism” fear, the shallow mass populace wanted to buy into the mass media's lie.” (Rabin, 2005). In subsequent *The Boondocks* Comic Strip and *The Boondocks* Animated Series production, McGruder realized that the secret to *The Boondocks* Animated Series' lied largely in the series' own veritable 'spin': depiction of cynical minority dissent as assumed public opinion between audience and producer. “I leave dots for the audience to connect themselves,” McGruder proclaimed in his 2005 interview with *The Onion A.V. Club*. “If the audience is laughing at my satire, that's because they believe it's fucking true!” (Rabin, 2005). As proven by the show's loyal Adult Swim following during its' 2005-2011 inception, the risks that McGruder, the Cartoon Network and Sony Television Entertainment took in production of *The Boondocks* Animated Series paid off in the rapid development of a vehemently loyal, demographic-wide following for *The Boondocks* Animated Series that frequently shattered short-lived Nielsen rating records for prior Adult Swim original programming.

McGruder claimed that the solution to mass media hegemony, succinctly, lied within public scrutiny of mass media's role within contemporary mass culture, particularly in terms of cultural, ethnic, political and/or social representation. “People need to stop and get honest, legitimate, factual information to rally behind,” McGruder claimed. McGruder seemed to have little faith, as he found it “hard to anticipate

legitimate motivation within the contemporary mass populace.” With *The Boondocks* Comic Strip and *The Boondocks* Animated Series, McGruder's incorporation of mass media satire as an encoding strategy facilitated message-based exposure to sophisticated mind control methods denoted by media outlets to endorse and maintain the hegemonic interests of the state (Rabin, 2005).

Ever-conscious of audience demands and susceptibility to heavy-handed encoding, McGruder claimed in subsequent interviews that his decision to focus on media coverage of the attacks in *The Boondocks* Comic Strip saved not only *The Boondocks* Comic Strip, but also facilitated and inspired McGruder's 2005-2011 work on *The Boondocks* Animated Series. One of the largest encoding strategy risks that McGruder assumed in his three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series was the comic's shift from black identity satire to cultural, ethnic, social and political satire presented in a matter-of-fact manner.

The forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series produced under McGruder's creative guidance satirize contemporary mass media representation in broadcast television, film, music, print media and broad surveys of social media use. Contemporary iterations of each of these formats are employed continually by Huey, Riley and Robert Freeman throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In *The Boondocks* Animated Series, Uncle Ruckus represents a common zero-point in terms of mass media usage. Ruckus routinely employs selective hearing, misinterprets contrary evidence and demeans the higher characters within McGruder's five-point character hierarchy at every given turn. In the second and third seasons of *The*

Boondocks Animated Series, Ruckus produces media in collaboration with media outlets for negative effects. This builds upon *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first season, in which Uncle Ruckus allows mass media outlets to imbue him with self-loathing and seemingly unfathomable bias, and endorses said self-loathing to the extent of using various media-based strategies as tools in an unwavering quest for assimilation within the predominantly white, upper-middle-class Woodcrest community of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. In Season 3's "The Story of Jimmy Rebel," Ruckus records hate-infused Country/Western music with a parody of Mississippi's own 1960s phenomenon, Johnny Rebel. A banned episode from the second season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series sees the fruit of Ruckus' alliance with Black Entertainment Television (BET) to produce a reality show on his daily life with negative effects in terms of audience saliency in mind (Barnes & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 2010).

Throughout *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons, Uncle Ruckus' production and support of mass media solidifies the character's status as a self-loathing caricature and figurative worst case scenario for contemporary cultural, ethnic, political and social considerations. In comparison to the first season's heavy thematic reliance on Uncle Ruckus, the final two seasons of McGruder's production tenure link the character to gratification of existing prejudices in both production and support of respective television programming and folk music production. Uncle Ruckus' mass media usage equates to a lack of positive mass media influence in tandem with an overwhelmingly negative sense of self-loathing perpetuated by negative representation in music and television (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Rifkin, 2000).

In a 2005 interview with *The Onion A.V. Club*, McGruder claimed that Riley Freeman was intended as a caricature vehicle for deconstruction of supposed media effects theories from 1960s-1970s communication scholarship (Rabin, 2005). Within the forty-five episode sample of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (2005-2011), Riley is depicted as the recurring character with the strongest ties to usage of two mediums: mass produced contemporary music and mass produced television programming. Riley Freeman, the second-lowest recurring character in McGruder's representation hierarchy, subsequently offers the most consistent reliance on satirized depictions of mass media usage depicted in *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Rabin, 2005).

Riley Freeman's self-gratifying mass media diet reflects the entertainment desire of Robert with an antithetical approach to negative representation to that of his older sibling, Huey. Throughout *The Boondocks Animated Series'* forty-five episodes, Riley Freeman's unsupervised film, music, television and video game diet is embraced in concordance with mass culture. Riley Freeman's film diet consists of R-rated popcorn fare, predominantly featuring Hip-Hop genre stars endorsed by mass culture. Riley's idea of news coverage falls in line with coverage on BET News or music news from *The Source*. Riley is consistently portrayed playing video games, although episodes focus exclusively on the games' solidification of problematic associations that already exist within Riley Freeman. By the same token, Riley's familiarity with digital media harbors contradictory aims to Huey's intellectual self-improvement; by contrast, Riley's internet usage is limited to support of negative stereotype laden music artists promoted by mass culture. Riley's unwavering support of satirized black representation in the fictional mass

culture lexicon that Riley navigates throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Throughout *The Boondocks Animated Series* (2005-2011), Riley Freeman is depicted as embracing the highest level of support to commoditized mass culture, the highest level of support to black entertainment that perpetuates negative and problematic stereotype, and the quickest adopter of emerging video game and music media formats within the Freeman family. Riley's naive, pervasive consumption of problematic mass media content reflects Robert's inability to keep up with Riley's mass media consumption and the negative effects of Riley's media diet in contrast to that of his older sibling. Riley Freeman combines a wide array of mass media formats with pervasive low-brow taste and a high susceptibility to negative long-term associations perpetuated by the mass media content he consumes (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Rifkin, 2000).

Tom Dubois is indicative of token representation within the supposed status quo of Woodcrest, the fictional Maryland suburb at the heart of *The Boondocks Animated Series*. Across three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, three specific episodes reveal Tom Dubois' connection to mass media usage in the digital age. In the first season's "A Date with the Health Inspector," Dubois is depicted as a privileged black suburbanite who grew up in the 1980s, hence harboring a detachment to contemporary mass media platforms like the Microsoft Xbox, a video game console that was popular during the height of *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first season popularity (Barnes & McGruder, 2006). In the second season episode "Tom, Sarah and Usher," Tom suspects his wife of an affair with the titular Grammy winning pop star. By acting on his feelings of inferiority, Tom spoils his wife's plans to book the artist at their daughter's ensuing

birthday party (Barnes & McGruder, 2009). The most explicit mass media influence over Dubois is exhibited in the third season's "A Date with the Booty Warrior," in which Dubois' marathon viewing of MSNBC programming like *To Catch a Predator* and *Lock Up* have a direct impact on the character's recurring fear of sexualized prison violence. The contrast of Dubois' response to MSNBC to his profession as an Assistant District Attorney is played to tremendous comedic effect in the third season episode (McGruder, 2010).

Throughout *The Boondocks* Animated Series (2005-2011), Tom Dubois represents a mediocre and frustrating middle point as a representation of the Woodcrest mass populace. Dubois' taste in mass media remains entirely mainstream and the character remains shockingly susceptible to mass media influence, as exhibited through his marriage paranoia and chronic, ironic fear of prison culture in spite of his lucrative career choice. Tom's consumption of mass media is rife with contradictions, as rendered most evident in the third season's recurrence of the character's most ironic and tragic phobia (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Robert Freeman represents the tier of representation respectability just below Huey Freeman in *The Boondocks* Animated Series ' three season McGruder arc. Robert's exposure to contemporary representation in film, music and television (Robert's preferred formats) cause him to continually question the long-term gains of his Civil Rights Movement activism. Robert represents the nonviolent-rhetoric-laden phase prior to Lyndon B. Johnson's Civil Rights Act of 1965, as proven by his disappointment with mass media representation (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

On the contrary, Robert Freeman's use of social media as a dating platform transcends that of any other character in *The Boondocks Animated Series*; episodes from the first season (*Guess Hoe's Coming to Dinner*, 2006), second season (*Attack of the Killer Kung Fu Wolf Bitch*, 2008) and third season (*The Lovely Ebony Brown*, Episode 311), with Huey and Riley's advice against social media dating and examples from prior episodes comprising one of the few prevalent aspects of narrative continuity within *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Barnes & McGruder, 2005, 2006, 2007; 2011).

In the first season episode "The Real," Robert concocts a scheme to exploit Xzibit's MTV program, *Pimp My Ride*, in an effort to restore his prized automobile (McGruder & Taylor, 2006). In the second season, premiere, "...Or Die Trying," Robert is depicted taking the recurring characters to a movie, *Soul Plane II: The Blackjacking*, facilitating an episode of Motion Picture Association of America satirization that concurrently laments the collapse of creative integrity in terms of multiplex fare that appeals to black audiences (McGruder & Taylor, 2007). In "The Story of Thugnificent," Robert's adventures progress into the music industry upon response to receipt of Riley's favorite rapper, Otis 'Thugnificent' Jenkins, as a neighbor in the Woodcrest community (Barnes & McGruder, 2007).

A World War II veteran and nonviolent activist in the Civil Rights Movement, Robert Freeman frequently exhibits a disconnect from emerging media formats and escalating content packages. Despite his claim to Woodcrest privilege, Robert seems confounded and confused by mass media innovations. Throughout *The Boondocks Animated Series*' three seasons, Robert frequently stares at television programming with problematic representation and laments what he views as cultural regression in film,

music and television programming (Jones & McGruder, 2005). Robert Freeman looks to film, social media and television for entertainment purposes; his responses to contemporary culture comprise a cornerstone of McGruder's humor incorporation throughout *The Boondocks Animated Series*.

Huey Freeman incorporates the most internet and print media usage for educational purposes. As Huey Freeman rests at the top of McGruder's five-point representation spectrum, his use of media formats pertains almost exclusively to the ten-year-old Woodcrest resident's pursuit of self-betterment through self-education. In the second season episode "The Story of Catcher Freeman," Huey looks up the supposed heritage of his slave ancestor on Wikipedia that contradicts wildly contrasting information provided by two adults, both Robert Freeman and Uncle Ruckus. In the first season finale, "The Passion of Reverend Ruckus," Huey uses print media, electronic mail and phone correspondence to prevent the execution of a figure whose likeness resembles controversial death row inmate Mumia Abu Jamal. The second season's first banned episodes, "The Hunger Strike," depicts Huey at work with mass media formats. Inspired by an outlet for contemporary activism and seething frustration with BET programming, Huey masterfully employs several concurrent mass media formats to rally national support against the network's corrosive programming (Barnes & McGruder, 2008).

Individual episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series* imply that Huey Freeman looks to digital and print databases to develop contextual familiarity with the contemporary media texts consumed by his peers. In most accounts of mass media dependency, ten-year-old Huey Freeman's tastes would correlate directly with those of his eight-year-old younger brother, Riley Freeman. Throughout the first three seasons of *The*

Boondocks Animated Series, McGruder depicts Huey's mass media usage as a cornerstone of the show's reversal of supposed minority and majority assumptions. Huey's responsible mass media usage stands staunchly opposed to the self-gratifying entertainment aims that appear at other junctures in the recurring character spectrum (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Huey Freeman functions as a recurring role model in terms of responsible mass media usage. Compared to his cohorts who comprise the remainder of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' recurring character spectrum, Huey sets a positive example for young Adult Swim viewers by eschewing entertainment value to focus on internal and external improvement of cultural, ethnic, political and social issues that surface throughout *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

As depicted in McGruder's recurring character spectrum, Riley Freeman is the most prolific and voluminous consumer of mass produced music and television programming across the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Robert Freeman offers the most avid consumption of social media, as he frequently engages with various internet dating sites in pursuit of a Woodcrest romantic interest. Huey Freeman offers the most prevalent engagement with print media consumption, as the character is constantly focused on intellectual self-improvement as a deterrent from negative effects of exposure to homogenized black representation through mass culture (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Between 2005 and 2011, *The Boondocks* Animated Series episodes frequently satirized the onset of the digital revolution by depicting the impact of emerging media platforms across the recurring character spectrum employed into the first forty-five

episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. McGruder sought to facilitate audience assimilation by reiterating the substitution of majority appeasement and minority dissent, as reflected in the other encoding strategies that comprise this study. As McGruder frequently stated in interviews, *The Boondocks* Animated Series sought to unite the young audience of Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block through communal disdain towards contemporary mass media representation of culture, ethnicity, politics and social dynamics (Jones & McGruder, 2005; Rifkin, 2000).

