



## Black men and the police

Elena Georgievski

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## MEMOIRE

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**Black men and the police: the case of Brooklyn Nine-Nine.**



*Brooklyn Nine-Nine Logo, Wikipédia. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brooklyn\_Nine-Nine, [last accessed 10 May 2021].*

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**Session de juin 2021**

## DECLARATION DE NON-PLAGIAT

Je soussignée, Elena Georgievski déclare que ce mémoire est le fruit d'un travail de recherche personnel et que personne d'autre que moi ne peut s'en approprier tout ou partie.

J'ai conscience que les propos empruntés à d'autres auteurs ou autrices doivent être obligatoirement cités, figurer entre guillemets, et être référencés dans une note de bas de page.

J'étaye mon travail de recherche par des écrits systématiquement référencés selon une bibliographie précise, présente dans ce mémoire.

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A Besançon le 17 mai 2021

Georgievski Elena

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Elena Georgievski".

## **REMERCLEMENT**

Je tiens à remercier Adrienne BOUTANG qui m'a aidé pendant ces deux ans à faire ce mémoire, et m'a soutenu dans mes idées et mes projets pour le futur, ainsi que Pascale GUIBERT qui a bien volontiers accepté de co-diriger ce mémoire afin que je puisse avoir la possibilité de réaliser un doctorat comme je l'avais rêvé. Vous m'avez permis de réaliser le projet que je souhaitais pour ce mémoire et je vous en suis reconnaissante.

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## Introduction

On May 25, 2020, two officers of the Minneapolis Police Department killed a man during his arrestation, holding him down for more than eight minutes. His last words “I can’t breathe” became one of the emblems of a movement against police brutality that reached every continent, movement also known as Black Lives Matter (BLM). From Minneapolis, to Seoul, South Korea, passing by Paris, France, the name “George Floyd” was chanted, synonym of the police’s failure to protect its citizens. Unfortunately, George Floyd is not the only American citizen to have died from police brutality that year, that month or even that day.

According to the website *Mapping Police Violence*, in 2020 alone, the police have killed 897 people, rendering the total of people killed by the police since 2013 to 8544.<sup>1</sup> This number of deaths by police violence is certainly the biggest of any economically developed countries in the world, far above European and Asian countries. According to the IOPC (Independent Office for Police Conduct), which oversees the police complaints system in England and Wales, there has been 43 fatal shootings by the police since 2004.<sup>2</sup> This clearly shows the issue of police violence against all American citizens, but looking at the data more closely, minorities are far more likely to be killed by the police than white Americans. Of this total of 8544 people killed in the U.S., 25% of them were black although the black population represent only 13% of the U.S. population. This means that black people are three times more likely to be killed by the police than white people.

The U.S. has a singular social context: deeply rooted in racism due to the centuries of oppression, it is also a country with a complexly diverse population, developed by centuries of immigration and known for its multiculturalism. Contrary to Europe, who ignored or dismissed the ideas of different ethnicities living on the continent until recently, the USA always integrated this facet of their population to their politics. Political ideas and the government were created with a hierarchy of people in mind, based on their

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<sup>1</sup> *Mapping Police Violence*, This is the Movement, [mappingpoliceviolence.org](http://mappingpoliceviolence.org), [last accessed 24 May 2021].

<sup>2</sup> *Independent Office for Police Conduct*, “Annual Deaths during or Following Police Contact Statistics”, [www.policeconduct.gov.uk/research-and-learning/statistics/annual-deaths-during-or-following-police-contact-statistics](http://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/research-and-learning/statistics/annual-deaths-during-or-following-police-contact-statistics), 2020, [last accessed 10 May 2021].

ethnicities, and American culture is deeply inspired by black culture whether Americans recognize it or not.<sup>3</sup> In the United States, the term ‘minority’ is often associated to race (the term “race” is used in this essay, as it represents an important part in the American society and construction of concept of ethnic minority, however, it is a social construction that is subjective to the individual and is not considered to be a valid scientific term). Due to the ‘one drop’ of blood rule that is specific to the U.S., children born from a multiracial relationship, regardless of whether they had European ancestry too, were identified as black. The same applied to Native Americans, who still today, can claim Native ancestry with only 1/64<sup>th</sup> of indigenous blood. Consequently, the media representation of minorities in America is complex and dates to the beginning of the twentieth century, far earlier than France for example, where minorities started to be represented on television only in the 1980s.<sup>4</sup>

According to Schermerhorn’s characterization<sup>5</sup>, there are four types of groups in a society: the majority, the mass subjects, the elite, and the minorities. The majority consists of those who have size (numeric representation) and power in society (political power, economical power...). The mass subjects are those with size, but not power, whereas the elite is the opposite (power but not size). Those who have neither size nor power are called minorities. But this characterization is unclear when we apply the notion of intersectionality: the accumulation of multiple social categorizations (race, social class, gender identity, sexual orientation...). A queer white woman will not face the same discrimination as a queer black woman, because adding to sexism and homophobia both can experience, the queer black woman will experience racism as well. Therefore, I will use the term ‘minority’ loosely and consider as a minority people who are not white straight cis men.

In this essay, I will study how minorities are represented on television in the United States, focusing on the sitcom genre. Media reproduce the social reality the audience witnesses in real life (social class, ethnic and racial division in society, etc.). The

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<sup>3</sup> Hall, Stuart, and Maxime Cervulle, *Identités et cultures: politiques des cultural studies*, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Hargreaves, Alec G., « Les Minorités dans les séries de TV : une évolution par à-coups », *Africultures*, n°97.1, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Goldmann, Gustave, “Defining and Observing Minorities: An Objective Assessment”, *Statistical Journal of the United Nations*, n°18, 2001, pp. 205–216.

specificity of television is that it is situated in the inside of the family house, compared to movies and newspaper. This means that it is one of the most widespread form of storytelling, and can touch everyone inside their homes, and can even bring forward a sense of familiarity to subjects who are not seen in the daily life of the audience. Nowadays, television has budgets and revenues that sometimes exceed those of the movie industry. With the apparition of streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime, it is one of the most accessible media for all. From shows that last more than a decade (*Supernatural*: 15 seasons, *NCIS*: 17 seasons...) to specific vocabulary created to name cultural phenomenon (binge watching: watching several episodes of a television show in a row), television shows are now extremely common, and it is rare to find someone who does not watch at least one. As I will explain later in the first part of this essay, it has been proven multiple times before that media representation is directly linked to how the population perceive minorities and even how minorities perceive themselves. Thus, television is the best media to pick samples from to see how exactly minorities are perceived and consequently represented.

Sitcoms, or situation comedies, first appeared on the radio then moved to television in the 1940s. Low budget and popular, sitcoms are composed of short episodes (around twenty minutes) that are situated in a common location (the family house, the workplace...).<sup>6</sup> It relies heavily on the characters, who must be very different from one another to create conflict in the narration. Hence the repeated use of stereotypes and archetypes in sitcoms to base their characters on. Archetypes and stereotypes are two sources of inspiration for creators, but their intermingling is problematic. They are used so that the audience understand immediately who the characters and their stories are.

Archetypes (developed by Jung when he analyzed dreams) are story characters: the hero, the villain, the lover...<sup>7</sup> They serve as “mental models”, the audience unconsciously relates to characters as they understand them, and therefore have bigger emotional response to the story. Archetypes are culturally enduring and therefore it is easy to learn and recognize them. Stereotypes on the other hand, are culturally specific. Developed by

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<sup>6</sup> Stafford, Roy, “TV Sitcoms and Gender”, *Media Education Magazine*, Riddlesden, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Kidd, Mary Anna, “Archetypes, Stereotypes and Media Representation in a Multi-Cultural Society”, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, n°236, 2016, pp. 25–28.

Lippman and defined as mental maps brains use a shortcut to understand the complexity of other people based on the little information they have, like a neutral system of classification. The modern definition, however, relates more to media representation. Negative images constantly used on specific groups lead to the audience assuming those characteristics as truth and result to social injustices. Therefore, casting archetypical characters by using stereotypes (for example: the thug is black, the innocent is a woman...) lead to a negative image of these groups in real life.<sup>8</sup> Stafford add a third type beside the archetype (long established characters that dates back to folk tales, like the “clown”) and stereotypes (social typing of the characters based on traits such as gender and ethnicity): the generic type. This last type is also seen as a “guest star” and a transient character that serves purpose for one narrative in one episode only.

The difference between a “fully rounded” and a stereotyped or character is the development of the character in the media: they must have a “background or ‘back story’ and a personality displaying a complex array of values and emotions”. Sitcoms tend to have archetypes and stereotyped characters, especially in their beginnings. This can be explained by the conservativeness of the sitcom genre: the characters are always in the same “situation” (workplace, family house) and the conflict ends at the end of every episode. As sitcoms can have a lot of seasons, the main characters can be considered “rounded characters” as they can display a variety of emotions and their background deepens with the seasons.

Sitcoms can also comment on stereotypes for narrative conflict, which describes the current period of the sitcom: a joke about a character’s situation, race, gender or sexual orientation is similar to a social commentary on the current situation and will reveal the period during which it aired. As Stafford writes “commentary on the stereotype provides with plenty of narrative conflict and if accurately observed can ‘capture’ a sense of the ‘now’”.<sup>9</sup> By undermining or accepting stereotypes, sitcoms can explore the “dynamics of social interaction”.<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to see what kind of jokes, stereotypes and social

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<sup>8</sup> Stafford, pp. 6-7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

commentaries are made and used on television today to see the current real-life social situation represented in media.

In his essay intitled “*Trapped in a Generic Closet: Black Cast Television sitcoms and Black Gay men*”, Martin addresses the specificities that surround the sitcom genre.<sup>11</sup> Although one of the most popular and ancient television genres, sitcoms have also been a place of segregation, and still represent one of the main genres when minorities are visible, with shows casted actors from only one minority groups. Sitcoms are based on comedy, which are linked to stereotypes because they both are impacted by the rules and social context of society, and as Martin quotes, “for many, one of the ways in which power exerts itself socially is through comedy”. Comedy can come from the improbability of the deviation of stereotypes, leading to comedic surprise, and are therefore often used in sitcoms. The fact that sitcoms use both archetypes and stereotypes to represent their characters, and the diversity found in sitcoms lead them to often being analyzed by scholars.

