Bridging the stereotypical gap from the past to the present: an analysis of African American stereotypes through The Boondocks

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Bridging the Stereotypical Gap from the Past to the Present:
An Analysis of African American Stereotypes through The Boondocks

by

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Bridging the Stereotypical Gap from the Past to the Present:

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss and identify African American stereotypes that contain both negative and positive connotations. These stereotypes have origins that date back to the Pre-Slavery Era. Regardless of the lapse in time, the stereotypes have only adapted and found a place in the world we live in today. I use these stereotypes and analyze them through a show called The Boondocks. Within the show, Aaron McGruder (the writer and producer of the first three seasons) makes it a point to present his audience with a satirical representation of all these known stereotypes through the main characters. By doing this, McGruder tries to acquaint society with the problems that the African American community currently faces on a day to day basis. The satirical twist causes one to sometimes overlook the real problems that are being presented, but the thesis carefully analyzes each character in order to uncover the truth that lies beneath the laughs. The thesis is divided into three chapters. Each chapter focuses on one or more of the main characters and discusses how they are stereotypical representations through their behavior, mindset and/or actions. The chapters are divided by time periods starting from the Pre-slavery and ending in the Contemporary Era. By doing this, I bring to light the harsh realities that are presented in the show and explain how McGruder wanted the African American community, to not only understand the problems at hand but to find ways to correct these problems. The show shines light on the trials and tribulations that are faced everyday and even creates a vast amount of satirical parodies as a way to enlighten those who have yet to understand the problems at hand. The thesis will illuminate and further develop ones understanding of African American stereotypes, along with showing how the same stereotypes placed on the race in the Pre-Slavery Era ring true today.
Introduction

_The Boondocks_ is a show that focuses on various African American stereotypes and brings them to life. With a satirical twist, the show widens the spectrum of many big issues while bringing to life the societal, political and social issues at hand.

McGrunder’s critiques extend beyond the realm of hip-hop to include a range of celebrities and issues such as white supremacy, media censorship, US foreign and domestic policy, uncritical patriotism, and other aspects of race relations between whites and blacks. John-Hall states: “Aaron McGruder’s biting comic strip provides a truth-to-power commentary that makes white people flinch, black folks think (and flinch), and all of us exceedingly more enlightened.”

_The Boondocks_ began as a comic strip on hitlist.com before it aired on Adult Swim in November of 2005. Aaron McGruder used _Bloom County_ as a basis and influence for _The Boondocks_.

“Yeah, the strip is really heavily influenced by Bloom County. I just cant help it.” _Bloom County_ was another satirical comical strip that began in the late 1980’s. The strip focuses on the ongoing political, social and economical problems that we still face in society. The strip’s twist is that it uses children by giving them adult personalities and has them speaking out on and discussing these problems in society.

_The Boondocks_ contains four seasons. Within these seasons the main characters, Robert Freeman, Huey Freeman, Riley Freeman, Uncle Ruckus, and Tom Dubois encounter many people and obstacles that set them up for lessons, failures and successes in the suburb of

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1 King, Regina, Cedric Yarbrough, and John Witherspoon. _The Boondocks: The Complete Uncensored Series_. Culver City, Calif: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2014. (Hereafter I will only indicate the season and episode of this show)


Woodcrest. These satirical obstacles are carefully analyzed, constructed and presented by Aaron McGruder (the original author, writer and producer) in the first three seasons. The final season was neither produced nor written by McGruder and we can see the vast differences that are apparent between the two versions. McGruder makes a point to analyze the stereotypes presented in society today. He addresses stereotypes that were created in the Pre-Slavery era and the way they are still relevant today. Many of these stereotypes have not only entered into modern day society but, they have advanced and grew into homonyms. These homonyms have caused stereotypes to either take a turn for the better or for the worse.

McGruder clearly shows this in the way he mixes and intertwines episodes that take place in different time periods with many representations of different stereotypes. Whether it is Robert’s ride to Birmingham as a Freedom Rider, Huey’s lifestyle as a terrorist, or Riley’s obsession with rap music, we see how McGruder bridges these age gaps into one. Not only does this cause a deeper analysis of each character, it brings to light the various ways they work within the society we live in now. With all the subjects that the show engages and brings to light, we can understand why Time magazine named it the “Sixth Most Controversial Cartoon of All Time”.

One focal point Time Magazine pointed out was the use of the word nigga and McGruder’s refusal to bleep it out. McGruder discussed his reasoning for this in a AV Club interview. He stated “I think it makes the show sincere,” he said. “I understand the word offends a lot of people. But that’s what late-night cable is for”. McGruder’s cartoons have always been known for its controversial premise which makes for a more intriguing show.

As long as it’s funny…Sometimes you just want to do stories that develop the characters that don’t necessarily make people mad. What I don’t want is for controversy to be the

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5 Phipps, 1999.
gimmick of the strip. That would play itself out pretty quick. I did the first six weeks, and then I started sort of trying to go in different directions. I did not want the strip to get dull and clichéd and predictable this early on. Sometimes it’s just not going to be controversial at all, and people will have to accept that.  

My argument stems from my statement above that stereotypes have not disappeared, but they have adapted. These stereotypes have evolved into having a vast amount of meanings especially the word nigger. These stereotypes transcended from the early Pre-Slavery days and are still relevant today. Robert, for instance, is one of the oldest characters within the show. He has lived through and witnessed almost every important historical event within African American culture. Regardless, Robert has to learn how to adapt to his growing grandchildren. He does well, due to the influence of pop culture and social media that has overtaken society, but even so, Robert’s age does play a role in the way he acts and the things he does. Similar to stereotypes, Robert, just like many old people that find themselves lost in the social world of today, did not change but merely learned to adapt the best way they can.

Riley and Huey Freeman are brothers, but have completely different mindsets. Riley is more laid back and his nonchalant demeanor sets him up for many problems as a young African American man in today’s society. He finds himself in many stressful and problematic situations because he focuses his interests on fame and fortune. Huey is more of a radical. He focuses his time on finding ways to fight and address the ways society tries to limit the African American man. He is bent on proving his theories correct. With a twist of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, Huey is an activist in himself.

Uncle Ruckus is a unique character in the sense that he is an African American man who believes he suffers from revitiligo. Therefore, he believes himself to be a Caucasian man trapped

6 Phipps, 1999.
in an African American man’s body. Throughout the show, he continuously stands behind this mindset and pushes people to believe it.

Tom Dubois is an African American lawyer who is married to a Caucasian woman. He follows every rule and law society has set. Tom does not believe in breaking laws and finds himself stuck in situations where he does break laws, due to the people around him.

By using these characters, I will argue that the show portrays everyone in a stereotypical light to show how a changing society also changes the perception of the things around it. Over a longevity of years, we have yet to see the differences in past stereotypes versus present ones.

My paper is separated into three chapters. Each chapter focuses on one or more of the main characters within the show. I use the stereotypes presented by the documentary Ethnic Notions\(^7\) to further analyze each characters’ role within the stereotypical realm of The Boondocks. The stereotypes within this documentary have origins during the slavery and post slavery era. I also use ongoing analysis from scholars, articles and theorist to show the way these stereotypes have morphed, changed and conformed.

In Chapter 1 titled The Facade of a Nation, my focal point will be the beginning stages of these known stereotypes. Mostly formed within the early 1700-1800’s. The chapter revolves around two of the main characters; Uncle Ruckus and Tom DuBois. I introduce both Tom and Ruckus as Uncle Tom’s. By analyzing the behavior and situations these characters get in, I would be able to show that these characters represent the birth of the stereotypes that began to arise and develop within this time period.

In Chapter 2 titled *A Change for the Better*, the focal point is on the positive stereotypes that arose during the Civil Rights Era. This chapter itself is unique because it brings to light the positive connotations that come with stereotypes. Activist such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X can be seen as positive connotations because they fought for African American people. They made it a point to be leaders and set a positive example of the importance of African Americans as a whole. Their leadership made the Civil Rights Era an extremely important era in African American history. Two characters are positive stereotypes within the show; Robert and Huey. On one hand, Robert experiences and lives through the major milestones during the Civil Rights Era, but Huey embodies the mindset of the activists that led this movement such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.

Chapter 3 is titled *The Modernized Misconception of the World Today*, the focal point of this chapter revolves around the misconceptions that are present today. Riley is one of the characters that truly represents this era. He can be viewed as a negative stereotype because he allows music, rappers, fame, and unhealthy living to control his everyday life and everyday movements. Regardless, there are also positive stereotypes that have risen up today such as the First African American President Barack Obama. Even though there are a few positive stereotypes, the negative ones have overtaken our societies mindset.

Many people have argued about the many stereotypes that plague our society, but the problem is no one addresses the fact that these stereotypes are the same ones we have been facing for years. These stereotypes are being brought into society the same ways they were in pre slavery era, through media. *The Boondocks* addresses these stereotypes and McGruder presents it to the youth and young adults. They play a big part in society today. By addressing the youth and young adults, we begin to influence their mindset and try to show them the wrongs in society.
During the pre slavery era, adults were more influenced by media and that mindset was taught and learned by the youth. Today, a lot of youth have a mind of their own and they are more influenced by media misconceptions and perceptions than they are by adult figures. McGruder uses this as a way to get into the mind of the youth and show them the problems we face in society as African Americans.
Chapter 1

The Façade of a Nation

_The Boondocks_ presents the audience with a very extensive basis of character flaws, confrontation and dialogue throughout the seasons. Within this chapter, I will identify the stereotypes that plagued the slavery era into the post slavery era, along with bringing in two characters, Uncle Ruckus and Tom DuBois. These two characters will further support my argument about how stereotypes began and are relevant today. Ruckus’ character is rather absurd in the way he is presented and through the things he says. Tom’s character is subtle compared to Ruckus. As the chapter continues there will be more details that support Ruckus’ claim. By using the documentary, _Ethnic Notions_\(^8\), I will show how the stereotypes arose and how they are similar to the ones we know today.

The slave era was the beginning of a lifetime of political debates, segregation, racism and fear within society. Regardless of the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil War, African Americans were still considered forms of property. Later on, the development of Jim Crow further enforced the segregation and racism that was ongoing in society. Ruckus’ character and _The Boondocks_, along with the the analysis’ of scholars, will show how property becomes a reoccurring theme throughout these years.

_Ethnic Notions_ is a documentary by Marlon Riggs. In _Ethnic Notions_, we get a clear understanding of the many stereotypes that plagued African Americans in the early days of the Antebellum and Reconstruction Era to the end of the Civil Rights Movement. This documentary

\(^8\) Riggs, 1987.
presents the audience with a thorough understanding of these stereotypes and how these stereotypes affected African Americans daily. The Sambo, Coon, Minstrels, Brute, Mammy, and Uncle Tom are all important figures that present us with a wide perspective on America’s perception of the African American. Riggs makes a crucial point in showing how these stereotypes were played out in society. He also shows how African Americans were a factor in their own oppression. He brings in many analyst and specialist to talk about and further educate us on its long lasting detrimental effects.

