RACIALIZING MEDIA POLICY

This page intentionally left blank

RACIALIZING MEDIA POLICY

EDITED BY

JASON A. SMITH

George Mason University, USA

AND

RICHARD T. CRAIG

George Mason University, USA

United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India
Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2023

Reprints and permissions service
Contact: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80455-737-2 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-80455-736-5 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-80455-738-9 (Epub)

ISOQAR certified Management System, awarded to Emerald for adherence to Environmental standard ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

CONTENTS

This page intentionally left blank

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Jason A. Smith, PhD, is an Affiliate Faculty with the Center for Social Science Research at George Mason University and Member of the Justice 21 Committee with the Society for the Study of Social Problems. His research focuses on race and media exclusion. Previous research has been published in *Sociology of Race & Ethnicity, Ethnic & Racial Studies*, *Studies in Media & Communication*, *The International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*, and the *Journal of Black Studies*. He previously edited the volume *Race and Contention in Twenty-First Century U.S. Media,* along with issues of *Information, Communication & Society* and the *International Journal of Communication*.

Richard T. Craig, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Communication at George Mason University. His research centers on mass media political economy; addressing the production, distribution, and consumption of media content. He takes particular interest in exploring the social structure/struggle embedded in media production and interpreted in media consumption. His goal is to use research to influence the development of policy to enhance opportunities for media production and distribution by marginalized cultures.

This page intentionally left blank

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Richard T. Craig, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Communication at George Mason University. His research centers on mass media political economy; addressing the production, distribution, and consumption of media content. He takes particular interest in exploring the social structure/struggle embedded in media production and interpreted in media consumption. His goal is to use research to influence the development of policy to enhance opportunities for media production and distribution by marginalized cultures.

Leah P. Hunter is an Assistant Professor in the School of Journalism & Graphic Communication at Florida A&M University. She earned her PhD in Media Communication Studies from Florida State University, MS in Broadcasting & Film from Boston University, and Bachelor's degree in Black Studies with a Psychology minor from Oberlin College. Before entering academia, she worked in the television and film industries. Notable companies she worked for include Whitney Houston's BrownHouse Productions, Spike Lee's 40 Acres & a Mule Filmworks, MTV Films and CBS Network. She has authored and co-authored a number of publications on media diversity and policy, assessment, and student achievement. She has published chapters on Tyler Perry's manipulation of his core audience in *The Problematic Tyler Perry*, the viability of Bounce TV in *Race and Contention in 21st Century US Media*, and sister circles in social media in *Black Sisterhoods*. Her interests include media diversity, political economy of media, and media law and assessment.

Malav Kanuga is a Research Fellow at the Media, Inequality and Change Center at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania and Rutgers University. He is a Cultural Anthropologist trained in ethnographic and archival studies of space, culture, and power, as well as uneven development in an internationalist and historical framework. As an Urban Researcher and an Activist, his work on the cultures and histories of popular mobilization and imagination attends to the articulations and resistances to domination and hierarchy in the urban and social life worlds of racial capitalism.

Allison Perlman is Associate Professor of History and Film and Media Studies at the University of California, Irvine. She is the Author of *Public Interests: Media Advocacy and Struggles Over U.S Television* (Rutgers UP, 2016).

Jason A. Smith, PhD, is an Affiliate Faculty with the Center for Social Science Research at George Mason University and Member of the Justice 21 Committee with the Society for the Study of Social Problems. His research focuses on race and media exclusion. Previous research has been published in *Sociology of Race & Ethnicity, Ethnic & Racial Studies*, *Studies in Media & Communication*, *The International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*, and the *Journal of Black Studies*. He previously edited the volume *Race and Contention in Twenty-First Century U.S. Media*, along with issues of *Information, Communication & Society* and the *International Journal of Communication*.

1

MERGING THE SUBFIELDS OF RACIALIZATION AND MEDIA POLICY

JASON A. SMITH AND RICHARD T. CRAIG

ABSTRACT

Racialization is an important concept when looking at structural mechanisms that perpetuate racial inequalities. The State, and its various organizational spaces of action, is often seen as a site for race to be enacted. Policy sectors such as housing, education, taxation, and immigration have been ripe areas of research that reflect this. However, media policy research has not effectively engaged with this critical conception. Media policy research has been driven by political economy perspectives within the field of Mass Communication and Media Studies, and can benefit from an approach that analyzes it in relation to social science perspectives that focus on processes which constitute, or are constituted by, actors, groups, and organizations. Our hope is that future researchers will find this volume useful in further developing critical studies of media policy that take into account race as a social force.