To see the representation of minorities in sitcoms today, from characters to their narratives, I chose to study the show *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (abbreviated *B99*). The show takes place in a police precinct. It follows the lives of Jake Peralta, Amy Santiago, Charles Boyle, Rosa Diaz, Gina Linetti, Michael Hitchcock, Norman Scully, and Terry Jeffords in New York’s nighty-nine’s fictional precinct in Brooklyn. Their lives change when their uninterested and lenient captain retires and is replaced by the hard-working and austere captain Raymond Holt. They later discover that Captain Holt is gay and faced many hardships to be the first black gay captain in New York. The most obvious reason as to why I chose this show is that the main cast itself is very diverse: two black characters, two Latin characters, three women and two queer characters. Out of the nine main characters, only four of them are white straight cis man, and one of them is part of an ethnic minority (Jake is half-Jewish).

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<sup>11</sup> Martin, Alfred Leonard Jr., *Trapped in a Generic Closet: Black-Cast Television Sitcoms and Black Gay Men*, The University of Texas, 2015.



*Poster with the main characters. From left to right: Gina Linetti, Charles Boyle, Rosa Diaz, Amy Santiago, Terry Jeffords, Raymond Holt, Jake Peralta. Michael Hitchcock and Norman Scully, the two other main characters, are not pictured, Brooklyn Nine-Nine Fandom Wiki, brooklyn99.fandom.com/wiki/Season\_Five, [last accessed 10 May 2021].*

B99 is created by Dan Goor and Michael Schur who created many other popular sitcoms (they worked together for *Parks and Recreation*, Michael Schur also produced *The Office*, *The Good Place*...) and who wrote for many shows (*Saturday Night Live* for Schur, *The Daily Show*, *Last call with Carlson Daly* and *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* for Goor). Moreover, the actors are from extremely different background: from very popular movie actors (Terry Crews in comedy action movies and Andre Braugher in dramas), to *Saturday Night Live* (Andy Samberg) and writers and/or actors of previous sitcoms (Stephanie Beatriz in *Modern Family*, Joe Lo Truglio in *Reno 911*, Chelsea Peretti wrote for *Parks and Recreation*...). This ensemble of different genre of actors is very interesting to see in a sitcom. Moreover, we will see in the second part that some of the actors directly impacted the character's portrayal.

Additionally, the show is extremely popular: it won a Golden Globe Award in 2013 after only one season. Since then, the actors have been nominated and even won multiple awards, some of them for their representation of minorities and the actors' involvement in their communities. The show even has a Canadian adaptation, called *Escouade 99* and set in Quebec City. Besides, it is one of the most popular show in today's popular culture, gifs and quotes from the show appearing constantly used in social media. When the show was cancelled in 2018, the fans (which included some celebrities like Lin Manuel Miranda, who was later invited in the show to thank him for his part in saving the series)

took over social media for one night to ask the network not to cancel, or for another to take it. Finally, NBC took over the show and immediately signed for three more seasons.

I chose to study black men specifically for numerous reasons. As said earlier, the relationship between black people and the police is currently very politically significant, with *BLM* movement. The representation of black men inside *B99* is diverse, with many main and secondary characters who fit in this category. The choice of the representation black men, and not black women for example, is also made because stereotypes surrounding black men also find their roots in white supremacy. In her book “*Black Looks: Race and Representation*”<sup>12</sup>, bell hooks writes that white supremacy actually invented the issues of black men being “‘crippled emotionally’ when they cannot fully achieve the patriarchal ideal”. Themes surrounding black masculinity, such as violence, sexuality and fatherhood, are therefore very present in the representation of black men, in order to put forward a white supremacist ideology.

To summarize, in this essay I will analyze the relationship between minorities and the police in sitcoms, using the example of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. First, I will analyze previous representation of black men on television, from when they first appeared in media to today’s situation, to see what the “traditional” representation of black men is. Then, I will study the social commentaries in *B99* to see if and how *B99* is a politically involved sitcom, and I will compare the traditional representation to the representation in *B99*, focusing on the characters of Terry Jeffords and Raymond Holt, to see if the representation is stereotyped or innovative. Finally, I will compare *B99* to other police sitcoms, to see the evolution of the relationship between the police and minorities, as well as analyze episodes of these shows that denounce the same thing: police violence against black men.

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<sup>12</sup> hooks, bell, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, Boston, South End Press, 1992, pp. 89-98.

# **1. Black Men on television: America's perception of minorities.**

In this part, I will first start by analyzing the American context of racial minorities, and especially the treatment of black men, in order to later compare it to *B99*. The show, under the comedy genre, talks about many socially relevant subjects and question's identity and power, something that the audience does not expect from an entertainment show. Because it deals with the issue of police violence, it brings forward the tensions that exist between black men and the police. In order to understand the conflicted relationship between black men, American society and the police, we will look at the works of two black activists and writers, James Baldwin and bell hooks. In their works, both authors describe their own lives, shaped by their black identity, and point out the social conflicts linking black men and the American system, shaped by white supremacy.

Then, I will analyze the general representation of black men on television and more precisely in sitcoms, from when they started to appear on screen to the situation today. Indeed, to understand the history of minority representation, one must first understand the history of minorities, especially black people, in the United States. As said earlier, a minority is a person which is not a part of the group in power (the elite) or a group in number (the majority). The groups that can be named are race or ethnicity, gender, social class, etc. In a cultural studies perspective, Stuart hall defines race as a modality through which class is lived.<sup>1</sup> It is not an abstract category which defines a group of people, but a lens through which one experiences life and that influences one's conditions of living in their everyday life. By establishing how minorities, and especially African Americans, are represented in media, we will be able to see how mainstream media dealt with the representation of black throughout history.

## **1.1. The American context: color as a political reality.**

### **1.1.1. The treatment of black men in America.**

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<sup>1</sup> Hall, 2017.

James Baldwin, famous author who fought for Black Civil Rights and the end of racial segregation, writes in his “Letter from a Region in My Mind”<sup>2</sup>, about the lives of black men in the United States and the creation of the “American Negro”.<sup>3</sup> In his letter, Baldwin both retells his own experiences, which is why he writes using the pronoun “I”, and dresses a portrait of American society, switching then to the uses of the pronoun “He”. Baldwin focuses on the differences between white and black men, which were created by white supremacy to construct a segregated country.

America has a specificity relationship to race, as “Negroes do not, strictly or legally speaking, exist in any other”. This is why the Black Muslim community in the United States, started calling black people “American Negro”. Their last names, for example, are the proof that they are products of slavery, as they were given to slaves by the white people who bought them. Baldwin defines the American Negro as such:

“I am, then, both visibly and legally the descendant of slaves in a white, Protestant country, and this is what it means to be an American Negro, this is who he is—a kidnapped pagan, who was sold like an animal and treated like one, who was once defined by the American Constitution as ‘three-fifths’ of a man, and who, according to the Dred Scott decision, had no rights that a white man was bound to respect. And today, a hundred years after his technical emancipation, he remains—with the possible exception of the American Indian—the most despised creature in his country.”<sup>4</sup>

This idea of created identity, of the “American Negro” can also be seen by the usage of the “He” instead of the “I”. It gives the reader an impression of manufactured identity, or an identity lost by black men and by Baldwin himself, who therefore have no choice but to adopt white supremacist ways of thinking of themselves as “animals” or a “creature”.

Once again, we see the impact of race on American politics, as black men were treated as “subhuman”. Therefore, since the beginning of American history, black men were considered as tools for white men, and did not deserve rights, freedom, or the respect

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<sup>2</sup> Baldwin, James, “Letter from a Region in My Mind”, *The New Yorker*, 17 November 1962, section Reflections, pp. 1–25, [www.newyorker.com/magazine/1962/11/17/letter-from-a-region-in-my-mind](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1962/11/17/letter-from-a-region-in-my-mind), [last accessed 17 Mai 2021].

<sup>3</sup> The terms “negro” and “negroes” are used in this essay to represent the specificity of the American context compared to racism against black people in other countries. However, it is recognized that the word is considered extremely offensive toward the black community.

<sup>4</sup> Baldwin, p. 19.

white men who came to the Americas wanted for themselves. Baldwin describes black people and Native Americans as the “most despised creature in his country” because both groups remind white people of what they have done in order to get power: they abused and massacred Native Americans for their land, and then stole and enslaved Africans in order to work on those lands.

The “American Negro” is unique and can only exist in America, but it also gives him the possibility to change society, through “the transcendence of the realities of color, of nations and of altars.” Baldwin uses the expression “transcendence of the realities” because if the existence of the “American Negro” is to be accepted in American society, its citizens would see beyond skin color thanks to the white and black citizens, and therefore any racial Others in America, but also go beyond nations and the world, as this phenomenon could spread to other countries who have a history of segregation and racism, and rise above religion, as Christianity is associated with whiteness and the North, whereas Islam is associated with Blackness and the South. This ideology, as we will see later, is used by some shows that are called “multicultural”, and depict a cast of characters that are diverse, but which comes with its own issues.

