



Shaded Lives: African American Women and Television

Beretta E. Smith-Shomade

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Since its invention, television has been one of the biggest influences on American culture. Through this medium, multiple visions and disparate voices have attempted to stake a place in viewer consumption. Yet even as this programming supposedly reflects characteristics of the general American populace, television-generated images are manipulated and contradictory, predicated by the various economic, political and cultural forces place upon it. In this work, the author sets out to dissect images of the African American woman in television from the 1980s. She calls their depiction "binaristic", or split. African American women, although an essential part of television programming today, are still presented as distorted and deviant. By closely examining the television texts of African American women in comedy, music video, television news and talk shows (Oprah Winfrey is highlighted), the author shows how these voices are represented, what forces may be at work in influencing these images, and what alternate ways of viewing may be available. The book offers critical examples of where the sexist and racist legacy of this country collide with the cultural strength of Black women in visual and real-lived culture.

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