Keywords: Racialization; media policy; Sociology; communications; media studies; media regulation

Racialization is an important concept when looking at structural mechanisms that perpetuate racial inequalities. The State, and its various organizational spaces of action, is often seen as a site for race to be enacted. Policy sectors

such as housing, education, taxation, and immigration have been ripe areas of research which reflect this. However, media policy research has not effectively engaged with this critical conception. We are not focused on race as a variable within media policy discussions. Rather, we are more concerned with racism as a system of power relations that perpetuate inequitable outcomes for particular groups across racial categories. Media policy research has been driven by political economy perspectives within the field of Mass Communication and Media Studies, and can benefit from an approach that analyzes it in relation to social science perspectives that focus on processes which constitute, or are constituted by, actors, groups, and organizations.

Media policy here refers to ideologies and activities that contribute to the policy-making processes of organizations that collectively make up the larger institutional structure of the media. Governmental, commercial, and civic locations all constitute the way our media landscape is shaped. For the purposes of this volume, we leverage a loose definition of "media policy" as it enables both an avoidance of fetishism and avenues for further research. In our initial call for papers to this volume we found ourselves having to pivot from the lack of scholarship that revolved around race and media policy. The Emerald Points series has given us an academic nook to put forth three case studies of racialization and media policy. As a burgeoning area of scholarship, lacking a definitive, or normative, definition of media policy is meant to set parameters for future work that studies racialized media policy issues. In the remaining part of our introduction, we will establish these parameters through outlining some of the scholarship surrounding racialization and racialized organizations, media policy as a subfield and its various approaches, and concluding with a section that outlines what racializing media policy contributes. Our hope is that future researchers will find this volume useful in further developing critical studies of media policy that take into account race as a social force.

RACIALIZATION

Within the social sciences, particularly Sociology, racialization is a concept that articulates how groups of people and individuals become defined by race. Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States* remains a key text in the racialization literature and anchoring point for the study of it. They define racialization as an "extension of racial meaning" to previously unclassified relationships, which contributes to racial projects that organize social structures along racial lines (2014, pp. 109 & 124).

Racialization can be both imposed to enact racial hierarchies and a self-identifying act from groups to resist racial hierarchies. A major focus in research on racialization is the recognition of process. As part of racial projects, racialization is continually ongoing and adapts to a given set of social, political, and economic conditions.

In a recent assessment of the racialization literature in the United States, Herbert Gans (2017) calls attention to researchers' focus on mapping racialization as a process, who and whom is racialized, the causes and effects of racialization, social class positioning, and intersectionality. Within the various ways that racialization has been carried out among social scientists, a key thread throughout is a focus on addressing racial inequality. The underlying power dynamics that come with naming indicate a structural position to be analyzed and assessed. The processes in which projects of racialization become institutionalized require determining which groups define terms, historical and contemporary starting points, and the economic and political processes that overlap (Gans, 2017, p. 343). Such determination requires a focus on mechanisms – properties and actions that bring about an observable outcome – that enable observation and explanation (Gonzales-Sobrino & Gross, 2019; Hughey, Embrick, & Doane, 2015).

Racialized Organizations

Racial inequalities in the United States persist through processes larger than individualized perceptions, ideologies, and actions based on race. A great deal of research has theorized and demonstrated how institutional racism pervades and reaffirms life chances for various groups that have been racialized (see Golash-Boza, 2016). Whether through the larger institutional sphere of the State (Bracey, 2015) or various organizational locations (Wooten & Couloute, 2017), the autonomy of both to exert power when challenged is the focus. Omi and Winant's original conception of racial formation treated organization loosely, centering on identity formation and interactions, yet racial formations and racialization take on a different emphasis when studied within institutions or organizations (Saperstein, Penner, & Light, 2013, p. 367).

Organizations are meso-level sites of research that together will constitute a larger institution. For example, the media as an institution is composed of various organizational bodies and actors that additionally cut across institutional boundary lines. Focusing on the organization as a discursive construction, Gail Fairhurst and Linda Putnam (2004) call attention to the

capital "D" Discourse of organizations that refers to "general and enduring systems of thought … that order and naturalize the world in particular ways" (p. 8). Communications scholarship has thus focused on the organization as an object, as becoming, and grounded in action. Respectively, these three orientations put emphasis on the status of the organization as an entity, the emergent and organizing properties of discourse, and continuous actions that constitute the organization. This approach highlights the need to not view organizations, or their discourses, as solely end-products but allows researchers to take into account organizational autonomy in the outcomes that are observed and studied.