The Uncle Tom was seen as an African American man whose focus was serving the white family. Similar to the Mammy, Uncle Tom’s made sure that the children in the white household were well taken care of. Both the Uncle Tom and Mammy shared the same attributes. Both of these stereotypes were known for their association with white people more than they did with African Americans. They saw whites as their family versus their own kind. This association is clearly exemplified in Ruckus’ character.

Ruckus and Tom Dubois’ character represents and speaks to the Uncle Tom description within Ethnic Notions.9 Throughout the chapter we will see how Ruckus’ racist and absurd mindset and Tom’s lifestyle present us with the way Uncle Tom’s are seen in modern day. There focus lies on pleasing the white man at all cost. Tom’s job as a lawyer and his refusal to break the law and Ruckus’ constant absurd remarks and comments on the African American race make us believe that McGruder wanted these two characters to be representations of an Uncle Tom hence when their names are combined it forms “Uncle Tom”.

The Coon spoke in a proper negro dialect. His image emerged in 1834 by the performance of George Dixon\textsuperscript{10}. The Coon was known as a buffoon. His focus was on free blacks. The coon became an important figure because he focused on the equality of both races. Here we have African Americans trying to take on the role of the white man by imitating his speech. You had the African American who was trying to adapt to the life of freedom and you have the sambo whose impersonation focused on the happy slave.

*The Marrow of Tradition* by Charles Chesnutt is a book that exemplifies the stereotypes that are addressed within *The Boondocks*. Jerry, who was the servant to Mr. Carteret (one of the main characters) was a classic Coon/Uncle Tom. He glorified the whites and hated the African Americans similar to Ruckus. Jerry believed that by supporting the whites he would have a better chance of survival if ever put into a situation where African Americans were forced back to slavery.

Dere’s one thing sho’, - dey’re gwine ter git after de niggers some way er ‘nuther. An’ w’en dey does, whar is Jerry gwine ter be? Dat’s de mos’ imp’ortantes’ question. I’m gwine ter look at dat newspaper dey be’n talking’ ‘bout, an’ less’n my min’ changes might’ly, I’m giwne ter keep my mouf shet an’ stan’ in wid de Angry-Saxon race, - ez dey calls deyse’ves nowadays, - an’ keep on de right side er my bread an’ meat.\textsuperscript{11}

Jerry stays in his place during the whole novel and in the end he ends up dying with his race. As much as he served the whites, he was granted no asylum during the race riots that plagued the town of Wellington in 1898. Just like many African American servants, Jerry was naïve and brainwashed to believe that his skin color did not mean anything. This did not benefit him in the long run.

\textsuperscript{10} Riggs, 1987.
The minstrels were used as a way to impersonate and mock African Americans in the entertainment realm. The minstrels began in 1843.\textsuperscript{12} The two main examples of minstrel are the dance aspect and the acting aspect. During that time period white men partook in this acting and eventually black men joined them. Slaves were portrayed through minstrels and television as happy go lucky. Blackface was one of the most known characters that represented your everyday African American. Blackface arose in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century. His face was pitch black and his lips were white to symbolize ashiness. Blackface was a form of entertainment for white audiences. Blackface portrayed the laughable and grotesque idea of the African American man.\textsuperscript{13} Blackface furthered the perception that African Americans all look the same. Blackface spoke in negro dialect and this character became idealized. This exaggerated image became known as the real image of the African American to those who did not know what African Americans looked like. It seemed as though slavery was a great thing and they believed that African Americans were happy being conquered.\textsuperscript{14} This mindset was ongoing for years. The idea of the happy slave, forced people to believe that slavery was good. This was the forefront for media misconception. Even in today’s world, the media’s portrayal of the African American still influences the mindsets of the world. African American woman and men are being portrayed as barbaric, careless, ignorant, violent and rude. The minstrels will further be discussed in Chapter 3 when we see the introduction of the way modern society has embraced these stereotypes through the eyes of Riley and Robert.

The word nigger is a stereotypical word that originated during the slavery era and was used as a way to address African Americans. Over the course of hundreds of years, the word

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Riggs, 1987.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Riggs, 1987.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Riggs, 1987.
\end{itemize}
changed both its meaning and its spelling. Nigger changed into nigga and became a word that is used to signify a friend or someone you are close to. Nigga became a form of everyday vernacular with the rise of rap culture. The words origins and modern day effects will also be discussed in Chapter 3. Within the airing of the show, McGruder made it a point to fight for the word nigga to not be bleeped out on television (as mentioned in the introduction). He wanted people to hear the word. Why? The word holds importance in the world we live in today. The word has become a factor in the modern day conversation. Everywhere you go, in music, everyday life and even youth are heard saying this word as if its original meaning holds no weight.

Some of The Boondocks characters have origins within the stereotypes in this documentary. Tom DuBois and Uncle Ruckus both embody the Uncle Tom character.

In “Humor, Race and Rhetoric: A Liberating Sabotage of the Past’s Hold on the Present”, the authors discuss the representation of Ruckus’ character.

Uncle Ruckus is a belligerent man who has fully adopted a white supremacist outlook and value system and hates black people. Likely the most controversial character in the show, Uncle Ruckus derives his attitudes and behaviors from his historical and cultural predecessors Uncle Tom and Uncle Remus. Ruckus not only enjoys serving whites, but he also worships their very existence: “White man just a joy to be around. They smell like lemon juice and pledge furniture cleaner.”

Ruckus’ hatred is an ongoing mindset that plagued the world from the early 1600’s. His attitude is one that many adapted and stood by. The influence on his hatred comes from his childhood experiences and his unsupportive family. Season 3 Episode 12 focuses on Ruckus’ early childhood. Ruckus was born on July 4th. He was born into a white family but the doctor

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discovered that he had a rare skin disease that will cause him to become a negro. The father takes him away and leaves him at the doorstep of the Ruckus’ with money. The first glance we get of Ruckus’ step family is the father speaking disgustingly about his wife. He tells her how useless she is and that all he needs her for is to clean up after him. This is the same mindset that was evident in the slave era towards African Americans. This idea of property will continue to show through throughout Ruckus’ analysis. As they get ready to go out, they find baby Ruckus on their doorstep and decided to keep him. Due to the fact that he was technically white, his step-father, Mister, hated him. He always beat Ruckus even when it was not his fault. Ruckus got it the worst out of all the children. Mister’s anger came from his hatred of white men and also from his mother, Nellie (their grandmother). Nellie was a miserable old woman. She hated everyone and everything including her son. This was similar to the way Mister hated Ruckus. Ruckus was thrown out of his house at a young age. Ruckus did not see his family for 50 years and then his Grandma Nellie showed up to his house saying she was dying. The minute Mister got a chance, he told Ruckus that he is useless and has not accomplished anything except being a Mexican (due to the many jobs he works). Mister goes on about how having children made him miserable and that Ruckus does not have revitiligo. He goes as far as calling all his kids Uncle Tom’s. They all realized that Mister was as miserable a person because he worked all his life and was still treated unfairly by white men. This contributed to Ruckus’ hatred for African Americans.

His hatred and love for African Americans stay prominent as the episodes continue. More and more we see how his attitude affects those around him. In Season 3 Episode 15, Ruckus has a dream about white heaven. Ronald Reagan is at the pearly gates of this heaven. When Ruckus finds out he has a tumor he decides to preach about his white God. He believes he is on a mission to preach and tell everyone that God loves white people and hates black people. The only way
white God will accept black people is if they hate their own blackness (just like Ruckus). The blackness is a representation of sin, therefore, hating your skin is hating sin. This farce goes on for so long people begin to listen and believe what he is saying. He ends up on TV talk shows and even tries to start his own church. He tells the audience to beat up African Americans because God hates black. Therefore, by beating them, you are saving them. Tom Dubois begins to feel “the spirit” and agrees with Ruckus’ testimonies. He goes as far as beating people up himself. Crazily enough, Ruckus’ racial indifference influenced the whole town and they began to believe this to be true. But just as quickly as he gained an audience, he lost it.

We get a glimpse of Uncle Ruckus’ hatred for African Americans the first time we meet him in the show. In Season 1 Episode 1, the Freemans are invited to a garden party for the neighborhood. Uncle Ruckus is one of the waiters and he also does the entertainment. He sings his song “Don’t Trust Them New Niggas Over There”. The song consists of describing how these “niggas” are untrustworthy, big nosed, bigmouthed people. He was talking about the Freemans. Even in the next episode, Ruckus makes it a point to glorify the white man. While he and Robert play chess, they discuss the R. Kelly trial and the fact that R. Kelly urinated on a 14-year-old girl. When Robert brings up the fact that Jerry Lee Lewis married a 14-year-old girl, Ruckus states “You can’t compare a chocolate monkey like R. Kelly to Jerry Lee Lewis”. Ruckus then goes on to discuss the first time he was on a jury Tennessee in 1957. He states how the African American man tried to pretend to be blind (even though he was) and was on trial for mistakenly shooting three white women. Ruckus automatically yelled out in court that the man was guilty. Robert starts to get angry at Ruckus’ hatred of black people considering Ruckus is African American. Ruckus quickly tells Robert how he has revitiligo, a skin disease that Michael Jackson had, causing his skin to get darker and darker. He truly believes he is a white man.
trapped in a black man’s body. He continues to praise white men for their institutional values that gave African Americans jobs, discipline, social structure and states that African Americans are ungrateful by marching, rioting and causing a fuss.

In Season 4 Episode 7, Ruckus truly expresses his extremist views, when Ed Wuncler II forces the Freemans to sign their freedom away to him. Wuncler goes as far as opening a park called Freedomland. Within this park, people are forced to reenact slavery. The Freemans are forced to pretend to be slaves and Ruckus goes as far as being a “slave owner”. He runs Freedomland alongside with Wuncler. Ruckus plays the role of the slave owner all too well. He has a whip and even goes as far as saying “the sound of that whip sure is sweet. It’s like Jesus gently snapping his fingers”. His outlandish remarks do not stop there, once the first night is over, Ruckus leads the Freemans and Tom to their new housing in the park. As Robert speaks against this, Ruckus states “I can do whatever I want slave. Oh, “Slave.” Mm, that tastes good in my mouth. What a joyous feeling it is just to say that word. It’s like saying “love” or “Reaganomics”. Sadly enough, people actually came to Freedomland to enjoy the recreation of slavery. Most whites saw it as entertainment while those actually partaking in it saw it as torture. Here we see Ruckus using others as property. This idea of property is a reoccurring theme. This is similar to the effect slavery had on society and individuals.

