

Framed

Media and the Coverage of Race
in Canadian Politics

..... Erin Tolley



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Media and the Coverage of Race in Canadian Politics

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Introduction

“Race is there, and it is a constant. You’re tired of hearing about it? Imagine how f---ing exhausting it is living it.”

– Jon Stewart, *The Daily Show*

In the summer of 2014, a white police officer in the city of Ferguson, Missouri, shot and killed an unarmed black teenager named Michael Brown. The incident set off a series of protests and brought into stark relief long-standing racial tensions in the United States. Although early news stories ran a photo of Brown in a cap and gown at his graduation ceremony, a number of outlets later switched to an image of the teenager in a basketball jersey making what some thought was a gang-related gesture. Americans took to Twitter using the hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown to ask whether in a similar situation the media would depict them as thugs and criminals or as parents, military personnel, and college graduates. Although some Canadians watched the news from Ferguson in solidarity, many overlooked that this country also has a complicated history with racial diversity. Writing for *Maclean's* about attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples, Scott Gilmore (2015) notes that Canada does have a race problem that, while we do not admit it, is much worse than the situation in the United States. He places the blame squarely on Canadians “for not paying attention. For believing our own hype about inclusion. For looking down our noses at America and ignorantly thinking, ‘That would never happen here.’ For not acknowledging Canada has a race problem.”

Yes, we celebrate multicultural festivals, the fusion of “Canadian” and “ethnic” cuisine, and the success of recording artists like Drake and K’naan. Nonetheless, Canadians with racial minority backgrounds earn 81.4 cents for every dollar earned by a white Canadian (Block and Galabuzi 2011),

and a 2014 list of Canada's ten greatest heroes, determined through a poll of twelve thousand Canadians, included just one person of colour: David Suzuki (Beeby 2014). Not even our canine friends are immune, with an episode of CBC's *The Current* suggesting that black dogs are much less likely to be adopted from shelters than their lighter-hued counterparts. And until recently, an Alberta fertility clinic prohibited clients from selecting a sperm donor with a racial background different from their own because, in the words of the clinic's executive director, these "rainbow families" would deny children a "cultural connection" with their parents (Barrett 2014).

Lawrence Hill, a Canadian author whose father was black and mother was white, "dissects the interrogation process" that individuals with apparently non-white backgrounds often face:

Imagine me at a party, sipping mineral water. A stranger walks up.

Stranger: "Do you mind me asking where you're from?" [This is code for "What is your race?"]

Me: "Canada." [This is code for "Screw off."]

Stranger: "Yes, but you know, where are you really from?" [This is code for "You know what I mean, so why are trying to make me come out and say it?"]

Me: "I come from the foreign and distant metropolis of Newmarket. That's Newmarket, Ontario, my place of birth." [Code for "I'm not letting you off the hook, buster."]

Stranger: "But your place of origin? Your parents? What are your parents?" [Code for, "I want to know your race, but this is making me feel very uncomfortable because somehow I'm not supposed to ask that question."] (quoted in Khoo 2007)

As Hill points out, Canadians do not openly discuss race, but they nonetheless continue to see it. Race, race-based difference, and racial prejudice persist, often in pernicious and subtle ways, but are there all the same. If one message emerges in the pages that follow, it is that race still matters.

Thinking Racially

Those who study racial prejudice argue that its structure and form have changed over time. Today's racism has been characterized as "discrimination

without prejudice” in that it is based on racially grounded assumptions about what is normal or acceptable rather than on systematic, institutionalized propaganda aimed at shaping citizens’ behaviour and views of one race as superior to others (Fleras 2011, 134). This racism tends to manifest itself simultaneously as the *tolerance* of racial minorities – not their acceptance or inclusion – in concert with a denial of the continued significance of race (Perigoie and Eid 2014). This form of racial prejudice has been variously called “everyday racism,” “incognizant racism,” and “modern racism.” These terms are more or less synonymous, but I have opted to use “modern racism.”

Theories of modern racism suggest that citizens, institutions, and organizational cultures are conditioned by racial views, norms, and beliefs that are so deeply entrenched as to be invisible, implicit, and encoded (Campbell 1995; Citrin, Green, and Sears 1990; Fleras 2011; Fleras and Kunz 2001; Henry and Tator 2002). To understand modern racism, it is useful to consider the distinction between *acting racistly* and *thinking racially*. Traditionally, people have considered blatantly prejudicial acts as evidence of racism. As societies have grown attuned to the idea that racism is wrong, however, these sorts of blatant acts have declined or at least become less evident, with citizens much less likely to act overtly on racist impulses. This does not mean that people do not notice or think about race, but merely that they rarely behave in openly racist ways.

The persistence of racial thinking is the cornerstone of modern racism. Those with racially prejudiced beliefs may not act overtly on these beliefs but may still harbour an antipathy towards minorities or avoid those whom they deem to be culturally different (Fleras and Kunz 2001). Modern racism is not the ethnic slurs and racist jokes of the past, but is instead manifest in subtle actions, such as a reluctance to hire an employee with a “foreign” accent, discomfort sitting next to a black man on a bus, or a belief that Asian Canadians are naturally hard workers. Modern racists tend not to recognize systemic biases, but instead prefer explanations that centre on the individual (Fleras 2012; Son Hing 2013). The discourse around “hard work” instead of “handouts” is illustrative of this tendency because it indicts individuals who live in poverty rather than probing the institutional and societal factors that may have contributed to this condition. The blame is laid at the feet of purportedly lazy welfare recipients, while all but ignoring the impact of mental illness, economic conditions, disability, race, and gender. Modern racism is subtle, not always clearly or specifically articulated in racial terms,

and often so ingrained in institutional practices and discourses as to be virtually imperceptible, and even appear as common sense.

