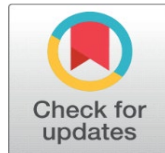
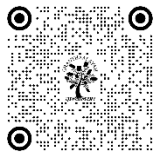


# OBLITERATING THE PRECONCEIVED PERCEPTIONS OF MASS MEDIA IN RICHARD WRIGHT'S *NATIVE SON* AND RALPH ELLISON'S *INVISIBLE MAN*

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## DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i4.2024.4442](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i4.2024.4442)

**Funding:** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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## ABSTRACT

Media grabs its place in the cockpit for the safe operation of the aircraft stacked with fragile human cognition. The facade of media exhibits its role as leverage in presenting the communal advancement of contriving, nourishing or hampering the notions of universal solidarity. The cogent strategy of media to helm curiosity on the way to and away from the prominent issues under consideration constantly determines and conditions which affair has to be ignited and which has to be extinguished within the society. This chosen or targeted issue that procures notability holds the main cord in manipulating human thoughts about the social, philosophical and political spin-offs. Whatever might be its form whether print, broadcast, cyberspace or out-of-home; the ramifications of its metamorphosis remain a knotty question since antiquity. Considerable theorists and critics uphold media to be perilous advocacy that is to be tamed intending to achieve egalitarianism. These approaches sort to unearth the forthright and expeditious influence on sustainable or passive readers and audiences which gets manifested by the 'magic bullet theory.' This article peregrinates through the underrepresentation of the marginalized groups and to be specific the stereotypical depiction of blacks by the media and its dire consequences that electrocute the white minds to capsize the interracial bonds. Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* disclose the aspects and various forms of media that throws their claws upon a specific race. On exhibiting such realities, this article tries to bring into existence this long-shrouded motive behind the stereotypical fabrication of the white psyche.

**Keywords:** Egalitarianism, Passive Readers, Media, Manipulating, Underrepresentation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Media and its upshots hail its consumers with enticing content on social, political and economic transitions. Experiencing media in all phases and aspects of life, the human populace comes in a grip with it either in a detached or critical state. The historical framework of media that records the euphoric developments from its 17th-century traditional form to its recent digital space has drastically transmuted the world. Media shoulders dual responsibilities, namely accountability and transparency. When this duo evinces polarities, the performance of the media in uprooting and scrutinizing the prevailing issues gets manipulated. Regarding these responsibilities, Sundaram claims, "The entertainment media, both the big and small screens, has a social responsibility, but of late, I find that caution has been thrown to the winds" (2). Consequently, media is speculated to have chronic effects on every individual's demeanour that far and wide ruin the healthy social construct.

Media literacy that encompasses mass communication, one of the main branches of media studies, holds the presumption that media and its constituents hold remarkable and strapping effects. From its incipient stage to this progressive cyber world, the major task for concern is the 'media effects' on the psyche of the masses and its potency for virtue or vice in the course of action. Perse states, "In general, media effects are usually described as cognitive, effective, or behavioural" (3). To begin with, the cognitive effects are extremely solicitous about the acquisition of the media content or information. This when examined brings in the interrogations of what is inoculated, and how the ideas are constructed and reconstructed in the gray matter. In addition to the cognitive effects, the affective effects encapsulate the impassioned responses to media content and the germination of fear and anxiety towards any object or occurrence as a result of the violent or stereotyped approach of media. Lastly, the behavioural effects are much concerned about the misanthropic or philanthropic behaviour in the communal world. Such behavioural changes and their responses by media consumers get propounded by the 'hypodermic needle theory' or 'magic bullet theory.'

Early researches on media, during the 1920s and 1930s, a huge part of which was based on stimuli-response psychology, presumes vigorous media effects escorting to magic bullet theory or hypodermic needle approach. The hypodermic needle theory is highly discernible when a media content or any data is jabbed under the dermis of the recipient. This theory is considered to be the direct outcome of the inception of the radio broadcasting technology that made it feasible to reach the ear of the audience and its early observations cling onto the impacts of the Nazi propaganda.