Ruckus continues to show his racism in an episode where he was a part of an important time in history, when the Freedom Riders rode into Birmingham. During this episode, Ruckus takes on the role of supremacy again. He stood next to and supported the man who was forcing the riots to take place as soon as the riders got off of the bus, Bull Connor. Ruckus calls Connor his hero. Ruckus explains his excitement in receiving the call to deal with the Freedom Riders; he calls it “the happiest day of his life”. Ruckus leads the riot with his words of hatred and gets
the crowd riled up. Once the riot started and the mob attacked, Ruckus (who was heavily associated with the Ku Klux Klan) snuck behind the bus and planted a bomb that forced them to drive 15 mph into Mississippi, but if they chose to leave and go back home no one would be harmed. In Mississippi, the police waited to shoot the Freedom Riders bus on site. Behind Connor stood his right hand, Ruckus. Ruckus motivated the crowd once again and made sure to emphasize the racial integration that would occur if the Freedom Riders crossed into city lines. This is the last time we see Ruckus. His departure comes directly after Connor states “Now scram before someone shoots your black ass by mistake”; Ruckus flees.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Ruckus’ absurdity is ongoing. His thoughts and actions point to the satirical comedy within the show. Tom DuBois is completely different from Ruckus. Tom clearly acknowledges that he is an African American, but is portrayed as a white man due to his proper dialect, job and lifestyle (also can be characterized as a coon).

Tom DuBois who embodies the Uncle Tom stereotype, including moral virtuousness, gentleness, innocence and even effeminacy. Tom is the most educated character in the show and the only regular character with a: “white”-collar job as District Attorney of Woodcrest, tying him to W.E.B. DuBois and the Talented Tenth. Tom is a law abiding, upstanding citizen in all of Woodcrest. He has assimilated to the dominate white culture of Woodcrest, married a white woman, prides himself on his Irish heritage, and speaks with an exaggerated white accent.¹⁶

Another episode that holds importance within Tom’s character is his reaction to Freedomland (Season 4 Episode 7). Initially, those who owed money to Wuncler were forced to work in Freedomland. Tom decided to apply for a job there regardless, of his financial independence. When he arrives, he is excited about having the opportunity to be a slave. He is

¹⁶ Timmerman, Gussman, King, 173.
doing jumping jacks while telling the Freeman boys that the fresh air and sunshine is amazing. He acknowledges that he has no shoes and states that “his toes like to be free”. Tom calls Freedomland, a place where “people get to go back to a noble time for black Americans when we overcame obstacles and struggled to be the free, fully realized human beings we are. God Bless America!” It was not until Tom saw the severity and reality of the place that he chose to leave. Regardless, Tom’s comments open up the door for the real issue at hand, the idea of property. The production of Freedomland came because there were many people within Woodcrest that owed money to Mr. Wuncler. Due to this, they were forced to sign their lives away and forced to work for him. This was an exact reenactment of true slavery, without the signatures.

In today’s society slavery is still relevant especially when people are constantly working to pay off debts such as loans, mortgages and bills. McGruder satirically uses this representation of Freedomland to show the development of slavery and the extremes people are forced to go to pay off their debts. The idea of intensive labor to pay what is owed takes on the same concept as that of slavery. People are indebted to the government with these vast amount of dollars. From the outrageous prices of college to the amount it cost to own a home or property, Americans find themselves working twice as hard to pay off all the debts that they owe.

Ironically, Tom gets another glimpse of what being a man with color means when he is also subjected to a possible jail sentence. One of Tom’s biggest fears was being raped in prison. At a young age, Tom watched a movie that portrayed the harsh realities of prison life and he realized that if he was ever caught doing something bad this is what would come of his life. This caused him to obey every law regardless of who was breaking the law around him. In Season 1 Episode 5, Tom is falsely accused of murder and realizes that regardless of the facts, his skin color makes him guilty. Tom’s arrest leads him to see the harsh realities of the criminal world.
Tom undergoes intense interrogation and is even told by an African American Detective that he was arrested because he was black and was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He goes on to tell him that if he admits to killing this boy (regardless of if it is the truth or not) he will make sure Tom does not go to prison. Tom eventually gets released because they caught the real killer. While all this was going on, Eddie, Gin, Huey and Riley were being praised for robbing a gas station. The newspaper the following day read as follows, “The Gas Station Terrorist cell had been planning to attack the people of Woodcrest by increasing gasoline prices 5 cents per gallon”. Directly underneath that article was the arrest of the murderer whose only similarity to Tom was his color.

Saidiya Hartman gives us a clear focus into the mindset of slaves and slavery in her book titled *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Hartman addresses this idea of color when she talks about obligation in her chapter titled “Fashioning Obligation”. Tom’s realization that his skin color was the basis of his arrest shocked him, but did not surprise him. Similar to Jerry, the servant to one of the main characters in the *Marrow of Tradition*, Tom’s naïve mindset is what leads him to feel betrayed by the system when put into this situation; “While the freed would no longer “feel the disheartening influences of belonging to a subjugated embarrassments arising out of recent slavery, or connected with a social repugnance founded principally on physical traits”.

Mark Anthony Neal cites Hartman’s book in his article titled “Nigga: The 21st Century Theoretical Superhero”. He states, “this notion of “indeterminate identity”” is echoed in Saidiya

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Hartman’s description of the black slave—the organic “nigger as property”—in her book *Scenes of Subjection*, were she asserts that the “fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others’ feelings ideas, desires and values; and as property, the dispossessed body of the enslaved is the surrogate for the master’s body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power”.\(^{18}\) This is important because this is what McGruder tries to bring to light. Regardless of the humanity of slaves, they were seen as nothing but property and this causes one to feel worthless as an individual.

In Season 4 Episode 1, Tom is forced to represent a rapper who was said to have robbed a convenient store. This rapper makes a deal with Tom. In exchange for Tom’s help, Pretty Boy Flizzy will help Tom win his wife back. Flizzy gives Tom pointers including being stern with his wife and being more tough as a man. Tom struggles with being stern because he is a kind man. He takes Flizzy’s advice and tells his wife he is leaving her, due to her drunken episode that occurred at the dinner table in front of guest. Things escalate when Tom realizes that Flizzy’s methods are working. In order for Tom to win his wife back, he has to step into a barbaric brutish role versus the role of a caring sweet guy. The results speak for themselves when Tom and Flizzy have a fist fight and Sarah is back with Tom again. Flizzy’s degradation of women is how women were seen during the post slavery era and how they are viewed today. Women were always supposed to be submissive, quiet and caretakers to their husbands. Sarah, Tom’s wife completely fits this role. So when Flizzy forces Tom to take charge it only benefits him, but clearly represents the stereotypes that women are uncontrollable unless force or sternness is

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involved. When this episode is viewed through the lens of the slavery period, one can analyze that this degradation of women is the same way slave owners degraded their female slaves and even their own wives. Many times slave masters would rape and beat the African American woman slaves and have children with them i.e. the mulatto child. Once the child was born, slave masters either sold both the mother and child or decide to keep either the mother or child. Regardless of the fact that these slave owners were married they sought pleasure amongst their slaves as a way to show their power and brutish ways.

McGruder uses Tom DuBois and Uncle Ruckus to explain and emphasize how this mindset from the 1800’s can still effect people in the 2000’s. It is important to note that history repeats itself. The same ideologies faced in the 19th century are the same as the ones we face now. It is imperative that the youth realize that these are ideologies that can be stopped. By informing the youth of these problems we hope to effect change. Interestingly, Ruckus’ hatred for the African American race is the same hatred Whites had for African Americans even before the slavery era. Ruckus’ character is the most absurd character. This absurdity is what McGruder counts on to fuel Ruckus’ character. Ruckus’ comments and even thoughts are so far fetched that it seems unreal. Surprisingly, Ruckus’ racist ideology is prevalent in the world today, on a more moderate basis. Many people still hold strong beliefs such as Ruckus’ belief that African Americans are apes and not worthy of life. He believes the white man is the reason for everything good and African Americans are the reason for everything bad in society. This is still ongoing in the 21st century. An example of this is when President Obama became the first African American president. In the Belgian newspaper, there was a portrayal of the Obamas’ as apes. This satirical picture caused a lot of backlash. The image was Mr. and Mrs. Obama as apes with a caption about the president selling weed. The newspaper issued an apology and stated that
“When you consider the fragment apart from its context, which is a properly worked out satirical section, then you don’t see the joke but just a picture evoking sheer racism,” the newspaper said. “We wrongly assumed that racism is no longer accepted, and that in this way it could be the subject of a joke”\textsuperscript{19} This was not the only one, a republican candidate for Kentucky, who resigned, also reposted this picture. “A Republican candidate for Kentucky's state legislature posted racist images of President Barack Obama and his family -- and defended those images by saying "Facebook's entertaining"\textsuperscript{20} and the mayor of West York, PA posted a picture of orangutans and said that it was Michelle Obama and her “family”. “Charles Wasko, the mayor of West York, Pennsylvania, faced pressure to resign after posting a picture of a monkey, saying it's a picture of Michelle Obama and a wagon of orangutans captioned "moving day at the White House".\textsuperscript{21}

Riggs brings to light the stereotypes we as African Americans are faced with and the ongoing problems within these stereotypes. McGruder uses these stereotypes and portrays them in a modern day light while authors such as Hartman, Timmerman and Neal find ways to analyze and present these stereotypes into an educational and social realm. McGruder’s uses of Tom Dubois and Uncle Ruckus were imperative to the show. These two showed us how the origination of stereotypes has continued to expand and widen in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. As the chapters unfold, we will see how McGruder hand picked his characters to represent different ongoing stereotypes in different time periods.

\textsuperscript{21} Bradner, 2016.
Chapter 2

A Change for the Better

Within *The Boondocks*, there is one character whose basis can fall into the drastic events that occurred during the Civil Rights Era; Huey Freeman. Huey plays a significant role within the African American transitional era through his personality and mindset which is very similar to those who were fighting for a change in the world during this time period; but we do have to keep in mind that Robert Freeman is present for a majority of this time period and some of these movements. Huey’s role is much more significant in this era than Robert for two reasons. One reason being that Huey’s character is a strong representation of a combination of Huey Newton, Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X. The second reason is that Robert finds himself more intertwined with being old school in a modern day 21st century. His character ends up being more modernized than historical regardless of the things he has experienced versus Huey, who is more historical than modernized regardless of his age. McGruder’s emphasis on making Huey the main embodiment of the radical personality makes for an interesting setup especially because Huey is 10 years old and acts more mature than his grandfather. McGruder’s role switch becomes imperative when we realize that Huey is more of an adult than Robert who has experienced racism at its worst and integration at its best.