Many resist the idea that societies continue to harbour racist sentiments, perhaps because this is not consistent with practices and policies that have been adopted to address inequalities. Even the word itself – “racism” – engenders defensiveness. These skeptics point to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canada’s reputation as a peaceful, multicultural country, and our history of immigration. That Canada has an official story of inclusion and is committed to democracy, quality, and fairness does not mean that its citizens do not also have negative feelings about racial diversity or engage in racial thinking (Henry and Tator 2002). Indeed, Canada’s pride in its multiculturalism and racial tolerance actually obscures the extent and influence of racial thinking. As Entman and Rojecki (2000, 1) put it, “The public face of race is now cloaked in a chameleon-like form, an ever-changing camouflage that obscures its force.”

In this book, I draw a distinction between racism – blatant and overt acts premised on a feeling of racial superiority – and the more implicit and often unconscious acts of racialization and race differentiation. Some will disagree with this distinction, arguing that the explicit and implicit acts both constitute racism. Certainly their effects are often the same, whether intended or not. However, because the research compiled for this study does not allow me to impute motive, I set intent aside. I look instead at how racialization is embedded and articulated in media coverage and explore the implications of this race differentiation.

Race Matters

I engage in a study of race even though scholars have largely rejected the idea that race has a scientific basis. Racial classification is arbitrary, fluid, and has often been used to nefarious ends. That race is socially constructed does not diminish its power, however. Racial differentiation is real and persistent. I follow Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki (2000, 242n211), who argue, “We can develop critique and understanding with the simultaneous knowledge that sorting people into ‘races’ based on skin colour is neither scientifically real nor morally desirable.” We cannot erase the salience of race by simply referring to its imagined quality, nor should the acknowledgment of that social construction stop us from examining it. Race and racial discourse structure institutions, perceptions, and human interactions.

For those labelled visible minorities, the salience of race is abundantly clear. Canada's census and the Employment Equity Act define visible minorities as individuals "who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" excluding Aboriginal peoples (Statistics Canada 2007). Visible minority groups thus include Canadians with Chinese, South Asian, black, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Arab, West Asian, Korean, and Japanese origins. The term "visible minority" has been criticized not only because it uses whiteness as the standard against which to judge other races (United Nations 2007), but also because it reifies racial distinctions and classifications. I employ the terms "visible minority" and "racial minority" with some reservation but do so because these are the labels most commonly used by the media, public institutions, and in the collection of official data.

Conversely, I use the term "white" to describe those who are not visible minorities or Aboriginal peoples. Within this category, I include individuals with non-British and non-French European origins, such as Ukrainian or Italian, who are often referred to as "ethnic minorities." A former director of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, Manoly Lupul (1983), distinguishes ethnic minorities from visible minorities, labeling the latter the "real minorities." He notes that because ethnic minorities are "undistinguishable in external appearance and therefore socially invisible, [their main concern] is language and cultural retention and development; the main concern of the real minorities, the socially visible peoples, is to shield themselves from the worst ravages of racism" (104). Although ethnic minorities have historically faced discrimination, the gap between them and other Canadians was arguably always smaller than that between white and non-white Canadians and, moreover, it has narrowed over time. Because of their lighter skin, ethnic minorities are more easily able to blend in and may facilitate this process by altering their surnames, adopting so-called Canadian traditions, or concealing their accents. It is thus race, not ethnicity, that marks some of the most significant disparities among Canadians.

Determining who is a visible minority and who is not is admittedly fraught terrain. The categories that I employ are based on perceived racial identities, which I have ascribed using cues such as a candidate's skin colour, in much the same way that voters determine who is a racial minority and who is not. This is a strategy that scholars have rightly critiqued. Indeed, orienting this study around an externally imposed definition of racial minority status has the effect of "giving the power of racial definition to the observer and objectifying the racial subject" (Thompson 2008, 537).

Paradoxically, then, while taking issue with racialization in the media, this study simultaneously legitimizes the very racialized categories that underpin that portrayal. This study also presents racial status as dichotomous – one is either visible minority or white – and thus does not engage with the complexity of these labels nor explore mixed-race identities (Mahtani 2014). Critical race scholars are doing important discursive work that challenges this approach (Dhamoon 2009; Razack, Smith, and Thobani 2010; Thobani 2007), but this book’s strategy is somewhat different. I begin with the premise that while racial ascription and categorization are problematic, individuals and institutions routinely engage in it. Instead of ignoring this activity, I confront it. By describing, quantifying, and theorizing the ways in which media coverage of visible minorities differs from that of their white counterparts, I work to provide an empirical rebuttal to those who say that race does not matter. The visible minority/white binary is simplistic, to be sure, but its strategic deployment brings into stark relief the racial differentiation that persists in the media and in politics. This book provides persuasive evidence of the durability, significance, and effects of racial differentiation.