Importantly, for the purposes of this volume here, Victor Ray (2019) has defined racialized organizations as "meso-level social structures that limit the personal agency and collective efficacy of subordinate racial groups while magnifying the agency of the dominant group" (p. 36). Ray outlines four tenets for racialized organizations that highlight how (1) racial groups' agency is either enhanced or diminished; (2) unequal distributions of resources are legitimized; (3) whiteness as default is a credential; and (4) formalized rules, commitments, or objectives are decoupled from addressing racial inequality. It is within organizations that cognitive schemas connect to established rules that produce social and material outcomes. Organizational foundations, hierarchies, and processes are building blocks for revealing racialized organizations.

The rich theorizing provided by the organizational scholarship listed above provides directional paths for scholars to engage in racialization and media policy studies. Within the space(s) of media policy-making, racialized organization theory is particularly useful for racialization studies to account for the ways that both State policy and individualized attitudes funnel through organizational spaces that support or challenge a larger racialized social system (Ray, 2019, p. 47).

MEDIA POLICY AS A SUBFIELD

Media policy as a subfield of academic study finds itself most in tune with disciplines such as Mass Communications, Media Studies, Media Industries, and Law. Sociology has had limited engagement with media policy – although the discipline has seen a growing interest and concern with digital and information-based studies on the broader structuring and interaction patterns within society (see Daniels, Gregory, & Cottom, 2017). The clear distinction of a media policy subfield is also somewhat convoluted as the interdisciplinary nature of it is forced to reckon with multiple disciplinary

viewpoints, and their associated theoretical anchorings. In the early 2000s, Sandra Braman (2004) stated the difficulties in defining the subfield and called attention to its overlap with any law and regulation dealing with information production and, more minutely, the ways in which the general public was mediated.

More recently, in his effort to clearly delineate media and communications policy-making, Robert Picard (2020) notes how the subfield has been historically disorganized due to the diverse academic disciplines that have shaped research on it. As a way to organize these efforts he offers four types of policy fields within media and communications:

1. Media policy is concerned with the industries and enterprises that produce and distribute content.
2. Communications policy focuses on systemic technologies, infrastructures, platforms, and content distribution systems and networks.
3. Information policy focuses on the flow and processing of information.
4. Telecommunications policy refers to telephony and broadcasting (separate from media policy as the focus within telecommunications is related to communication platforms' properties and economic bases).

These efforts to outline media policy have directional merit when engaging in the academic study of media policy. Braman's viewpoint was focused on what media policy meant for the law and legal studies. Likewise, Picard's viewpoint centers on a policy-driven perspective, aimed at helping scholarship inform policymaking. Scholars within media policy studies have argued for the need for academic research to inform media policy issues utilizing the tools of the social sciences and humanities (Smith, Lloyd, & Pickard, 2015), as well as developing learning experiences and developing media policy education (Lentz, 2014). These positions are both valuable and contribute to scholarship within media policy studies, including our own, yet define a normative, and limited, space for where policy exists. Due to his focus on policy, law, and regulations, Picard's four types of policy fields center the focus of academic research within the governance of political systems – State policymaking and its related principles that create policy effects. Yet studies of governance, and the organizational components and its associated actor groups, have fractured in the twenty-first century to account for a number of challenges that have questioned the spaces in which politics take place, radical societal uncertainties, the role of difference and identity, and interdependencies among groups (see Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003). Maria Michalis (2021) calls out that in response to various media policy-related concerns – such as neoliberal economic policies, surveillance capitalism, the

concentration of global platforms, and dis-information – media policy has begun to be reconceptualized as social policy, that is, media policy-related fields and issues are no longer isolated to industry-specific concerns.

Media policy requires a bit of breathing room. To fully capture the various complexities that might be entangled with media policy we should be careful not to fall into what Des Freedman (2015) calls "media policy fetishism." By critiquing the "neutrality" of policy-making processes and the associated power structures within, Freedman demystifies media policy in an effort to guide research that promotes a capacity for change. In order to avoid this fetishism, Freedman recommends that we avoid insulating questions of policy from content and creative practices and the spaces from which they flow. Research should also reconnect media policy to the publics in which policies were enacted for and/or upon. Lastly, media policy work should challenge the policymaking process to include not solely governmental or corporate interest, but a public interest. In this regard, media policy is not concerned *primarily* with Picard's view of policymaking rooted solely in political systems, but "needs to be considered in relation to media reform and social change" more broadly (Freedman, p. 109).