It is important to consider that McGruder studied communication theory at the University of Maryland in the late 1990s, just as *The Boondocks* Comic Strip surfaced in the school's student newspaper. McGruder also used mass media innovation to address the audience in pre episode bumps dictated by the franchise creator in a satire of content warnings in prior television programming. McGruder's familiarity with young frustration over the rise of societal mass media dependency stands as a hallmark of *The Boondocks* Animated Series episodes produced with the guidance of the original creator of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (1999-2006), which placed far less emphasis on satire of mass media dependency in an effort to maintain the Strip's older syndicated readership (Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

Individual episodes from *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons often factor in McGruder's criticism of mass culture's increasing dependency on mass media consumption. To provide a sense of context for this analysis of mass media usage in *The Boondocks* Animated Series (2005-2011), summaries are provided of (1) McGruder's conceptualization of mass media and, conversely, (2) trends in mass media coverage on McGruder during production of *The Boondocks* Comic Strip (1996-2006)

and *The Boondocks* Animated Series (2005-2011). As McGruder stated in 2005, *The Boondocks* Animated Series was “a show for people who question 'the state of things,'” alluding to episodes' reversal of minority frustration and majority consolation (Rabin, 2005). Across three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, McGruder assumed audience frustration with increasing mass media dependency as a cornerstone of the program's viewership, the results of which proved tremendously successful among the young audience that comprised the recurring viewership of the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

CHAPTER IX

POPULAR CULTURE REFERENCE INCORPORATION

Between 2005 and 2011, the first three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series* relied heavily on explicit content of prior forays into adult-oriented animation as a means of facilitating an accessible dialogue on black representation. As the Adult Swim block and McGruder faced an ethnically diverse audience for *The Boondocks Animated Series*, the show also incorporates myriad references to black popular culture as a vehicle for furthering the show's encoded dialogue on black representation. This dialogue also serves to assimilate an audience for *The Boondocks Animated Series* within the Adult Swim audience and target demographic, in a manner similar to the show's incorporation of mass media satire (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Many episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series* were based entirely on referential humor, as a means of providing a figurative “soapbox” for McGruder to discuss specific aspects of contemporary black popular culture. Falling in line with groundbreaking narrative precedents in the adult-oriented animated format, *The Boondocks Animated Series* often eschewed continuity between individual episodes or seasons to offer episodes based on specific cultural phenomena. *The Boondocks Animated Series* frequently employs an extensive lexicon of popular culture references, all of which are alluded to in the aforementioned appendices (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

As in the case of the show's encoding of shock humor and explicit content, *The Boondocks Animated Series* followed the model of existing adult-oriented animated programming by incorporating satire of contemporary popular culture. Yet again, the main difference in McGruder's vision was *The Boondocks Animated Series* ' focus on

problematic aspects of black media representation. While prior successes in adult-oriented animation like *The Simpsons*, *South Park* and *Family Guy*, they shied away from referential satire that might prove offensive to ethnic or minority groups within their target demographics. By comparison, *The Boondocks* Animated Series simultaneously used referential satire as a vehicle for criticism of contemporary black cultural representation (Groening, 1989; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Parker & Stone, 1997).

As rendered evident through *The Boondocks* Animated Series ' aims through it's' focus on media usage, the Adult Swim block's audience and target demographic was reachable through adherence to satire of popular culture. Frequent allusions to music, film, television, and various other cultural phenomena serve another aim within *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, popular culture references are often implemented into episodes with much greater frequency than that of adult-oriented animated precedents created by Matt Groening, Seth McFarlane, Trey Parker and Matt Stone. McGruder offers an expansive lexicon of popular culture references that plays to the tastes and sensibilities of the Adult Swim block's existing audience and target demographic (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Referential humor in *The Boondocks* Animated Series also transcended prior successes in adult-oriented animation by successfully employing a lexicon of obscure referential humor. The series frequently incorporates references to contemporary and nostalgic references from film, television, music, literature and other mediums in an effort to unite an ethnically diverse following for *The Boondocks* Animated Series. While referential humor in *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* offered satirized portrayals of widely recognizable popular culture icons, *The Boondocks* Animated Series often

gambled with obscure popular culture references in an effort to unite a pop-culture savvy audience for the show among the gradually increasing Adult Swim audience (Braxton, 2007; Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Allusions to popular culture allow McGruder to discuss specific frustrations with the contemporary black experience. Episode topics in *The Boondocks* Animated Series included themes as diverse as 2002 R. Kelly sexual misconduct trial, media-perpetuated associations between black identity and criminal behavior, black reality television representation by figures like Whitney Houston and Bobby Brown, associations between black contemporary culture and martial arts and more (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The fourth chapter in this collection examines the lexicon of cultural references that permeates the forty-five existing episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. This analysis will explore use of referential satire as a device to potentially bolster the accessibility of McGruder's commentary on the state of contemporary black culture for the Adult Swim audience and target demographic (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The fourth chapter offers a negotiated critical reading of the series' film, music, television and social media satires. It explores encoding of referential satire on two levels: the tactic's ability to imbue episodes with McGruder's sociopolitical views, which can often seem thematically bleak or hopeless within entire episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. The fourth chapter also examines McGruder's efforts to balance potentially controversial views with sly encoding of popular culture references. Through *The Boondocks* Animated Series' reliance on referential humor, McGruder sought to unite the young audience of "Adult Swim," many of whom likely felt similarly frustrated

with problematic aspects of contemporary American popular culture (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Through incorporation of popular culture references, *The Boondocks* Animated Series facilitated Adult Swim viewer support from low-brow, middle-brow and high-brow audiences of the Cartoon Network's late night programming block. Each episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series relied on substitution of supposed majority consent and minority dissent in terms of critical commentary on satirized issues of contemporary culture, ethnicity, politics and race. The first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series subsequently developed a dedicated recurring viewership through a delicately balance of homage-based pastiche and humor-based kitsch style reference incorporation which remained integral to the show's continually successful encoded efforts at audience assimilation (Bach, 2007; Braxton, 2007; Cavna, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

By contrast to *The Boondocks* Animated Series, McGruder's 1996-2006 work on *The Boondocks* Comic Strip incorporated frequent high-brow references to a media-savvy audience of older newspaper readers. With *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons, McGruder sought to dissolve class barriers within the viewership by offering a lexicon of humor designed to resonate with all viewers on some level; if audiences completely missed the popular culture references in an episode, the outsourced South Korean animation was designed to sustain their interest in the series' artistic integrity and keep the audience interested in the show. As McGruder surmised in a 2008 interview with Evan Jacobs, “[Each episode] of *The Boondocks* Animated Series offers cross brow appeal through Hip Hop Culture satire for low-brow audiences and obscure film references for high-brow audiences.” (Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005). As each

episode was designed for repeat viewing, sly jokes and references incorporated into respective episodes are designed to reward audiences for revisiting the show, particularly through the Sony Home Entertainment DVD releases in uncensored format (Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005; McGruder, 1996).

This analysis of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons (2005-2011) examines franchise creator Aaron McGruder's implementation of popular culture reference incorporation as an audience assimilation technique. As with the encoding strategies described in the other chapters that comprise this study, this study offers a critical analysis of positive and problematic aspects of audience connotation in terms of each episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series denoted by McGruder through the Adult Swim programming block and Sony Television Entertainment (Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

This analysis of popular culture reference incorporation in the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series examines references to film, music and television as encountered by the five members of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' recurring character spectrum. This analysis examines incorporation of film, music and television references in terms of a representation spectrum comprised (from low to high) of Uncle Ruckus, Riley Freeman, Tom Dubois, Robert Freeman and Huey Freeman. Rather than an exhaustive listing of all 191 popular culture references incorporated into *The Boondocks* Animated Series, an extensive appendix located at the conclusion of this study offers a comprehensive listing of every film, music and television reference encoded into the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The first season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series was criticized by McGruder for a lack of humor to facilitate cross-brow audience appeal. Subsequently, a gradual increase of referential humor that played upon a vast array of popular culture references factored heavily into development of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' second and third seasons. As a cross-spectrum analysis reveals, the incorporation of popular culture references in the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series gradually stretched the borders between pastiche homage and trite kitsch reference, the latter of which corroded all episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series produced in McGruder's absence and aired in late Spring 2014 ((Jones & McGruder, 2005; Jones, 2014).

In his 2013 Vice promotion of the Kick starter campaign for *Uncle Ruckus: The Live-Action Movie*, McGruder offered his most recent commentary on record pertaining to the state of contemporary black culture. Ever the pessimist as a cultural commentary, McGruder claimed that it was “hard to say if black people can or will transcend their present sense of self-loathing.” According to McGruder, the Uncle Ruckus character, who was created as a grotesquely exaggerated zero-point for *The Boondocks* Animated Series' five-point respectability spectrum, had become indicative of black cultural, ethnic, political and social ambivalence. According to McGruder, “Uncle Ruckus is [conceived as] a satirized depiction of black cultural ignorance, exaggerated for comedic effect” (Cooper, 2013).

In the 2013 interview, McGruder claims that his interest in *The Boondocks* Animated Series production waned when he saw a CNN paid expert compare the likenesses of Uncle Ruckus, a fictional character of McGruder's creative vision and Herman Cain, the pizzeria entrepreneur who ran as an early h Republican Presidential

candidate in 2011. swelled in tandem with the 2008 election of President Barack Obama (itself satirized in the third season premiere, “It’s a Black President, Huey Freeman” (2010) (Cooper, 2013; McGruder, 2010).

In the March 2013 promotion for *Uncle Ruckus: The Movie* through Kick starter and VICE (a half-hour interview), McGruder offered a retrospective view of the creative intentions behind Uncle Ruckus' incorporation into the recurring character spectrum. As McGruder claimed, Uncle Ruckus was developed and incorporated into *The Boondocks Animated Series* episodes as “a satirized depiction of black cultural ignorance, exaggerated for comedic effect.” McGruder further confided that he never expected Uncle Ruckus to become the most societally relevant component of *The Boondocks Animated Series*' recurring character spectrum (Cooper, 2013). “Ideally, I wanted black people to look at Uncle Ruckus and say, “We're a long way from that now.” (Cooper, 2013).

When asked if McGruder feels the Uncle Ruckus societal relevance that scared him away from *The Boondocks Animated Series* production will subside in his opinion, McGruder surmised that it is “hard to say if black people can or will transcend their present [March 2013] sense of self-loathing” (Cooper, 2013). McGruder noted that Uncle Ruckus' popularity in the first three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series* was that “most of us know someone just like” Uncle Ruckus; the implementation of stereotype incorporation, humor incorporation and mass media usage satire were intended to relegate Uncle Ruckus' zero-point of the recurring spectrum to the status of cultural, ethnic, and political and social caricature of a worst-case scenario for McGruder's critical views of contemporary society in regard to the black mass populace. McGruder surmised

that many black people in contemporary society “are culturally or mentally frozen in the 1880s;” Uncle Ruckus was intended as a caricature of this extreme degree of subservience, yet began to take on its own societal connotation between 2005 and 2012. According to McGruder, the frustrating Uncle Ruckus stereotype has been perpetuated frequently through mass media outlets, in tandem with McGruder's analysis of the mass media as discussed in the prior negotiated reading (Cooper, 2013; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

References to contemporary music in episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series* often reflect McGruder's frustration with the state of contemporary black entertainment, particularly in terms of mainstream rap music. McGruder transferred from a private Jesuit School to a public high school in Columbia, MD during the cultural peak of the Afrocentrism movement (Basile, 2005; McGrath, 2004). In a 2008 interview with Evan Jacobs, McGruder discussed the prevalence of Hip-Hop culture during the height of the Afrocentrism era. McGruder's favorite artists of the era included Brand Nubian, DAS EFX, The Jungle Brothers, KRS ONE, The Last Poets and Public Enemy (Bach, 2007; Jacobs, 2008; McGrath, 2004; Rabin, 2005).

As a 2005 interview from *The Onion A.V. Club* surmised, McGruder's personality shined most brightly through episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series* that satirized the state of contemporary Hip-Hop music from the vantage point of eight-year-old Riley Freeman's unsupervised, limitless diet of potentially negative influences. In accordance with his own views on artistic integrity in both *The Boondocks Comic Strip* (1996-2006) and *The Boondocks Animated Series* (2005-2011), McGruder's March 2013 interview with *Vice Magazine* offers the franchise creator's most succinct analysis of contemporary

Hip-Hop: “The negativity and problematic ideals in Hip-Hop culture were perpetuated long before the rise of Hip-Hop culture itself,” McGruder espoused, “Honestly, I couldn't care less about [the explicit thematic content]; the content is what it is.” (Cooper, 2013).

Unlike other CRT scholars of the 1990s and 2000s, McGruder offered little criticism of contemporary Hip-Hop music's negative imagery or over-incorporation of prejudiced or profane language; McGruder was too angry with the genre over the void of creative talent. McGruder's frustration lied with the decline in Hip-Hop genre talent that occurred between the peak of the Afrocentrism movement and the rise of Media Mogul perpetuated record labels like Cash Money Records or No Limit Records. The New Orleans based Cash Money and No Limit record labels are a frequent target of Riley-centric episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (2005-2011). McGruder's link to all five characters in the recurring character spectrum is substantiated by his personal connection to views frequently espoused by Riley Freeman, the recurring character most frequently involved with the satirization of Hip-Hop culture contained in the first forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Gray, 1995; Jacobs, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 1995).

In a 2008 interview with Rick Florino, McGruder commented on Comedy Central programs *South Park* and the short-lived *Chappelle's Show* in terms of production context. McGruder had wrapped production on the second season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series prior to the Florino interview. Speaking as an experienced television producer rather than a weathered daily cartoonist, McGruder offered valuable insight on the impact of *Chappelle's Show* and *South Park* on the development of *The Boondocks*

Animated Series' first two seasons (Chappelle, 2002; Florino, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In relation to Parker and Stone's *South Park*, McGruder claimed he envied the week-to-week production format of *South Park* due to the maintenance of contemporary relevance through episode tweaking in the hours preceding air dates of specific episodes. Moreover, McGruder celebrated the TV-MA rated episode content of *South Park*, which McGruder viewed as a direct precedent to his production deal for *The Boondocks* Animated Series through Sony Television Entertainment and the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block. In a critical capacity, McGruder quickly quipped that he would not trade the aesthetic integrity of *The Boondocks* Animated Series for the haphazard aesthetic of *South Park*, echoing standards of artistic integrity that were introduced in 1999 interviews (Florino, 2008; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Parker & Stone, 1997).

McGruder assumes a higher degree of respect for *Chappelle's Show*, directly citing the sketch comedy program's influence over the first two seasons of production for *The Boondocks* Animated Series. McGruder told Florino that he intended to replicate Chappelle's innovative incorporation of uncensored episode content on season-based DVD release sets. Speaking briefly on Dave Chappelle's departure from Comedy Central, McGruder calls Chappelle's action early retirement after two years of unprecedented success. When asked about the applicability of Chappelle's predicament to *The Boondocks* Animated Series production, McGruder claimed that he planned to “keep working on *The Boondocks* Animated Series as long as it's good,” concluding that the series “doesn't need to go on any longer than that.” (Chappelle, 2002; Florino, 2008).