One thing this study does not examine is the media’s coverage of Aboriginal people in politics, a choice that merits some explanation. Given the economic, social, and political disparities faced by Aboriginal people, many might assume that their experiences would be included in a book about race, the media, and politics in Canada. However, while Aboriginals and visible minorities may collectively possess a “minority” identity, their separate histories, cultural heritage, political aspirations, and claims on the state are all very different. Many Aboriginal people would balk at being included in a study of visible minorities, because they do not see their place in Canada’s political system – nor their experiences of racism – as at all analogous. While the media’s coverage of Aboriginal people in politics deserves examination, a point to which I return in the concluding chapter, it is inappropriate to lump all this diversity into a single study. As a result, I focus here on visible minorities.

Racial Diversity in Canadian Politics

In Canada, questions about social pluralism and identity have historically been oriented around issues of language, ethnicity, culture, and class, with territorially based claims and concerns about Quebec nationalism having primacy (Nath 2011; Wilson 1993). This orientation is a reflection of the

country's federalism, a mechanism that grants rights on the basis of geography, as well as the constitutional recognition of two founding nations. For this reason, Seymour Wilson (1993, 648) refers to Canada not as a mosaic, but as a "smelting pot" with "English and French both assuming totemic significance in subsuming all the other cultural and racial groupings." Even the adoption of multiculturalism – the showpiece of Canadian diversity policy – was more about the protection of linguistic and cultural rights than about racial pluralism. The federal government is said to have pushed in the 1960s for bilingualism within a multicultural framework in an effort to dilute the claims of Quebec nationalists while appeasing ethnic minorities – primarily those of Eastern European origin – who were unhappy about the dualistic assumptions that underpinned initiatives to strengthen Quebec's place in the federation (Haque 2012; Kymlicka 2012; Lupul 1983).

These foci are reproduced in the political science literature, which has been relatively silent on questions of race (Thompson 2008; Wilson 1993). This silence is not simply a reflection of societal preferences, but also a disciplinary lag; sociologists and historians have devoted comparatively more attention to racial pluralism than have their counterparts in political science (Thompson 2008). The lack of attention to race can be observed in the American and British political science literature as well as in Canada, suggesting there is something particular to the discipline over and above cross-national differences in history, social demography, and institutional configurations (Thompson 2014; Wilson and Frasure 2007). The explanation can be found, in part, in the liberal tradition that underpins Western political thought, which assumes a neutral state interacting with homogenous political subjects (read: white, able-bodied, heterosexual, and male) (Vickers 2002). Nonetheless, Nisha Nath (2011) notes that the American and British traditions have vibrant race studies and race relations programs, in contrast to the Canadian field, where race has been deactivated or decoded as "ethnicity" or "culture." In other words, the lack of attention to race is particularly acute in Canadian political science.

This erasure is partly a function of Canada's deracialized founding narrative – centring as it does on our white English and French forefathers – and the related tendency towards institutional theories of political development, which downplay the significance of other interests or social groupings (Nath 2011). In her examination of the relative sidelining of race in Canadian political science, Debra Thompson (2008) suggests that not

only is race a conceptually difficult variable to measure, but it is typically overlooked in studies that focus on formal political involvement and elite-driven explanations of politics because racially marginalized actors have historically been excluded from formal political arenas. This book marries these two challenges in that it focuses explicitly on race – not ethnicity or culture – and examines the impact of race on elites in an electoral context. Some will argue that I do not fully overcome the conceptual and measurement challenges inherent in such an endeavour, but this orientation nonetheless contributes a new race-based dimension to our understanding of the media and electoral politics in Canada.

Given that Canada's political arena has been dominated by able-bodied, middle-aged, white men, it is somewhat surprising that scholars have not looked more closely at how race affects political behaviour. Although women, minorities, and other traditionally marginalized Canadians are beginning to gain an electoral foothold, a scan of the House of Commons during question period or a quick glance at the official photograph of a newly sworn-in cabinet suggests that those who occupy the corridors of power do not fully mirror those who occupy our coffee shops, our street corners, and our supermarkets. Following the 2011 federal election, 9.4 percent of members of Parliament were visible minorities, an uptick from the 7 percent who held office following the 2008 federal election, but still well below the 19.1 percent of visible minorities who make up the Canadian population. To achieve a Parliament that roughly mirrors the country's racial diversity, Canadians would need to elect about twice as many visible minority candidates.

There are a number of explanations for this numerical underrepresentation. One explanation relates to candidate supply, including visible minorities' willingness to run for public office, their qualifications and credentials, and the networks and financial resources available to facilitate their run for office. Although Canadians with visible minority backgrounds are less likely than others to vote (Jedwab 2006; Reitz and Banerjee 2007),¹ they nonetheless demonstrate levels of political interest and knowledge that are equivalent to or even higher than those of other Canadians (Gidengil et al. 2004). This suggests that some untapped political potential may exist within the visible minority population. It also raises questions about why this apparent political efficacy has not fully translated into political engagement.

Given that visible minorities express an interest in, and some knowledge about, Canadian politics, it is simplistic to conclude that they are not elected to office because they are unwilling to run. In recent years, the proportion of

visible minorities who run in federal elections has hovered between 9.0 and 10.1 percent of all candidacies (Black 2013). These candidates tend to be as qualified as – if not more so than – their white counterparts, with many holding impressive educational and occupational credentials, as well as substantial records of service to their communities (Andrew et al. 2008). That said, while visible minority Canadians can be found across all employment categories, they are underrepresented in corporate leadership positions, the legal profession, and in the judiciary (Cukier et al. 2014), all of which are “feeder occupations” for the political arena. We thus need to give some thought to other sorts of barriers that may limit the supply of visible minority candidates. These include conflicting priorities, such as busy careers or a need to work multiple jobs, limited access to the financial resources required to contest public office, or difficulty building the networks that underpin success in the electoral arena. Because many visible minorities are also recent immigrants to Canada, some of these barriers may be a function of this migration experience. However, we should not simply assume that the gap in political representation will close as visible minorities become more comfortable in their adopted home. Some research in fact suggests that it is second-generation visible minorities – those who have been born and raised in Canada – who express the greatest sense of exclusion (Reitz et al. 2009).

