The Media Performance Of Leonard's Video Controversy And The Cause Behind It

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Introduction

Society and the NBA treated the two events differently, and media theories of 'race and orientalism' explain this phenomenon within the context of the media conglomerate. The media performance of Leonard's video controversy vis-à-vis racial discrimination against Lin reveals two contrasting stories of the way the media prefers one to the other. Jewish community dominated the NBA for the first half of the twentieth century and benefited from the sports the same way African-Americans are utilizing it as a space to get away from the marginalized lifestyle. Media Conglomerates also play a critical role in setting the narratives and choosing which narrative to emphasize. For example, anti-semantic comments in a video chat can cause big trouble even if the speaker is White American (Leonard) vis-à-vis hate speech that Lin receives being a celebrated start on an almost routine basis without a major push from the mainstream media. However, there exists a parallel between the Asian minority and Jewish minority in the United States, and both are represented in the demographics of the American national population due to their fast growth on the upward success ladder. The media performances of Meyers Leonard and Lin Jeremy are significantly different from each other due to two distinct races being attacked, Jews and East Asians, respectively. Media conglomerates highlighted and effectively managed Leonard's issue because orientalist media theories emphasize the euro-centric or Western-centric worldview, which limits the point of view of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia merely to the reflection of the West.

Analysis

History of NBA and Domination of Jewish Players

The sport of choice for youth in a densely populated and urban environment in the United States is basketball because, for obvious reasons, a basketball court takes less room than other games like soccer or football that require a reasonable field (Wade, 2013). However, the benefit of games like basketball, which require less room, is most suited for economically marginalized communities. In the physical sense, it keeps you fit while cheap to play, and all you need is a ball and shoes. Lisa Wade, Doctorate in Sociology, provides the aforementioned justification for the population (disadvantaged) that tends to take basketball. The history of basketball suggests that the first half of the twentieth century is the time when the Jewish e communities represented the game, like African Americans today. The isolation of Jewish families in inner cities, after migrating from another part of the world,

resorted to basketball as a way out of the ghetto. Interestingly, the young population of marginalized communities make their way to college, especially within the context of burdensome college tuition fees. Stereotypes associated with Jews were different from those that are associated with the African-American population today, and Paul Gallico in the 1930s stated, “The game places a premium on an alert, scheming mind, flashy trickiness, artful dodging and general smart blackness.” Moreover, stereotypes about Jews for having God-given better balance and speed due to short heights and being short-sighted used to be an advantage in sports.

Conglomerates

The large news conglomerates are generally referred to as ‘mainstream media,’ which is a grouping of various large mass news media companies with the ability to influence people at a mass level. The mainstream media reflects and shapes the societal debates in the present moment, along with the ability to shape debates at future points in time, and is the opposite of alternative media that relies on the decentralized mechanisms of many producers of content. The power of social media is effective in bringing to the limelight the discussions of users on the network, and it allows mainstream media to provide mass media outreach. However, mass media is not decentralized, and large news conglomerates homogenize the narratives in mass media. The concentration of media ownership is of concern to the global population and not only to a specific country, and the successive mergers of broadcast media and newspapers in countries around the world result in the creation of media bias. The comparison of two racial events in the United States with significantly divergent reactions in media emphasizes the fact that conglomerates pursue the fictionalized ‘image of the Orient’ approach through the utilization of social sciences, literature, and arts.

Race & Orientalism in the Media

Necla Mora (2009) emphasizes the Eurocentric viewpoint in media, which is termed ‘Orientalism’ by Edward, which was said in 1978 in the book with the same title. The way the West used the mercantilist approach in the nineteenth century to colonize the world, orientalists emphasize a similar treatment of acquiring knowledge in the post-World War II world. Orientalism criticizes the process of acquiring information through science and media as reflecting the interests of groups rather than adopting an objective process. Edward Said elaborates on the narrow scope of ‘organized writing,’ and explains the Western perception of the East as a mysterious place, which is why the phrase “the marvels of the East” is used. Moreover, the popular TV Show Game of Thrones also refers to the spatial location of seven kingdoms as ‘Westeros,’ and the world where dragons and myths exist is referred to as ‘Estrous.’

Race and orientalism in media are inherited from knowledge production, coupled with media content production and distribution processes, during the period when the West viewed the East as ‘the Orient’ while considering itself as ‘the Occident.’ Precisely, controlling and authorizing views from the

‘East’ enabled the West to monopolize power and knowledge and use it to its advantage through misrepresentation and generalization of the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa. The nineteenth century was also the time when artists and writers from the West travelled the ‘East,’ and the political-economic power ensured control and authorization of the views those artists and writers reflected. The stereotypes still exist, and the treatment of Meyers Leonard for anti-semantic comments is reflective of the ‘Occident’ narratives and explains the difference in treatment of basketball player Jeremy Lin, suffering from racial decimation against Asians. The prioritization of ‘anti-Semitism’ and viewing East with ‘Orientalist’ discourses is racial discrimination against the minority Asian population.