A 2008 interview with Evan Jacobs reveals McGruder's sentiments on the specifics of Chappelle's departure. As a television producer, McGruder claimed that it was growing increasingly challenging to remain mindful of content constraints. McGruder claims that while *Chappelle's Show* was designed to facilitate cultural criticism, the creator's lack of interest in production of a third season should have offered valuable advice to Comedy Central in terms of proceeding without Chappelle's participation. McGruder concluded by noting that a supportive cast and crew help him to avoid the frustrations that facilitated the rapid demise of *Chappelle's Show* at the height of the series' critical and commercial appeal (Chappelle, 2002; Jacobs, 2008).

McGruder's pilot episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series focuses on introduction of the recurring character spectrum. As a result, the study places a stronger emphasis on stereotype incorporation than satirized humor incorporation or reference incorporation. In the pilot, Uncle Ruckus is introduced to the Freeman family as a groundskeeper at Edward Wuncler, Sr.'s estate with an overt reference to *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1981); Ruckus claims that Robert “must believe that sunshine flies out of his ass” (Barnes & McGruder, 2005).

Uncle Ruckus' evocation of popular culture references in *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first season were incorporated selectively. In “The Trial of Robert Kelly,” Ruckus defends the artistic integrity of Jerry Lee Lewis as a positive corollary to R. Kelly's behavior. The season one finale, “The Passion of Reverend Ruckus,” evokes Ruckus' dreams of Ronald Reagan and his elaborate effort to mock televangelist revival format in an effort to gain assimilation to what Reagan refers to as “White Heaven,” majestically displayed in the intro to the finale (Barnes & McGruder, 2006).

Uncle Ruckus' incorporation of popular culture references increased in the second season. In the second season premiere, "...Or Die Trying," Uncle Ruckus works as a multiplex usher and fights other characters within the recurring character spectrum in a nunchaku style that evokes the technique of Bruce Lee in Warner Brothers' successful 1973 crossover picture, *Enter the Dragon* (McGruder & Taylor, 2007). When Tom Dubois finds himself possessed in "Stinkmeaner Strikes Back," Ruckus yet again evokes religious imagery in an extensive homage to William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973). The sequence in "Stinkmeaner Strikes Back" also features direct use of Mike Oldfield's "Tubular Bells," evoked in Friedkin's score throughout *The Exorcist* (Barnes & McGruder, 2007; Blatty & Friedkin, 1973). The banned second season finale, "The Uncle Ruckus Reality Program," featured an extensive homage to *Austin Powers* franchise antagonist Dr. Evil, intended to evoke villainous undertones among BET programming executives (Barnes & McGruder, 2008).

In the third season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, Ruckus' referee job in "The Red Ball" evokes direct homage to the opening of Mel Brooks' racially progressive *Blazing Saddles* (1974). Ruckus stars in the following episode, "The Story of Jimmy Rebel," which is framed around an obscure reference to Johnny Rebel, a separatist singer-songwriter who found success in the early 1960s. The penultimate episode of the third season, "The Color Ruckus," concurrently evokes the aesthetic and thematic melodrama of Richard Fleischer's *Mandingo* (1975) with the compromised truncation of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* in writer-director Steven Spielberg's 1985 film adaptation (Brooks, 1974; McGruder, 2010)..

McGruder's 2005 pilot of *The Boondocks* Animated Series establishes popular culture references as a predominant influence over eight-year-old Riley Freeman's behavior, in lieu of the historical references that influence ten-year-old Huey Freeman's behavior. Throughout episode, Riley repeatedly evokes the Tony Montana character from Brian De Palma's *Scarface* (1983) through frequent verbal evocation of Tony Montana, played to comedic referential effect within the episode (Bregman & De Palma, 1983; Jones & McGruder, 2005)..

Riley's introduction also evokes Comedy Central's *Chappelle's Show* in "The Garden Party" through the introduction of recurring cohort Edward Wuncler III (Charlie Murphy). Ed Wuncler III's dialogue is peppered with allusions to dialogue from Murphy's performance on Chappelle's successful sketch comedy program. Wuncler's behavior provides a pervasively negative influence over Riley Freeman's behavior. Riley's relationship with Ed Wuncler III is often depicted as criminal activity and played to comedic effect throughout the subsequent forty-four episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series produced during McGruder's production tenure (Barnes & McGruder, 2005).

Throughout subsequent episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, Riley Freeman is pervasively evoked in tandem with implementation of popular culture reference incorporation. In the first season, Riley evokes references to Hip-Hop music magazine *The Source* and their associated annual award show. Subsequent first season references evoked by Riley and his narrative cohorts include Allen and Albert Hughes *Menace II Society* (1995) and multiple references to Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994). Subsequent seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series rely increasingly on

Riley as a narrative device, facilitating the show's referential descent into pastiche and kitsch presentation (Hughes & Hughes, 1995; Gordon & Tarantino, 1994; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Throughout *The Boondocks Animated Series*, Riley Freeman maintains a strong connection to contemporary rap music promoted by mass culture. Riley's adventures with Hip-Hop artists offer McGruder a direct platform for critical commentary on the contemporary decline of musical integrity within the Hip-Hop genre. Just as aspects of Afrocentric Hip-Hop culture permeate *The Boondocks Animated Series*, Riley Freeman acts as the figurative litmus for potentially negative effects of young exposure to an unsupervised diet of film, music and television. Third season episodes like “Smoking with Cigarettes” and “The Fundraiser,” which also maintains concurrent homage to multiple films, are indicative of *The Boondocks Animated Series'* devolution into kitsch based reference incorporation (Asante, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005)..

Tom Dubois offers comparatively little interaction with popular culture, as the character's interests are a reflection of the Woodcrest status quo. Tom's disconnect from contemporary popular culture is frequently incorporated to comedic effect throughout the first season of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In the second season, Tom Dubois' cultural intake improves with episodes like “Tom, Sarah and Usher” and “Stinkmeaner Strikes Back.” Both episodes offer wild variants on Tom's traditionally liberal, passive demeanor. Between the two episodes, Tom evokes direct homage to Rudy Ray Moore's *Dolemite*, Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, Randall Wallace's *Braveheart* and Emilio Estevez's *The Mighty Ducks* (Barbes & McGruder, 2007; McGruder & Taylor, 2007).

The third season decreases Dubois incorporation in tandem with popular culture references, as “It’s a Black President, Huey Freeman” emphasizes Tom’s preference of Hollywood revisionist cultural and historical narratives in lieu of a connection with his actual past. The third season offers a play on Tom’s prison paranoia inspired by the 1975 documentary *Scared Straight*, in which juvenile delinquents interact with incarcerated felons (McGruder, 2010).

In “The Garden Party,” Robert’s diatribe about Tropicana orange juice offers one of the series’ few advertising references (McGruder, 2007). Robert is also depicted in the pilot opening as a fan of Billy Blanks’ “Tae Bo” exercise program. Both of these examples allude to Robert Freeman’s desire to bask in the creature comforts of Woodcrest after moving to Maryland from Chicago with his grandsons, Huey and Riley Freeman (Barnes & McGruder, 2005)..

Robert’s evocation of popular culture references correlates most frequently with the character’s attempts to meet women through internet based social media outlets. (Jones & McGruder, 2005). In the first season’s “Guess Hoe’s Coming to Dinner,” Robert accidentally dates a prostitute who evokes stylistic traits from Gordon Parks Jr.’s *Super Fly*. In the second season’s *Attack of the Killer Kung Fu Wolf Bitch*, Robert’s love interest concurrently evokes aesthetic and stylistic components of the *Mortal Kombat* video game franchise and Jean Claude Van Damme film *Bloodsport* (1988) (Avnet, 1987; Barnes & McGruder, 2008; Boon & Tobias, 1993).

The second season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series maintains Robert’s disconnect from contemporary culture. This disconnect rings true in the second season’s “...Or Die Trying” and the third season’s “Pause” episodes, both of which offer

McGruder's sly critical commentary on the state of contemporary black representation in Hollywood cinema (McGruder & Taylor, 2007; McGruder, 2010). All three of Robert's encounters with antagonist H.M. Stinkmeaner incorporate an increasing degree of popular culture reference reliance. In "Stinkmeaner Strikes Back," Robert's preparation evokes the aesthetic and narrative style of Run Run Shaw and Gordon Liu's classic martial arts opus, *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin*. In the third season, Stinkmeaner's cohorts arrive in the likenesses of characters from 1970s sitcoms like *Good Times* and *Sanford and Son* (Barnes & McGruder, 2007, 2008; Cheh & Shaw, 1969; Lear, 1972, 1974).

Huey Freeman traditionally refuses to support popular culture, often colliding with it due to his frustration with contemporary cultural, ethnic, political and social considerations. Huey represents the most direct adherence to the principles of the Afrocentrism movement, as he prefers to help his fellow black Woodcrest residents while disavowing correlations to contemporary mass culture such as the films, music, television and video games that have a consistently detrimental effect on younger brother Riley Freeman's worldview. While Riley Freeman's character places a heavier reverence upon mass culture than black history, Huey reflects an inverse emphasis of history over popular culture (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Upon Huey's introduction in McGruder's 2005 pilot, "The Garden Party," Huey cites Black Freedom Movement leader Malcolm X and Cuban Dictator Fidel Castro as the two predominant aesthetic and ideological influences over his behavior as a Woodcrest resident (Barnes & McGruder, 2005). Throughout the rest of Season 01, Huey aspires to help other black Woodcrest residents, creating the template for accidental

forays into popular culture that characterizes Huey's interaction with a variety of known references throughout the subsequent forty-four episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In all three of Robert Freeman's encounters with H.M. Stinkmeaner, Huey has recurring dreams involving the 1960s Japanese film franchise *Zatoichi: The Blind Swordsman*. Huey's interaction with Riley Freeman throughout *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first three seasons reflects the character's disdain with black representation in film, music and television. In the third season, Huey is predominantly relegated to the status of a message delivery vehicle while Riley is used as a template for multiple concurrent references to popular culture (Barnes & McGruder, 2005, 2007; McGruder, 2010).

While the first season of *The Boondocks Animated Series* relied heavily on message delivery, the second and third seasons developed an increasing reliance on the cross-brow audience appeal of referential humor seeped in popular culture. Riley Freeman's narrative arc through the first three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series* offer the most bountiful implementation of popular culture reference incorporation as an encoding strategy intended to facilitate cross-brow audience appeal (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Other members of the recurring character spectrum factor into the series' popular culture reference lexicon to a lesser extent. Uncle Ruckus' exaggerated anti-intellectualism severely limit the character's cultural intake, thus limiting the number of popular culture references evoked by the recurring character. Spectrum middle-point Tom Dubois functions with a rudimentary, revisionist account of history that is willfully substantiated by Hollywood cinema without a tinge of skepticism. Robert Freeman's

activist past is reflected through the character's disappointing encounters with popular culture, which are juxtaposed with Robert's signature blend of ambivalence and frustration towards contemporary cultural, ethnic, political and social concerns. Spectrum peak Huey Freeman's limited involvement in popular culture is symptomatic of the character's sense of trepidation related to negative black representation in film, music and television (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

McGruder increasingly relied on popular culture references after the production of *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first season in an effort to facilitate audience appeal. Although the concurrent film, music and television references of the second season maintain a respectful sense of pastiche style incorporation, the third season's devolution into kitsch based reference incorporation preceded McGruder's struggles to continue the series between 2011 and 2013, prior to his official retirement from production of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

CHAPTER X

HISTORICAL REFERENCE INCORPORATION

Aaron McGruder was not the first show-runner to depict generational gaps between primary and secondary characters in the adult-oriented animated format. *The Simpsons*, *South Park* and *Family Guy* often incorporated grandparent figures into the series. In examples prior to *The Boondocks* Animated Series, elderly characters were universally depicted as conflicted individuals who embodied socially irrelevant views. With *The Boondocks* Animated Series, elderly characters were employed as vehicles to maintain McGruder's often-satirical outlook on conflicts between black history and memory (Groening, 1989; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Parker & Stone, 1997).

As is the case with popular culture allusions, incorporation of historical references offers *The Boondocks* Animated Series is employed by McGruder as a figurative “soapbox” for issues within respective episodes. One recurring historical theme within the show is a web of conflicting views between elderly black character's views on the nonviolent activism of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. Through *The Boondocks* Animated Series, conversations between primary characters Robert Freeman and “Uncle Ruckus” reveal a desire to take credit for supposed societal gains that appear to have little impact within McGruder's view. Primary character Huey Freeman is also employed as vehicle for historical references, as the vast majority of episodes depict Huey as a product of 1960s-1970s radical black scholarship. Primary character Riley Freeman also plays into the show's lexicon of historical references, as a figure who rejects the supposed gains of the Civil Rights Movement due to their lack of perceived relevance to his day-to-day life. Viewed collectively, *The Boondocks* Animated Series ' combination of (1) satirical

discussion between characters and (2) dramatization of seminal events from black history reflect a pessimistic view that seemingly echoes statements from Bill Cosby that reflected frustration with the declining cultural, ethnic, political, and social standards of contemporary black America.