We must also consider the demand for visible minority candidates, including parties’ recruitment strategies, the openness of nomination contests, the willingness of party elites to run visible minority candidates in competitive ridings, and the extent to which voters are comfortable voting for visible minorities. These barriers to electoral office may have lowered in recent years, as parties recognize the value of putting forward diverse candidate slates (Marwah, Triadafilopoulos, and White 2013; Tolley 2013). That said, efforts to nominate visible minorities have been inconsistent across parties and over elections, and there is some evidence that visible minorities tend to be placed on the ballot in ridings in which the party is less competitive (Black 2013). Parties also tend to confine visible minority candidacies to the most diverse ridings – those where the visible minority population exceeds 30 percent – which places a ceiling on the number of diverse candidates vying for election at any given time (Black and Hicks 2006).

Evidence of voter bias against visible minority candidates comes to some mixed conclusions, depending on how researchers have examined the question. Those who have looked at actual electoral outcomes have found that, all other factors being equal, Canadians show little reluctance to vote

for minority candidates (Black and Erickson 2006; Tossutti and Najem 2002). This is not necessarily because of an absence of racial prejudice, but simply because other factors, like party affiliation or preference for a particular leader, tend to override considerations related to a candidate's race (or gender, for that matter). However, the potential shortcoming of an observational approach – one that looks simply at the surface relationship between candidate race and electoral outcome – is summarized by the authors of one such study, who note that because they looked only at aggregate results, they cannot “necessarily rule out discrimination on the part of voters” (Black and Erickson 2006, 549). When researchers have probed voters' actual feelings about visible minority candidates, the conclusions are more mixed.

In one public opinion survey, 79 percent of Canadians said they would be less likely to vote for a party if its leader were black, 78 percent would be less likely if the leader were Jewish, 71 percent if the leader were Aboriginal, and 63 percent if the leader were Muslim; 71 percent said they would be less likely to vote for a party led by a woman (CRIC 2004). That a majority of Canadians admit that a leader's race or gender could decrease their support for a political party shows that such characteristics continue to matter. Other researchers have used experimental methods to understand the calculus behind vote choice. These studies have similarly shown a connection between candidate race and voter preference, with most voters tending to prefer candidates whose ethnocultural background mirrors their own (Bird 2011; Tolley and Goodyear-Grant 2014). Canadians' apparent preference for politicians like themselves could be a function of racial prejudice, or it could be grounded in less nefarious assumptions about the extent to which politicians with characteristics similar to our own will listen to us, understand our issues, and advocate on our behalf.

That said, parties have made a number of efforts to engage so-called ethnic Canadians in the political process. Strategies to shore up the support and participation of immigrant and minority voters have been particularly evident within the Conservative Party of Canada, although other parties – both federally and provincially – have pursued similar strategies (Black and Hicks 2008; Harell 2013; Palmer 2013; Tolley 2013). Efforts include targeted policy measures, attendance at ethnic events and festivals, and outreach through the so-called ethnic press. Although some have decried these initiatives as cynical narrowcasting, these strategies have nonetheless increased the attention given to immigrant and visible minority voters and, if

nothing else, fostered the perception that these voters are important political players. The media have been instrumental in this regard, penning numerous articles that draw attention to the “wooing of the ethnic vote” (Canadian Press 2011; Ditchburn 2006; Ibbitson and Friesen 2010; Leblanc 2007; MacCharles 2008). These stories provide a frame of reference for understanding diversity in a political context.

Connecting, Shaping, Mirroring: The Role of the News Media

This book positions the media as a vital link in the citizen-politics relationship. We can think of the media as having at least three roles in this relationship. Here, I draw attention to the media as a connector, a shaper, and a mirror.

MEDIA AS A CONNECTOR

Apart from our family and friends, the media are one of our primary sources of information about politics (Gidengil et al. 2004). It is from the media that we learn about political issues, actors, and events. The media help to connect us to political life and play a key role in educating us about the world around us. Nonetheless, Augie Fleras and Jean Kunz (2001, 53) argue that “mainstream media do not exist to inform or entertain or even to persuade ... Mainstream media are first and foremost business ventures whose devotion to the bottom line is geared towards bolstering advertising revenues by attracting audiences and securing ratings.” While media do play an important informational and educative role, this function is sustained through advertising, even at public broadcasters such as the CBC. Audiences are drawn in by the unexpected, the shocking, the titillating, and the novel, and media organizations structure their content to attract market share and advertising revenues. Conflict, drama, social impact, novelty, magnitude, proximity, timeliness, brevity, and visual attractiveness are all considered when deciding what constitutes news (Johnson-Cartee 2005). The outcome of these decisions influences the issues, events, and actors to which news consumers will be connected.