However, the fact that African Americans are called “American Negroes” traps them into slavery, unable to escape their past as their entire present and future condition of life in the country has roots in the enslavements of their ancestors. As Baldwin writes:

“It is only ‘the so-called American Negro’ who remains trapped, disinherited, and despised, in a nation that has kept him in bondage for nearly four hundred years and is still unable to recognize him as a human being. And the Black Muslims, along with many people who are not Muslims, no longer wish for a recognition so grudging and (should it ever be achieved) so tardy. Again, it cannot be denied that this point of view is abundantly justified by American Negro history. It is galling indeed to have stood so long, hat in hand, waiting for Americans to grow up enough to realize that you do not threaten them.”<sup>5</sup>

The reader sees the broken identity of black people once again, as even the term to describes them, “American Negro”, is made with a lot of distance (the use of quotation marks, the “so-called”). It is a way to appropriate the term but still pointing out that it

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

finds its origin in white supremacy and that black people can go beyond the “American Negro”. Baldwin also includes the reader, switching to the pronouns “you” in the last sentence. This enables the reader to be put at the same place as black people and was probably made so that Baldwin, a known black activist, appeals to his community. However, the letter was published in *The New Yorker*, which is read across the globe, and therefore reaches a very wide audience. This is similar to television shows and especially sitcoms, which air on popular television channels and have a wide range of audience, and could appeal to white people as well as black people, or be segregated to one race only.

To this day, black people in the United States can feel the consequences of white supremacy: they are trapped in the same spaces, districts and cities that are unsafe for them because of the violence from gangs and policemen alike, disinherited from both their African ancestry which they have lost because of their kidnapping and their American citizenship for being a person of color, and still despised by the white American citizens; particularly the people in power, who can openly criticize Black people who are successful, such as the former president of the United States, Donald Trump, who tweeted that several black and brown female members of government should “go back to [...] the broken and crime infested countries from which they came”. In media, black people are trapped in some well-known stereotypes such as the “sassy black woman” or the “thug”.

Baldwin describes the moment black people start to change and fight more for their rights. After the Second World War, black soldiers came back from Europe with the experience of freedom and lack of segregation from Europeans compared to racial slurs and tedious tasks they were given by their American compatriots. Baldwin even says that “German prisoners of war were treated by Americans with more dignity than [the black man] has ever received at their hands” and he was “far freer in a strange land than he has ever been at home”. Coming back “home” to a segregated place where they were treated worse than a people who had done the greatest genocide on earth and were told to wait for the white men to give them rights. Baldwin describes the sentiment shared by black people at the time:

“There is absolutely no reason to suppose that white people are better equipped to frame the laws by which I am to be governed than I am. It is entirely unacceptable

that I should have no voice in the political affairs of my own country, for I am not a ward of America; I am one of the first Americans to arrive on these shores.”<sup>6</sup>

By calling African Americans, a “ward”, and “one of the first Americans”, Baldwin gives recognition and space to his own community, who was ignored and cast aside. Indeed, the success of the United States rely heavily on its slavery and use of black labor, as well as the labor of other minorities, which allowed the country to develop successfully. But because people treat others differently based on their skin color, “color [...] is a political reality”. Being Black shifts not only the way you experience your life, but the way you will be treated in all matters, and by not having a say in political affairs of their own country, they remained governed and trapped in a subcategory of citizenship. One can also see that there is a history of black men protecting American citizens, here as soldiers, and years later, as policemen in *B99* and other police shows.

White people continue this segregation and support white supremacy because of their fear, or as Baldwin writes, “[t]he white man’s unadmitted—and apparently, to him, unspeakable—private fears and longings are projected onto the Negro.”<sup>7</sup> Baldwin blames the white American’s inability to talk about the race issues on the fear of losing their idea of superiority which is not in touch with reality. White supremacy has engraved itself in history and public perception of race, although white people represent only a minority of the world population. An example of this is the white washing of the Bible, who happens in the Middle East although all the representation of biblical figures presents them as white. But to recognize this, would mean to “be forced reexamine themselves and release themselves from many things that are not taken to be sacred, and to discard nearly all the assumptions that have been used to justify their lives and their anguish and their crimes so long.”<sup>8</sup> Baldwin does point out that white people can be unaware of how white supremacy shifted their world’s perception, but there is only so much one can blame on one’s ignorance. Indeed, Baldwin describes white people as having “lost *his* conscience”<sup>9</sup>, as they willingly chose to cast a blind eye on the issues faced by black people in the United States. The use of the pronoun “his” does not refer to the single white

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p .23.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

man responsible of the incident that led him to this thought, but to the entire group of people who share the single-minded belief of white supremacy. It could also refer to Baldwin's own lost conscience, of a black man who do not trust others because of what he experienced, which would further alienate him – and through him, all black men. To “grow up” as Baldwin wrote, is to accept that black men and women were indeed men and women, and not products to be bought and used, and by accepting that black people deserve as much rights as them, white people have to relinquish their power imbalance, which will threaten their ways of life.

This can be related, years later, to some individuals' choice of ignoring the problem brought up by Baldwin and to pretend everything is fine, which can also be seen in media. Indeed a show, especially an entertainment show like a sitcom, is not expected to represent those issues, and is praised as a liberal and forward thinking show if it chooses to do so. However, choosing not to represent issues that would directly affect the characters and their minority groups, or sugarcoating those issues, go along with the white supremacy's vision: not acknowledging the problem means there is no problem, and therefore nothing to be fixed.

The idea of white supremacy is shown through different instances in Baldwin's letter. One of the things that makes white supremacy still possible in the United States is the academic possibilities. First of all, the idea that white people can teach something to black people dates back to slavery and Christianization, where black people were seen as savages who would be lost without the help of the white world. Segregation meant that few black people could be educated, as most end up defaulting to the idea of blackness that white supremacy teaches to children. Therefore, academic and intellectual careers can be seen as out of reach for black people. This can be seen in the way Baldwin himself, although now recognized as a great writer, did not believe he could have any other path than the thugs on the streets or the priests inside the church. Even the church is a way for white supremacy to be preached and learned by black people, as:

“White people hold the power, which means that they are superior to blacks (intrinsically, that is: God decreed it so), and the world has innumerable ways of making this difference known and felt and feared. Long before the Negro child

perceives this difference, and even longer before he understands it, he has begun to react to it, he has begun to be controlled by it".<sup>10</sup>

This led to black children not reaching for the same goals and ambitions as white children. This can still be seen today with the “doll test”, which shows how children perceive lighter skin colors as “smarter” and “beautiful” and darker skin colors as “ugly” and “stupid”. In media, this can be seen by the adoption by black children of stereotypes that harm them and forbids them from being anything else than the white supremacist’s vision of the black man or woman. Even when children rise above these thoughts, they are brought back by their family who fear for them, like Baldwin says from his own experience:

“The fear that I heard in my father’s voice, for example, when he realized that I really believed I could do anything a white boy could do, and had every intention of proving it, was not at all like the fear I heard when one of us was ill or had fallen down the stairs or strayed too far from the house. It was another fear, a fear that the child, in challenging the white world’s assumptions, was putting himself in the path of destruction.”<sup>11</sup>

As said earlier, white supremacy is responsible for the perception that black men do not fit the patriarchal ideal.<sup>12</sup> This is because this patriarchal ideal is anchored in white European standards, where men were defined by their abilities to work and have money and land, whereas women stayed at home. This white European standard became the scale in which black masculinity would be measured. During slavery, black men were deprived of their manhood as they were inferior to white men and they had no freedom to act as such. Therefore, the black men of that era wished to be “hardworking men who longed to assume full patriarchal responsibility for families and kin”. Later, the movement of black liberation still based themselves on the white standards and black men wanted to assert their patriarchal, just like white men did. Black women also accepted those sexist beliefs and wished for black men to be the patriarchs of their household, although they were mainly the one working, as the stereotypes surrounding black men shifted from brute physical labor to laziness which prevented them to be employed. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most black men did not fight for equal rights for women because of the patriarchal ideals

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p .4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>12</sup> hooks, pp. 89-98.

and choose to restrict their fight for freedom to slavery. Baldwin also proves that as he explains the difficulties black men face trying to protect black women:<sup>13</sup>

*“Protect your women:* a difficult thing to do in a civilization sexually so pathetic that the white man’s masculinity depends on a denial of the masculinity of the blacks. *Protect your women:* in a civilization that emasculates the male and abuses the female, and in which, moreover, the male is forced to depend on the female’s breadwinning power. *Protect your women:* in the teeth of the white man’s boast ‘We figure we’re doing you folks a favor by pumping some white blood into your kids,’ and while facing the Southern shotgun and the Northern billy.”<sup>14</sup>

In this paragraph, which looks like a soliloquy with the anaphora of “Protect your women”, the reader can feel Baldwin, and by extension, black men’s frustration of the violence white men have on both black women and black men. They are trapped by the white standard of masculinity which obliges them to be authoritative male figures, and by White Americans, the Northern Billy Yank and the Southern Johnny Reb, in a position where it is impossible for them to protect themselves and their families.

However, as hooks tells through her own memories, black people themselves often did not fit in those standards.<sup>15</sup> In her book, hooks also cite black men who did fight for women rights along black women in order to have a “greater involvement in racial uplift [rather] than a way for black women to be autonomous and independent”. However, white supremacy gains by creating discord within the black community as “[t]hose representations of black gender relationships that perpetually pit black women and men against one another deny the complexity of our experiences and intensify mutually destructive internecine gender conflict”. It also creates discord on the subject of homosexuality, as the white European idea of masculinity has always been heterosexual and “always promoted the persecution and hatred of homosexuals.”

Black men were respected for a variety of things, not just their ability to bring money to the household. Eventually, alternative lifestyles started to admire and associate themselves with black culture; hooks takes the example of the “travelling” black man who is seen as the “quintessential embodiment of man as ‘outsider’ and ‘rebel’”. Still

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<sup>13</sup> Baldwin, p .17.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> hooks, pp. 89-98.

today, this can be seen through the LGBTQ+ community's language association of black slang, such as "tea" or "dishing". On this subject, hooks writes that:

"In every segregated black community in the United States there are adult black men married, unmarried, gay, straight, living in households where they do not assert patriarchal domination and yet live fulfilled lives, where they are not sitting around worried about castration"

Sexism in the black community is therefore anchored in white supremacy. As hooks writes: "Racial integration has had a profound impact on black gender roles. It has helped to promote a climate wherein most black women and men accept sexist notions of gender roles". If the representation of black men in media chooses not to represent those types of black masculinity and the respect these black men have from their own community, it is because they go against the vision of masculinity brought by white supremacy. Therefore, these representations question the white patriarchy and offer alternatives to it, which would diminish the patriarchal standard as an ideal.