The pre-civil rights era into the civil rights era was a very important but detrimental time period. From the late 1800’s until mid 1900’s, African Americans were subjected to a vast amount of prejudice, violence and death. In 1877, Jim Crow became a segregated way of life for African Americans. Years later, in 1954, the Civil Rights Era began. The Civil Rights Era was one the most important eras within African American history. Not only was this era filled with a
vast amount of violence, it was also filled with a vast amount of positive advances within the African American community. This era is associated with the actions of many iconic figures in American history, political and social groups, and life changing events such as: Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X, The Little Rock Nine, The Freedom Riders, Rosa Parks, The Black Panthers, the marches, riots, rallies and much more. This era holds a lot of significance because it brings to light a positive view on stereotypes which are generally associated with negative connotations. The Civil Rights Era focuses on the advancement of African Americans in the societal, political and social realm. Not only was the rise monumental, it advanced the whole world as we knew it.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a well-known Reverend and activist whose views focused mostly on Christian beliefs and nonviolence. He endured many problems as a leader such as the burning of his house, but was very successful in reaching out to people and having supporters. Through his church and Christian beliefs he formed an immense group of followers. He focused on finding ways to reach out to the people by strategizing marches and rallies that brought people together without violence. This led his participation within the movement to be quite successful. In Chapter 9 of the book titled “Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare”, James H. Cone states “Martin’s message of nonviolence and love was so pleasing to whites that, for a brief time during the 1950’s, many regarded him as more moderate and thus more acceptable than Roy Wilkins of the NAACP and other civil rights advocates. He soon became the most talked about and influential black person in America”.  

Malcolm X was another activist whose early views were influenced by the motto, “by any means necessary” which brought on an acceptance of violence. During Malcolm’s younger years he dealt with a lot of violence, crime and drugs. This lifestyle landed him in jail for ten years where he joined the Nation of Islam. On his release he decided to advocate and fight for the rights of African Americans through religion. Sadly, Malcolm realized that the man he looked up to, Elijah Muhammad, was breaking all the rules and beliefs that he fought so desperately to withhold. Once he broke away from the Nation of Islam, he took a trip to Mecca where he reformed himself and became a man with different views. He realized that his outlook was unfair and rash as a young adult. Therefore, as an older man, Malcolm X spoke on nonviolence and unity, similar to Martin Luther King Jr. Regardless of his new outlook on life Malcolm X was assassinated by the Nation of Islam while giving a speech to the Organization of Afro-American Unity at the Audubon Ballroom in Washington Heights.

Due to Malcolm’s change so far into his life, people viewed him as a young rash adult. Even after his death, Malcolm was portrayed as a violence racist who believed that African Americans were better off in a separate world from whites. Since he was relatable he held a lot of weight in his influence on young people. Cone discusses how Malcolm’s perception in media was “an anti-white, anti-Christian, and anti-integration image, placing him in direct opposition to the political and moral values of Martin King and the civil rights movement”.

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26 Cone, 246.
had harsh views that kept him on an opposite spectrum of King. What society fails to realize is regardless of the way these men fought, they were both fighting for the same thing.

Huey Newton along with Bobby Seale were the founders of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. The Panthers were a Black Power political party that advocated for the improvement of life for African Americans. The Panthers took on a military stance against America. The party fought for things such as “better housing, jobs, and education for African Americans”. They also fought against police brutality, especially between African Americans and white police officers, which is something ongoing in today’s society. Many people were hurt during these protests and Newton himself was arrested and convicted of killing a police officer. Regardless of his short sentence, due to political and social support, Newton realized that the fight he was fighting can be turned into a new direction. When he was freed, similar to Malcolm X after his trip to Mecca, Newton tried to take a new approach focusing mostly on helping and forming services for the poor such as clinics and lunch programs. Shortly after his arrest, the group began to fall apart. Newton, similar to Malcolm was known for his younger years and rash mentality, not the changes he made after prison.

One thing that both MLK Jr. and Malcolm X wanted was freedom for African Americans. They wanted the race, as a whole, to rise above its oppression and fight for the freedom that they have yearned for, for centuries. “From the beginning of their ministries, they both sought the unqualified liberation of the African Americans from the bonds of segregation and discrimination to self-determination as a people, from a feeling of inferiority and nobodyness to an affirmation of themselves as human beings”. Both Malcolm and Martin fought to achieve

29 Cone, 246.
this but in different ways. Martin’s use of Christianity and nonviolence won him the support of many men including white men. Malcolm’s view on “by any means necessary” and taking a stand was supported by many including the Harlem population. Throughout the seasons, Huey Freeman pushes for the freedom of African Americans from their new form of slavery; media, food and an unrealistic lifestyle. America sold a percentage of young African Americans a dream that they can become rappers, NBA players, NFL players and more. This is the generalization that *The Boondocks* portrays and is shown through Riley’s character. The only representation of a positive African American role model is Tom and he is portrayed as an Uncle Tom (Chapter 1). McGruder’s representation of Tom shows the audience that in order to be a successful African American you need to try to fit in to the American/White culture. Riley and Huey do not even consider Tom to be African American because he acts white. In Chapter 3, I will further discuss how social media has completely engulfed Riley’s life and how it is similar to perception of the world today. Huey makes it a point to strive to be better than the people around him and that’s what makes his character so influential in the show. He takes on the role of an adult and has a mature perspective about the situations and problems that surface around him.

Huey is the older brother to Riley. He embodies many characteristics that make him a leader within the show.

Huey Freeman is the preteen leading protagonist of *The Boondocks* who in attitude and behavior lives up to his namesake: Huey Newton, the cofounder of the Black Panther Party. The image of Huey Newton in American media portrayal, particularly since his murder in 1989, is a complex one. Rhodes recounts the complexity of the various media portrayal of Huey Newton, including his role not only as an iconic figure for the Black Power movement and a fallen freedom fighter but also as a criminal and a drug addict. She sees in Huey Freeman of *The Boondocks* a character that “retains many of the characteristics of the Panther mythology, down to the Afro, scowl, and doctrine language” (326). In *The Boondocks* Huey Freeman is an enlightened young black man who regularly opines about the current US President, white supremacy, and the state of the black community in America. He describes himself as “the founder of twenty-three different radical leftist organizations, including the Africans Fighting Racism and
Oppression, or AFRO, if you will, the Black Revolutionary Organization, or BRO…and also the Black Revolutionary Underground Heroes…BRUH. As Huey interacts with the other characters, he reflects upon the politics of race and often emerges as the voice of reason.\(^{30}\)

Regardless of Robert’s age, Huey understands both the old and the new generations and realizes the effect society is having on the African American race.

Huey, is a combination of the two most significant activist within the Civil Rights Era; Martin Luther King Jr but mostly Malcolm X. Both of these men were fighting for the acceptance of the African American race but they both strategized differently. Huey was in turn, supposed to represent Huey Newton of the Black Panthers, but I also do believe he has qualities of these main figures in the Civil Rights Movement. Huey embodies Martin Luther King Jr.’s fight for freedom and mindset, but truly encompassing Malcolm X’s early views and teachings on freedom along with Huey Newton’s early views.

Throughout the seasons, Huey presents the audience with a clear understanding of how society uses certain things keep the African American oppressed. In Season 4 Episode 7 (the creation of Freedomland), Huey talks to both Robert and Riley about how the 1% uses reality TV shows and junk food to target the African American race. It causes them to become sick and their minds to become dulled down. Huey’s participation within this episode exemplifies the mindset of activist during the Civil Rights Era. As he comes up with a plan to revolt, he states “We may not make it alive, but if a man doesn’t have something worth dying for, what’s the point of living?” As Huey tells the others of the plan, he makes another influential statement. “Every gain in US history has been because oppressed people weren’t afraid to fight. If we don’t fight, we’re saying its okay for them to own everything, our self-worth, our minds, and I’m not giving up my

\(^{30}\) Timmerman, Gussman, King, 171-172.
freedom to anybody for any price”. This quote exemplifies why Huey embodies Martin Luther King Jr, Huey Newton and Malcolm X due to his mindset as an activist, leadership skills, and his constant fight for those who were oppressed. Huey’s intelligence and zeal to want to fight against his oppressor causes the show to take on a more serious role.

Huey’s serious role becomes a reality when we find out that two episodes in Season 2 got taken off of broadcast due to the controversial argument in both. Season 2 Episode 14 and 15 both discuss the effects that TV and the 1% has on minorities. Episode 14 and 15 attacks BET and portrays intense criticism on how it effects and portrays the African American race. Season 2 Episode 14 begins with CEO Debra Leevil of BET headquarters discussing the purpose of the channel. “Our leader Bob Johnson had a dream. A dream of creating a network that would accomplish what hundreds of years of slavery, Jim Crow and malt liquor could not, the destruction of Black people”. The show continues as they realize that Huey is the only person who is against their network and can actually speak out against them. Huey decides to go on a hunger strike until BET is no longer active or ongoing. With ongoing press from Reverend Rollo Goodlove (representation of Al Sharpton/Al Green) and an interview, people began boycotting BET. BET retaliated by putting up incriminating evidence of the Reverend in the strip club on the news. Regardless, the boycott was effective and caused a drop in viewings of the channel. A meeting was set up and the Reverend sold out for a show. Huey realized that his hunger strike did not do anything, as the man who was supporting him gave into the white man’s will, by accepting a show. Regardless Huey tried and his activism continues throughout the seasons.

McGruder uses these episodes to present viewers with food for thought. Not only does money play a big factor in the things that occur in society but it goes to show that behind the scenes things aren’t as they seem. This was not only an attack on BET but it was also an attack
on African American activist. This episode shows that anyone can be bought and their views can be persuaded with the right amount of influence. McGruder also tries to show the viewers that there are people who try to advocate with us, but not for us. BET is supposed to be a representation of what is considered entertaining to Blacks. A majority of the shows that are shown on BET show a barbaric and uneducated representation of the African American race as a whole. Huey tries to analyze and experiment with these shows.

Season 1 Episode 12 focuses on the effect that black television has on the minds of African Americans. As the episode begins, we see how Huey is determined to show how junk food, BET and lack of sleep effect the everyday mind and bodies of African Americans. Huey explains his reasoning for doing this 2-week experiment. “But I’ve always wondered can the images we see do more than hurt us emotionally? Is it possible to see something so bad that it actually hurts you physically? In other words, can too much black television kill you?” By the end of the experiment Huey realized that the effects were not as bad as he thought. The audience can see that he became a little aggressive, was extremely tired and moody, but other than that he was fine. Huey was stuck in a trance for the two weeks and secluded himself from everyone. His experiment proved his hypothesis to be wrong but McGruder uses this episode to show that television and media can have a negative effect on society and the African American race. Sadly, the effects are more detrimental than we think.

In the episode that brings Martin Luther King Jr. into the reality of the modernized world we see how hard it is for him to make sense of what the world has become (Season 1 Episode 9). This episode focuses on MLK Jr.’s life within this modern day world. Instead of King dying on April 4, 1968, he ends up in a 32-year coma and wakes up in a changed world in the year 2001. Shortly after 9/11, King makes a comment on what the US should do in response to the current
events. King responded by saying, “Turn the other cheek”. This caused an outrage amongst Americans. They were upset at his nonviolent approach. What people failed to realize and what King failed to realize was that these were two different time periods and these were two different wars being fought. King did not understand what happened to the African American race especially when he saw the television portraying female and male African Americans in a negative light. Huey explains to him that the people were waiting for him to come back but King realizes that the fight that he fought years ago was no longer a fight worth fighting for. King tries to understand the changes that are occurring within society but fails to. Huey tries his best to push King to continue to fight. As him and King team up to start a new political party, King faces the scrutiny of public talk shows and decides to get people to come together the old fashion way, through word of mouth, radio and face to face interaction. King finally realizes that the only way to get to the people is by using the media to his advantage. So he decides to broadcast a political party meeting where hundreds of celebs show up. Ironically, the two people who were running the event, King and Huey, were forced to pay their way into the event. Once inside, they realized the meeting was actually a party where people were dancing and drinking not realizing that the effects, were part of the deterioration of their own race. King makes a speech to this audience about his disappointment of the African American race while using the word “niggers” throughout the course of the speech. His speech was then aired over all networks for everyone to see, and African Americans began a revolution. Sadly, just as quickly as change came, it also went. The episode reiterates the ongoing struggle that we face as African Americans. It also exemplifies the lack of patience and the zeal we have to fight for change and the negative effects of society along with media’s way of making things temporarily relevant/trending.
Jennifer Heusel addresses this episode and gives her interpretation of McGruder’s purpose. Heusel believed that “The Boondocks performed heresy by agitating dogmatic details of post-racism.”