The Nazi leaders' use of radio for blatant propaganda purposes, as well as the more democratically motivated use by U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt of radio addresses to the nation, gave rise to widespread concern that it would become possible for those in power to transform the citizens into mere puppets. At the same time the hypodermic needle theory was inspired by influential sociological theories that the modern mass-society individual was lonely, vulnerable, and easily manipulated. (Littlejohn and Foss 64)

The authors who were shell-shocked by the prospects of media as a potential catalyst for propaganda during the teetering period of World War II reflect those impacts through their seminal works that include Gordon Allport and Hadley Cantril's *The Psychology of Radio* (1935), which scrutinizes the determining attitude of radio and social behaviour of the masses. Orson Welle's "Halloween Episode," the radio adaption of H. G. Wells's

*The World of Wars*, was broadcasted on 30 October 1938 over Columbia Broadcasting System, made the listening audience imbibe the news bulletins and this, in turn, hiked the sense of hysteria among the mass audience making them believe the invasion of Martians.

The evolution of hypodermic needle theory or Magic bullet theory is often ascribed to Harold Lasswell's *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927). Lasswell was an acclaimed scholar in the field of propaganda research and a communication theorist. The nucleus of this pioneering work was a report of Lasswell's analysis of the propaganda both in a qualitative and quantitative aspect. It also records the consumers' cognizance of the propaganda and tracks down the impact of that propaganda upon the masses. Lasswell states, "If a suspicion can be engendered against the propaganda of the government and the war party, a potent weapon of disintegration is created. The Germans complained that they were the victims of the systematic vilification by ignorant pedagogues, irresponsible politicians, and lying news mongers" (529).

The present article titled, "Obliterating the Preconceived Perceptions of Mass Media in Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*" gets flanked by dockets to be fathomed out. How does the hefty role of media regulate itself in aggrandizing or constraining the beneficial stance on cultural diversity? In what way does media ambivalence infringe the solidarity or aggravate the prevailing polarities among the human community? How does magic bullet theory emphatically express the role of media in triggering the psychic anxiety within whites by gravitating towards the black stereotypical structures? In this light, Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* drag to the pulpit the multifaceted media that fudges reality. The current study eventually tames inflation by not letting loose the philosophical basis of media ethics and responsibility theories.

The article entitled "Propaganda and Media in *Native Son*" delineates different forms of propaganda that instil fear and anxiety in the minds of the blacks. In addition, the article "How Racial Stereotypes in Popular Media Affect People – And What Hollywood can do to Become More Inclusive" logs the adverse effects of media consumption and Hollywood's depiction of gender and race bias where blacks starring as subordinate figures. On the contrary, this research paper picks out the qualitative approach by administering the magic bullet theory or hypodermic needle theory to dispense the

determining attitude of the intertwined stereotyped media and domineering whites over the fear installed black folks and strives to tame the implicit racial conspiracies through media ethics.

Centuries together analyzing the convoluted opinions and sentiments of the whites towards the African Americans in the light of media not only showcases interracial predicaments but also the inadequately conceded humanism and black hope. The exploration of several news contents, billboard advertisements, Hollywood movies and pamphlets assist to sustain the whites' racial unrest. The public concern over the traits of media leads to a "series of content analyses about violence, race and most recently gender; and . . . experiments and surveys about the 'violent' antisocial effects of media, the prosocial effects" and "the effects of racial stereotypes in the media upon the black and white children's attitudes toward race" (Tuchman 528). Media in the American world brings out the fact, that racism is considered to be a persistently penetrating notion in white America. The twinning of media and the white world is much evident for they determine each other with one accord to monitor and keep a check on the blacks. "Racial isolation heightens the importance of the messages Whites receive about Blacks from the mass media . . ." and in turn "whites control mass media organization, and . . . media productions offer a revealing indicator of the new forms of racial differentiation" (Entman 2-3). Through what means do the white sailors' helming of media, and vice versa, using the frenzied determining force can be illustrated? Wright's *Native Son* and Ellison's *Invisible Man* play their part to demonstrate the complex structure of the trio through their sturdy characters.