This of course raises questions about who is doing the connecting, in that the characteristics of those who oversee media outlets may influence judgment on what matters. In this respect, the leadership cadre of Canada’s media organizations provides a fairly stark profile of homogeneity. For example, a 2010 study of media organizations in the Greater Toronto Area found that

visible minorities are underrepresented on boards of directors, occupying just 6.1 percent of all seats even though they make up approximately 40 percent of the GTA's population (Cukier et al. 2010). Looking nationally, Postmedia Network owns ten of the country's largest daily newspapers, including the *National Post*, *Montreal Gazette*, *Ottawa Citizen*, *Vancouver Sun*, and *Vancouver Province*. On its board of directors are eight men and two women, all white (Postmedia 2014). The *Globe and Mail*, Canada's English-language newspaper of record, is controlled by the Woodbridge Company, the investment vehicle of David and Peter Thomson, who are multi-billionaires and members of Canada's richest family (Heaven 2009). Meanwhile, Rogers Media is controlled by the estate of Ted Rogers and owns *Maclean's*, *L'actualité*, *Chatelaine*, and *Canadian Business*, as well as fifty-six radio stations, seven CityTV stations, and a number of specialty channels (Rogers Media 2015a). Its board of directors consists of five women and eleven men, none of whom are visible minorities (Rogers Media 2015b). Rogers's thirteen-person executive team is entirely male, but does include two visible minorities (Rogers Media 2015c). Finally, Quebecor Media, which is controlled by the Péladeau family, owns forty-three daily newspapers and 250 community newsweeklies, in addition to TVA and Vidéotron, respectively Quebec's most profitable television network and its largest cable company (Lange 2008; Quebecor 2012). Quebecor's eight-person board of directors includes two women, one of whom serves as the chairperson; all members are white (Quebecor 2015a). The members of its ten-person management committee are all white, although half are women (Quebecor 2015b).

The homogeneity observed at the media's corporate level is similarly reproduced at the working level of reporters and editors.² Women occupy about just one-third of editorial positions in Canadian print newsrooms, and more than three-quarters of English-language national columnists are men (Smith 2015). In one of the largest demographic profiles of the Canadian newspaper, television, and radio sector ever conducted, David Pritchard and Florian Sauvageau (1999) found that just 3 percent of journalists had minority racial backgrounds. Although this number may have increased somewhat in the ensuing years, several more recent case studies suggest that any improvements have been marginal. For example, in the Greater Toronto Area, Cukier et al.'s (2010) study revealed that just 5.9 percent of newsroom editors and producers were visible minorities; among senior management, the proportion dropped to 3.6 percent. A 2005 study of Canadian television news directors found that 90 percent were white, while in 2006 just 6 percent

of the CBC's employees were visible minorities (Barber and Rauhala 2005; MediaSmarts 2012b). Meanwhile, John Miller and Caron Court's (2004) cross-Canada survey of daily newspapers found that visible minorities and Aboriginal people represent just 3.4 percent of news staff in Canada.³

On *The National's* "Media Watch" panel, commentator Jeet Heer, himself a visible minority, noted, "The media in North America is ridiculously white – it's whiter than snow, it's whiter than cocaine – and that creates a certain set of biases or assumptions as to what's relevant" (January 20, 2015). In her interviews with female journalists in Canada, Vivian Smith (2015) highlights their status as outsiders, a situation that diminishes attention to issues like social justice, poverty, and health, and which prompts a number to in fact leave the profession. While newsroom diversity may not *on its own* lead to more inclusive coverage, it does send a message about the importance of including diverse perspectives and connecting Canadians to a wide range of beliefs and voices (Pease, Smith, and Subervi 2001). The media are not passive facilitators but instead help shape how we see the world around us.

MEDIA AS A SHAPER

The media play an active role in determining which stories are covered, how subjects are portrayed, and the standards by which events, issues, and personalities are understood and evaluated. In connecting us to the world, the media are thus gatekeepers that funnel the political universe into a limited selection of stories. This selection of stories is framed by a particular – often narrow – set of interpretative lenses. Gatekeeping theory suggests that the media determine which information citizens will receive and how it will be conveyed (Donohue, Olien, and Tichenor 1989; Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien 1972; Shoemaker and Vos 2009). The genesis of this literature was a study by David Manning White (1950) that followed the work of "Mr. Gates," a newspaper wire editor, over a one-week period in 1949. White compared the wire stories that Gates received to those that actually appeared in the newspaper; he coupled this with Gates's written explanations as to why a story was published or discarded. White found that the decision to run a story is in fact "highly subjective" (386). Gates's personal evaluation of a story – particularly his assessment of its truthfulness – was the reason for one-third of the rejections; space constraints or the inclusion of other similar stories were the reasons for rejecting the rest of the stories. White notes that nearly 90 percent of the wire stories that Gates received never appeared in the paper, suggesting that media choices are not inconsequential. They

help to determine the issues, events, and actors about which citizens will learn.

Since the publication of White's pioneering study, others have expanded on and revised it, adding the work of multiple gatekeepers, categorizing types of gatekeepers, and examining structural considerations (Bass 1969; Folarin 2002; Gieber 1956). I adopt a dual individual-institutional conceptualization of gatekeeping, which is in line with Steve Chibnall's (1977, 6) observation that "the reporter does not go out gathering news, picking up stories as if they were fallen apples, [s]he creates news stories by selecting fragments of information from the mass of raw data [s]he receives and organizing them in a conventional journalistic format." This conceptualization underscores the media's role not simply as a reflector, which I discuss below, but just as importantly as a shaper. Media choices determine not just what constitutes a story, but also how this story will be told. As Lydia Miljan and Barry Cooper (2003, ix) note, "Stories are told from perspectives: that is not an accident or effect, but the essence of stories." In short, the media set the agenda and prime Canadians to think about particular issues, actors, or events in certain ways.