Although many critics and fans read the episode as heresy against MLK the man, I suggest reading the King character as an exaggerated personification of post-racial America, who ultimately does dogma incorrectly. For this reason, it is important to differentiate between MLK the man and King the character. To read the King character as anything but an exaggeration is to dismiss the show's satire, as well as to ignore the episode's incipient heresies against post-racism. As I will show below, The Boondocks defiled King the patron saint of post-racism, but it did not completely reject the beloved community ideal as articulated by MLK the man. Rather, The Boondocks demonstrated a commitment to the beloved community as a work-in-progress.

Heusel brings up some drastic points that takes McGruder’s episode and deconstructs it drastically. She brings up three important points. She discusses how post-racial society tolerates black on black violence, McGruder’s representation of racial branding and a distortion of MLK Jr.’s nonviolent philosophy. Heusel also mentions that McGruder’s use of King brings about important racial stereotypes such as blackface (mentioned in Chapter 1). As she analyzes the episode to the core she makes it a point to emphasize how the episode influences violence through certain characters such as Ruckus. When Ruckus is seen throwing a brick at MLK Jr during the episode and using racial slurs this prompts Heusel to discuss how post racial violence tolerates black on black violence due to the influence of white dominance. Ruckus who can be a representation of blackface uses violence (known by the white man) as a way to subdue MLK Jr.

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Heusel, 28.
“Reminiscent of the violence MLK experienced at the hands of whites, the episode reanimated this same violence but now performed in black face”.

Heusel points to King’s response to 9/11 that occurred within the episode, as a way to expand on the racial branding that occurs. “Racial branding appears in multiple forms, such as name-calling and scapegoating, but generally allows for the antagonistic rejection of perspectives that challenge orthodoxy”. King’s response went against the response President Bush made within the episode which was to attack those who attacked us and King responded with a nonviolence approach causing an uproar within society. Through Heusel’s interpretation we can see the many ways the McGruder’s episode expands past the political, social and societal realm and brings a wide conversation of Americas acceptance of black on black violence and the vast problems within the post racial realm.

Huey was widely influenced by Malcolm X and Huey Newton’s views. Both Newton and Malcolm were advocates for the motto “by any means necessary”, when they realized that this was ineffective and the turmoil they endured (Newton through prison and Malcolm through Mecca) they decided to change their outlooks for the better. Newton focused more on the community and helping from within, while Malcom focused more on nonviolence and strategically planning. It is very ironic since Malcolm and Newton did not like King’s way of doing things. Malcolm himself called King a traitor and little did they know, this traitor would help influence their own lives. Even though these men played an extremely important role in the development of the African American race, people fail to realize that they too make mistakes and are flawed.

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33 Heusel, 31.
34 Heusel, 31.
One of the problems we face with idolized African Americans is that we forget that they are just human beings at the end of the day. *The Boondocks* addresses this by the way people act regardless of MLK Jr coming out of a coma. He was treated like an everyday man. He faced no idolization regardless of his significant past. Both Martin and Malcolm had their flaws. Martin was said to have had an affair during his marriage and this caused an uproar because Martin preached and followed the Christian values. Malcolm X and Martin both had sexist views and believed that women were beneath them. Cone states that “Martins sexism was less obvious than Malcolm’s because Martin did not speak often on the theme of women, and when he did, he put his views in the acceptable public discourse of his time. Whatever views Malcolm held on any subject, he presented them in the most extreme form possible so that no one would be in doubt about where he stood on the subject”.35 Both Malcolm and Martin were a balance for each other. Martins focus on Christianity and Malcolm’s force to be Muslim caused both of them turmoil in the end. Keep in mind, King, Malcolm and Newton were all in trouble with the law at some point in their lives. One thing we notice is that King can be seen as the father of the activist. King’s mindset was an older one and kept him leveled. He was arrested for protesting and was placed in Birmingham Jail. Newton was arrested for manslaughter and Malcolm was arrested for burglary. Due to them being arrested for these crimes, those who were in lower classes and felt the heat of racism, leaned more towards Newton and Malcolm, because they understood the struggles of the everyday man more than King (who was from the middle class) did. Malcom and Newton were arrested for crimes that only set the African American race back while King’s arrest advanced the race. Eventually Newton and Malcolm followed in King’s footsteps. Therefore, Huey, is a

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35 Cone, 279.
representation of more than just Newton, he represents King and Malcolm and the African American fight for freedom, acceptance and revolution.

Robert Freeman is the grandfather to Huey and Riley. Robert is the only character, (besides Ruckus) within the show that has seen and experienced almost every important event in 20th century African American history. Robert’s place in this chapter is minuscule due to the fact that only his experiences make him relevant. In Episode 1 Season 3, we get a glimpse into Robert’s past life. “Nobody knows exactly how old Robert Freeman is, not even Robert Freeman himself, but his age is estimated somewhere between 80-120 years old”. Robert was alive during many important events that took place during the Civil Rights Movement. In Season 4 Episode 5, Robert was involved in the Freedom Riders bus ride to Montgomery. Prior to the actual events taking place, a few of those involved in the Freedom Riders spoke out on their thoughts of Robert and the movement. Julian Bond stated “Robert Jebediah Freeman is a very odd recurring character in the Civil Rights Movement. He is a self-described civil rights legend, which I feel is, well, not at all accurate. Even by his own account his participation in the freedom rides seems to have been completely against his will”. The episode begins as Robert was on his way to Chicago to get out of the South and away from the Freedom Riders. Ironically, while running from a white man he ended up on the Freedom Riders bus. Against his will, by Reverend Sturdy Harris, Robert was forced to join the Riders on their journey into Birmingham. Robert refused to get off the bus once they arrived and then he saw one of the female riders was being attacked. Robert fought back regardless of the nonviolent strategy that the Reverend had in place. Once they boarded the bus again, they were on their way to Mississippi, when a bomb was placed on the bus. Due to the brutal attacking everyone received they were allowed to get off of the bus except Robert, the Reverend and Diane Nash. As the three rode in Mississippi, the bus was fired on, on
site. Regardless, the bus made it past the Mississippi State Line and the Freedom Riders were protected by the President. When the police commissioner refused to listen to the President, all three of them were put into jail.

One thing that really stands out in this episode is the actual facts that the producers added into the episode. They show how brutal it was for African Americans especially when it came to Jim Crow laws in the South. Many times people were forced to endure such terrible circumstances, that it caused problems for African American individuals. From the satirical standpoint, they made sure to show how Robert was not afraid of anything or anyone when Robert decided to use an all-white bathroom instead of the one for coloreds. As he ran from the white man, who was chasing him due to his use of the wrong bathroom, he ended up on the Freedom Riders bus, which he tried to escape multiple times. Reverend Sturdy Harris kept Robert on the bus. Harris himself was a man who was extremely built. Regardless of his build, Robert made it a point to tell him how crazy he was and how ridiculous his plan of action was. Sturdy intimidated those around him but used non-violence direct action and a martial art technique to make sure that no harm came to white people during the riots. Reverend Sturdy did not believe in an “eye for an eye”, but more so that “violence only begets more violence” a quote stated by MLK Jr. Reverend Sturdy was supposed to be a representation of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. Even Julian Bond commented on how insane this nonviolent plan of action was. Once the riot begins the only person who was using this technique was the Reverend himself who was unable to get hit by the average man because of his physical build. Robert, on the other hand, was using his belt to fight back. Then someone took his belt and started to beat him with it. As the episode continues we realize Robert was seriously on the bus against his will. He did not
want anything to do with the Freedom Riders but consistently uses his “Civil Rights activist platform” in other episodes.

Through the few episodes presented we start to see Robert in a semi serious light. Regardless of his influence in African American history, all the other episodes point to the fact that Robert is not as responsible and as serious as he should be. His focus is more of living a younger lifestyle as an older man. In Chapter 3, we will get a full portrayal of Robert’s lifestyle and realize that McGruder is using Robert for a lot of different purposes throughout the show.

McGruder’s use of his characters continue to show the viewers that he is trying to voice and address the things that are very detrimental and important within our society. This is imperative because McGruder uses Huey to represent the real political stance that he himself is taking. In an article titled “Free Huey- McGruder’s inner child”, McGruder talks about his reasoning for making all the characters the way he did and states this;

I think a lot of The Boondocks’ success can be attributed to me growing up around white people,” he says. “If I didn’t know White people so well, I would never be able to sell them angry Black kids every single day. Old white people read the paper. I see angry Black kids to 20 million White people a day. 30 million on Sunday. This is an audience that needs to hear what Aaron McGruder says through Huey Freeman, the kind of people who are not likely to have a young politically minded Black man in their sphere of influence.36

He uses Huey’s intense views and advanced mindset to analyze one of the most important time periods in African American culture while showing that regardless of Robert partaking in these events he is still not where he needs to be as an adult. Huey’s mind is advanced beyond his years and Roberts is behind. Chapter 3 will show Robert’s personality as a whole.

Chapter 3

The Modernized Misconception of the World Today

Within *the Boondocks*, Riley Freeman and Robert Freeman are large representations of this contemporary media filled era. Riley Freeman is a clear example of someone who wants to live a criminal lifestyle. This “criminal lifestyle” comes from his constant watching of movies such as “Scarface” and “The Godfather”. He is a representation of the media culture that has engulfed the younger generations. He has a love for rappers and gangsters and keeps up with the trends, including fashion and music. He also wants to be rich and famous. Riley is a third grader who encounters many problems that African Americans face within society. He is easily influenced by those around him and tries not to take responsibility for the things that do occur. When he is put into certain situations, his first thought is to get rich or find a quick way to fix the situation; just like his grandfather, Robert Freeman, all actions have to have some personal gain or gratification. Riley believes that with the right connections, he too, could one day be a rich, famous and gangster.

Robert Freeman, on the other hand, represents an older generation. Robert is a Civil Rights Activist and a disciplinarian who is old school and lacks knowledge about many things in the present day such as women and the 21st century trends. Regardless his role in the historical events of the 20th century makes him somewhat of a legend in the 21st century. Regardless of his age, Robert is very similar to his grandson Riley. “Robert is responsible for moving the boys from the south side of Chicago to the lily-white Woodcrest suburb. Unlike his grandsons who fight the white power structure, Granddad is known to work with and manipulate it for his
advantage”.