Wright's masterwork and indestructible monument *Native Son*, when viewed through the prism of media theory reflects miscellaneous facets within the provinces of America. The propaganda in the novel, taken for study, carries several connotations that restrict the critical and untrammelled apprehension of information and tills the psyche for passive forbearance. The novel takes its pace with the exposure of the billboard with the State's Attorney, Buckley engraved on it. The protagonist Bigger Thomas when brought into the sphere of dilemma by the author as that of Hamlet, he rambles around contemplating whether to take or not to take his job as a chauffeur under a white master. Now, Bigger enters an austere zone witnessing a signboard heavy with a boot-faced white man pointing his index finger at every black bystander making each one of them decipher his words with much consciousness. There the protagonist and his black neighbourhood look with awe at the words inscribed on it. "IF YOU BREAK THE LAW, YOU CAN'T WIN!" (Wright 43). The 'law' might be the Black Codes or the Jim Crow Law that is orchestrated to govern the black deportment. It also highlights a priori assumption about the black world epitomizing them as criminals. Buckley's dispassionate and unblinking eyes hover around with omnipresent threat. Maggard opines, "The ability to . . . control the access to information constitutes a form of cultural power" (67). The events after Mary's death bring to light the importance of the newspaper that controls the entire American activity. When the journalists arrive at Dalton's, they begin to interrogate the past and present happenings. When they put forth Jan Erlone's correspondence with Mary's murder, Britten, the private detective wants them to fill the newspaper column with the content that fascinates them, "Use your imagination" (Wright 239). The interconnectivity of Jan, a communist and Bigger, a timid black man, with the murder case becomes a portion for entertainment that blooms with imagination. Maras states, that "Objectivity is a key concept in journalism, media and communication studies. . . . Objectivity is, at the same time, a key concept for media professionals and practitioners, from broadcasters to bloggers." Maras also quotes Everette E. Dennis's key concepts of objectivity in journalism. Objectivity establishes a crucial role in "Separating facts from opinion." It presents "an emotionally detached view of the news" and strives "for fairness and

balance . . ." (Maras). Besides *Native Son*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* also enumerates the spell of media that it casts upon the uncritical recipients and the extent of the narrator's critical evaluation of the media content.

In the 'Prologue,' the black narrator addressed throughout as 'Invisible Man,' narrates an incident where he accidentally rams into a man. Sequentially, the man denominates the narrator using offensive words. Invisible Man retaliates against the blond man for his unremitting curses and words of abuse. The following day, *The Daily News* brought into his view the picture of the anonymous blond man with whom he entered into a fray. He then devoured the newspaper and located the caption beneath the portrait "stating that he had been mugged" (Ellison 5). Was the blond man 'mugged?' Was the news story cooked up as the victim was victimized by a black? After scrutinizing the content, Invisible Man was carried forward by an intense contemplation, "Poor fool, poor blind fool, I thought with sincere compassion, mugged by an invisible man!" (Ellison 5). Such propaganda cultivates pre-judgmental notions within whites over blacks. After the death of Brother Clifton, one of the most productive Brotherhood committee members, there were venting of social riots in Harlem and thereabouts. The narrator who has now acquired a position in the committee with his oratorical skill reads through the paper that lists several such chaotic events that have brightened the night. To

alleviate this civil contravention, he plans to organize the committee which is in utter dispute. He targets the skilful manipulator by drafting a letter. "I was pleased by the developments and went ahead with my plan . . . and sent an open letter to all the press denouncing them for distorting and inflating minor incidents" (Ellison 495). The former incident addressing him as a marauder made him no more a dormant recipient. He then firmly believed that society's decorum gets vandalized when the stable equilibrium topples between media ethics and humanity. Correspondingly, the narrator's initial action was to ameliorate the hasty movements of media that would conciliate the minds of the riotous mass audiences.

The present research has patrolled the correlatives that alley media's public outlook with media discourse. It has also pulverized the media's steady bombardment of racial fear and falsification to squash out the concealed propulsion that exacerbates the prevailing physical and psychological demarcation between whites and Native Americans. The role given to magic bullet theory as a metallic fastener, a kind of leverage to the article, lay bare the scalding magma with media and a huge populace as its components. This helps to hypothesize and after gradual analysis land over a universal panacea. The perpetual remedy is enkindled by media ethics theory. Critical judgement of the media-consuming public would be the initial advancement to strengthen the desired goal of attaining social order. The narrator in the *Invisible Man* was walloped by the misrepresented news content about himself, which transformed him into a harbinger warning media against its biased ideas.

The prodigious tree of media is not grounded in the soil by a single tap root system but by the fibrous ethical system that includes morality, impartiality, fairness, accuracy, timeliness, social responsibility, appropriateness, objectivity, practicality and accountability. The beginning of the 1970s marked the implementation or establishment of several media ethical codes. The New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) was a formal extensive effort to carry forward equitable presentations of media information. Enactment of several other policies and orderliness in regulating and dispensing the collected data ought not to remain effective only at the time of implementation but even in every adverse circumstance. To reckon with the hypodermic needle approach that presents the crumbled realities and media ethics theory that settles social unease with befitting counteractions have to be in accordance to materialize the harmonious cosmopolitanism.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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