To contradict the white supremacy ideology, Baldwin writes that "the only thing that white people have that black people need is power".<sup>16</sup> Indeed, to think that black people need to be "raised" to the level of white people implies that they lack something to begin with. However, the reason they do not get a higher education, and therefore are seen as idiots, or the reason they are not working, and therefore seen as lazy, is because white people hold power over them. This is why Baldwin talks about creating "new standards" instead of taking white people "as models of how to live". This is why he is so against the ideas that some black people push forward of a black nation separated from white Americans. Baldwin writes:

"The glorification of one race and the consequent debasement of another—or others—always has been and always will be a recipe for murder. There is no way around this. If one is permitted to treat any group of people with special disfavor because of their race or the color of their skin, there is no limit to what one will force them to endure, and, since the entire race has been mysteriously indicted, no reason not to attempt to

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<sup>16</sup> Baldwin, p. 22.

destroy it root and branch. This is precisely what the Nazis attempted. Their only originality lay in the means they used.”<sup>17</sup>

By comparing the Nazis’ wish of ethnic cleansing to the African American’s wish to live alone, Baldwin tries to shock his audience. Indeed, the two seems so different, especially for black people who wish to segregate themselves to escape the violence they suffer in white America. However, Baldwin warns that the root of the problem is not in the glorification and creation of a Black State but in the refusal of diversity, as issues will still continue even after the creation of a Black State. This can be resumed by one sentence written by Baldwin: “People are not, for example, terribly anxious to be equal (equal, after all, to what and to whom?) but they love the idea of being superior.”

Baldwin also describes the violence that black men have seen and suffered from because of white supremacy. For example, for Baldwin, the police is synonym to violence.<sup>18</sup> He describes multiple times his own encounters with them, where he was verbally and physically assaulted, so much that he started to “intimidate them before they can intimidate [him].” This shows an idea of “kill or be killed” and self-preservation toward the institution that is supposed to protect them. This distrust of the police is still something that exists today as police violence against black people still exist. By reading Baldwin’s letter, we can see how black people perceived the police: he describes them as dogs who answer to white supremacy (“this was not because they had become more human but because they were under orders and because they were afraid.”) or as children who are either afraid (“There they stood, in twos and threes and fours, in their Cub Scout uniforms and with their Cub Scout faces, totally unprepared”) or entitled to the little bit of power they have (“[I] discovered, through ugly experience, what they were like when they held the power and what they were like when you held the power.”).

Baldwin explains the expectation of black men toward white Americans by showing how differently they reacted to the holocaust in Germany<sup>19</sup>. Whereas “white people were, and are, astounded”, Baldwin explains that black people were “frightened”, as they knew by personal experience, how they were treated by white Americans especially as they

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3, p. 10, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

knew they would be no consequences, could lead to the same thing if they one day decided so. The comparison between the holocaust and the treatment of black men in America is not made to see which event is worse, but to see how one could lead to the other. The two groups who are suffering from white supremacy were both seen as not human and lived through extreme violence and an ethnic cleansing; there is after all, no black race, African men and women who came to America aboard slave ships were all part of different ethnic groups and were forced to leave their family, their language, and their culture behind.

However, for white supremacy, it is black men who are considered to be violent. Multiple times throughout his letter, Baldwin tells his own history of violence, such as the time he wished to kill his own father.<sup>20</sup> He blames this in the idea of “kill or be killed” that black people experience as they live their lives in bad neighborhoods, to the point of even risking their lives by simply going to school. Baldwin describes himself as a “little boy” running away from the “pimps and racketeers”, comparing himself to the Lamb looking for the Christ’s salvation and therefore, making the outside world a place full of wolves and sinners, who are preying on him.

Baldwin writes that “[i]n the United States, violence and heroism have been made synonymous except when it comes to blacks.” Indeed, violent movements of protest, led by Malcom X, were a lot less well received in the United States, than movements of peace led by Martin Luther King Jr. This can be because white people do not want to face consequences of the way they treated African Americans, which would make peace movements less of a trouble for them. It also furthers them into the position of a victimhood, a state of being that is applied to them, instead of revolution and manhood, a state of action and change. This is vital to the general vision of black men, especially black men who are opposed to the police. Many black man and woman thrown into jails and considered criminals because they were seen as violent by the police, when they were only fighting for their own rights. This is another difficulty to overcome in the representation of black men and the police.

The association of sexuality and black people can be seen by, first of all, the very early sexualization of Baldwin himself by adults around him, and by the white American

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7, p. 9.

needs to emasculate black men.<sup>21</sup> He tells himself multiple times throughout the text that he has been afraid of how people look at him, and the comments by older people toward his body are one of the reasons he ran toward the Church, place where sex is seen as a sin and is forbidden, when he was young. White Americans both try to sexualize black bodies – by adultification of black children, especially young black girls, and the oversexualization of their bodies, and at the same time, they emasculate black men to try to preserve their Puritanism beliefs that render white women as pure and sexuality as a threat to them, and therefore to white men. In the general representation, this led to young black teenagers to be considered as adults by white people, and therefore sexualized and even sentenced as adults by the criminal justice system.<sup>22</sup>

In her book, hooks confirms that by explaining what she calls “dick thing” masculinity.<sup>23</sup> Because the white European standards were adopted by black people as well, they also went through phallocentric ideology, where “a man was no longer a man because he provided care for his family, but simply because he had a penis. Furthermore, his ability to use that penis in the arena of sexual conquest could bring him as much status as being a wage earner and provider.”. Therefore, in order to prove themselves as men, black men sexualized themselves at a young age. This can be seen by the development of rap music, which “provides a public voice for young black men who are usually silenced and overlooked”, but which is also a music “riddled with sexism and misogyny”. However, black men are also seen as emasculated by white men, literally castrated and sexually mutilated during the lynching of black bodies, and figuratively by adopting white standards of masculinity, and not being able to provide for their families. Once again, this completely ignores the many black men who do not fit in the “monolithic standard of black masculinity” and suggest a “completely flat one-dimensional representation” of black masculinity.

In order to describe the relationship between black and white people in the United States, Baldwin compares them with the religious figures of Cain and Ham.<sup>24</sup> Cain is the

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1-5.

<sup>22</sup> Vaughn, Joshua, “Young, Black and Charged as Adults”, *The Crime Report*, 2018, [thecrimereport.org/2018/11/30/young-black-and-charged-as-adults/](http://thecrimereport.org/2018/11/30/young-black-and-charged-as-adults/), [last accessed 24 May 2021].

<sup>23</sup> hooks, p. 103, p. 35, pp. 88-89.

<sup>24</sup> Baldwin, pp. 7-8.

first son of Adam and Eve and also the first murderer in the world, as he killed his brother Abel because of his jealousy. Ham, whose name can be associated to brownness, is one of Noah's son whose descendants was cursed to become “slaves of slaves” after sinning.<sup>25</sup> This biblical passage was therefore used as an explanation to the enslavement of black people, and the reason why white people thought themselves superior to black people. But for black people, who were forced to convert to Christianity during slavery, white people were the descendants of Cain, which shows “how deeply we feared and distrusted and, in the end, hated almost all strangers, always, and avoided and despised ourselves.” This religious comparison to two sinners presents well how both groups look at each other through the same lens of religion. In his own text, Baldwin often refers to white people as “devils” and describe their “diabolical” action, as they are perceived as such by the black community. This is a way for them to explain the evil things that white people have done willingly to them. As Baldwin describes:

“Most Negroes cannot risk assuming that the humanity of white people is more real to them than their color. And this leads, imperceptibly but inevitably, to a state of mind in which, having long ago learned to expect the worst, one finds it very easy to believe in the worst.”

Therefore, the two groups also see each other as not humans: white people see black people as subhuman to explain their enslavement, whereas black people see white people as evil deities to explain their behavior.

The idea of the gaze is also literal, in the way that “black people, mainly, look down or look up but do not look at each other, not at you, and white people, mainly look away”<sup>26</sup>. Black people look up and down, which gives an impression of a scale, in which they cannot look at those who are on the same level as them because they do not have the same rights. This gives an idea that black people are unequal. Baldwin, once again, calls out the audience by saying black people are not looking at “you”. This direct gaze from Baldwin to the reader, is made to make a point. If the audience is white, they might feel black people are looking at them with malice, which is not the case because black people do not look at you because they are ignored and wish to be ignored, in order to be safe. If

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<sup>25</sup> Trigano, Shmuel, “La figure biblique de Ham. Un essai de clarification”, *Pardès*, 44.1, 2008, pp. 9–16.

<sup>26</sup> Baldwin, p. 5.

the audience is black, it reinforces the idea that black people do not look at each other, in order to not see themselves be reflected in others.

The fact that black people look either up or down is also meaningful: looking down is often seen as a sign of submission, whereas looking up is seen as a sign of reverie. It might mean that black people either submit to white supremacy and try to be as little as possible to be safe, or they are looking up, trying to fight the system which put them down in the first place. Baldwin also writes that white people “look away”, signifies that white people do not wish to see others. They might be afraid of black people, who are – as we have seen through Baldwin’s letter – perceived violent and dangerous, or they might ignore black people in order to not humanize them and make their suffering real, and a consequence of the white supremacy they live in. The use of the adverb “mainly” is there to point out that some do fight these preconceptions and look at each other.

### 1.1.2. The history of minority representation.

Now that we have seen the general context of American minorities and especially the relationship between black men and the system created by white Americans that benefit white supremacist, I will analyze the representation of minority representation. However, to understand it, we have to look at how exactly representation impacts society.