When Robert finds himself in situations, he too, tries to quickly fix them or sway it so the resolution has a benefit for his own personal gain. Many times both Robert and Riley find themselves in situations that they have caused and they still do not learn from their past mistakes. As the seasons go forward, we realize that Robert is far from the mature elder in the house, he is portrayed as a grown child who lives in the moment. He is very old school, yet tries his best to stay relevant with music, TV shows and the media.

McGruder uses his show to bring to light the problems and many situations that are apparent in today’s society, while having conversations that society chooses to address and those that it does not. The effect that media has had on these issues and stereotypes have transcended through time and are highly apparent even today. Have we truly progressed from media perception in the 1800’s? With the rise of reality shows, African Americans are faced more and more with stereotypical representations in today’s society. The Boondocks focuses on many modernized shows and people, but also brings to light the many debates and discussions in today’s society amongst African Americans. McGruder address politics, homosexuality, music culture and race amongst other issues at hand in the first three seasons. In the last season, a majority of the episodes in the Boondocks are parodies. These parodies enhance the satirical elements of the show. These parodies are also a way for the show to capture the audiences’ attention. Due to McGruder not being apart of the final season, we see the lack of originality and we also see that a lot of the problems that were addressed in the previous season, in terms of African Americans, were not addressed in the final season.

Riley Freeman is a large representation of the media influence that affects society. Riley’s love for the social realm causes him to be influenced and misguided by those around

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37 Timmerman, Gussman, King, 172.
him. Riley’s obsession with this lifestyle becomes problematic and detrimental as the seasons continue. Riley’s character clearly focuses on being happy and carefree especially because he is only eight years old.

Huey’s younger brother Riley is a wannabe thug who champions BET, “gangsta” culture, and the “hip-hop lifestyle.” Riley has significantly internalized the misogynistic, homophobic, and materialistic ideology present in some hip-hop music. He has created an obviously exaggerated false reality in which he believes he is struggling in the streets to overcome “the Man.” When questioned about his music idol, Gangstalicious, he says, “I know he not a real gangsta, but that’s cool. Cuz he’s in entertainment; he doesn’t have to be in the streets like I do. He’s telling our stories for us” (The Story of Gangstalicious). Ironically, as much as Riley speaks of his struggle on the streets, the Freeman’s live in a wealthy suburb, on Timid Deer Lane.  

Throughout the seasons of this show, he clearly shows his lack of responsibility and carefree behavior. He also exemplifies this modern societal problem where young people want to get rich quick without any work or effort involved. His get rich schemes usually backfire, yet that does not stop him from trying. An episode that illuminates Riley’s obsession with get rich quick schemes is when he uses the school fundraiser as a startup for his own company. This idea arose from a candy fundraiser that the students were asked to do in school. With the influence of gangster movies such as “Scarface” and “Goodfellas”, Riley used the knowledge of these “criminals” to further his success as one. His reasoning for this fundraiser was based on his need to be rich and famous with a yacht, a house and the many luxuries that rich people have. Riley took all the appropriate steps needed to start a business. He hired employees, started a website, spread the word and the company grew. He targeted other schools, businesses and even had parents selling at their workplace for their children. Riley became too caught up with this lifestyle and went as far as purchasing the “Scarface Suite” for his new office. Shortly after moving into his new suite, the old chocolate company decided to come after Riley. They began

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38 Timmerman, Gussman, King, 171-172.
robbing employees and taking chocolate from them. They even went as far as mailing Riley one of his business associates in a slab of chocolate. Then they blew up the car that Riley bought for his grandfather. The old company was not happy in the expansion that was taking place within their territory. They began to retaliate. Riley realized it was time to end what he had started. But instead of pulling out of the candy lifestyle, he decided that he was going to be influenced by gangster movies and stand his ground. The meeting ended in a shoot-out between the gangsters and the FBI. Riley realized how bad a situation he had gotten himself in. Ironically Riley did not learn from these movies at all. “Scarface” ends with a retaliation and the murder of Tony Montana. Instead of taking notes, Riley only saw the steps needed to get there. He decided since he knew the ending he would do things differently but as seen that was not the case.

In Season 2 Episode 11, Riley encounters another situation where his teacher calls him a nigga. This episode begins with an interview of the two parties, Riley and Mr. Petto. Mr. Petto tells the audience that during this encounter he believed the word to mean something different than a racial slur because he replaced the last letters -er with an -a. He believed the word to mean a friend or someone you are cool with. He also states that Riley uses the word on a daily basis and multiple times within his class. Riley does use that word on a daily basis to almost everyone and anyone. Sadly, Mr. Petto was penalized and suspended for his use of this racial slur against Riley. To analyze both sides of the situation the word nigga is not something that should be thrown around at all especially when it comes to Caucasians and African Americans due to the long history and the origin of the word. The other side is the fact that African Americans say it to each other every day. Not only do we hear this in rap culture, we also here it amongst social media and entertainment. African Americans use this word as a sense of friendship. When a

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derogative term gets its meaning changed due to the change of a letter, others races are unsure how to react. Therefore, when Mr. Petto uses this word, we can understand his misconception within the word itself. The debate between the word nigga and the word nigger, has been ongoing for years. How do we expect people to truly understand the terrible meaning behind this word, when we as African Americans use it on a daily basis? Huey, Riley’s brother, brings up a very important point. “The problem with restraining speech is who gets to set the rules. If it’s only okay in a certain time or place, who gets to say what time and what place?” Riley is right and in Episode 1 of Season 1, Ruckus sings a song titled “Don’t Trust Them New Niggas Over There” and then they all clapped.

The debate for the definition of the word nigger vs nigga has been ongoing in the societal realm for years. Mark Anthony Neal’s article titled, “NIGGA: The 21st Century Theoretical Superhero”, discusses the debate and makes it a point to show the origins of the different spelling. Neal argues that “the term “nigger” as landlocked, immobile, static, segregated, and an embodiment of black racial subjects in the 20th century South. I argue that the term “nigga” relates to concepts of blackness as mobile, fluid, adaptable, postmodern, urban, and embodying various forms of social and rhetorical flow that are fully realized within the narratives of hip hop”.40 Neal uses multiples sources to outline the rebirth of the word nigga. One main influence on the definition of this word stems from hip hop music. The hip hop group NWA was the begin of this word in the contemporary form. Their name NWA stands for “Niggas with Attitude”. Within their music they try to focus the idea of the “nigga” to be a form of identity that encompasses “a sense of authenticity” and focuses on “concepts of hyper-masculinity and the

40 Neal, 557.
homoerotic fantasy”.\(^{41}\) Their use of the word embodied the struggle that African Americans went through during the 1960’s. “Already accepting that they were products and inhabitants of a brave new black world - post-Civil Rights, post-Reagan era, post crack, post-LA Riots, post-MTV, etc.- the hip-hop generation in the 1990s was more concerned with defining what a “real” nigga was, in other words, the black subject that was most organically representative of this brave new black world”.\(^{42}\) Surprisingly enough, this change of spelling in the word has prevailed through time. It now has an effect on music entirely. Rap, Hip Hop and R&B embody all definitions of this word. Neal does make it a point to show the words meaning is not what it meant in the 1800s. Those in our contemporary world use the word in everyday conversations. This word is being used within the black vernacular and the American vernacular. It has unconsciously found a place in today’s society. Young African Americans find it offensive when those who are not African American call them a nigga but how can we censor who gets to say what? Today, people of all races use this word as a way to describe a friend or someone in general. As mentioned above it has become a part of the vernacular. People subconsciously say it but regardless, those of an older generation cannot accept this word in their vocabulary just because of a letter change.

Many argue that the word has taken a place in our everyday vernacular due to African Americans claiming it back but there are those who believe this word only has negative connotations. In Marlene F. Watson’s book titled “Facing the Black Shadow”, she discusses how African Americans are thinking that they are claiming the word back but they are instead hurting themselves by using it. In Chapter 1: “The N-Word and the Black Shadow”, Section 2: “The N-Word: Should It Be Reclaimed?”, Watson states:

Tupac is credited with using “nigga” in song, but in interviews he explained that for him

\(^{41}\) Neal, 558.  
\(^{42}\) Neal, 560.
it was an acronym for: Never Ignorant Getting Goals Accomplished.” This may have been a creative attempt to reclaim the N-word and transform it into something positive for black people, but the word fell short of Tupac’s vision, as witnessed by the number of young black men and women in prison, on drugs, or dead— including Tupac, himself.43

She ends this section by saying...

Let’s understand that using the N-word isn’t reclaiming it. Casting off the black shadow starts with facing the harm “nigger” does to our psyches. Our deal and resistance to looking at the n-word this way, is part and parcel of our community’s deep taboo against talking about slavery among ourselves and with the wider world. Seriously, the n-word is still a weapon of racism that cuts us down. You use it at your peril, because the n-word serves the black shadow.44

Yet, African Americans believe this word to be their own. This controversy is important because it speaks to the mindset of many of the African American youth today. A lot of people believe that using the word nigga, the way Tupac also viewed it, is a way to claim and overtake the power that whites have had on the word for generations. This can be considered a rare form of black privilege.

*The Boondocks* had the same effect that NWA had in the 1990’s. Both areas had a place in everyday social life. The youth are highly effected by both media and music. Riley’s use of this word on a daily basis is nothing shy of how youth in today’s society use it. The word has many definitions including that of a friend or companion. In today’s music this is the definition the word takes on. Therefore, when looking at the episode with Mr. Petto we can see from an educational standpoint why he believed saying this word would bear no repercussions.

McGruder uses this episode to highlight the double standard that has taken place on this derogatory term. It makes us feel sorry for Mr. Petto. We feel sorry because he is unaware of the vernacular that has been forced on him as a man from an older generation. He tries to show us

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44 Watson, 38.
that language cannot be censored especially when it is used in everyday discourse. Riley encourages this behavior without knowing the full extent of the word. Riley is extremely influenced by Rap, Hip Hop and R&B which we now understand to be the seed of the word nigga.

In this next episode one of Riley’s favorite rappers, Gangstalicious is focused on. This episode is another representation on how culture and media affect the youth. As the episode begins they talk about the problems two rappers had with each other. As the violence continued, both rappers ended up shooting themselves in a nightclub. Shortly after, Gangstalicious was shot for the fourth time. Riley’s first instinct was to turn on this show called “the news” and find out more information on what had happened. Once he realizes what happened, the story in itself was satirical. Gangstalicious was doing a show and performing his single “I got shot”, when three men ran on the stage and shot him. Since everyone was enjoying the concert and the song no one actually realized that he had actually been shot.