Media Performance of Meyers Leonard

Media performance of the Meyers Leonard yields criticism from different segments of society, and punishment from various sports institutes, advertisement, and gaming companies can simply be categorized as harsh (Friedman, 2021; Greer, 2021; Guedes-Reed, 2021; “Meyers Leonard: NBA player deeply sorry for the anti-Semitic slur,” 2021). On the contrary, Meres Leonard’s video controversy relates to using anti-Semitic slurs on the Twitch stream. NBA player Meres Leonard represents Heat, and he used the word ‘kike’ while live-streaming on March 11, 2021, which resulted in criticism from mainstream national and international media. After Meyers, Leonard officially apologized and mentioned that he was not aware of the words’ meaning. Leonard is Heat’s centre and was suspended from activities and facilities of the club for using anti-Semitic slurs. He was playing ‘Call of Duty: Warzone’ on Monday, March 11, which gained a news feed on social media the latter day and promoted backlash online. Online users mentioned NBA and Heat in their respective comments and raised concerns for the rights of the Jewish community. Defector Patrick Redford noted that Leonard’s stream reacted to the slur-containing messages in the chat room, which resulted in removing some of the messages by the moderator of the chat room; however, the moderator eventually had to switch the mode to ‘emote-only.’ Leonard was playing a game the next day when all this happened, and during the live stream, he received a call from his wife, to which he responded by stopping the game. As soon as the clip went viral, Leonard started deleting the tweets from archives.

The consequences of using anti-semantic slurs for Leonard were at socioeconomic and political levels. For example, Leonard is a vivid gamer, and one of the consequences is that multiple gaming companies end their partnerships with him and ban Leonard from streaming on their platforms. A portion of Leonard’s apology on Twitter includes, “I am deeply sorry for using an anti-Semitic slur … I didn’t know what the word meant at the time; my ignorance about its history and how offensive it is to the Jewish community is absolutely not an excuse, and I was just wrong.” After the end of the investigation, the NBA imposed a 50,000 U.S. dollar fine on Leonard, along with suspension from all activities and facilities for one week. Additionally, he also needs to participate in the cultural diversity program to seek a better understanding of cultural and racial issues. In a similar way, according to WPLG’s Will Mando, Meyer Leonard met via Zoom the next Tuesday with members of the Jewish

community, and the students from the University of Miami Hillel partnered with the Jewish community relations council to have an opportunity to participate in the question and answer session. The purpose of the session was to enhance the learning processes of the former Heat Center vis-à-vis the antiemetic slurs used. The response from the Jewish community was welcoming after receiving an apology from an NBA player (Guedes-Reed, 2021), moreover requested him to join a repentance event commonly known as 'teshuvah.'

Media Performances of Jeremy Lin

Jeremy Lin also suffered racial decimation against Asians, but unlike Meyers Leonard, attention paid to the discrimination of the Asian population is lesser. Basketball player Jeremy Lin is an American professional basketball player representing Santa Cruz Warriors. Lin became the symbol of inclusive culture in the United States generally, and more specifically at NBA, and the cultural phenomenon became known as 'Linsanity.' As first American of Chinese or Taiwanese decedent to play at NBA, Lin belongs a group of few Asian Americans to actually participate in the league. After becoming the first American-Asian to win the NBA Championship in 2019 for the Toronto Raptors, he is widely known for his Christian faith. During his career, Lin encountered racial slurs against Asian ancestry. During the journey, Lin is overwhelmed with incidents of encountering racial slurs against his Asian ancestry, even since the time he was in sixth grade in school. During his time playing at Harvard, the most open remarks he received were, "Open your eyes, sweet and sour port, and Wonton soup, pseudo-Chinese gibberish, Orchestra is on another side of campus, and Go back to China."

At one point in time, Harvard teammate Oliver McNally called him with an ethnic slur, 'chink.' In February 2012, Jason Whitlock posted on Twitter, "Some lucky lady in NYC is gonna feel a couple of inches of pain tonight;" the Fox sports columnist is referring to Lin's achievements at the Knicks-Lakers game. Asian American Journalist Association demanded an apology from Whitlock, to which he responded, "I debased a feel-good sports moment. For that, I'm truly sorry." Unlike Leonard's incident, Lin responded in defence, "People just aren't used to seeing Asians do certain things, so it creates a very polarizing effect." Furthermore, Lin spoke for the rights of Asian Americans and stated, "I feel like Asians in general don't get the respect that we may deserve whether it comes to sports, basketball, or whatever it might be" (Chow, 2019).