The fifth chapter within this study examines McGruder's efforts to encode historical references into *The Boondocks* through three avenues: (1) conflicting memory of historical events between characters, (2) depictions of supposed cultural gains and their lack of resonance in contemporary black society, and (3) a view of contemporary black culture that seems to reject celebration of ethnic history as a cultural construct. This analysis examines incorporation of historical references as an encoding strategy implemented throughout 2005-2011 episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series to facilitate audience accessibility among members of the Adult Swim programming block's key demographic. Examination of eighty-one historical references across a forty-five episode, three season sample of *The Boondocks* Animated Series reveals historical reference incorporation at contrasting levels at all five corresponding points in McGruder's representation spectrum. Viewed collectively, the establishment of historical context for each recurring character and broad sense of historical context within each episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series evoke parallels to the creative peak of the 1980s-1990s peak of the Afrocentrism movement (Asante, 1980; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Gray, 1995; Hall, 1973, 1980; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Historical references in *The Boondocks* Animated Series are often incorporated in tandem with one or more of four encoding strategies discussed in the prior chapters. The eighty one historical references alluded to within the sample are often intertwined with

stereotype incorporation, satire and shock humor incorporation, sardonic depictions of increasing reliance on technology and mass media outlets, and pervasive allusions to popular film, music and television (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

This analysis of historical reference incorporation in *The Boondocks Animated Series* refers to the same representation spectrum alluded to frequently throughout this study. Each of the five recurring characters in *The Boondocks Animated Series* offers a unique perspective on black history. Conflicting perspectives on historical narratives are often exaggerated through *The Boondocks Animated Series* stereotype and humor incorporation towards comedic aims (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Between 2005 and 2011, *The Boondocks Animated Series* imbued the five regularly recurring characters into a multi-faceted revisionist interpretation of various aspects of nineteenth and twentieth century black history. McGruder's recurring characters evoke spin and selective memory for self-congratulatory purposes throughout the first forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series* (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The depiction of history incorporated throughout *The Boondocks Animated Series* feels intrinsically linked to the scholarship of British military historian Paul Fussell, who examined the self-serving properties of selective historical revision as a divide between a broad historical narrative and the selective memories of individuals who share said narrative with subsequent generations. In episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series* like “Return of the King,” “Wingmen,” “The Story of Catcher Freeman,” “The Story of Johnny Rebel” and “The Color Ruckus,” individual perspectives on black history are often played for laughs through reflection of self-serving interests across McGruder's five

point recurring character spectrum (Barnes & McGruder, 2008, 2010; McGruder, 2006, 2010).

Uncle Ruckus and Riley Freeman, the lower end points of McGruder's representation spectrum, express frustration with the lack of perceived gains from the 1960s Civil Rights Movement (Kelley, 1991; Lawson, 1993). Uncle Ruckus reflects a satirized caricature of the self-loathing, cultural regression discussed in Steven Lawson's *Civil Rights Crossroads*, while Riley Freeman supports mass culture and eschews problematic aspects of film, music, television and video games in terms of problematic representation of black cultural, ethnic, social or political concerns. Riley and Ruckus feel respectively jaded by the lack of gains from the Civil Rights Movement (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Uncle Ruckus actively assaults black leaders in historical satire episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series like Martin Luther King (“Return of the King”), President Barack Obama (“It's a Black President, Huey Freeman”) or conveyed narrative of family ancestor Catcher Freeman (“The Story of Catcher Freeman”). By the same token, Ruckus celebrates white figures with oppressive links to black history like Ronald Reagan (“The Passion of Reverend Ruckus”) or Jimmy Rebel, a satire of 1960s Mississippi folk singer Johnny Rebel (Barnes & McGruder, 2008; McGruder, 2010).

Riley Freeman indulges in the criminal associations perpetuated by negative stereotypes portrayed on televised news. Robert clearly fails at supervision of eight-year-old Riley Freeman's multi-format mass media diet, a void which is often played for comedic effect throughout McGruder's three season production tenure on *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Tom Dubois reflects ambivalence with history, as he is only inspired to political action through film recreations of minority history. Tom and his wife, Sara Dubois, seem too confused to imbue their daughter, Jazmine Dubois, with a distinct narrative heritage rooted firmly in diversity, often leading to depictions of Jazmine Dubois' cultural and historical confusion (products of Tom and Sara's ultra-liberal parenting) to comedic effect (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In three of the first season episodes “Granddad's Fight” “The Return of The King” and “Wingmen” Robert Freeman's 1960s activism (the younger character incarnation voiced by Aaron McGruder) is depicted as a desperate plea to establish personal investment in the Civil Rights Movement to fill a void established by Robert's perceived lapses in black cultural, ethnic, political and social considerations. While Uncle Ruckus is pervasively depicted throughout *The Boondocks* Animated Series as a self-loathing antagonist who combated black activism throughout the 1960s, Robert Freeman feels cheated of his supposed Civil Rights Movement activism legacy (Fussell, 1999; Jones & McGruder, 2005; Kelley, 1991; Lawson, 1993; McGruder 2010).

The fifth chapter correlates with the second chapter on media usage and audience assimilation in *The Boondocks* Animated Series. In *The Boondocks* Animated Series' cross-generational depiction of mass media usage, elderly recurring characters Robert Freeman and Uncle Ruckus often look to black media representation as a symbol of nonviolent activism's cultural and ideological limitations. The chapter also provides a further exploration of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' depiction of media usage among elderly black characters, which is a level of cultural relevance that prior elderly characters in adult-oriented animation were rarely afforded (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

The historical reference incorporation chapter is separated from the discussion of cultural references in the preceding chapter for two reasons. First, historical references offer the show a bit more accessibility and interest to Adult Swim audience or target demographic members who experience similarly frustrating clashes between history and memory. Second, *The Boondocks Animated Series* transcends prior depictions of age and history in the adult-oriented animation format by allowing primary and secondary characters an active participation at seminal junctures of twentieth-century black history (Barnes & McGruder, 2008; Jacobs, 2008; Lawson, 1993).

In a 2005 interview with Devin Farici of entertainment website *Cinematic Happenings Under Development (C.H.U.D.)*, McGruder elaborated on the allure of narrative historicization throughout the recurring character spectrum as the most enticing creative prospect of the transition from *The Boondocks Comic Strip* to *The Boondocks Animated Series*. McGruder called historicization his “favorite creative possibility of the TV format,” reflecting giddy enthusiasm with a concurrent sense of disbelief in regards to the creative freedom afforded to *The Boondocks Animated Series* by Sony Television Entertainment and the staff of the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block (Farici, 2005).

Between 2005 and 2011, Uncle Ruckus was regularly incorporated into *The Boondocks Animated Series* episodes for comedic effect. In most instances, Uncle Ruckus' caricature-worthy sense of self-loathing carries into the character's forays with historical figures like Debra V. Lee (“The Uncle Ruckus Reality Program,”) Martin Luther King (“Return of the King,”) Ronald Reagan (“The Passion of Reverend Ruckus”) and black ancestors from both the Freeman family (“The Story of Catcher Freeman.”)

and his personal family heritage (“The Color Ruckus”). Uncle Ruckus often lashes out aggressively against black cultural, ethnic, political and social aims through pervasive use of derogatory language, dependency on alcohol, inability to maintain consistent employment and unending efforts to assimilate into the hegemonic white Woodcrest sociopolitical infrastructure (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Throughout the first season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, Uncle Ruckus is a peripheral, antagonistic participant in the same era of the Civil Rights Movement as that of Robert Freeman's nonviolent activism. In “Return of the King,” a vignette of Uncle Ruckus hurling a brick at Martin Luther King is a corollary to Robert's flawed historicization and mythification of his own limited participation in 1960s activism (Barnes & McGruder, 2006).

In the banned second season finale, “The Uncle Ruckus Reality Program,” Uncle Ruckus refers to black fraternities Omega Psi Phi, Kappa Alpha Si and Alpha Phi Alpha in a derogatory manner. At all other junctures in the series, Uncle Ruckus is highly dismissive of all but the most pessimistic narratives of twentieth-century black activism (Barnes & McGruder, 2008).

Uncle Ruckus' back story is explored in the penultimate episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, “The Color Ruckus.” The episode incorporates conventions from film-based twentieth-century black history revision, particularly through concurrent thematic and aesthetic evocation of Steven Spielberg's *The Color Purple*, a sanitized adaptation of Alice Walker's critically and commercially successful novel on the early twentieth-century black female experience in the southern United States. Ruckus is

revealed as the product of a past rife with multiple forms of abuse and varying angles of ethnic confusion (McGruder, 2010; Spielberg, 1985).

Throughout the first three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, Uncle Ruckus is revealed as a self-loathing product of a figurative worst case scenario in terms of his personal history. Uncle Ruckus' pervasive deprecation is the product of his heritage and a limited understanding of ethnicity that was forced into him at an early age. Uncle Ruckus' only other historical references in *The Boondocks Animated Series* refer to the third season's "The Red Ball," in which Uncle Ruckus serves as a referee in a kickball game between the United States and China. The transnational sporting event is hosted by Edward Wuncler, Sr. as a means of settling a debt with Chinese investor Long Duo (McGruder, 2010).

Throughout *The Boondocks Animated Series'* first three seasons, Riley Freeman's emphasis on popular culture and Huey Freeman's emphasis on historical consciousness share a common passion between the siblings. Regina King's vocal performance as both siblings facilitates the link between eight-year-old Riley Freeman and his ten-year-old brother, Huey Freeman. Riley Freeman exhibits little interest in black history, as conveyed by his lack of interest in Robert and Uncle Ruckus' tales of black history as conveyed in "The Return of the King," "Wingmen," "The Story of Catcher Freeman" and "The Color Ruckus" (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Riley's self-serving fixation on commoditized mass culture dissolves his interest in black history for personal gain. Riley's pervasively negative role models are reflected in Riley's pervasive glorification of aggression, criminality and street credibility as imbued by a steady unsupervised diet of film, music, television and video games. Riley

Freeman's historical commentary is limited to criticism of the George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush presidential administrations, as conveyed through criminal shenanigans with white recurring secondary characters Ed Wuncler III and Gin Rummy (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Riley sees no connection between his vapid contemporary concerns and the thematic content within historically removed, revisionist narratives set forth in episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series like “The Return of the King,” “Wingmen,” “The Story of Catcher Freeman” and “The Color Ruckus.” Unlike the improbable, extremist caricature embodied by Uncle Ruckus, Riley Freeman embodies the threat of mass culture when encroaching upon personal history. McGruder views Riley Freeman's abandonment of historical context as a gateway to assimilation of negative stereotype perpetuation through commoditized participation in the hegemonic production of homogenized mass culture (Barnes & McGruder, 2008; McGruder, 2010).

Tom Dubois represents the historical context imbued within token black representation nestled within the Woodcrest mass populace. Voiced by *Reno 911!* sketch comedy veteran Cedric Yarborough, Dubois' involvement in history (like the preceding Riley Freeman) is an incidental occurrence, rather than the result of active participation.

Tom's career as an Assistant District Attorney is incorporated as a humor based corollary to his recurring fear of prison rape. In “A Date with the Health Inspector” (2006) and “A Date with the Booty Warrior” (2010), Tom Dubois incidentally becomes the target of a mass media smear campaign that evokes the Willie Horton scandal that effectively corroded Michael Dukakis' 1988 presidential campaign. While visiting prison with Huey and Riley Freeman, the black Assistant District Attorney misses overt

recurring references to the 1972 Attica Prison Riot and the brutal execution of inmate Glen Ridge years later. Tom Dubois is only roused to historical participation by vapid entertainment. Upon his introduction in the second episode of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, “The Trial of Robert Kelly,” Tom lacks a cursory understanding of black history even at junctures where it could help his career. As a direct contradiction to spectrum successor Robert Freeman, Tom Dubois looks to Hollywood fantasy for development of active historical context (Barnes & McGruder, 2005, 2006; McGruder, 2010).

In accordance with the tenets of Woodcrest mass culture assimilation, Tom Dubois is more interested in Hollywood's historicization of twentieth-century activism than the development of a cohesive minority history narrative. In “It's a Black President, Huey Freeman,” Dubois offers a tremendous amount of superficial support to Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign without a basic understanding of the administration's purported aims. Tom's support of California's Proposition 8 gay marriage amendment was the product of inspiration conveyed by heterosexual character actor Sean Penn's performance as Castro District politician Harvey Milk in Gus Van Sant's *Milk* (Rudin & Van Sant, 2008). By the same token, Tom is depicted as embracing his supposed Scottish heritage after a viewing of Randall Wallace's 1995 Mel Gibson vehicle, *Braveheart* (Gibson & Wallace, 1995).

Robert Freeman was an active participant in twentieth-century history, serving as one of the Tuskegee Airmen in World War II and a nonviolent activist during the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott. Robert feels jaded by his omission from historical narratives, particularly in terms of his direct attachment to Rosa Parks' instigation of the nonviolent protest. In “Return of the King,” Martin Luther King visits the Freeman residence for

dinner and scolds Robert for continued prank calls to Rosa Parks decades after the fact (Barnes & McGruder, 2006). In “Wingmen,” Robert concurrently struggles with the death of his best friend and fellow veteran while again coming to terms with his omission from the historical narrative (McGruder, 2006). The subsequent seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series omitted Robert's rich historical context to focus on ten-year-old grandson Huey Freeman's efforts at contemporary historical revision in all but one instance, the second season's “The Return of Catcher Freeman.” (Barnes & McGruder, 2008).

Robert lacks the context to understand the importance of his contributions to black activism. He audaciously painted his World War II fighter plane in an era years prior to the 1948 integration of the United States Armed Forces. Robert's most overt act of activist defiance remains unnoticed by the character throughout *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons, embedded deep within a montage at the end of the first season's “Wingmen” to reward repeat viewings from enthusiastic audiences (McGruder, 2006).

Huey Freeman's efforts to rally support for contemporary black activism permeate the first three seasons of *The Boondocks* Animated Series. Huey once again stands as an example to lower characters within the recurring character spectrum, presenting a figurative best-case scenario for contemporary black historical consciousness and development of historical context to strengthen critical thinking skills. Huey's passive and active senses of historical context carry the same narrative weight in episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series as his brother's support of hegemonic, commoditized mass

culture through a steady diet of film, music, television and video games (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In the 2005 premiere of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, “The Garden Party,” Huey Freeman repeatedly evokes his historical inspirations through direct references to black activist Malcolm X, guerrilla revolutionary Che Guevara, Chinese leader Mao Zedong and Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. These references are peppered throughout the subsequent forty-four episodes as recurring semiotic signifiers intended to facilitate cross-brow appeal for Huey's potentially challenging lexicon of historical references (Barnes & McGruder, 2005).