Research on media effects has evolved, with scholars debating the relative strength of effects – whether powerful or minimal – as well as the conditions under which these effects will take hold (Neuman and Guggenheim 2011). Early studies focused on propaganda and persuasion, and tried to establish a direct causal link between media messages and citizen behaviour (Lasswell 1930). This model often depicted the media as a hypodermic needle, with messages being directly and powerfully "injected" into consumers. Over time, researchers began to look for more nuanced accounts of media effects. Many of these frameworks suggested that the media have limited effects on audiences because citizens select the media they consume, choose the messages they retain, and opt to interpret them in any number of ways (Klapper 1960). According to minimal effects models, personal and social characteristics circumscribe the media's effect on consumers. As media saturation grew, however, researchers began to argue that selective exposure was no longer possible.

The third stage of research returns to the idea that the media can have powerful effects and tries to demonstrate these using new methodological tools and better measurement (Neuman and Guggenheim 2011). Many of these accounts look at the cumulative effects of the media, and argue that media messages have the potential to focus attention on certain issues, alter

public opinion, influence behaviour and emotions, or legitimize particular responses or directions (McQuail 1994; Soroka 2003; Werder 2009). The effects can be significant when the messages are ubiquitous, uniform, and repeated over time (Noelle-Neumann 1973). While under some conditions, there will be no effects or the effects will not be absolute, media coverage matters overall because it has the potential to affect how citizens view the world, the criteria they use to evaluate issues, and the decisions at which they ultimately arrive (McCombs and Shaw 1972; Patterson 1993). The media influence which issues are on the agenda, how the public will judge those issues, and the schema through which we will understand the world around us. These theoretical frameworks are referred to as agenda-setting, priming, and framing.

Writing about the media's agenda-setting role, Robert Hackett (2001, 199) argues, "Through their ability to focus public attention on some events and issues, and away from others, the media influence public perceptions of what exists, what is important, what is good and valuable, what is bad and threatening, and what is related to what." The agenda-setting literature hypothesizes that when an item is accorded more prominence or space, audiences will give it more significance or importance when they make decisions (Cohen 1963; Lippmann 1922; McCombs and Shaw 1972). Although agenda-setting studies often focus on the ways in which *issues* are made salient, a new body of work examining the salience of *attributes* is emerging. Each issue, event, or actor has a number of features or qualities, and the media make choices about which attributes to highlight. In turn, this attribute agenda influences voters' evaluations of the subjects in question.

Even if the intent is benign or subconscious, the ways that the media present subjects and the attributes on which they choose to focus have an impact on how citizens view those subjects. As Maxwell McCombs, Esteban Lopez-Escobar, and Juan Pablo Llamas (2000, 78) point out, "Both the selection by journalists of objects for attention and the selection of attributes for detailing the pictures of these objects are powerful agenda-setting roles." In their research, they found a strong positive relationship between the attributes highlighted by the media when presenting political candidates and those mentioned by voters when describing those candidates. Similarly, results from an experimental study by Catherine Lemarier-Saulnier and Thierry Giasson (2015) suggest that when voters read a news article with a gendered frame, they are more likely to evaluate it using gendered criteria or descriptors. In other words, how the media choose to frame candidates – the

language that they use, the qualities that they highlight, and the features that they leave out – does influence how voters think about those candidates. This influence is sometimes referred to as priming. This body of research argues that by highlighting certain attributes, the media make those criteria more accessible and may prime citizens to consider them more seriously when making their decisions (Iyengar and Kinder 1987).

The issues and attributes that are made salient through agenda-setting and priming can be thought of as the story's frame. A frame is the angle, schema, or narrative arc that journalists use to highlight one or more aspects of an event, issue, or actor (Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 1997). Frames refer to the elements that are included, excluded, emphasized, or downplayed when a story is reported on (Gitlin 1980). They are a way of simplifying and organizing information in a manner that helps citizens understand the features, characteristics, or attributes that are most important. We can distinguish between substantive frames, which focus on policy issues, problems, and possible solutions, on the one hand, and procedural frames, which evaluate "political actors' legitimacy based on their technique, success, and representativeness" on the other (Entman 2004, 5–6). The most recognizable frame used in political news coverage is the game frame, which focuses on tactics, strategy, and the horse race. Stories about who is leading, or slumping, in the polls fall squarely within the game frame. Substantive frames are much less common, with the media routinely devoting less attention to policy discussion than to the "battle" (Farnsworth et al. 2007).

Frames are necessary if we are to understand the complex and unfamiliar world around us. Nonetheless, they alter the weight and relevance that is accorded to a given consideration or angle and thus "promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman 1993, 52). In the next chapter, I will discuss some of the frames that the media use when reporting on candidates in electoral politics. The key point here is that in choosing what to cover and how to cover it, the media help to shape our understanding of the world. This understanding is, of course, grounded in the real world, which brings us to the media's third role, that of a mirror.