Approaches to Media Policy

Approaches to media policy tend to fall within three frameworks: political economy, discursive spaces, and social movement research. A political economy approach to media policy studies is one of the more classic and foundational approaches within the subfield that focuses on power relations. Representing a "totality" – macro-level – approach, attention to political and economic influences on policy processes and decisions are heavy (Mosco, 2009). Official locations regarding media policy-making are central sites of study. These official sites for policymaking are subject to requirements that call for a need to meet both economic and social objectives for a society (Napoli, 2001), generating tensions for analysis. For example, when looking at media consolidation, Allen Hammond (2016) notes the tripartite regulatory overlap between governmental agencies consisting of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Federal Trade Commission, and the Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice – sites prone to lobbying and revolving-door hiring practices between industry and agencies that undermine public interest obligations. Larger structural conditions shape media policy focus areas and outcomes – with political economists noting a largely neoliberal, market-focused pull on policy decisions (Blevins & Martinez, 2010; Gandy, 1998; Lloyd, 2006).

Media policy as a discursive space highlights interactions within the organizational locations of policy work, additionally reflecting the cultural turn in Communications and Sociological research that focuses on the meaning-making capacities within organizations. A common theme to this approach is a focus on language, its uses, and how different actor groups come to collective efforts. For example, discursive approaches focused on the official locations of media policy work highlight the influence that non-experts might have in cocreating legitimate policy (Gangadharan, 2009). Looking at the interpretive communities within media policy-making, Thomas Streeter (1996) highlighted that it was not necessarily the physical locations that dictate the space for policy action, but the relational dynamics that existed between those involved in policy that constitute the space. Additionally, the "vernacular" aspects of media policy (Kirkpatrick, 2013) call attention to the bottom-up approaches that account for diverse locations and groups outside of official policy locations.

Social movements as an object of study have grown more pronounced within the social sciences. In relation to media policy it is a burgeoning area of inquiry that highlights engagement and actor groups once left out of political processes and the locations of those processes. Allison Perlman (2016) draws a distinction between media advocacy and media activism. The first calling attention to reform and change through official policy channels, the latter through external pressures on media industries. Movement actors operate in, and across, multiple locations. Defining media at the margins, Clemencia Rodríguez (2017) calls out how media activism is localized and media itself is transformed from what might be expected. By focusing on the communication needs and uses of communities our definition of media technologies, their processes, and pathways for change become broader and more complex. Within social-movement-focused research we see how outsiders might push in on media policy locations, as well as challenge what is typically seen *as* media policy-related issues. For example, social movement actors have turned various issues, such as representation and content (Montgomery, 1989) and employment (Gutiérrez, 2019) within television, into normative concerns of media policy. Social movement actors engage in official policy spaces to initiate change in these examples. This has demonstrated the capacity for groups to shift attention, discourse, and action on agenda items once overlooked. A growing focus within this approach will be the blurring of social problems that movement actors bring to the table, the location of the table, and what might be considered media policy.

The approaches above are not singularly isolated from one another within media policy studies. There are degrees of overlap. As Streeter (2013, p. 492)

notes, discursive approaches are not merely "activists' tricks" to be employed by social movement groups for political means, but when combined with history and political economy can provide insights to how power is exercised within policy processes. From the macro totality of political economy, to the meso-organization of discursive spaces, and the agency-oriented approach of social movements, media policy studies help articulate the construction of our modern media systems. Less-clearly articulated has been the role of race within media policy studies.

RACIALIZING MEDIA POLICY

As we called out earlier in our introduction, "racialized organizations" is a useful framework for assessing racial inequality regarding media policy. Minority ownership, employment, and access have been three major focus points for media policy regarding racial inequities (see Gandy, 1998; the "minority" designation has been the traditional labeling and framing within policy and academic literatures). However, direct studies regarding the process of racialization are few and far between within media policy studies. Highlighting the mechanisms within media policy locations, the discursive practices that shape outcomes, and various actor groups involved point toward a more sustained ability to critically assess power relations regarding racial inequality within media policy spheres of influence.

A number of scholars have wrestled with racial inequality within the media system through a focus on media policy. Yet the articulation of racialization processes is uneven. For example, Byerly, Park, Miles, and The Howard Media Group (2019) reflect the critical position of political economists that challenge the neutrality of policymaking by explicitly calling for race- and gender-conscious policies that would advocate for more diversity of broadcast ownership. This earlier assessment is a trail marker regarding Ray's (2019) call to challenge the neutrality of organizations regarding race and decision-making processes. Still focusing on broadcast ownership, and in an opposite direction within the political economic framework from Byerly et al., Jeffrey Blevins and Karla Martinez (2010) claim that the FCC is not racist, as it was in the past, but "wrapped up in neoliberal economic thinking" (p. 230). Due to this neoliberal position that media policy is currently situated in, media reformers should rest their position not on race-conscious policy efforts but "holistic" views of media policy such as media ownership and consolidation. Lost in this positioning is the race-neutrality assumed by media policy locations, where legitimate processes are decoupled with direct calls for racial equity (Ray, 2019).