Minorities are represented since the beginning of print media, but how they are represented directly impacts the majority’s perception of the minorities and minorities’ self-perception. The cultivation hypothesis<sup>27</sup> suggests that television communicates information about the social environment that influences the population’s perceptions about the social world over time (the accumulation of representation over a long period of time instead of the single exposure to the representation). This means the audience sees the portrayals of crime and violence which increases their fears and perception of danger, leading to the “mean world syndrome” and discrimination based on these fears. In addition, minorities can be harmed internally by their representations, especially children. Society’s standards of beauty, for example, lead to self-esteem issues in children and even

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<sup>27</sup> Mastro, Dana E, and Robinson, Amanda L., “Cops and Crooks: Images of Minorities on Primetime Television”, *Journal of Criminal Justice*, n°28.5, 2000, pp. 385–396.

internalized racism.<sup>28</sup> This can be linked to many other subjects, such as sexuality discrimination, internalized shaming, and homophobia.

The representation of minorities in media is very complex and sensitive as the expectations are heavy, and the consequences can be disastrous. This burden is theorized by the author Viet Thanh Nguyen as “narrative plentitude and narrative scarcity”.<sup>29</sup> The dominant culture has many narratives, as almost all the stories are about them. These narratives are sometimes good and sometimes bad, but bad stories have no consequence to the dominant group, they are merely considered an individual failure. Minorities do not have the same treatment, as contrary to the dominant group, they have few narratives. Because of the narrative scarcity, almost none of the stories are about them and subsequently, a bad story is not only the failure of the individual, but of the entirety of the minority group. Every negative narrative about them can be felt by the group, and on the other hand, a good representation of the minority group is seen as a success for the entire community. As a result, minorities end up with the burden of educating the audience as well as entertaining them. This can be related to a quote from *B99*, where Captain Holt says to Amy Santiago, recently promoted to sergeant “Just remember, you represent all Latina policewomen right now.”<sup>30</sup>

Every minority group follows the same trend of representation in the United States.<sup>31</sup> First, there is the nonrecognition phase when minorities are not represented at all until recognition occurs in the form of comedy and ridicule. Next is the regulatory phase: minorities are more and more represented, but still stereotypically and prominently in roles related to the legal system (police officers or criminals). Finally comes the egalitarian phase, minorities are represented in a multitude of situations and with diverse characters.

Another important aspect of representation is tokenism. During the regulatory phase, the representation of minorities is stereotyped and actors from minority groups are more

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<sup>28</sup> hooks, pp. 1-7.

<sup>29</sup> Aldama, Frederick Luis, and González, Christopher, *Reel Latinxs: Representation in U.S. Film and TV*, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> “Nutriboom”, Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Season 5, Episode 16, FOX, April 15 2018, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562)

<sup>31</sup> Mastro & Robinson, pp. 385–396.

often than not secondary characters. An example of this would be the archetype of the best friend in teenage dramas, who is often a minority (gay best friend, black best friend...) to the white protagonist. This phenomenon is called tokenism, which according to Merriam Webster's dictionary<sup>32</sup>, is "the policy or practice of making only a symbolic effort (as to desegregate)". Therefore, these characters, although important as they mark the first step toward representation, are not examples of good or faithful representation of minority groups. In his letter, Baldwin describe how tokenism is seen by whites, a "proof of a change of heart—or, as they like to say, progress". However, black people do not see it as progress but a consequence of the outside world on the white powers at the top of the pyramid, as if it were only "a matter of love and justice", those things would have happened sooner and if they were uninfluenced, they "might very well not have occurred yet."<sup>33</sup>

To this day, some minorities are rarely, if at all, represented on television. Mastro and Robinson analyzed primetime television for two weeks in fall 1997 to pay attention to how minorities were treated by the police on television. In parallel of their study, they witnessed the gross underrepresentation of Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans on television. Minorities were never represented as much as they are now, twenty years later. But that does not mean that the representation is good or that it is enough. According to the *Hollywood Diversity Report* made by UCLA, in 2017 only 2.2 out of 10 actors in broadcast scripted TV are people of color.<sup>34</sup> Sitcoms in particular are a great place to find diversity: because of its humorous genre, sitcoms were first used to mock minorities. Sitcoms can also be seen as a segregated genre, as they can be divided in "black sitcoms", "white sitcoms", etc. A few examples of it would be the shows *One Day at a Time*, following the life of a Cuban family and *Fresh Off the Boat*, which follows the life of Chinese immigrants, becoming the first family sitcom to picture Asian-Americans in over 20 years. During the recent years, sitcoms have started representing

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<sup>32</sup>"Tokenism," *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tokenism](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tokenism), [last accessed 10 May 2021].

<sup>33</sup>Baldwin, p. 20.

<sup>34</sup> Hunt, Darnell, et al., *Hollywood Diversity Report 2019*, Los Angeles, UCLA College Social Sciences, 2019.

more minorities that are not racial, such as *Speechless* which portrays the life of a family and their disabled son.

In his article intitled “*Unmelting Images: Film, Television, and Ethnic Stereotyping*”, Holte describes the relationship between minority representation, stereotypes, and sitcoms.<sup>35</sup> Holte writes:

“Perhaps more than other forms, television programs and films are dominated by genres. The genres create expectations for writers and directors as well as audiences, and these expectations are met through familiar conventions and stereotypes.”

The expectation that the audience has of situational comedies are very obvious as they are included in the title of the genre. The familiar conventions and stereotypes depend on the types of setting and characters created for the show. A film convention that is pertinent for this essay is the “melting pot squad”, that originated from war films after the Second World War that are full of stereotypes: German are evil whereas the good American soldiers see beyond their differences to fight the common enemy. It moved to television by replacing soldiers by police officers, whose squad was diverse. However, Holte points out that these shows, especially during the 1960s, concentrated on the dramatic side of the genre instead of the development of their character that did not go beyond a few episodes. Nevertheless, he mentions that “dramas featuring Black writers, production staff, and actors [...] avoided comic cliches and characters”<sup>36</sup> before being ultimately ignored by the networks, which we will see was not unusual for the time.

*B99* falls into the category of the “melting pot squad”, as we have seen in the introduction. One could also say a similar message is spread by the show: instead of fighting the common enemy that is Germany, the police squad fights criminals. Therefore, the representation of said criminals will be analyzed later in the show, as a stereotyped representation of them could lead the audience into accepting these stereotypes as true.

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<sup>35</sup> Holte, James Craig, “*Unmelting Images: Film, Television, and Ethnic Stereotyping*”, *MELUS*, n°11.3, 1984.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 103.

## 1.2. The traditional representation of black men

Now that we have explained the general context of the representation of minorities on television, I will analyze the traditional representation of black men and black gay men, especially in sitcoms. This will be later compared to the two black characters of B99, Terry Jeffords and Raymond Holt, who is also a gay man.

Some of the themes that are constantly represented with black men, no matter the period we are analyzing are the following: monetary success, fatherhood, and black masculinity. Since race and class are linked, it is important to consider them both in the analysis of a character. Racial minorities are more likely to suffer from job and housing inequality and end up living in low-income neighborhoods known for their high concentration of racial minority population, such as Washington Heights or Queens in the city of New York. Another example of the intersection between race and class is the inequality in education, which led universities to create a quota system. In fiction, when a black man has monetary success, he immediately adopts a white supremacist way of thinking about blacks.<sup>37</sup> They present themselves as highly educated and sophisticated. Successful black men talk, think, and live the same way a white man would, and see other black people through the same racist and condescending lens as white supremacist do.

Fatherhood plays a huge part in the subject, because of the stereotypical absent black father, but it is not a representation of the reality of many black families. Indeed, many families saw the mother working and the father staying at home, because of the segregation and the difficulties due to racist stereotypes which stopped men from finding jobs. Similarly to the changes in black representation, the stereotypes around black fathers changed through the centuries. During slavery, black fathers were hardworking, but during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the representation changed to fit the stereotypes of the time. Black men were lazy and irresponsible at work and were the same at home as well.

Black masculinity is a very complex subject, as there is not just one version of it. Black masculinity is often linked to sexism. One of the most popular form of black masculinity representation is rap music, which as we have seen in the first part is anchored

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<sup>37</sup> hooks, p. 19.

in white standards of masculinity and success: in those songs, black men are seen as monetary successful, but also very sexual. They are also violent and are seen as “living on the edge”. hooks describes it as such because of the way black men are taught to be emotionally numb, by the white patriarchy, but also by their senses being “daily assaulted and bombarded. [...] Hence the overall tendency in the culture is to see young black men as both dangerous and desirable.”<sup>38</sup>

The “dick thing” masculinity can also be seen by the representation of black masculinity in movies and television. hooks cites movies such as *Raw* by Eddy Murphy, from which she takes the phrase “dick thing”, but also “Heart Condition”, “where the black male describes himself as “hung like a horse as though the size of his penis defines who he is?” This is why the “dick thing” masculinity describes itself well, as it puts the entire focus on the man’s penis, and no other attributes. Because sexuality is so important to black masculinity, this theme is often associated to stereotypes of violent and sexual black men, that are dangerous and threaten white people, and white women in particular.<sup>39</sup>

hooks also explains that the amount of representation of black men in drag has nothing to do with the acceptance of drag. Instead, it mocks black women and allows the misogynistic treatment of black women to continue. It also destroys black masculinity, as “appearing as a woman within a sexist racist media was a way to become in play that castrated silly childlike black male that racist white patriarchy was comfortable having as an image in their homes.”<sup>40</sup> It is also a way to mock drag queens and black gay culture, as it is seen as comedy and not something to take seriously. Because they “oppose a heterosexist representation of black manhood”, black gay men are seen as isolated from the rest of their communities.<sup>41</sup> As Martin<sup>42</sup> writes in his essay: “The invocation of ‘family values’ stands in for heterosexuality. Black gayness (or gayness generally) is never considered within the realm of an ‘authentic black masculinity’.”

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 112.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p. 146.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 146-148.

<sup>42</sup> Martin, p. 42.