MEDIA AS A MIRROR

The media have been said to hold up a "mirror to society," reflecting the events and issues of the day (Gans 1979; McQuail 2010). Although the image has been popular among journalists because it carries the implication of

fair and accurate reporting, others have suggested that news is in fact a reflection of the interplay between journalists and the subjects that they cover. In this way, the media are a “distorted mirror” (Taras 1990). This is not to say that the news is a work of fiction, but rather that it is a construction or interpretation of reality (Schudson 1989). How the news is told – and indeed what constitutes news itself – is determined by the media. This process is influenced by an understanding of the narratives that will resonate with the public. As Robert Hackett (2001, 202) argues: “The news draws from, and contributes to, the values and assumptions of its surrounding culture.” These assumptions are premised on a positioning of media audiences as consumers, not citizens. Consumers are differentiated by their purchasing power and are thus not equal; this distinction imbues inequality into the media system (Hackett 2001).

A recognition of systemic inequality runs headlong into the notion of journalistic objectivity. Objectivity requires journalists to adopt a position of neutrality or independence, to report on facts, to present stories fairly and accurately, and to strive for balance in the representation of issues and subjects (Donsbach and Klett 1993). Although objectivity figures prominently in discussions about journalistic responsibility, the concept is itself contested. Robert Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao (1998, 87) argue that “objectivity disguises and denies how the culturally conditioned gaze of the observer helps to construct that which is observed.” When we describe the media as “objective,” we ignore journalists’ situatedness in society, as well as the evaluation and interpretation in which they must routinely engage. While objectivity serves as a “normative ideal,” a perfect reflection is not attainable (Hackett and Zhao 1998, 83). The twin realities of inequality and imperfection determine the image that is eventually reflected by the media mirror.

Day-to-day pressures and practicalities of newsmaking also influence how the news is fashioned. Journalists face deadlines and space limitations that can affect which stories get told, which ones are set aside, who is asked to provide background or opinion, how detailed an item is, and even the page on which it will appear. Time constraints can limit the depth of reporting, and stories may as a result be oversimplified or only partially explored. Editors may encourage this tendency by narrowing the angle or removing complicated details (Randall 2000). Stereotypes, symbols, caricatures, and other rhetorical devices may be employed as shortcuts or for added “colour” (Campbell 1995). The sources on whom journalists rely may be limited by time pressures, familiarity, or challenges building connections with new

interlocutors; these limits can constrain the range of voices and perspectives that inform a news article or report (Randall 2000; Taras 1990).

Stories that are deemed newsworthy are the ones most likely to be told, which means that most news items include an element of the unexpected. That which is “commonplace” rarely appears in the media precisely because it is not striking, significant, or surprising enough. Reality is thus framed through a media-centric perspective about which stories are worth telling (Fleras 2011). This perspective is in part influenced by news judgment, journalistic routines, and organizational behaviour, but also by what the media predict citizens will believe, tune into, and accept. In this way, the framing of news stories reflects, reinforces, and refashions reality. According to Augie Fleras (2011, 36), “Mainstream media are neither neutral nor value-free. Rather, they are so loaded with deeply embedded ideas and ideals about what is normal and acceptable with respect to race, gender, and class that media representations of diversities and difference are invariably raced, gendered, Eurocentric, and classed.” Such representations are not a function of wilful racism, sexism, or classism on the part of the media, but rather a function of the racialized, gendered, and classed society of which the media are a part.

While the mirror that the media hold up may be somewhat distorted or partial, the images they are reflecting are nonetheless images that we have created and condoned. It is for this reason that understanding the media’s portrayal of race is so important: not only does it tell us something about the media but also something about ourselves.

Framing the Argument

This book provides the first extended study of the media’s coverage of race in Canadian politics. It explores the racialized frames that emerge in political news coverage and looks at the extent to which these mirror and manufacture reality. It examines the contextual nature of racialized coverage by looking at a number of factors, including candidate gender, political party affiliation, and the diversity of the ridings in which candidates run. It investigates candidates’ own views on media coverage and race in politics. It sheds light on the work that journalists do, the constraints that they face, and how they think about covering stories about diversity. Finally, it raises questions about the media’s role in shaping views about race, inclusion, and democratic politics.

Motivating this study is a desire to understand the extent to which the media's coverage of Canadian politics is differentiated by the race of its subjects. Are visible minority candidates covered differently from their white counterparts? Is their coverage less frequent, more negative, or less prominent? How does a candidate's race influence the portrayal of their qualifications, policy interests, and socio-demographic background? And do candidates' gender, party affiliation, or political experience affect the racialization of their media coverage in any way? These questions are probed in Chapters 2 and 3, which are based on an examination of more than 1,380 news stories in two periods: during the 2008 federal election, and a longitudinal analysis extending from 1993 to 2013. I find that candidate race influences both the *form* and the *focus* of media coverage.

Visible minority candidates' coverage is systematically and substantively different from that of white candidates. This is particularly so for non-incumbent visible minority candidates; these candidates must, in effect, prove themselves as electoral contenders before being taken as seriously as their white counterparts. Female candidates face a similar barrier to entry, which raises questions about how intersecting identities affect media coverage. How do the media portray candidates when they possess race and gender identities that are often marginalized in the political arena? What frames characterize the coverage of visible minority women? Are these frames different from those that have been identified in the coverage of white women? What gendered and racialized narratives are apparent?

To complement the aggregate, quantitative media study presented in Chapter 2, I also use an intersectional and discursive approach to examine the media's coverage of visible minority women in politics. Chapter 3 thus shows the more implicit ways in which media coverage can be both gendered and racialized. By analyzing the language, imagery, and rhetorical strategies used in the political news coverage of visible minority women, this approach breaks down silos that have emerged in research on gender and race in Canadian politics. Although women have made some cracks in the proverbial glass ceiling, I argue that the gendered and racialized discourses that characterize the media's coverage of visible minority women in politics indicate the durability of what I call the "stained glass ceiling." To fully understand the experiences of these women, we must go beyond "whitestream" accounts, which are often silent on the impact of race and other markers of diversity.