In the first season's “Wingmen,” Huey comes to terms with his migration from inner-city Chicago and introspective feelings of cultural abandonment. Dewey, Huey's prior best friend from Chicago, offers such a hollow understanding of Islamic tenets that he substitutes “Eggs, Salami and Bacon” for the traditional Muslim salutation, As-Salami Alaykum. Huey leaves Chicago with Riley and Robert after coming to terms with the fall of Afrocentrism amidst the encroaching influence of superficial black representation in mass culture (McGruder, 2006).

Huey's direct participation in black history is perhaps best reflected in the first season's Peabody Award winning “Return of the King,” which offers a revisionist account of the Martin Luther King assassination and facilitates the famed Civil Rights Leader's interaction with Huey Freeman. Although Huey Freeman's beliefs fall closer in line with the activism of subsequent eras, he maintains the utmost respect for Dr. King and attempts to develop an oratory forum for King's purported return. The episode closes with the disastrous release of King's memoir, the bastardization of King's historical

narrative, and recurring images of King incorporated into various aspects of mass culture advertising. Huey remains steadfast in his support of Dr. King in spite of the character's lukewarm contemporary resonance in regard to black cultural, ethnic, political and social concerns in the early-to-mid 2000s (Barnes & McGruder, 2006).

The finale of the first season, "The Passion of Reverend Ruckus," chronicles Huey Freeman's efforts to assist a death row inmate intended to evoke the likeness of famed political prisoner Mumia-Abu Jamal. The second season's first of two banned episodes, "The Hunger Strike," reveals Huey's extensive dedication to rallying support for a nationwide boycott of the BET network by black viewers. In "The Story of Catcher Freeman," Huey Freeman offers a corollary perspective to the adult narratives forcibly conveyed by recurring spectrum adults Uncle Ruckus and Robert Freeman (Barnes & McGruder, 2006, 2008).

The first season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series focused predominantly on the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement within the context of peripheral, radical black activism in concurrent and successive eras. The season tends to focus on somber memorialization of McGruder's episode-based critical messages. The first season offers the most consistent incorporation of contrasting historical narratives from widely varying perspectives (maintaining varying levels of interest) throughout the recurring character spectrum (Barnes & McGruder, 2005, 2006; McGruder, 2006; McGruder & Taylor, 2005, 2006).

The second season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series de-emphasized the heavy-handed message delivery of the first season, focusing instead on McGruder's strong suit: frustrated critical commentary of contemporary cultural, ethnic, political and social

considerations. The season remains consistently mindful of contemporary considerations, pausing only once late in the season for one of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' most artistically ambitious and expensive episodes, "The Story of Catcher Freeman." (Barnes & McGruder, 2007, 2008; McGruder & Taylor, 2007).

The third season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series comprised McGruder's final material associated with the franchise. The season focused on post-2008 presidential election frustration with the cultural climate of the Obama administration. Although the scripts and storyboards were developed for the third season in 2008, the episodes only increased in relevance during the hiatus for outsourced animation (McGruder, 2010).

CHAPTER XI

EPILOGUE

This study examines encoded content in *The Boondocks* Animated Series with regard to controversial sociopolitical views and accessibility for the audience of the Cartoon Network's Adult Swim programming block between 2005 and 2011. The five chapters that comprise this study intentionally ignore tremendously problematic depictions of gender relations within *The Boondocks* Animated Series (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Although it may seem that these chapters are universally congratulatory of McGruder's progress with facilitating bold discussion of race, gender representation can only be viewed as pervasively problematic within the show. The show's shallow conceptualization of gender harkens back to Stuart Hall's 1982 discussion of "Relations of Representation," in which he argues that one form of oppression in media representation is often incorporated as a means of building an audience for a text that facilitates supposedly progressive aims (Hall, 1973, 1980, 1982; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

In *The Boondocks* Animated Series, few female characters are featured at the center of individual episodes. Moreover, females are almost universally utilized as examples for McGruder's depictions of frustration with contemporary black culture. The female secondary characters who do speak in *The Boondocks* Animated Series are often employed as examples of black social, cultural, and political ambivalence. The gender relations depicted in *The Boondocks* Animated Series offer more problematic representation for female characters than any of McGruder's successful precedents in

adult-oriented animated programming. An examination of problematic gender dynamics within *The Boondocks* Animated Series is an ideal cornerstone for future critical analysis on the text.

After the 2005-2011 production of *The Boondocks* Animated Series, the Cartoon Network and Sony Television Entertainment pacified Aaron McGruder by allowing him to produce a season of his sophomore television effort, the live-action, comparatively light hearted comedy *Black Jesus*, in summer 2014. Carl Jones was enticed into production of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' fourth season without McGruder with a launch of his own production, an outsourced animated adaptation of Sony Picture Classics' 2010 film *Black Dynamite*, in tandem with the film's director, star, and writer, Michael Jai White.

Despite Carl Jones' best efforts to produce a fourth season of *The Boondocks* Animated Series without franchise creator Aaron McGruder, the final ten episodes of the series were a critical and commercial failure that comprise one of the most negative public receptions of an original program in the history of the Adult Swim programming block. Out of respect for the encoding strategies examined in this study, *The Boondocks* Animated Series' fourth season is omitted from the chapters that comprise this study.

Season Four of *The Boondocks* Animated Series is neglected within this framework to maintain a focus on McGruder's singular creative vision through his forty-five episode production tenure. The season incorporates concurrent popular culture references on a rapid basis, yet eschews McGruder's message-based approach in the ten-episode devolution to vapid kitsch. The show incorporated a wide array of popular culture references in an effort to maintain cross-brow audience appeal, often to the

detriment of individual episodes. The humor in fourth season episodes often felt muddled due to the rapid, seemingly desperate incorporation of allusions to salient film, music, and television references.

Current events in the fourth season often felt dated; in April 2014, *The Boondocks Animated Series* returned with a hollow caricature of the Chris Brown / Rhianna relationship. The season continued with a multiple episode based, Freeman family centric spoof of AMC's enormously successful *Breaking Bad*. In a spoof of the reality television phenomenon *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, Robert Freeman marries a member of Kim Kardashian's family and appears on E! Entertainment Television. Within ten episodes, the fourth season of *The Boondocks Animated Series* stretches to ambitiously incorporate Asian and Mexican cultural commentary in tandem with the show's original Dubois, Freeman, Ruckus five-point spectrum dynamic.

Kris Kristofferson's "The Pilgrim, Part 33" is situated at the end of the actor/singer/songwriter's second LP, *The Silver Tongued Devil and I* (1971). Kristofferson's acting and writing talents transcend the contemporary nostalgia of his recording career. In a similar capacity, "The Pilgrim, Part 33" evokes dialogue between Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) and Betsy (Cybill Shepherd) in Martin Scorsese's inimitable *Taxi Driver* (1975). As Betsy surmises of Travis upon initial encounter, "He's a prophet and a pusher; partly truth, partly fiction; Walking contradiction." (Kristofferson, 1971; Scorsese, 1975).

Between 2005 and 2011, Aaron McGruder's *The Boondocks Animated Series* reflected a similar degree of cultural, ethnic, political and social frustration to the pervasively negative worldview eschewed by Travis' voice-over narration throughout

Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*. The Kristofferson quote iterated by Betsy on a New York City afternoon applies directly to McGruder's three season, forty-five episode production tenure on *The Boondocks Animated Series*.

In the first three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, McGruder used Asheru's "Judo Flip" as the opening credits theme of *The Boondocks Animated Series*. Preferring to let the episodes speak for themselves as critical commentary, McGruder refused to comment on the song's denoted relevance to specific episodes during 2005-2008 promotional interviews (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Across *The Boondocks Animated Series*' first half-decade of production, McGruder's encoding strategy incorporation strategies reversed the minority critical dissent and majority critical conformity. McGruder's substitution contradicted the encoding strategies of preceding black representation in prior eras of television programming, facilitating the mass culture resonance that led to McGruder's departure from *The Boondocks Animated series* in 2014 (Jones, 2014; Jones & McGruder, 2005).

As McGruder surmised in 2005, "*The Boondocks Animated Series* was created for people who constantly question the state of things" (Basile, 2005). Episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series* evoke a degree of cultural, ethnic, political and social frustration to that espoused by De Niro's flawed, frustrated protagonist throughout *Taxi Driver*. Much like Scorsese's 1975 film, *The Boondocks Animated Series* evokes a pessimistic worldview that refuses to be ignored.

Between 2005 and 2011, Aaron McGruder oversaw production of forty-five episodes of *The Boondocks Animated Series* across three seasons of production. This study has examined five encoding strategies employed in *The Boondocks Animated*

Series by McGruder: (1) incorporation of stereotypes, (2) incorporation of humor, (3) satirization of mass media dependency, (4) popular culture reference incorporation and (5) historical reference incorporation. The three season implementation of these strategies faced a fair share of controversy, as reflected throughout this exhaustive exploration of *The Boondocks Animated Series'* use of encoding strategies to facilitate audience resonance for the series among loyal viewers of Cartoon Network's late night Adult Swim programming block (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

Newcomers to *The Boondocks Animated Series* often presume that McGruder's personal views are solely represented by the height of McGruder's recurring character spectrum, ten-year-old protagonist Huey Freeman. A negotiated reading of encoding strategies evoked through recurring characters in *The Boondocks Animated Series* reveals a far more complex template. First and foremost, McGruder never intended for his artwork to convey a singular argument within any specific episode. In the first three seasons of *The Boondocks Animated Series*, McGruder employs a recurring character spectrum to effectively convey a multi-faceted dialogue on contemporary cultural, ethnic, political, and social frustration (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

As this examination of encoding strategies proves, traces of McGruder's message-based criticism of contemporary culture, ethnicity, politics, and society are evident through examination of the five aforementioned encoding strategies within a character-specific framework (Jones & McGruder, 2005).

APPENDIX A

THE BOONDOCKS ANIMATED SERIES EPISODE GUIDE (2005-2011)

01. "The Garden Party".

Director: Anthony Bell

Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes

Original Air Date: November 6, 2005

Episode Number: 101

Production Code: 103

Description: "When tycoon Ed Wuncler invites the Freemans to his garden party, Huey hopes to shock his white wealthy neighbors with his brand of "the truth". But things don't go as he planned."

02. "The Trial of R. Kelly."

Director: Anthony Bell

Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes

Original Air Date: November 13, 2005

Episode Number: 102

Production Code: 101

Description: Huey disagrees with Riley - and apparently most Blacks - regarding the R. Kelly case.

03. "Guess Hoe's Coming to Dinner."

Director: Anthony Bell

Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes

Original Air Date: November 20, 2005

Episode Number: 103

Production Code: 102

Description: Huey and Riley team up to convince Granddad that his new girlfriend is actually a prostitute who is after his money.

04. "Granddad's Fight."

Director: Joe Horne

Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes

Original Air Date: November 27, 2005

Episode Number: 104

Production Code: 104

Description: After getting beaten up by the mean and blind Col. Stinkmeaner, a humiliated Granddad wants a rematch.

05. "A Date with the Health Inspector."

Director: Joe Horne

Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes

Original Air Date: December 4, 2005

Episode Number: 105

Production Code: 106

Description: When Tom is wrongfully accused for murder, Huey and Riley enlist the help of Ed III and his friend, Gin Rummy to find the real killer.

06. "The Story of Gangstacious."

Director: Seung Eun Kim

Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes

Original Air Date: December 11, 2005

Episode Number: 106

Production Code: 107

Description: "Riley visits his favorite rapper, Gangstacious, who's been shot and hospitalized. But is he really a "gangsta"?"

07. "A Huey Freeman Christmas."

Director: Seung Eun Kim

Writer: Aaron McGruder

Original Air Date: December 18, 2005

Episode Number: 107

Production Code: 109

Description: "Huey's teacher gives him full creative control over the schools Christmas play."

08. "The Real."

Director: Anthony Bell

Writer: Aaron McGruder

Original Air Date: January 8, 2006

Episode Number: 108

Production Code: 105

Description: "Riley convinces Granddad to pretend he is blind so that Xzibit will pimp their ride. Huey is being stalked by a government agent. Or is it just his imagination?"

09. "Return of the King."

Director: Calvin Lee

Writer: Aaron McGruder

Original Air Date: January 15, 2006

Episode Number: 109

Production Code: 110

Description: "Martin Luther King comes out of a 32-year coma and Huey helps him to readjust. But Dr. King finds that his peaceful philosophy is no longer accepted in post-9/11 America."

10. "The Itis."

Director: Joe Horne
 Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes
 Original Air Date: January 22, 2006
 Episode Number: 110
 Production Code: 108

Description: "When Granddad and Ed Wuncler open a soul-food restaurant, it ends up having a terrible effect on Woodcrest."

11. "Let's Nab Oprah."

Director: Seung Eun Kim
 Writers: Aaron McGruder & Yamara Taylor
 Original Air Date: February 12, 2006
 Episode Number: 111
 Production Code: 112

Description: "Riley, Ed III and Rummy set out to kidnap Oprah Winfrey and it's up to Huey to stop them."

12. "Riley Wuz Here."

Director: Calvin Lee
 Writers: Aaron McGruder & Yamara Taylor
 Original Air Date: February 19, 2006
 Episode Number: 112
 Production Code: 113

Description: "An eccentric art teacher encourages Riley to express himself through graffiti. Huey watches nothing but shows with black people for two weeks to see if it has any negative side effects."

13. "Wingmen."

Director: Seung Eun Kim
 Writer: Aaron McGruder
 Original Air Date: March 5, 2006
 Episode Number: 113
 Production Code: 111

Description: "When one of Robert's army buddies, Moe, dies, he and the boys return home to Chicago for the funeral. On the way there it is revealed that Robert and Moe had a bad falling out over a girl. Huey is excited to be home in hopes of seeing his old friend Cairo, but finds out that he wants nothing to do with Huey."

14. "The Block is Hot."

Director: Calvin Lee
 Writers: Aaron McGruder & Yamara Taylor
 Original Air Date: March 12, 2006

Episode Number: 114

Production Code: 114

Description: "Jazmine learns a harsh lesson about capitalism when her lemonade stand becomes a subsidiary of Wuncler, Inc."