### 1.2.1. Black Men representation

The representation of African Americans in the media dates back to the beginning of the United States and shifts through the centuries.<sup>43</sup> During slavery, and especially in the South, black people were represented in cartoons and showed little to no intelligence. In the theater, white performers appeared with blackened faces and all the characters were stereotypical (happy, singing and dancing slaves). This lasted until the 1920s, when black actors started to be cast to depict black characters, but still they appeared mostly as comic relief, the humor solely at their expense. As Martin writes in his essay, black men are “corporeal, not cerebral”, the latter being associated to the white man instead.<sup>44</sup> An archetype that came from this stereotyped representation is “The Idiot”.<sup>45</sup> The Idiot was a proof that black men lacked intelligence, as they could not handle issues such as money or family. The Idiot also made the link between Blackness and criminality. Martin writes:

“Thus, black men throughout slavery were in their ‘rightful place’ as laborers while white people (and white men specifically) enjoyed the fruits of their hard labor. Most importantly, while black men were ‘naturally’ positioned as subordinate to white men, they needed to be constructed as happy within the social order.”<sup>46</sup>

The stereotypes of violence, sexual urges and lack of intelligence also led to the stereotyped archetype of the “Brute”. The Brute is connected to “Africanness” and wildlife, which emanate from the slave trade and which put Black people as more animal than human. Because of the animalistic vision of Black men, the Brute also represents the uncontrollable sexual urges that are seen as a danger to white women, especially after slavery ended the Black men were recognized as men, and not “animals”, which meant they would “rightfully” have access to white women. The Brute was eventually reclaimed by filmmakers in the 1970s to symbolize black power and pride. This stereotyped representation bled into real life as many still think that Black men are more dangerous than White men.

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<sup>43</sup> Martin, Michael T., “The Afro-American Image in Film and Television: The Legitimization of the Racial Divisions in the American Social Order”, *Présence Africaine*, n°124.4, 1982.

<sup>44</sup> Martin, 2015, pp. 36-41.

<sup>45</sup> In his thesis, Martin uses the word “Coon” in order to talk about this representation. However, due to the offensiveness of this word, I chose to replace the word by “Idiot”.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid*, p. 38.

In the thirties and forties, even if stereotyped characters remained, the stereotypes themselves changed. Black characters on screen were musically gifted, and by the thirties became earnest and semi-heroic figures. In the fifties and sixties, influenced by Hollywood, more and more black characters appeared on television with once again a new stereotype: somber and noble Christian blacks. Thanks to the Civil Rights Movement, the sixties led to more diversity in the roles for black actors in movies and eventually in television. The networks were more reluctant and argued it would jeopardize major sources of revenue since advertisers would stop working with them consequently. This is similar to what will happen in France in the 1990s, when channels refused to air a minority sitcom, explaining that French viewers will not identify with stories unless they are close to French culture and norms.<sup>47</sup>

In his article, Holte quotes Robert Sklar who writes how Black representation changed after the 1960s.<sup>48</sup> Sklar observes that there is indeed a bigger representation of Black characters on television, through popular series and staple Black programs. However, he also points out that, although comedies of that period have brought forward the representation of Black people, it also created a new stereotype: “Blacks are either funny or absent”.

The difference between the stereotyped noble Christian blacks and the stereotyped representation of Black men in the comedic genre led to the creation of two Black archetypes in sitcoms: the “Status Quo” and the “Social Outcast”.<sup>49</sup> The Status Quo is called as such as they have not advanced since the beginning of black sitcoms. Therefore, they confirm the first traditional representation of black men. As Morgan writes in his article “Black Situational Comedies: a legacy of stereotypes, ideology and hegemony”, the Status Quo “dresses black, talks black, and acts black. He embraces his ‘blackness’ and is even proud of it”. Morgan defines them as:

“[...] the trickster or class clown. He is lazy and has no tangible, aspirations, ambitions or life goals. He prefers to take short cuts when dealing with serious issues and prefers instant gratification, to long term satisfaction. What he lacks in intellect, he makes up

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<sup>47</sup> Hargreaves, p. 165.

<sup>48</sup> Holte, p. 103.

<sup>49</sup> Morgan, Donald, “Black Situational Comedies: a legacy of stereotypes, ideology, and hegemony”, Journal of Culture, Arts, Literature, and Linguistics (CaLLs), n°2.2, 2017, pp. 27-33.

for in athletic prowess, usually basketball or football. He is more often than not a good street dancer and good Hip Hop performer. He is a rebel who does not conform well to rules and is, by nature loud and confrontational when challenged. He is also a seducer, who is able to start relationships with multiple women easily.”

They have many similarities to the archetype of the “Idiot”, as both show a lack of intelligence and physical prowess, as well as a penchant for trickery.

A famous character that fit in this archetype is Will Smith, from *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, a young man who is sent to live in Bel Air with his Aunt, Uncle and cousins, after he gets into some trouble in his hometown of Philadelphia. Will Smith does not like homework or school and prefers to spend time with his friends or picking up women to put them in his “chicktionary”. He also deals with his problem through violence, as he learned to do so in the streets of Philadelphia. More recently, the character of Andre Johnson, the father of the family in *Black-ish*, represent this archetype. Indeed, Andre is afraid that his family forget about their blackness now that they are middle-class. He is eager to show his children what blackness means, in the way they speak, the clothes they wear, etc. Those two characters do not fully conform to the archetype, as Will is also shown as intelligent despite his own refusal to work, and Andre is faithful to his wife and used his intelligence to provide a good life for his family.



*Will Smith, in casual clothes, and the Banks family, in suits and dresses. "Fresh Prince of Bel Air" by Sally , [www.flickr.com/photos/45214024@N02/6833429268/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/45214024@N02/6833429268/), [last accessed 24/05/2021].*

The Social Outcast is the opposite of the Status Quo, as they associate more with whiteness than with blackness. The Social Outcast, as his title says, is ostracized by others as he does not conform to the status quo of blackness. Morgan describes in his article:

“The Social Outcast is meant to stand out due to their appearance, personality and mannerisms which are seen as ‘White’. They are often referred to as being ‘Sell Outs’ because they do not exemplify African American stereotypes. Instead they willingly and knowingly shed themselves of their ‘blackness’ and choose to adopt a personality archetype similar to that of educated ‘White Folks’. They may be outwardly black but inwardly they personify stereotypical, Caucasian characteristics. They are responsible, hardworking and have aspirations, ambitions and life goals. These characters are conservative and not rebellious, opting to listening to and obeying the rules. They are shy introverts, who lack confidence when dealing with the opposite sex and are, for the most part ‘loners’ with very little friends.”

They share some similarities to the somber black stereotype that arrived in the 1950s. Indeed, they represent a more “suitable” version of the black character, from a white point of view. The Social Outcast is closer to whiteness than blackness, which explains his intelligence and lack of sexual danger, contrary to the archetype of the Brute for example.

A character that fit in this archetype is Carlton Banks, from *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. Carlton, although he is Will’s cousin, has no similarities to him. Born and raised in Bel Air, he adopted very young a likeness to expensive and luxurious things and is even called a sell out by other young black men that he comes across in the series. Another character that fits in this archetype is Junior, Andre’s oldest son in *Black-ish*. Junior likes “nerd” things, such as magic and fantasy books, which upsets Andre who would like him to be a Status Quo like him.



*Will Smith and Carlton Banks, NBCUniversal/Netflix, www.telerama.fr/series-tv/le-prince-de-bel-air-diffuse-sur-netflix-et-si-on-regardait-la-serie-autrement,n6346792.php, [last accessed 24/05/2021]*

### 1.2.2. Black Gay Men representation

Stereotypes surrounding Black Gay Men are also anchored in the same pattern as the representation of Black men that I have analyzed.<sup>50</sup> However, when talking about gayness on television, the audience tends to associate whiteness to it. This is commonly called “the white bias”, a phenomenon that whitewashes any character, or in this case any theme, which does not specify the race. One of the most famous examples is the outrage following the portraying of Hermione Granger by a black actress, in the play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, as the author never actually described the skin color of the character. Therefore, gayness is white on television unless specified otherwise. This develops into a different representation of gayness in white or multi-cultural cast sitcoms and black sitcoms. White gayness has been absent or represented as stereotypically feminine (“female” jobs or behavior) until the 1970s, when the representation broadened on television and shifted thanks to the beginning of the gay rights movement that followed the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Black gayness, however, did not appear on television until 1977.

In his essay, Martin concentrates on the representation of black gay characters in black sitcoms instead of white or multicultural sitcoms, as the later tends to “subscribe to post-racial and post-gay ideologies”. This means that, for the characters as well as the audience, race and gayness do not matter much and instead, the show focuses on the humanity of all characters. This is seen by the fact that black or gay characters in such sitcoms do not talk, or very little, about their blackness or their gayness. Therefore, the representation of black gay man varies from white sitcoms to black sitcoms. As *B99* is a white or multicultural sitcom, it adopts the post racial and post gay ideology, and therefore the stereotypes and archetypes between white gays and black gays are the same. Martin describes four archetypes of gay characters on screen: the “educative gay”, “sissy regular”, the “respectable gay” and the “homonormative gay”.

The educative gay is named as such as its role was to educate the public on homosexuality, and to rebuff the stereotypes of the flamboyant white gay man or worked in “feminine” careers. The educative gay appeared in one episode only, to tackle the subject of homosexuality and prove that the main characters, all heterosexual of course,

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<sup>50</sup> Martin, 2015, pp. 42-49.

were liberal and open-minded. Once the episode was done, the educative gay would not reappear again. The sissy regular is a regular character in the series, usually present in sitcoms or as a comic relief, that – contrary to the educative gay – represents a feminine gay and embraces stereotypes. The show *Barney Miller*, that I will analyze later in this essay, presents both those archetypes in their somewhat regular characters: Officer Zitelli, who hides his sexuality and whose plot (in two episodes) is to show how homosexuality is dealt with inside the police force and Marty, an effeminate and dramatic gay man who is often arrested and is therefore a precinct regular.