Integral to this study is the development of a new theoretical framework for understanding the media's coverage of race in politics. This book advances a theory of racial mediation: rather than being neutral reflectors of the political sphere, journalists act as mediators, making choices about story selection, presentation, and framing. I argue that while a number of factors influence these choices, the race of electoral candidates is among them. Race provides a cue or angle around which stories are oriented, which results in coverage that is racially differentiated. Situating my discussion of racial mediation within the literatures on political communication and race studies – and drawing on existing studies of gendered mediation – I introduce the frames through which information about candidates' socio-demographic background, political viability, and policy interests are communicated, often in racialized ways.

The book moves beyond media outputs, however, to look at the inputs that result in the coverage that we see. Chapter 4, in particular, is a response to the assertion – raised anecdotally as well as in the literature – that to the extent that media coverage is racialized, this is largely a reflection of how candidates present themselves. This claim has some basis: candidates provide the raw ingredients for the framing of their backgrounds, political qualifications, and policy interests. However, media portrayals are not purely a function of self-presentation. Based on my interviews with members of Parliament, former candidates, and political staffers, I argue that while all public figures engage in some degree of strategic self-presentation, their media portrayals are not a perfect reflection of the images that they project. Rather, mediation is occurring, and candidate race is one factor in the relationship between self-presentation and media portrayal. When a story involves a visible minority candidate, media coverage will often emphasize the diversity angle, through a focus on socio-demographics, minority issues, novelty, unexpectedness, or unlikelihood. The media are not passive reflectors; race and racialized assumptions affect media coverage.

Why is that so? Do assumptions about race influence news judgment, story selection, and framing? Are media institutions and practices inherently racialized? And what guidelines or training do journalists receive to help them cover stories about race? Chapter 5 delves into these questions. I discuss the institutionalization of whiteness and argue that the media are embedded in cultural norms that privilege – often implicitly – majority and mainstream representations, practices, and beliefs. Media choices are not

isolated. Rather, they occur within a broader societal context that is foregrounded by an assumption of whiteness as standard. The media are not solely responsible, but nor are their choices neutral. In representing diversity as exotic and newsworthy, the media help to shape perceptions and attitudes about race. These choices are at the heart of racial mediation.

A series of interviews with journalists, discussed in Chapter 5, provides rich insights into the factors that affect story selection and framing, the complexities and nuance of news judgment, and the impact of diversity on news coverage. Among the journalists with whom I spoke, there was almost no evidence of blatant racism. Nonetheless, many downplayed the potential impact of race on their news judgment, reporting, and coverage. Several suggested that the media's commitment to fairness and accuracy means that coverage is, in essence, colour-blind. Given that my own analysis of media portrayals found some fairly persuasive patterns of racial differentiation, this lack of self-reflection on the impact of race and diversity was somewhat surprising. It was less so when I looked at guidelines and training for reporting on diversity. In general, race and diversity are not well covered in the curriculum at Canadian journalism schools, and journalists receive minimal workplace training about reporting on these topics. Guidelines produced by the Canadian Press and at the newsroom level are imprecise and open to interpretation. Interviewees confirmed this, but also noted that exercising judgment is an important part of being a journalist. Journalists are not robots, and the stories they tell have many facets, different layers, and varying interpretations. It is telling, however, that when a story does include a visible minority subject, its form, focus and framing are different – and importantly, more racialized – from a similar story about a white subject.

The media's portrayal of race has negative effects on public discourse, electoral representation, and democracy in Canada. As I detail in Chapter 1, racialized coverage can influence voters' decision making, discourage potential candidates from running for office, hamper the recruitment of a diverse candidate slate, and diminish the achievement of equality in the electoral arena. I return to this point in the book's conclusion, where I argue that politics are not race-neutral. Race influences media coverage, political aspirations and experiences, and the exercise of democracy. Visible minorities are portrayed differently from their white counterparts and can expect their news coverage to be framed according to stereotypical assumptions about their socio-demographic backgrounds, viability, and policy expertise.

Nevertheless, our discourse is marked by a profound silence about the effects of race, the persistence of racialization, and the potential for racially based thinking to colour our judgment. Instead of confronting the persistent racial gaps that characterize the practice of politics, we mythologize multiculturalism and resort to tropes about colour-blindness, equality, and inclusion.

I argue that when we see racialized coverage, we should not simply blame the media. Indeed, to understand the relationship between race and politics in Canada, we must cast our gaze much more broadly and consider how political parties, candidates, and the public contribute to the continued salience of race. Each of us plays a role in the patterns identified in this book. In the conclusion, I offer some suggestions to counter racial mediation. This grounding is an important practical contribution of the study, but my prognosis is somewhat grim. While some measures can be taken to produce political news coverage that is less racialized, widespread change really demands a cultural shift. We need to acknowledge racial thinking, problematize race-differentiated coverage, and resist racialized assumptions about diversity, minorities, and politics in Canada. This shift requires an honesty and openness that Canadians have thus far been reluctant to embrace. As a result, visible minorities suffer, as do our democratic institutions, which remain only partially representative and devoid of the full range of diversity that so many of us proudly claim as quintessentially Canadian.