15. "The Passion of Reverend Ruckus."

Director: Sean Song

Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes

Original Air Date: March 19, 2006

Episode Number: 115

Production Code: 115

Description: "Ruckus' message of hating black people in order to get into White Heaven catches on. Huey tries to save a radical who was wrongly convicted of murder from being executed."

Season 02: October 2007-February 2008

16 "... Or Die Trying."

Director: Seung Eun Kim

Writers: Aaron McGruder & Yamara Taylor

Original Air Date: October 08, 2007

Episode Number: 201

Production Code: 205

Description: "Granddad takes the kids to the movies but has to sneak them in since he refuses to pay the exorbitant prices. Huey tries to sabotage the film, but Uncle Ruckus tries to stop him."

17 "Tom, Sarah & Usher."

Director: Seung Eun Kim

Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes

Original Air Date: October 15, 2007

Episode Number: 202

Production Code: 202

Description: "After Sarah kicks Tom out over an argument about superstar Usher, he turns to the Freemans and A Pimp Named Slickback for help."

18 "Thank You for Not Snitching."

Director: Seung Eun Kim

Writer: Aaron McGruder

Original Air Date: October 22, 2007

Episode Number: 203

Production Code: 203

Description: "Riley's natural inclination to never snitch is challenged when he learns Ed

Wuncler III and Gin Rummy are behind a series of robberies in Woodcrest, climaxing in the theft of Granddad's car.”

19 “Stinkmeaner Strikes Back.”

Director: Seung Eun Kim

Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes

Original Air Date: October 29, 2007

Episode Number: 204

Production Code: 201

Description: “Colonel Stinkmeaner returns from Hell after making a deal with the Devil, and possesses Tom in order to take revenge on Granddad.”

20 “The Story of Thugnificent.”

Director: Seung Eun Kim

Writer: Aaron McGruder

Original Air Date: November 05, 2007

Episode Number: 205

Production Code: 204

Description: “When rapper Thugnificent moves in across the street, Granddad complains about the non-stop noise and partying, leading Thugnificent to record a new song, "Eff Granddad."”

21 “Attack of the Killer Kung-Fu Wolf Bitch.”

Director: Seung Eun Kim

Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes

Original Air Date: November 19, 2007

Episode Number: 206

Production Code: 207

Description: “After various failed attempts at meeting women on Myspace, Grandpa Freeman tries one last time and the results look promising, except for the fact that she was raised by wolves and knows a martial art that seems to be extinct.”

22 “Shinin'.”

Director: Dan Faussett

Writer: Aaron McGruder

Original Air Date: November 26, 2007

Episode Number: 207

Production Code: 208

Description: “A bully steals the chain that signifies Riley's membership in Thugnificent's crew, prompting various attempts by Riley to get it back.”

23 “Ballin'.”

Director: Dan Faussett

Writers: Andre Brooks, Aaron McGruder & James Van Veen

Original Air Date: December 03, 2007

Episode Number: 208

Production Code: 209

Description: "Coaching a terrible children's basketball team, Tom believes Riley's amazing and inspired ball-handling skills are just what his squad needs to win its first game, until everyone finds out Riley doesn't know how to shoot or play with teammates."

24 "Invasion of the Katrinians."

Director: Dan Faussett

Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes

Original Air Date: December 10, 2007

Episode Number: 209

Production Code: 206

Description: "Granddad's cousin and his family take up residence in the Freeman home after being displaced by Hurricane Katrina."

25 "Home Alone."

Director: Dan Faussett

Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes

Original Air Date: December 17, 2007

Episode Number: 210

Production Code: 212

Description: "When Granddad goes on vacation, he leave Huey and Riley home with Uncle Ruckus as their chaperone. The boys cause enough havoc to chase Uncle Ruckus away, which leaves Huey in charge... much to Riley's disappointment."

26 "The S-Word."

Director: Seung Eun Kim

Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes

Original Air Date: January 21, 2008

Episode Number: 211

Production Code: 213

Description: "Granddad and the good Rev. Rollo Goodlove try to cash in big after a teacher calls Riley "the n-word" in school."

27 "The Story of Catcher Freeman."

Director: Dan Faussett

Writer: Aaron McGruder

Original Air Date: January 28, 2008

Episode Number: 212

Production Code: 214

Description: "Granddad and Uncle Ruckus offer conflicting accounts of a slave revolt led by Huey and Riley's ancestor. Huey reveals that the truth is much different than either of them thought."

28 “The Story of Gangstacious, Part 2.”

Director: Dan Faussett
 Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes
 Original Air Date: February 04, 2008
 Episode Number: 213
 Production Code: 215

Description: “Despite many obvious clues to the contrary, Riley denies that his favorite rapper, Gangstacious, is gay.”

29 “The Hunger Strike (Part 1)”

Director: Dan Faussett
 Original Air Date: N/A (Pulled by Adult Swim)
 Episode Number: N/A (Pulled by Adult Swim)
 Production Code: 210

Description: “Huey goes on a hunger strike in a boycott of BET, and receives some high-profile support from Reverend Rollo Goodlove, who may be more interested in his own self-promotion than any good intentions.

30 “The Uncle Ruckus Reality Show (Part 2).”

Director: Seung Eun Kim
 Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes
 Original Air Date: N/A (Pulled by Adult Swim)
 Episode Number: N/A (Pulled by Adult Swim)
 Production Code: 211

Description: “Huey goes on a hunger strike in a boycott of BET, and receives some high-profile support from Reverend Rollo Goodlove, who may be more interested in his own self-promotion than any good intentions.”

Season 3: May 2010-August 2010

31 “It’s a Black President, Huey Freeman.”

Director: Sung Dae Kang
 Writer: Aaron McGruder
 Original Air Date: May 02, 2010
 Episode Number: 301
 Production Code: 304

Description: “A German documentary follows the Freeman family during the election of the country's first Black President.”

32 “Bitches to Rags.”

Director: Young Chan Kim
 Writer: Aaron McGruder

Original Air Date: May 09, 2010

Episode Number: 302

Production Code: 302

Description: "When his new album tanks, Thugnificent is faced with the horror of getting a real job."

33 "The Red Ball."

Director: Young Chan Kim

Writer: Aaron McGruder

Original Air Date: May 16, 2010

Episode Number: 303

Production Code: 306

Description: "Huey leads the residents of Woodcrest in a kickball game against a seemingly unbeatable Chinese team, while the game is secretly being funded and rigged by Ed Wuncler and the Chinese mafia."

34 "The Story of Jimmy Rebel."

Director: Sung Hoon Kim

Writer: Aaron McGruder

Original Air Date: May 23, 2010

Episode Number: 304

Production Code: 303

Description: "Ruckus finds his musical soul mate in famed racist country-western singer Jimmy Rebel."

35 "Stinkmeaner 3: The Hateocracy."

Director: Sung Hoon Kim

Writer: Aaron McGruder

Original Air Date: May 30, 2010

Episode Number: 305

Production Code: 307

Description: "Three of Stinkmeaner's old crew arrive in town to exact payback on the Freeman family."

36 "Smokin' With Cigarettes."

Director: Sung Hoon Kim

Writer: Aaron McGruder

Original Air Date: June 06, 2010

Episode Number: 306

Production Code: 309

Description: "Riley becomes friends with a sociopathic boy named Lamilton Taeshawn, who wants to do nothing more than hurt people, cause mayhem, and smoke cigarettes."

37 "The Fundraiser."

Director: Sung Dae Kang
 Writer: Aaron McGruder
 Original Air Date: June 13, 2010
 Episode Number: 307
 Production Code: 310

Description: "Riley organizes a fund raiser with Cindy McPhearson, Jazmine Dubois and other kids from Woodcrest, but the money isn't going to anyone in need."

38 "Pause."

Director: Sung Hoon Kim
 Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes
 Original Air Date: June 20, 2010
 Episode Number: 308
 Production Code: 301

Description: "Granddad is cast as the leading man by mega-superstar of stage and screen, Winston Jerome. But when the theatre group turns out to be a homo-erotic evangelical cult, it's up to Huey and Riley to put a pause to it.

39 "A Date with the Booty Warrior."

Director: Young Chan Kim
 Writer: Aaron McGruder
 Original Air Date: June 27, 2010
 Episode Number: 309
 Production Code: 308

Description: "Having conquered his fear of prison rape, Tom volunteers to lead Huey, Riley, and some classmates on a trip to jail as part of a Scared Stiff program. But when a riot breaks out, Tom has to get the kids, and his delicate backside, out of jail in one piece."

40 "The Story of Lando Freeman."

Director: Sung Dae Kang
 Writer: Aaron McGruder
 Original Air Date: July 04, 2010
 Episode Number: 310
 Production Code: 312

Description: "There's a new handyman in the neighborhood undercutting Uncle Ruckus... which is all good for Granddad and his garden until the man claims to be his long lost son, Lando. Will Granddad take responsibility and be a father to his son? Not without a talk show paternity test."

41 "Lovely Ebony Brown"

Director: Young Chan Kim
 Writers: Aaron McGruder & Rodney Barnes
 Original Air Date: July 11, 2010
 Episode Number: 311

Production Code: 311

Description: "Granddad meets a young black woman who asks him out on a date, but the only person who can spoil Granddad's new romance, is Granddad."

42 "Mr. Medicinal."

Director: Sung Hoon Kim

Writer: Aaron McGruder

Original Air Date: July 18, 2010

Episode Number: 312

Production Code: 313

Description: "After a checkup, a doctor warns Granddad that he could die any day if he doesn't get his stress levels down. Not wanting to become dependent on pills, he decides to take Thugnificent's suggestion... and turns to marijuana."

43 "The Fried Chicken Flu."

Director: Sung Dae Kang

Writer: Aaron McGruder

Original Air Date: August 01, 2010

Episode Number: 313

Production Code: 315

Description: "When a fast food promotion crosses with a plague of biblical proportions, society spins out of controls faster than you can say "white meat only.""

44 "The Color Ruckus."

Director: Young Chan Kim

Writer: Aaron McGruder

Original Air Date: August 08, 2010

Episode Number: 314

Production Code: 314

Description: "Uncle Ruckus must face the truth about his racial origins, when his abusive father and the rest of his family show up in Woodcrest."

45 "It's Goin' Down."

Director: Sung Hoon Kim

Writer: Aaron McGruder

Original Air Date: August 15, 2010

Episode Number: 315

Production Code: 305

Description: "Legendary anti-terrorist agent Jack Flowers becomes suspicious of Huey when Ed Wuncler III and Gin Rummy plot a terrorist attack in Woodcrest."

APPENDIX B

THE BOONDOCKS ANIMATED SERIES CHARACTER GUIDE (2005-2011)

Angelou, Maya

Actress: Jill Talley

Reference: Maya Angelou is widely considered to be a seminal black poet, public speaker and public figure.

Relationship: Angelou is accidentally kidnapped by Ed Wuncler and “Gin Rummy,” as they were trying to kidnap Oprah Winfrey instead. Angelou attacks the characters and quickly escapes.

Appearances:

- 111: “Let’s Nab Oprah” (2006)

Berle, Shabazz K. Milton

Actor: Rahon Kahn

Reference: Mumia Abu-Jamal

Relationship: Huey rallies for the release of Berle, a founding member of the Black Panther Party. The two become close friends through correspondence before Kahn’s execution.

Appearances

- 115: “The Passion of Ruckus” (2006)

“Booty Warrior”, The

Actor: Carl Jones

Reference: Fleece Johnson (Convict from MSNBC “Lock-Up” Interview)

Relationship: Appears in a satirical depiction of MSNBC’s “To Catch a Predator,” assaults the host

Episode: S3 “A Date with the Booty Warrior” (309)

Brown, Ebony

Actress: Gina Torres

Relationship: Dates Robert Freeman briefly towards the end of the series arc.

- 311: “The Lovely Ebony Brown” (2010)

Bushido Brown

Actor: Cedric Yarborough

Reference: Afro Samurai (*Spike* Productions, animated portrayal of black action star)

Relationship: Bushido Brown was originally depicted in the series as Oprah Winfrey’s personal bodyguard.

Appearances:

- 111: “Let’s Nab Oprah” (2006)
- 206: “Attack of the Killer Kung-Fu Wolf Bitch” (2007)
- 305: “Stinkmeaner III: The Hateocracy” (2010)

Cairo

Actor: Che Bouey

Relationship: Replaces Huey as Dewey Jenkins' new best friend, after his move to Woodcrest. Huey feels intimidated by Cairo's intense devotion to black radicalism.

Appearances:

113: "Wingmen" (2006)

Calloway, Sway

Actor: Sway Calloway

Relationship: Sway Calloway narrates the entertainment journalism segments on Gangstacious and Thugnificent that Riley watches in the show.

Coulter, Ann

Actress:

Reference: Ann Coulter (Conservative Commentator)

Appearances: 211: "The S-Word"

Crabmiser, Lord Rufus

Actor: Aries Spears

Reference: Fred Samson, *Sanford & Son*

Episode: S3 "Stinkmeaner III: The Hateocracy" (305)

Cristal

Actress: Tiffany Thomas

Reference: Mariah Carey Mainstream Appeal

Episode: S1 "Guess Hoe's Coming to Dinner" (103)

Devil, The

Actor: Terry Crews

Reference: Malebolgia (Satan Parallel) of *Spawn* comic/television/film franchise

Relationship: Colonel Stinkmeaner makes a deal with "The Devil" to return to Earth and torment Robert Freeman from beyond the grave.

Episode: S2 "Stinkmeaner Strikes Back" (204)

Dr. Doomis

Actor:

Reference: Dr. Harold Loomis, *Halloween*

Relationship: Visits the Freeman family to warn Robert about the dangers of Riley and LaMilton's friendship. Establishes parallels between LaMilton and Michael Myers.

Appearances:

- 308: "Smokin' with Cigarettes" (2010)

Dubois, Jazmine

Actress: Gabby Soleil

Appearances: Jazmine Dubois is credited with appearances in ten episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series' first three seasons.