Orientalism: The Case of Meyers Leonard and Jeremy Lin

Orientalism refers to the scientific study of languages, cultures, people, and religions in the Near East and the Far East. The major contributing factor to the mentality of orientalists is the development era of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that is, the era of industrial capitalism. The difference between the media performance of Meyers Leonard and Jeremy Lin lies in the East-West divide. Jeremy Lin is mostly in defence of his race, while Meyers Leonard received criticism and punishment for uttering anti-Semantic slurs, and he was pressurized to rectify his attitude. This attitude towards

Meyers Leonard is due to the Europe-centric, or west-centric, attitude of media. For example, the media portrayal of Meyers Leonard represents severe punishment despite the minority Jewish population. However, Lin is American-Taiwanese, and due to discriminatory, isolating, external, and prejudice-filled opinions of "Western European white man on the Eastern people and cultures" (Mora, 2009; p. 419). The comments that Jeremy Lin receives on a regular basis during games, along with other private and public events, indicate the perception of the East by the West. Historically speaking, racial division in American society is reflected in the mass media owned by media conglomerates with biases towards people of colour.

Opponents of Anti-Semantic slurs and viewpoints rely heavily on creating pressure at mass media, finance, economy, politics, and technological levels while failing to see the potential in a collective and unbiased approach towards people of all races. For example, the Jewish population of the United States can benefit from unity with the African-American community, and the gains are for both communities. However, it is hard for people like Jeremy Lin to make it to the top, and even more difficult to stay there despite receiving hate speech. Meyers Leonard received punishment at every level, and Jeremy Lin seems to be alone in the fight for inclusiveness in society. Orientalism in mass media highlights issues that media conglomerates want to promote, and that is due to the corporate nature of mainstream media, coupled with the stakes of multiple stakeholders. Anti-Semitism in the West is unacceptable due to the treatment of Jews during the first half of the twentieth century, and it presents White's viewpoint. On the other hand, racism against people of colour is beyond the scope of the White ruling elite of the world.

Alternative Media: The Case of Meyers Leonard and Jeremy Lin

Digital media is a public space where people from different walks of life and from around the world can collectively participate in bringing a change in someone's attitude or policy of an organization or state. Digital media is a public space, and unlike mainstream media, it has the capacity to transform the lives of people. In the case of Meyers Leonard, a comment (sematic slur) created an outrage, while in the case of Jeremy Lin, something similar happened, but mainstream media did not take notice. The benefit of alternative media is that it facilitates the users' consumption and contribution of information and viewpoints that reflect the concerns of one or more communities. Alternative media also allows users to analyze the effects of raising concerns. Alternative media does provide an opportunity to collaborate and accelerate the process of reform in various ways, but in order for actions to take place at the state level, alternative media lacks traditional pillars of organization (Downing, 2008). Hierarchical structures of organization, coupled with delegated authorities with individuals for the promotion of an agreed agenda, are lacking in the case of discrimination against Lin, while Leonard's video controversy received the due share because it is the exact story mainstream media is always looking for. Downing (2008) argues the role of social media in social movements, and these isolated events of racial discrimination can be viewed through the same lens. However, the difference in attitude towards one community indicates systematic bias at the national and international levels, especially on the part of the media conglomerates.

Parallels between the Jewish community and East Asian Community in the United States

Jonathan Karp argues that the Jewish community and the East Asian Community have many similarities despite the fact that they have different cultural norms, values, and histories (2019). The term he used for both the minorities is 'overrepresented minorities,' and mostly when it's about the minority population making its way up the ladder, then either it Jew or East Asian. Parallels between East Asians and Jews suggest that both groups remained victims of societal discrimination and immigration restrictions, and both have received stereotypical notions of 'model minorities.' Despite the upward mobility of both communities, prejudices and stereotypes about both races are evident in the case studies analyzed in this paper. Lin is the first East Asian to win an NBA championship but remains defensive of all sorts of attacks due to his race origin tracing to Taiwan, East Asia. On the other hand, Leonard's punishment for unknowingly uttering anti-Semitic slurs created trouble for him. The analysis of the two case studies of racial discrimination in media reflects two different stories: a story that media conglomerates want to tell and another story that they want to take seriously and resolve.

Conclusion

The role of media conglomerates in highlighting and effectively managing Leonard's issue as part of an attempt to create an inclusive society is not in the same heated way as Lin's. Lin receives racist comments on a regular basis, and the most penalty one receives for being racist to an Asian American is in the form of an apology, stating the reason for the comments to be nothing more than humorous conversation or remark. Lin is the first American-Asian to win the NBA Championship, but the mainstream media treats both incidents differently. Although social media (alternative media) plays a critical role in facilitating debates by giving voice to millions of users, they lack the ability of organizations that mainstream media fulfils. Mainstream media has conglomerates that operate at a global level and reflect an orientalist worldview that reflects the East in the image of the West. An interesting finding of the research is the parallel between Asian and Jewish communities in the United States, which represent a minority population due to their fast growth pattern of achieving a high standard of living over the last few generations. Just like the African-American community today, the Jewish community in the first half of the twentieth century started playing basketball as an escape from a marginalized lifestyle. Narrative building for performing effectively through media conglomerates, and they have to set their respective agendas for focusing on issues that mean most to them, unlike alternative media. Alternative media, on the other hand, provides public space for the audience and general users to share their feedback through online interaction; however, it lacks the ability of organizations, which media conglomerates fill effectively.

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