The respectable gay was a hybrid character of the past two archetypes, formed in the 1990s. The respectable gay has the educative gay's masculinity and seriousness, but he was also a regular character like the sissy regular. According to Martin, the respectable gay had to fit into some categories: “1) gay men are charming; 2) gay men are physically attractive; 3) gay men have taste; 4) gay men are successful; and 5) gay men are chaste”. The respectable gay is also “well-adjusted within mainstream (read: white) heteronormative culture. It offered an alternative to the single episode educative gay character and allowed more gay representation in sitcoms. One of the most popular sitcoms that portrayed a respectable gay as a main character is *Will & Grace*. Will is a handsome young man (category 1 and 2) and a successful lawyer (category 4), living in a beautiful apartment in New York City (category 3) with his firm owner best friend Grace. He is looking for love but is timid about his sexuality and sometimes hides it from others (category 5).

The last archetype, called “homonormative gay” by Martin, started after the popular sitcom *Will & Grace*. They are similar to the respectable gay; however, those homonormative gays are also in long term relationships. They are homonormative as they conform to heterosexual norms such as marriage, children and the want to find a family, pets and dinner dates, and are in such “no different from the socially constructed image of heterosexual married couple”. Characters that fit in this category are for example, Mitch and Cam, from the show *Modern Family*, who adopt a child in the pilot episode of the sitcom and are eager to get married when gay marriage is made legal.



*Mitch, Cam and their daughter Lily, Jason Leung, abc.com/shows/modern-family/news/scrapbook/141002-tucker-pritchett-family-photo, [last accessed 24/05/2021].*

To conclude this first part, the representation of Black men has been heavily influenced by white supremacy. Because the creation of the African American, or “American Negro” is unique to the United States, the stereotypes surrounding black men reflect how white supremacy perceived them. Indeed, in order to assume their superiority over black men, white men had to push white standards on Black Americans, which meant that subjects like fatherhood, masculinity and sexuality were all seen from a white gaze. Black men could not achieve the white patriarchy and manhood and therefore they felt emasculated and started to internalize these beliefs. In real life, black men could not protect their families nor work in order to be monetary successful, which took away their manhood from a white standard. Therefore, they overtly sexualized themselves in order to prove themselves as men and were sexualized by others as sexual deviants and a danger to white people. On television, this was reflected with stereotyping black men as lazy workers, thugs, and rapists, and created archetypes as The Brute or The Idiot. These representations only furthered the white supremacy ideology and completely ignored the reality of black men, such as the violence they face by the police and criminals on the streets, or the different aspects of black masculinity.

Black people were also heavily represented in comedies than other genres as it allows stereotyping to be seen as true. The genre of the sitcom is also at fault for this, as it bases its characters on already created archetypes and plays on known stereotypes to create

humor. In order to further create discord inside the black community, television sitcoms created two archetypes opposite to each other: The Status Quo and The Social Outcast. Whereas one is representing black people's pride of being black, the other was seen as an internalization of white culture by black men and acted as a comic relief. However, both of these are heavily influenced by a white supremacist vision of blackness, who tries to be a standard that black people have to reach. Black gay men were ostracized by the black community because of the heterocentric ideal of masculinity imposed by white supremacy. Their representation in sitcoms differs from white or multicultural sitcoms, as it either follows the "liberal" ideology of post racial and post gay representation, or it anchors the representation in the black culture. In multicultural sitcoms, their representation is either used to teach the audience about gayness and render it "normal" (again, from a heterocentric point of view), or once again to be a comedic relief. Sometimes, black men would be represented in drag in order to mock black women and black gays, and to emasculate black men.

## **2. *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*: a sitcom with a political undertone.**

*B99* is a sitcom. As seen in the introduction, a sitcom is a comedy show with short episodes, which narratives mostly changes after every episode while the general situation stays the same (the workplace, the family, etc.).<sup>1</sup> It is also a light-hearted and familiar genre, as it relates to a “slightly exaggerated representation of every events”. It gives the audience the impression of familiarity and possibly escapism, as nothing truly bad can happen if the conflict always ends at the end of the episode. Because of it, one could think that sitcoms try they hardest to escape any kind of political and social conflict, as it would break that feeling of escapism. Sometimes sitcoms are culturally specific and quickly react to current events by making jokes on some situations. However, the most successful sitcoms are the ones who pushed the limits of the genre and “shocked” the audience by creating narratives outside the comedic genre, that can be politically involved. Therefore, the question sitcoms must answer is how far they are willing to break the escapism they provide, and how politically involved they choose to be.

Dan Goor and Michael Schur are no stranger to combining comedy and serious themes in the same scene. Schur created *The Good Place*, a four-season long sitcom on Netflix, which has been applauded for its use of real philosophical arguments on ethics as the bases of comedy in the show, as well as its philosophical aspect in general. The two showrunners also worked for many late-night shows, writing jokes on current politics every night. Although *B99* main genre is comedy, the show is constantly going back and forth from drama to action, from personal relationships to workplace drama, from political statements to jokes. Created by the same group that runs *Fox News*, the infamous Republican channel, which controversies are known throughout the world, *B99* appears out of place inside such a broadcasting group and seems to defy the norms with its diverse characters and storylines. With all these various narratives and channel disagreements, one could ask just how far *B99* is politically involved.

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<sup>1</sup> Stafford, pp. 4-5.

## **2.1. The diaphony of a leftist show on FOX.**

*B99* was first aired on the *FOX* Broadcasting Company, or simply *FOX*, until 2019, when they moved the show to the NBC channel to prevent its cancellation. However, it is important to look at the original channel of the show, and how its conception seems to be at odds with some of the group's ideology. *FOX* is a channel part of a bigger group named *FOX* Entertainment Group. *FOX* Entertainment Group is responsible for numerous other channels, including *Fox News* Channel, more commonly referred to as *Fox News*. *Fox News* is infamous for its Republican bias which they proudly display and is the most watched cable outlet.<sup>2</sup>

Because of the deep difference between *FOX*'s Liberal point of view, allowing shows like *B99* with its diverse cast of characters and clear Democratic tendencies, and the Conservative ideology presented on *Fox News*, it is natural to wonder how those two channels can be sisters. Tensions between them have been recorded in the past, as Matt Groening, creator of *The Simpson*, which is airing on *FOX*, claims to have been threatened with a lawsuit from *Fox News* for its parody on the show.<sup>3</sup> To understand the diaphony between the liberal *FOX* channel and the conservative *Fox News*, I will look back at their creation and involvement in politics, especially concerning subjects like BLM and police violence. By understanding the environment *B99* was created in, we will see how *B99* actually challenged the *FOX* Group.

### **2.1.1. *Fox News*: a biased coverage that influences the audience.**

*Fox News* was created in 1996 with the goal to attract a Conservative audience, and beat other channels with a more Liberal bias, like CNN. To do so, the channel changed its visual form and its content, to be unique. The channel is the first to adopt a dynamic duo of celebrity hosts to attract the audience and use visual and musical cues to introduce

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<sup>2</sup> Schneider, Michael, "Top-Rated Channels of 2019: TV Network Winners & Losers – Variety", *Variety*, 26 December 2019, variety.com/2019/tv/news/network-ratings-top-channels-fox-news-espn-cnn-cbs-nbc-abc-1203440870/, [last accessed 10 May 2021].

<sup>3</sup> Ciar, Byrne, "Simpsons Parody Upset Fox News, Says Groening", *The Guardian*, 29 October 2003, http://www.theguardian.com/media/2003/oct/29/tvnews.internationalnews [last accessed 10 May 2021].

segments of the shows (such as the *Fox News Alert*, which interrupts the programming to reveal a breaking news story), as well as the news ticker that repeats headlines. Those methods were quickly adopted by other news channel, and even became a standard for journalistic news. Regarding its content, *Fox News* has never been objective, and used their position of Conservative media as a way to position themselves as rivals of the other cable news network, mainly CNN which is a known Liberal channel. *Fox News* also introduced more “soft news” (entertainment-based news) that focuses on human interest rather than public policy, always with the goal to broaden their audience. And once again, cable channels like CNN adopted it to stay high in the ratings.<sup>4</sup>

*Fox News* channel has been studied immensely for its influence on the vote of its audience. Called the “*Fox News Effect*”, the studies on the channel were made after the 2000 election where *Fox News* used their Republican bias to push for Bush’s election. Even though *Fox News* had been created only four years prior to the election, it already had half the audience CNN had at that time. Studies showed that the Republican party gained voters in towns where *Fox News* was broadcasted during the election, which might have convinced 3 to 28% of its viewer to vote Republican.<sup>5</sup>

This begs the question: how did *Fox News* manage to do so? The answer lies within the reinvention of the news genre and the push of “*Fox News ideology*”<sup>6</sup>. *Fox News* was the counterweight to liberalism mainstream media and combined with the star power of the celebrity host, as well as the reinvention of the news genre through visual and soft news content, *Fox News* became the most popular cable news channel.

But the reason the audience comes back every time to the channel is because of its ideology. Since its beginning, *Fox News* has been branded as a neutral channel, through slogans such as “fair and balanced” or “we report, you decide”, but does favor Republican politicians and the Conservative ideology while simultaneously villainizing Liberals. This is the result of their politicized narratives, that goes on 24/24, 7/7, as it is a cable news

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<sup>4</sup> Morris, Jonathan S., “The Fox News Factor”, *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, n°10.3, 2005, pp. 56–79.

<sup>5</sup> DellaVigna, Stefano, and Ethan Kaplan, “The Fox News Effect: Media Bias and Voting”, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, n°122.3, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Jones, Jeffrey P., “Fox News and the Performance of Ideology”, *Cinema Journal*, n°51.4, 2012, pp. 178–185.

channel. The politicized narratives give the audience the option to “pick a side” in political and social struggle, but the side to choose is made by the news and not by the audience. *Fox News* puts forward a side that shows patriotism and Conservative ideology and opposes it to the other side of ideological threats. As it opposes the audience highly regarded Conservative, the audience is threatened by the other side and *FOX* emerges as the channel where they can trust such threats will be exposed and fought.