Dubois, Sarah

Actress: Jill Talley

Relationship: Neighbor to the Freeman family, wife to Thomas Dubois, mother to Jazmine Dubois

Appearances: Sarah Dubois appears in twenty of the series' forty-five existing episodes.

Dubois, Thomas Lancaster

Actor: Cedric Yarborough

References: Harriet Beecher Stowe (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*), W.E.B. DuBois

Relationships: Neighbor to Freeman family, Husband to Sarah Dubois, Father to Jazmine Dubois

Appearances: Thomas Lancaster Dubois ("Tom") appears in 28 of the existing 45 episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series.

Appearances: Thomas DuBois appears in 20 of the 45 existing episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series:

- 102: "The Trial of Robert Kelly" (2005)
- 104: "Granddad's Fight" (2005)
- 105: "A Date with the Health Inspector" (2006)
- 107: "The Itis" (2006),
- 108: "The Real" (2006)
- 109: "Return of the King" (2006)
- 112: "Riley Wuz Here" (2006)
- 113: "Wingmen" (2006)
- 115: "The Passion of Ruckus" (2006)
- 202: "Tom, Sarah and Usher" (2007)
- 204: "Stinkmeaner Strikes Back" (2007)
- 205: "Thank You for Not Snitching" (2007)
- 206: "The Story of Thugnificent" (2007)
- 207: "Attack of the Killer Kung-Fu Wolf Bitch" (2007)
- 208: "Ballin'" (2007)
- 209: "Invasion of the Katrinians" (2007)
- 210: "Home Alone" (2007)
- 212: "The Story of Catcher Freeman" (2008)
- 213: "The Story of Gangstalicious: Part 2" (2008)
- 214: "The Hunger Strike" (Unaired)
- 215: "The Uncle Ruckus Reality Show" (Unaired)
- 301: "It's a Black President, Huey Freeman" (2010)
- 308: "Pause" (2010)
- 309: "A Date with the Booty Warrior" (2010)
- 310: "Lovely Ebony Brown" (2010)
- 312: "Mr. Medicinal" (2010)
- 313: "The Fried Chicken Flu" (2010)
- 314: "The Color Ruckus" (2010)
- 315: "It's Goin' Down" (2010)

Ethelburg, Jessica "Wonder Cheeks"

Reference: Karrine "Super Head" Steffens

Context: Shapes the face of mainstream music with her popular book, *The Private Lives of Mainstream Rappers*

Appearances:

- 213: "The Story of Gangstalicious, Part 2" (2008).

Flonominal

Actor: Busta Rhymes

Reference: Homo-Erotic Mainstream Rap Music Culture

Appearances: S2 "The Story of Gangstacious," S2 "The Story of Thugnificent, Part 2" (213)

Note: Played by Kevin Michael in S3 episode, "Bitches to Rags" (303). Only actor who doesn't return in 2010.

Flowers, Jack

Reference: Jack Bauer, 24 (Kiefer Sutherland television program)

Context: Jack Flowers represents the head of the F.B.I.'s "Central Terrorist Agency," which only appears in the show's final existing episode.

Appearances:

- 315: "It's Goin' Down" (2007)

Freeman, "Aunt" Cookie

Actress: Niecy Nash

Relationship: Sister to Robert Freeman, Aunt to Huey and Riley Freeman

Episode:

- 113: "Wingmen" (2006)
- 209: "Invasion of the Katrinians" (2007)

Freeman, Catcher

Actor: Chris Jai Alex

Reference: Dueling stories of Freeman slave ancestry, due to conflicting Robert/Ruckus accounts

Appearances:

212: "The Story of Catcher Freeman" (2007)

Freeman, Huey

Actress: Regina King

Reference: Huey Newton (Founding member, "Black Panther Party")

Relationship: Grandson to Robert Freeman, Brother to Riley Freeman

Appearances: Huey Freeman appears in all 45 existing episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series.

Freeman, Jericho

Actor: Cedric the Entertainer (Comedian)

Relationship: Jericho Freeman is Robert Freeman's cousin, who comes to visit after the hurricane.

Appearances:

- 209: "Invasion of the Katrinians" (2007)

Freeman, Lando

Actor: Gerald 'Slink' Johnson (Comedian)

Relationship: Son of Robert Freeman

Appearances:

- 312: “The Story of Lando Freeman” (2010)

Freeman, Riley

Actress: Regina King

Appearances: Riley Freeman appears in all 45 existing episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series.

Freeman, Robert Jebediah “Granddad”

Actor: John Witherspoon

Reference: Direct allusions to dialogue from “Mr. Jones,” Craig Jones' father in the *Friday* film series

Appearances: Robert Freeman appears in all 45 existing episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series.

Freeman, Thelma

Actress: Crystal Scales

Relationship: Wife of Catcher/Tobias Freeman

Appearances:

- 212: “The Story of Catcher Freeman” (2008)

Freeman, Tobias

Actor: Donald Faison

Reference: Dueling stories of Freeman slave ancestry, due to conflicting Robert/Ruckus accounts

Appearances:

- 212: “The Story of Catcher Freeman” (2008)

Gangstalicious

Actor: Mos Def

Reference: Satirical/Outwardly Homo-Erotic View of Mainstream Rap Machismo

Appearances:

- 106: “The Story of Gangstalicious” (2006)
- 202: “Thank You for Not Snitchin” (2007)
- 213: “The Story of Gangstalicious, Part 2” (2008)

Ghostface Killah

Actor: Dennis Coles (“Ghostface Killah”)

Reference: Satire of Mainstream Rap Implementation of Martial Arts Film Tropes

Episode:

- 204: “Stinkmeaner Strikes Back” (2007)

Goodlove, Reverend Rollo

Actor: Cee-Lo Green

Reference: Cee-Lo Green (Musical Artist)

Appearances:

- 211: “The S-Word”

- 214: “The Hunger Strike”

Gripenasty, Lady Esmerelda

Actress: Bebe Drake

Reference: Aunt Esther, *Sanford and Son*

Relationship: Part of “The Hateocracy,” a group of senior-citizens that targets Robert Freeman after the demise of Colonel Stinkmeaner.

Appearances:

- 305: “Stinkmeaner III: The Hateocracy” (2010)

Hansen, Chris

Actor: Jim Meskimen

Reference: Host of MSNBC's “To Catch a Predator”

Relationship: Rekindles Tom Dubois' fear of prison assault when he attacks Chris Hansen on live TV.

Appearances:

- 309: “A Date with the Booty Warrior” (2010)

“Health Inspector,” The

Actor: Terry Crews

Reference: Terry Crews' Prior Material (*Old Spice* Commercials)

Relationship: The “Health Inspector” perpetuates Tom Dubois' fear of sexual assault in prison.

Appearances:

- 105: “A Date with the Health Inspector” (2006)

Jackson, Moe “Mo' Guns”

Actor: Mike Epps (Comedian)

Relationship: World War II veteran from Robert Freeman's unit, whom Robert visits in Chicago

Appearances:

- 113: “Wingmen” (2006)

Jackson, Terrell

Actor: No Voice

Relationship: Terrell Jackson is revealed by the media as the true identity of “The X-Box Killer,” indicating the media's problematic association with crime coverage and criminal profiling.

Appearances:

- 105: “A Date with the Health Inspector” (2006)

Jenkins, Dewey

Actor: Austin Williams

Relationship: Huey's former best friend in Chicago, prior to his move to Woodcrest

Appearances:

- 113: “Wingmen” (2006)

Jenkins, Otis “Thugnificent”

Actor: Carl Jones

Reference: Homo-Erotic Subtext of Mainstream Rap Music Culture

Relationship: Woodcrest neighbor to the Freeman and Dubois residences

Appearances:

- “The Story of Thugnificent” (2006)
- “The Story of Gangstacious” (2007)
- “Thank You for Not Snitchin” (2007)
- “The Story of Gangstacious, Part 2” (2007)

Jerome, Winston

Actor: Affion Crockett

Reference: Tyler Perry

Relationship: Attempts to seduce Robert Freeman into a sexual liaison through an elaborately staged hoax, involving a fake film production and dozens of personnel.

Appearances

- 308: “Pause” (2010)

King, Martin Luther

Actor: Kevin Michael Richardson

Reference: Civil Rights Historical Figure

Relationship: The Freeman family takes Dr. King in, after he finds the post-coma world disheartening.

Appearances:

- 109: “Return of the King” (2006)

Leonard

Actor: DeRay Davis

Relationship: The only member of Thugnificent's “Lethal Interjection” crew that remains loyal by the end of season 2, despite Thugnificent's pervasive abuse.

Appearances:

- “The Story of Gangstacious” (2007)
- “Thank You for Not Snitchin” (2007)
- “The Story of Gangstacious, Part 2” (2007)

Leevil, Deborah

Actress:

Reference: Debra L. Lee, President/CEO/Holdings Owner, “Black Entertainment Television”

Cultural References: “Dr. Evil” antagonist in *Austin Powers* film series, Disney inception of Cruella Deville

Note: Episodes featuring depictions of BET plotting the “destruction of all black people” as a mission statement were pulled from Adult Swim by the Cartoon Network in 2007, after Lee threatened the network with legal action.

Appearances:

- 214: “The Hunger Strike” (Unaired)
- 215: “The Uncle Ruckus Reality Program” (Unaired)

Long-Dou, Ming

Actress: Tiffany Espensen

Reference: Athletic Prowess of Chinese Children

Appearances:

- 303: “The Red Ball” (2010)

Luna

Actress: Aisha Tyler

Reference: Satirical Portrayal of On-Line Dating

Relationship: Meets Robert Freeman on Myspace

Appearances:

- 206: “Attack of the Killer Kung-Fu Wolf Bitch” (2007)

Lynchwater, Colonel George “Massa”

Actor: Jeff Glen Bennett

Appearances:

- 212: “The Story of Catcher Freeman” (2008)

Macktastic

Actor: Snoop Dogg (Calvin Broadus)

Reference: Satire of Mainstream Rap Culture

Appearances:

- 205: “The Story of Thugnificent” (2007)
- 207: “Shinin” (2007)
- 213: “The Story of Gangstacious, Part 2” (2008)

Maher, Bill

Actor: Barry Sobel

Reference: Bill Maher (Televised Liberal Commentator)

Appearances:

- 109: “Return of the King” (2006)

McPhearson, Cindy

Actress: Tara Strong

Reference: White Perception of Mainstream Rap Music Culture

Appearances:

- 207: “Ballin” (2007)
- 213: “The Story of Thugnificent, Part 2” (2008)
- 303: “The Red Ball” (2010)
- 310: “The Fundraiser” (2010)

Matthews, Billy

Actor: Jim Meskimen

Film Reference: Dustin Hoffman, *Rain Man*

Relationship: Competes against Riley's basketball team, the "Ballaholics", in season 2.

Episode: S2 "Ballin'" (208)

Milosevic, Butch Magnus

Actor: Daryl Sabara

Relationship: Butch ("Bitch") Magnus is a bully who torments Riley at J. Edgar Hoover Elementary School.

Appearances:

- 207: "Shinin'" (2007)

O'Brien, Pat

Actor: Barry Sobel

Reference: Pat O'Brien, "Fox Sports Radio" Host, "Access Hollywood" Host, 1997-2004)

Appearances:

- "The Itis" (2006)

Obama, Barack

Actor: Marlin Hill

Relationships: The 2008 presidential election results paved the way for satirized Obama portrayals in three episodes from the show's final existing season.

Appearances:

- 301: "It's a Black President, Huey Freeman" (2010)
- 310: "The Fried Chicken Flu" (2010)
- 315: "It's Goin' Down" (2010).

Parks, Rosa

Actress: Michele Morgan

Relationship: Clashes with Robert and Ruckus over memories of 1950s-1960s activism

Appearances:

- 109: "Return of the King" (2006)

Petto, George

Actor: Fred Willard

Relationship: Riley's teacher at J. Edgar Hoover elementary School

Year: 2007

Appearances:

- 211: "The S-Word" (2008)

Pimp Named Slickback, A

Actor: Katt Williams

Reference: Money Mike, *Friday After Next*

Relationship: In season 1, Robert Freeman accidentally begins a relationship with a prostitute, thus bringing "A Pimp Named Slickback" in as an occasional recurring character. In season 2, the character was hired by Tom Dubois in an effort to increase his

assertiveness.

Appearances:

- 103: “Guess Hoe's Coming to Dinner” (2005)
- 109: “Return of the King” (2006)
- 202: “Tom, Sarah and Usher” (2007)
- 215: “The Uncle Ruckus Reality Program (Unaired)

Pistofferson, George

Actor: Jimmie Walker

Reference: J.J. Evans, *Good Times*

Relationship: Part of the “Hateocracy”, a group of senior citizens that targets Robert Freeman.

Appearances:

- 305: “Stinkmeaner III: The Hateocracy” (2010)

Rebel, Jimmy

Actor: Greg Travis

Reference: Johnny Rebel (1960s Musician, Proponent of Mass Resistance)

Appearances:

- 304: “The Story of Jimmy Rebel” (2010)

Reagan, Ronald

Actor: Jim Meskimen

Reference: Hollywood Star, California Governor and U.S. President Ronald Reagan

Relationship: Visits Uncle Ruckus in his dreams to affirm his whiteness, despite his “skin condition”

Appearances:

- 115: “The Passion of Ruckus” (2006)

Ruckus, Bunny

Actress: Star Jones

Relationship: Mother to Uncle Ruckus

Appearances:

- 314: “The Color Ruckus” (2007)

Ruckus, Darrel

Actor: Gary Anthony Williams

Ethnicity: Caucasian

Relationship: Brother to Uncle Ruckus

Appearances:

- 314: “The Color Ruckus” (2007)

Ruckus, Darryl

Actor: Gary Anthony Williams

Ethnicity: Caucasian

Relationship: Brother to Uncle Ruckus

Appearances:

- 314: “The Color Ruckus” (2007)

Ruckus, Mister

Actor: Don “D.C.” Curry

Ethnicity: Black

Relationship: Father to Uncle Ruckus

Appearances:

- 314: “The Color Ruckus” (2007)

Ruckus, Nelly

Actress: Luenell Campbell

Ethnicity: Black

Relationship: Grandmother to Uncle Ruckus

Appearances:

- 314: “The Color Ruckus” (2007)

Ruckus, “Uncle (No Relation)”

Actor: Gary Daniels

Relationship:

- Envious of the Freeman family's move from Chicago to Woodcrest
- Serves to antagonize the Freemans in various ways throughout their stay in the suburb.