Riley’s reaction to these unfortunate events shows how deeply this has affected him. Riley believed he was a street soldier and it was his job to protect and help Gangstalicious. After his grandfather tells him that he cannot go to the hospital to visit Gangstalicious, he tries to do everything to get him to say yes. Riley goes as far as throwing himself down the stairs and running into the car when his grandfather was reversing. Riley goes to the extreme just to see his idol. When he finally meets Gangstalicious, more trouble arises for Riley. Riley ends up getting caught up in Gangstalicious’ problems. As Riley and Gangstalicious flee from men with guns, Riley realizes that his favorite artist is not a gangster but just a regular guy who raps. Riley realizes, yet again, that his granddad has some knowledge regardless of his flaws and many downfalls. Riley’s disobedience constantly lands him in these outlandish situations. Both Riley
and Gangstalicious get put into a trunk and are driven to an area where Gangstalicious is stripped down and kissed by the guy who kidnapped him. As they try to shoot Gangstalicious they miss and Riley passes out shortly after. When Riley gets home he tells his brother the story and states that one of the guys knocked him over the head and he passed out. While he was passed out he had a dream about Gangstalicious kissing the other guy.

One of the important things that is exemplified within this episode is the idea of music being able to influence people to do badly. Eminem is a prime example of this. He discusses murdering his ex-wife and killing people within his music but he does so as a release. He does not intentionally write this music so people can go and do what he says. Artist cannot and should not be held responsible for audiences who cannot tell the difference from the music versus reality. Music since the late 1900’s has changed the things people do, say and think. Music has been an outlet for young people everywhere. It was inspirational especially during the 1990’s. During that time, it focused on the problems that were occurring in society that people either refused to talk about or acknowledge. As mentioned above, Neal makes it a point to highlight these drastic changes that influenced society through music. NWA’s music focused on the many problems occurring in Compton, California during those times. Racism, violence and murders were ongoing and rising within many communities especially amongst African Americans. Their music became so controversial because it spoke to the times. It highlighted police brutality, the mass incarceration and more. One of their songs “F*** the Police” became a hit that focused on the brutality within society.

The second important theme is the rise of the gay community. Riley decides not to acknowledge that he saw his favorite rapper kissing another guy but, once the truth comes out he does not quite accept it the way we would expect. The gay community has been ongoing within
music for years. The acknowledgement of the gay community is rare because of the image that comes with being a rapper. This idea of someone being a male rapper and being gay is problematic due to the idea that society has, that gay men are not true men. Regardless, people in society have accepted or rejected the gay community due to their own personal beliefs.

The episode continues and Riley realizes that his favorite rapper is gay. At first he chooses not to acknowledge it and continues to believe that it is not true. But as the episode continues, he slowly realizes that the truth is harder to accept than a lie. Riley completely disregards the dream he had about Gangstalicious and forgives him for being a punk when he receives some CD’s from him. Riley was quick to forgive and just as quickly as he was influenced in other situations it happened again. As the episodes continue, more bribes come Riley’s way as Gangstalicious sends him apparel and CD’s. Naive as they come, Riley is oblivious to the fact that he is being bought as a way to keep Gangstalicious’ secret. Huey decides to educate Riley on the obvious but Riley does not want to hear it.

As Gangstalicious presents his new apparel, we as the audience realize the gay references that are being portrayed. Regardless, Riley wears this clothing with no hesitation because it is trending. The more clothing Riley wears from the new line the more feminine he looks. The idea of cropped tops, pearls, skirts, bags and sandals is incorporated in this line. Everyone loved the gear until they found out that Gangstalicious was gay. His sexual orientation contributed to the way people viewed him and associated with him. Regardless, Robert started to see the changes in his grandson and could not believe that he had a gay grandson. He continues to spy on Riley and tries to even set him up to do masculine things but Riley refuses. Robert’s reaction is essential to the basis’ of this episode because it shows us how ignorant people react in situations they cannot understand. Due to Riley “being gay”, he was going to be exiled from sharing a room with Huey
and a bathroom. Huey could careless about his brothers sexual orientation and realized that it effected Riley and Robert more than anything. This mindset causes people to react before actually understanding the issue(s) at hand. This generational difference and gap between Robert and his grandsons is also a factor in the way people respond and react to gay people. Those of an older generation like Robert, did not know how to handle homosexuality because he was never exposed to it and never really encountered it. He even goes as far as saying he will stop loving Riley because he is gay.

Even with the generational gap, Riley believes that knowing and being friends with someone who is gay causes you to be gay by association. Even Thugnificent, Riley’s other favorite rapper, believes that if he and his group do a song with Gangstalicious they will be gay by association. Once Riley comes to the realization that Gangstalicious is gay, he comes to the conclusion that he is now gay. He begins crying and neither he nor Robert know how to handle this situation. In the end, he asks Gangstalicious if he is gay and he says no. Riley wanted nothing more than to believe that and he does.

Ironically Riley throws the word “gay” around quite frequently throughout the show. You would think he was homophobic with the way he used the word but essentially the word symbolizes someone that consists of too much emotion or affection i.e. feminine qualities portrayed by a man. Interestingly, Season 4 Episode 10 actually focuses on Riley’s use to the word “gay” and the effect it had on a student who he called “gay”. As the episode begins a student is recording a young boy dancing during lunch. Riley shouts out “That’s gay! Cut that out”. In a matter of minutes, the video went viral and the news spoke about how his statement was a verbal assault on his classmate. The media picked up and voiced their opinion on this matter. People began calling him a bully. When they interviewed Riley the following day he said
that he is not a bully and that everyone who calls him that is gay. A group of people gathered in
front of the Freeman household chanting “Bully, bully stay back! Gay is the new black!

After two days of protests outside the Freeman house, Robert became annoyed at what
was happening. Robert tells Riley that if he sees something gay, he better look the other way and
not even acknowledge it. The Freeman family gets exploited by not only the LGBT community
but by an organization called Yes-Homo. Mr. Sweetlove (head of the organization) told the
Freemans about who he was and what it is he wanted from the family. While Mr. Sweetlove
describes his organization he uses the phrase “LGBT”. Robert had no idea what the phrase meant
and Riley thought it meant “lettuce, gay, bacon and tomato”. As Mr. Sweetlove continues, he
tells them that using the word gay as a replacement for something stupid or dumb is offensive.
Riley automatically tells Mr. Sweetlove that he meant what he said and that he was not using
the word as a way to say something else. Mr. Sweetlove begins to get frustrated with the Freemans
and asks them for a donation to the Yes-homo organization. They let Mr. Sweetlove know that
they are broke and he comes up with the idea to have Riley appear in their youth campaign.
Riley had to do three things and out of these three the main one was given a public apology.
During his public apology, Riley ignores the speech his grandfather wrote for him and states one
thing, “Gay is gay, thank you”. Robert quickly gets on the microphone and states that he
apologizes on behalf of the whole family. He tells everyone that Riley is a little slow in the head
and that he has special needs with behavioral and developmental issues.

Shortly after, Mr. Sweetlove delivers an apology speech to Riley and the Freeman family.
Then the Freemans are exploited again by a group for those who are especially abled: Specially
Abled Alliance Against Defamation (SAAAD) due to their lies about Riley’s disability. Robert
offers Riley up to appear under the campaign as a way to attract the youth similar to the way Mr.
Sweetlove did the Public Service Announcement (PSA). Two weeks later, Riley attends the Special Olympics and tells Goodlove how amazing it is being “retarted”. He is able to get out of homework and class due to the fact that he is “retarted”. He enters into the race and refuses to run because he “does not want to be around retards”. Riley ends up getting beaten up by the contestants of the Special Olympics and ends up in the picture he refused to originally be in. This goes to show us how uncensored people are and the acceptable changes society has influenced in everyday vernacular today.

Another controversial topic is this play on words. Riley uses the word gay for anything or everything that he deems homosexual in his eyes. When do we begin to censor what it is children are able to say and not say? How is it that this 10-year old boy uses the word nigga and gay as part of his everyday vocabulary? The writers are trying to tell us that the problem with the youth is the fact that they are uncensored and do not realize how their words can hurt others. This lack of censorship can be detrimental to people who have to endure these harsh words that the youth use today.

The lack of censorship is so apparent in today’s society that it seems as though the youth are oblivious to the things they say and do. Earlier this year, 6 white high school students lined up to spell the word nigger with their shirts. They were smiling and posing. Shortly after this picture went viral the school district made a statement. Supposedly these females only faced a five-day suspension. This just goes to show how people are not realizing the effects that words have on others. Not only does this become a racial problem it becomes a problem within the realm of censorship. You have to ask yourselves what gives these girls the right and motivation to do something like this and think its okay? Huey argues about censorship and who should be
allowed to say what in Chapter 2. This is imperative because it puts *The Boondocks* into our current reality.

*The Boondocks* also becomes relevant again when we discuss a few other problems in society today, such as the representations of African Americans in media. With the rise of media culture, many shows such as “Love and Hip Hop”, “The Real Housewives of Atlanta” and “The Bad Girls Club”, have been introduced into everyday life. These shows exemplify and portray African American women in the worst light. The women on these shows are violent, angry and uncontrollable. These women not only fight amongst themselves but they fight against others too. Regardless of where they are and who they are with, these women are ready to embarrass themselves. As an African American adult watching these grown African American women portray themselves like this, it causes one to question how detrimental the show is to our culture.

Not only does it show the barbaric side of females, it enhances it.

This misrepresentation sets America up to believe that all African American women are the same. It is a stereotype within itself. Sadly, the stereotype is supported by African American females who go on social media prompting/posting fights that occur within different high schools. With the website known as worldstarhiphop.com, youth find themselves posting the craziest fights and altercations that occur. This site partially promotes violence amongst the youth, mostly minorities and it forces this violence to become a part entertainment in everyday life.

Another form of oppression for African Americans is through the prison system. The prison system is a very big topic in today’s society. McGruder addresses this in Season 3 Episode 7. McGruder takes a different spin on the episode when he chooses to revolve it around Tom Dubois’ fear of being anally raped in prison but he does address the problems within the
prison system. Similar to the show “Scared Straight”, Riley, Huey and classmates are brought into a prison to scare them into stopping their violent, careless behavior. Once they arrive, they listen to prisoners tell them how terrible it is in prison. As the show progresses, the prisoners decide to revolt and they hold all the children hostage while Huey and Riley help them with their demands. Sadly enough, they have been in prison so long that all they ask for is females of all different ethnicities. Riley and Huey realize that these men do not even care about their freedom they just care about having females. Shortly after they decide to surrender. McGruder outlines the oppression of African Americans and the vast amount of them who are in prison. He uses the episode to point out what society believes inmates are incapable of, which is thinking and making wise decisions, hence the reason they are in prison in the first place. He also emphasizes that those who are imprisoned are deserving of their fate in prison.