Appearances:

- “Uncle” Ruckus appears in all but two episodes of *The Boondocks* Animated Series ' existing 45-episode arc
- Uncle Ruckus the most substantial supporting character outside of the Freeman family in *The Boondocks* Animated Series.

Rummy, Gin

Actor: Samuel L. Jackson

Reference: Samuel L. Jackson (Mainstream Perception)

Relationships: Gin Rummy always appears alongside fellow Iraqi War veteran “Ed” Wuncler, III.

Appearances:

- 105: “A Date with the Health Inspector” (2005)
- 111: “Let's Nab Oprah” (2006)
- 203: “Thank You for Not Snitchin” (2007)
- 312: “The Story of Lando Freeman” (2010)
- 315: “It's Goin' Down” (2010)

Simmons, Mabel

Reference: Tyler Perry (Madea), Moms Mabely

Relationship: Robert Freeman is recruited by Winston Jerome to play Mabel Simmons' love interest in Jerome's next film, *Mabel Simmons Gets a Man*.

Appearances:

- 308: “Pause” (2010)

Stinkmeaner, Colonel H.M.

Actor: Cedric Yarbrough

Reference: Titular character from *Zatoichi: The Blind Swordsman*

Relationship: Antagonizes Robert Freeman in all three seasons

Appearances:

- 104: “Granddad's Fight” (2006)
- 202: “Stinkmeaner Strikes Back” (2007)
- 305: “Stinkmeaner III: The Hateocracy” (2010)

Taeshon, LaMilton

Actor: Bobb'e J. Thompson

Reference: Michael Myers, *Halloween*

Relationship: Maintains a brief friendship with Riley Freeman in Season 3

Year: 2010

Appearances:

- 308: “Smokin' with Cigarettes” (2010)

Uberwitz, “Mister”

Actor: Judge Reinhold

Reference: Judge Reinhold's 1980s film career

Relationship: Huey Freeman's teacher at J. Edgar Hoover Elementary School

Appearances:

- 107: “A Huey Freeman Christmas” (2006)

Von-Huesen, “Mrs.”

Actress: Marion Ross

Reference: Daughters of the American Revolution, National Rifle Association, GOP Politics

Appearances:

- 202: “Thank You for Not Snitching” (2007)
- 211: “The S-Word” (2008)
- 313: “The Fried Chicken Flu” (2010)

“White Shadow”, The

Actor: John C. McGinley

Years: 2007, 2010

Appearances:

- 108: “The Real” (2006)
- 315: “It's Goin' Down (2010)

Wuncler, Edward

Actor: Ed Asner

Relationship: Grandfather to “Ed” Wuncler III, Freeman family banker, financier of Woodcrest, epitome of rich white typification

Appearances:

- 101: “The Garden Party” (2005)
- 108: “The Itis” (2006)
- 111: “The Block is Hot” (2006)
- 303: “The Red Ball” (2010)
- 315: “It's Goin' Down” (2010)

Wuncler, Edward “Ed” III

Actor: Charlie Murphy

Reference: Marshall Mathers (Musical Artist), Norman Mailer (*The White Negro*)

Relationship: Edward III is an Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran who enjoys the privileges of high society through his grandfather, Edward Wuncler along with his veteran friend, “Gin Rummy”.

Context: Wuncler III is typically depicted with his partner-in-crime, “Gin Rummy”. Both of these characters satirize mainstream demands that black stars face, thus explaining the decision to cast the white characters with popular black actors.

Appearances: “Ed” Wuncler appears in 10 of the existing 45 episodes of *The Boondocks* series:

- | | |
|--|--|
| • 101: “The Garden Party” (2005) | • 303: “The Red Ball” (2010) |
| • 105: “A Date with the Health Inspector” (2005) | • 305: “Stinkmeaner III: The Hateocracy” |
| • 203: “Thank You for Not Snitchin” (2007) | • 310: “The Fundraiser” (2010) |
| • 208: “Shinin” (2007) | • 315: “It's Goin' Down” (2010) |
| • 302: “Bitches to Rags” (2010) | |

Xzibit

Actor: Xzibit

Reference: Former Rapper, present host of MTV's “Pimp My Ride”

Relationship: Arrives at the Freeman residence after Riley and Robert Freeman submit a fake application to Xzibit's television program.

Appearances:

- “The Real” (108)

APPENDIX C

THE BOONDOCKS ANIMATED SERIES REFERENTIAL LEXICON (2005-2011)

FILM

- *28 Weeks Later* (Fresnadillo & Lavigne, 2009)
- *36th Chamber of Shaolin, The* (Cheh & Shaw, 1969)
- *101 Dalmatians* (Disney, 1961)
- *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (Grazer & Roach, 1997)
- *Bloodsport* (Arnold & Disalle, 1987)
- *Blazing Saddles* (Brooks, 1974)
- *Blow* (Demme, 2001)
- *Blues Brothers, The* (Landis & Michaels, 1981)
- *Boondock Saints, The* (Duffy & Weinstein, 2002)
- *Braveheart* (Gibson & Wallace, 1997)
- *Burden of Dreams, The* (Blank & Herzog, 1982)
- *Clockwork Orange, A* (Kubrick, 1971)
- *Django Unchained* (Tarantino & Weinstein, 2012)
- *Dolemite* (Martin & Moore, 1975)
- *Eddie Murphy: Delirious!* (1983)
- *Enter the Dragon* (1973)
- *Exorcist, The* (Blatty & Friedkin, 1973)
- *Fatal Attraction* (1987)
- *Friday* (Gray & Jackson, 1997)
- *Goodfellas* (Scorsese & Winkler, 1990)
- *Good Son, The* (1993)
- *Halloween* (Carpenter & Hill, 1978)
- *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka* (Wayans, 1987)
- *In the Heat of the Night* (Jewison & Wexler, 1968)
- *Juice* (1996)
- *Kill Bill, Vol. 1* (Tarantino & Weinstein, 2004)
- *Little Mermaid, The* (Ashman & Clements, 1989)
- *Lock, Stock, Two Smoking Barrels* (Ritchie, 1996)
- *Major Payne* (Wayans, 1995)
- *Mandingo* (De Laurentis & Fletcher, 1975)
- *Matrix, The* (A. Wachowski & L. Wachowski, 1999)
- *Menace II Society* (A. Hughes & A. Hughes, 1994)
- *Mighty Ducks, The* (Avnet & Herek, 1992)
- *Milk* (Rudin & Van Zandt, 2009)
- *Monty Python Quest Holy Grail* (Gilliam & Jones, 1975)
- *Monty Python's the Life of Brian* (Gilliam & Jones, 1981)
- *Mr. Deeds* (Sandler & Schneider, 2005)
- *New Jack City* (Peebles, 1991)
- *Omen, The* (1975)
- *Paid in Full* (Berdinka & Stone, 1992)
- *Passion of the Christ, The* (Gibson, 2004)
- *Petey Whitestraw: The Devil's Son in Law* (Martin & Moore, 1979)
- *Platoon* (Ho & Stone, 1986)
- *Problem Child* (1992)
- *Pulp Fiction* (Gordon & Tarantino, 1994)
- *Reservoir Dogs* (Gordon & Tarantino, 1992)
- *Ring, The* (2000)
- *Rocky III* (Stallone, 1983)
- *Scared Straight* (1975)
- *Scarface* (Bregman & De Palma, 1983)
- *Shaolin Rescuers* (Cheh & Shaw,

- 1979)
- *Shaolin Soccer* (Chow & Weinstein, 1997)
- *Shining, The* (Kubrick, 1980)
- *Soul Plane* (Hart & Perry, 2005)
- *Snatch* (Ritchie & Rudin, 2003)
- *Star Wars: A New Hope* (Lucas, 1977)
- *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* (Kirschner & Lucas, 1981)
- *Star Wars: The Return of the Jedi* (Lucas, 1983)
- *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* (Lucas, 2000)
- *State Property* (2003)
- *Super Fly* (Parks & Shore, 1972)
- *True Romance* (Bruckheimer & Scott, 1993)
- *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Prices*
- *Warriors, The* (Gordon & Hill, 1979)
- *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (1971)
- *Zatoichi, the Blind Samurai* (Kitano, 1969)

TELEVISION

- *24* (FOX)
- *Afro Samurai* (Spike)
- *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (Nick)
- *Dukes of Hazzard, The* (CBS)
- *Everybody Hates Chris* (FOX)
- *Full Metal Alchemist* (TV Tokyo)
- *Inazuma Eleven* (TV Tokyo)
- *Good Times* (CBS)
- *Live with Regis and Kelly* (NBC)
- *Looney Tunes* (Warner Brothers)
- *Chappelle's Show* (Comedy Central)
- *Dragon Ball Z* (TV Tokyo)
- *Law and Order* (NBC)
- *Lock Up* (MSNBC)
- *MTV Cribs* (MTV)
- *Naruto* (Nick)
- *Peanuts* (CBS)
- *Ryoma Echizen* (TV Tokyo)
- *Samurai Champloo* (TV Tokyo)
- *Sanford and Son* (CBS)
- *Source Awards, The* (BET)
- *Steve Wilkos Show, The* (The CW)
- *To Catch a Predator* (MSNBC)
- *Total Request Live* (MTV)
- *Transformers* (NBC)
- *Yo! MTV Raps* (MTV)

MUSICIAN REFERENCES

- Aalon
- A Tribe Called Quest
- Beatles, The
- Biggie Smalls (Notorious B.I.G.)
- Blondie (Debbie Harry)
- Cam'Ron
- Chris Rock
- Curtis Jackson, "50 Cent"
- Curtis Mayfield
- D'Mite
- Del the Funkee Homosapien
- DMX
- Elton John
- Erik B. and Rakim
- Erykah Badu
- Freda Payne
- Freeway
- Georges Bizet
- Ghostface Killah
- Gnarls Barkley
- GZA
- Hall and Oates
- Ice Cube
- Isabelle Antena
- Jay Z
- Jerry Lee Lewis
- Jim Jones
- Johnny Rebel
- Kanye West
- Katt Williams
- Lil Wayne
- Lionel Richie
- Little Brother
- M.F. Doom
- Mani Dibango

- Michael Jackson
- Mike Oldfield
- Mobb Deep
- Notorious B.I.G.
- Outkast
- Raekwon
- Ray Charles
- Rick Astley
- Robert Kelly
- Sade
- Samuel Barber
- Sean Paul
- Soulja Boy Tell Em
- Smokey Robinson
- Snoop Dogg
- Stevie Wonder
- Tupac Shakur
- Usher
- Will. I. Am.
- Xzibit
- Young Jeezy
- Cee-Lo Green
- Dante Brasco
- Lil Wayne
- Mos Def
- Snoop Dogg
- Xzibit

HISTORICAL REFERENCES

- Abu-Jamal, Mumia
- African American Fraternity: Omega Psi Phi
- African American Fraternity: Kappa Alpha Si
- African American Fraternity: Alpha Phi Alpha
- Afrocentrism
- Arsenal, The (Western European Soccer Rivalry)
- As-Salami Alaykum [Muslim Salutation/Greeting]
- Attica Prison Riot
- Black Entertainment Television [BET]
- Bush, George H.W.
- Bush, George W.
- Capone, Albert
- Castro, Fidel
- China Olympic Games
- Chinese Athlete Scandal
- Chinese Athlete Education Camps
- Chinese Communism
- Cosby, Bill
- Coulter, Ann
- Cuban Visit Communism
- Dandridge, Dorothy
- Davis, Cassie
- Dodge ball Schoolyard Controversy
- Foxx, Redd
- Guavara, Che
- Harris, Steve
- Heston, Charlton
- Horton, Willie
- Hoover, J. Edgar
- Hudlin, Reginald
- Hussein, Saddam
- Industrial Revolution
- Islamic Faith (Black Muslims)
- Jonestown Massacre, Guyana Settlement (1979)
- King, Regina
- Kuntsler, William
- Lee, Debra
- Lee, Robert E.
- Liverpool [Western European Soccer Rivalry]
- Maher, Bill
- Martin Luther King, Jr. [Ph.D.]
- Maybely, Moms
- McCain, John
- McReevey, James
- Milk, Harvey (CA Politician)
- Montana, Tony [Cultural Allusion]
- Montgomery Bus Boycott (1965)
- Motion Picture Association of America [MPAA]
- NAACP Image Award
- National Rifle Association [NRA]
- Nat Turner Slave Rebellion
- Nonviolent Activism (Early 1960s Protest)
- Northwest Airlines Flight 253
- Obama, Barack
- Obama, Michelle
- Parks, Rosa
- Perry, Tyler
- Persian Gulf Conflict (1990-2009)
- Proposition 8 [2008 California Marriage Bill]
- Ridge, Glen
- Ritchie, Guy
- Rock Chris
- Schwarzenegger, Arnold
- Sistah Souljah
- Stallone, Sylvester
- Steffans, Kareen “Superhead”

- Turner, Nat
 - Tuskegee Airmen
 - United States Capitalism
 - United States and Chinese Recession Loans (2008)
 - United States Treasury Dollar Decline (2008)
 - United States Recession (2008)
 - University of Florida Taser Incident
 - University of Maryland
- Department of African American Studies
- Walker, Jimmie
 - Williams, Tooke
 - Witherspoon, John
 - World War II
 - X, Malcolm
 - Yarborough, Cedric
 - Zedong, Mao

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