In Michelle Alexander’s book titled *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, she analyzes the Jim Crow laws that affect African Americans in society today and focuses on the prison system which contains a large amount of African Americans. In her introduction she says, “The more things change, the more they remain the same”. She speaks on the surrounding factors of the African American race which keep us in bondage. In each section of each chapter she conquers and argues the many things that keep African Americans living in an unfair world. In a section of Chapter 1 titled “The Death of Jim Crow”, Alexander presents the rebirth of Jim Crow in a different sense. Alexander argues that this new Jim Crow is rooted in the idea of “law and order”. She believed that once the Civil Rights Movement came about America decided that the only way to gain complete control or power

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over minorities is through this unfair legal system. Alexander uses the prison system to show how African Americans have been and continue to be exiled and oppressed. The lack of representation and the idea of people not caring enough has caused the African American race to suffer tremendously. Instead of trying to find ways to fix this system, we are too busy fighting it.

The prison system has become one of society’s ways of segregating minorities. Today’s statistics show that African American’s and Hispanics take up about the majority of people in prisons. These statistics have skyrocketed over the years and we have to ask ourselves what is the reasoning for this outcome? People believe that whites have influenced and feed African American the tools they need to further push themselves into the system. It does not help that many prisoners, once released, are stuck when coming out of prison because they are not given the same opportunities as those who were not incarcerated. Once released, a majority of prisoners end up back in prison within the first couple of years. Those who do not end up back in prison either end up dead or moving in to low income areas and having low paying jobs. The prison system has become the focal area of segregation. With these outrageous numbers, we realize that over the years African Americans have been provoked. With the rise of violence and police brutality, one can imply that maybe these statistics are altered. With the force being placed on the African American race, the retaliation is even stronger. This topic has and continues to be controversial, regardless of the statistical data.

By bringing in Alexander’s analysis, we realize that McGruder uses the episode to show the audience, specifically the minorities, that society sets them up for failure. A lot of the episodes where we view Riley’s behavior we can see how his behavior can end up destroying his life and landing him in prison. One of the main reasons he was sent to the program was due to his bad behavior. McGruder shows the youth that the decisions they make can change their
futures. Robert tries to discipline Riley to the best of his abilities but he too is learning how to live and grow in this new society.

Robert also encounters many modernized situations that he does not know how to handle. In Season 1 Episode 8, Robert is easily convinced by Riley to lie and say that he is blind in order to gain the perks of a TV show known as “Pimp my Ride”. Riley influences his grandfather to go along with this lie in order to have a new and improved car. Riley goes as far as taking this lie to another level when the TV show “Home Makeover Edition” comes to redo the Freeman house. Riley lies and tells the producers that Robert ran a homeless shelter out of his home. The Freeman family then begins to experience the perks of these TV shows. Their downfall occurred when Robert received his car and commented on its beautiful, exterior including the rims, color and more. The cast of both shows realized that he was not blind and it was all a scam. After this, “Extreme Makeover” left the house half done and “Pimp my Ride” took the car. Robert was angry at Riley for lying and blamed Riley for the family’s new misfortune.

Due to Robert’s lack of good decisions within a society he does not understand, the Freeman family encounters that hardest situation they have had in all the seasons. Robert finds out that the family is broke, completely (Season 4 Episode 1). This changes everything. When Ed Wuncler comes by to collect the money Robert realizes how deep of a hole he has dug himself in. This causes him to make rash decisions that not only affect him but it affects the whole family.

Season 4 Episode 2 was a parody of the show *The Good Times*. This show consisted of a family growing up in a poverty stricken project in Chicago during a time of racial hardships.
(1970’s). The show takes us through the everyday lives of the Evans family. The theme song for the show *Good Times* is heavily used as a way to satirize the situation that the Freemans are in.

![Good Times Theme Song Lyrics.](https://www.lyricsondemand.com)

In this episode of *The Boondocks*, Robert realizes that he is a few million dollars in debt. By not reading the fine print and being deceived by ads and spokespeople, Robert decided to take out a new mortgage which only caused more problems. Eddie Wuncler II comes to collect the money that the Freemans owe and since they cannot pay him back, he decides to rent out the house and put the Freemans in the garage. At first, Robert decides to get a job and ends up getting laid off. In desperation, Robert decides to open up a few credit cards after watching the commercials for it on TV. Since he did not read the fine print, yet again, the credit cards put him in more debt. Ed Wuncler then offers Robert a chance to sign a loan with his bank. When Robert saw all the money he quickly signed not reading the contract for the loan that he was taking out which had a 150% interest rate. Robert put himself another million dollars in debt. The episode ends with Robert literally signing his life away to Ed Wuncler. The Freemans were signed into slavery.

*The Boondocks* episode begins by showing how a lack of knowledge causes a problem within society. People are so caught up in get rich quick schemes that they do not realize how these schemes can affect their future or the future of those around them. Their suffering and Robert’s bad decisions cause them to find themselves in more debt and also in a problematic situation. Robert gets laid off, he buys credit cards that only put him in more debt and then he signs his life away. The desperation of the Freeman family goes to show how ignorance is bliss.

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46 “Good Times Theme Song Lyrics.” *Lyrics On Demand.* Web.
Robert could care less about reading what all these contracts offered. Instead he signed and suffered the consequences. The satire is the truth within the episode. Many people sign for credit cards, loans and much more without actually reading, let alone understanding what it is they are signing up for. Therefore, the blame lands on people who get exploited through their own avidity. Within college campus, this usually happens to freshman. They get their freedom and decide to get a credit card not realizing that there is interest and payments that have to be made to that card. Many people find themselves in debt because decisions they made when they were younger. One can feel sorry for Robert but at the same time he is the reason for his current suffering and downfall.

A CBS news study titled “Americans Reading A Lot Less”, shows that Americans read a lot less than they used too. This study was done in 2007. The study showed that a large amount of “adult Americans were not even reading one book a year”. The study goes on to show that younger students and high school students are less likely to read recreationally. “The new study examined data on everything from how many 9-year-olds read every day for "fun" (54 percent) to the percentage of high school graduates deemed by employers as "deficient" in writing in English (72 percent)". Majority of people in today’s society are more focused on television and media causing them to spend less time reading. This is exactly what happened to Robert, his lack of reading caused him to get himself stuck in a money draining situation.

Season 4 Episode 3 is also another parody based on the show “Breaking Bad”. The show consisted of a guy, Walter White who was diagnosed with cancer. In order to make sure his family is financially secure he decides to manufacture and sell methamphetamine. In this episode

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of *The Boondocks*, Robert decides to do the same thing as a way to earn a mass amount of money in a short period of time. Originally Huey makes a chemical that is a bomb. This chemical helps with hair growth. Robert puts it in his hair prior to his date and wakes up with long flowing hair. Robert lets everyone try it and everyone’s hair grows long and flowing within a matter of hours. Robert sees this as a get rich quick scheme until Huey tells him that it is a bomb. Regardless, Riley, Huey and Robert go forward to manufacture and mass sell this product to Boss Willona, a gangster and a seller of hair care products. The product begins to sell in every beauty store in the nation. Huey refuses to help because of the fact that the product is dangerous. Shortly after, the airport denied these women who had this hair product from flying due to the explosive chemical in their hair. The episode ends with Robert screaming and going crazy at the fact that he has no outlet and feels the things that are happening are unfair. Regardless, this does not stop Robert from finding himself in another get rich quick scheme.

In Season 4 Episode 4, Robert ends up looking for a job and finds a few of them but none that he can keep. Eventually he finds himself in a nursing home working for Geraldine. She runs an escort service from inside of the nursing home. Without reading the contract, yet again, Robert agrees to be an escort and signs it. He goes on multiple dates with lonely women. Some of them he just talks to and takes on dates and others just want companionship. Foolishly enough, Robert gets himself into another situation that he cannot get out of. One of the dates he ends up with takes over his life and cooks and cleans for him and the boys. Robert tries to get out of his contract and his bosses make sure that does not happen when they decide to beat him up. The obsessive girl that Robert was with made sure he was arrested for prostitution because Robert cheated on her with another woman who was a white woman. Robert gave up the pimps
(his bosses) when he was arrested. In hindsight, the family ended up right where they started, broke.

The season does not end there with the many schemes and financial situation. We start to feel bad for Robert because as an old man in a new age, he is struggling and lost. *The Boondocks* tries to show us that the generational gap between the 1900’s and the 2000’s is drastic. Those in the older generation are trying their best to adapt but it becomes troublesome with the major advancements in society. Between the rise of technology and the vast advancements in our society through our social realm, we see Robert trying to make good decisions but they all backfire on him and the boys. As the season goes on the Freemans find themselves worse off than before.

In Season 4 Episode 6, Robert dates Kardashia Kardashian. While dating her he gets put on a reality TV show. While dating Kardashia, Robert received a large amount of money. This episode is a parody of the show *Keeping up with the Kardashian* which follows the Kardashian family around on a day to day basis. This reality TV show captures the everyday lifestyle of these celebrities. Within this episode of *The Boondocks*, the show makes it a point to make fun of plastic surgery and implants. In the episode, Kardashia goes to this doctor who pumps her butt with jello shots of petroleum in order to make it bigger. Her half-brother (i.e. Rob Kardashian) is only known momentarily for his sock business and his role as the brother within the actually show. This plays his character very similar within the episode. Huey follows her to get evidence of her butt growth. Eventually her butt explodes and she is sent to the hospital. Regardless, Robert does not make it on the reality TV show because he finds out that Kardashia was not even a real Kardashian. The TV show gets cancelled and instead of saving all the money that they
received from Kardashia they spent it all and find themselves in the same financial position they were in prior to Robert’s dating.

This portrayal of Robert shows the audience how age can change perception, thoughts and actions. Roberts lack of reading, attention and care causes us to notice how he represents a majority of the African American population, both young and old. Robert fails to read any contract before signing it, he is obsessed with reality TV, girls, nudity and junk food. He could care less about what is happening when he finds himself in bad situations. All he does is try to fix them without much thought or planning. Robert is easily influenced and persuaded so it causes him to not take on the parental role but more so the friend role. This is detrimental within our society. In a household where there is no adult, children often find themselves lost and clinging to different things to feed their souls such as music, TV, celebrities. Huey is a terrorist and Riley is a gangster; they are clear representations of what the lack of adult supervision can result in.
The Boondocks does a great job in showing us the detrimental problems that are occurring within the African American community. McGruder presents us with the problems and tries to make it apparent to the African American community with the hopes that he could effect some change. The show addresses the problems at hand and points the community in the right direction. Many times these stereotypes and situations cause a domino effect of problems within a household. Parents find themselves losing their kids to drugs, violence and gangs. This is nothing new, but has become more apparent today. Today, a lot of children grow up without fathers and this causes young African American children (mostly boys) to have to look to the streets and outside the household for a father figure. Sometimes the person they look up too is someone who is a good role model and sometimes they are bad role models. The lack of education and the zeal to strive for better effects part of the community and the other half is effected by life’s continuous struggles. As a community, African Americans have to strive to live above the stereotypes that society has placed on them and focus on building ourselves as a whole. With time and effort, we too can rise above the negative stereotypes that society has placed on us and fight to make these stereotypes more positive. With people who want change in our corner, there is nothing we cannot do. Margaret Mead said it best… “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has”.

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Works Cited