The bias also exists within the words they use to talk about the news, which can be proved using J.L. Austin’s theory of locution, illocution and perlocution.<sup>7</sup> *Fox News* introduces some news, using performative language to report it, like the construction of an Islamic community center in Manhattan near the site of the World Trade Center which becomes “Ground Zero Mosque”. The illocution behind it is to warn the audience about something that goes against their values, and as a consequence, the perlocution is that the audience might want to vote for politicians who are opposed to such threats. By giving their bias the title of “news” and reinforcing the Conservative values as the “good” ones and Liberal ones as the “bad” ones, *Fox News* creates a safe haven for like-minded people, which gives a sense of community to its audience.

The BLM movement unites both the police and black people, as it was created as a consequence of the police violence against black people. Analyzing *Fox News*’ perception of it will give us a clue on the relationship between *Fox News*, the police, and racial minorities. Shana Leclercq analyzes in her MA thesis the titles that *Fox News* gives to articles about BLM.<sup>8</sup> The titles she found clearly intended to paint BLM as a threat to American citizens by using titles such as “BLM releases list of ‘demands’”. *Fox News* also opposes BLM and the police (“against the police”, “anti-police rhetoric”) in order to establish a lawful-lawless binary. This gives the audience that BLM is an organization opposed to the law. *Fox News* also focuses on the racialization of the BLM movement, so that their audience perceive BLM as a black only movement, which is “inherently racist”. Therefore, the audience might interpret that BLM means only black lives matter.

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<sup>7</sup> From his book *How To do Things with:* Locution is the act of naming or wording something, illocution is the intent meant behind the sentence and perlocution is the effect the sentence has on the audience. Depending on the choice of words during the locution, the intent and the effect will change.

<sup>8</sup> Leclercq, Shana, A Critical Discourse Analysis: The Securitization of Black Lives Matter by Fox News Media, Master Thesis, Leiden University, 2019.

This perception of BLM as a lawless and segregated movement further proves that Fox News caters to an audience which values the police and stereotypes minorities.

### 2.1.2. *FOX*: A Liberal channel?

*FOX* was created in 1986 and intended to be an “urban network” to appeal to very specifics viewership not targeted by other companies yet, such as the black viewership. It was a way for *FOX* to win the market rapidly. To do so, they started to air and create shows that others did not think to do, going outside the boxes, and distinguish themselves from the traditional networks. To put it as one of *FOX* Programmer, Garth Ancia, said “Do anything you want, but make sure it’s different... *FOX* is here to give you the chance to do things you can’t do anywhere else.”<sup>9</sup>

Both channels, although at the opposite side of the political spectrum, had the same goal of broadening their audience by distinguishing themselves from other channels. For *FOX*, it meant creating and airing shows that are particularly unique and appealing to the “urban” audience, and for *Fox News*, it meant being the opposite force of cable news channel by reinventing the genre and appeal to Republicans. Regarding their political involvement, especially concerning the police and BLM, the two channels have more in common than what it seems.

*FOX*, although a lot more liberal leaning, has a somewhat similar point of view to police representation as has its sister channel. Many broadcasting companies have made documentaries (*Rest in Power: The Trayvon Martin Story*, Paramount Network<sup>10</sup>), or have represented BLM’s impact on their shows that features the police or black characters (*Black-Ish*, on ABC<sup>11</sup>, *Law and Order: SVU*, NBC<sup>12</sup>), *FOX* has surprisingly made two episodes concerning police violence, one of them being *B99*’s “Moo-Moo” episode which I will analyze later on in this essay. The other is an episode of *Empire* (2015-2020), one

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<sup>9</sup> Zook, Kristal Brent, *Color by Fox: The Fox Network and the Revolution in Black Television*, W.E.B. Du Bois Institute, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 1-9.

<sup>10</sup> Jenner Furst, Julia Willoughby Nason (Directors), *Rest in Power: The Trayvon Martin Story*, Paramount Network, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> “Hope”, *Black-Ish*, Season 2, Episode 16, ABC, February 24, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> “Guardians and Gladiators”, *Law and Order: SVU*, Season 22, Episode 1, NBC, November 12, 2020.

of FOX's most-watched show, which focuses on the family of a black hip-hop star, Lucious Lyon, whose son is arrested by the police as he moves out of his house<sup>13</sup>.



*“Sin that Amends”, Empire, Season 3, Episode 2, September 21, 2016, “Andre Receives Some Racism By The Police And Gets Arrested For No Reason / Season 3 Ep. 2 | EMPIRE”, Clips d’Empire, Youtube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgB9hYQRGoA, [last accessed 10 May 2021], 00:00 – 01:13.*

However, FOX has had no documentaries made about the BLM movement, and two episodes seems like a low number compared to the number of police shows on FOX, from reality TV (*Cops, America’s most wanted...*) to dramas (*911, Lethal Weapon, Bones...*)

FOX’s depiction of police officers is most evident through the reality TV show *Cops*.<sup>14</sup> The show aired on FOX from 1986 until 2013, and was intensely popular since its beginning, as it was the first reality-TV program to use real video footage instead of re-enactments. Aaron Doyle explains *Cops*’ intent and effect on its audience through the “Law and order ideology”. The ideology bases itself on the decline of society and pictures a world of violent street crimes in bad neighborhoods. The only solution to control this decline is by making tougher laws and more control where such crimes are committed. Policemen are therefore expected to be effective and hard, without concerning themselves with things such as process and civil right, as criminals are all guilty. The show also fits FOX’s previous media stances, as it reinforces the “us” versus “them” simple thinking, it is easy to see who is “good” and “bad”, as well as incenting emotions through its many dramatic and action sequences. Each episode ends on a closing comment by the cop of

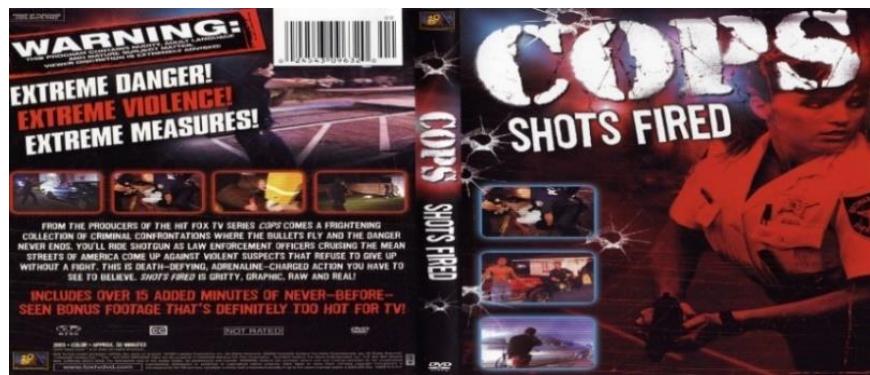
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<sup>13</sup> “Sin that Amends” and “What Remains is Bestial, *Empire*, Season 3, Episode 2 and 3, September 21 and 28, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Doyle, Aaron, “‘Cops’: Television Policing as Policing Reality” in *Entertaining Crime*, by Mark Fishman and Gray Cavender, Routledge, 2018, pp. 95–116.

the week, creating a moral for the story, which once again, plays into the law-and-order ideology.

The crimes represented on *Cops* are done by a very specific group of criminals. Because the ideology blames criminals for their crime without the due process of trial, it gives the impression that every person who is accused of a crime is guilty and is immediately seen as evil. Therefore criminals, or “Them” are less than human, whereas good people and police officers, “or us”, either are threatened by these criminals or are trying to get rid of these evils (“frightening [...] criminal confrontations” and “violent suspects that refuse to give up”, see figure below). Because of this opposition between “them” and “us”, as well as the specific situation where crimes occur on the show, class and race are vital to the public perception of what criminals are. Indeed, in order to perpetuate the law-and-order ideology, *Cops* does not present crimes such as white-collar crimes or crimes done in neighborhoods like Beverly Hills. It focuses instead on crimes done in poorer neighborhoods, as wealthy neighborhoods were esteemed by co-producers as “not crime ridden enough”, which proves that the crime and order ideology wants to create an atmosphere of crimes and danger in areas where lower classes live (the “mean streets of America”, see figure below).



“*Cops Shots Fired*” DVD, compilation of the show “best” moments, *Critics Online*,  
[http://www.critcononline.com/cops\\_tv\\_series\\_1989.htm](http://www.critcononline.com/cops_tv_series_1989.htm), [last accessed 10 May  
2021]

Doyle cites a study that proves that reality programs such as *Cops* “under-represent African-Americans and Hispanics and over-represent whites as police officers, while over-representing minorities and under-representing whites as criminals”. At the same

time, the show's management team makes sure to not choose to follow police officers who exhibit racist behavior.

*Cops* is a reality TV show, but through our earlier analysis, we can already establish that the reality portrayed by the show is biased. The show was meant to mimic a "ride-along", where civilians follow a police officer for a shift. The show introduces its footage as reality, using words such as "gritty, graphic, raw and real" on its DVD cover (see figure above). However, the footage is still edited to wrap an episode into a story for television and shows a higher arrest rate compared to real life statistics. The police officers are also seen tailoring their behavior for the program through outtakes. As we have seen previously, they pick very carefully which crimes they decide to film, and every episode follows the same narrative devices as fiction shows do. The audience sees a hero, a police officer they can identify with, discovers a crime, follows a lead, and eventually arrest a criminal in an unambiguous storyline.

Because the audience identifies with the police officers, the viewer shares their point of view as well. *Cops* manages to do so by making the police the only people the audience can identify with, by giving them names and backstories whereas other people involved, such as witnesses and criminals, have neither. And as the audience sees everything as "good" and "bad", "us" and "them", Doyle explains that the audiences feel an "illusion of certainty" which is present in on fictional police dramas. In the mind of the audience, the hero is always right, therefore, the suspects presented by the hero are all victims of a presumption of guilt. This illusion can be explained by a quote from *B99*'s first season, "If Jake says the guy did it, that usually means the guy did it." (Season 1, Episode 7, "48 hours"). This eventually blurs into reality, with police academy constructers admitting that many law enforcement students' entire idea of what a police officer does is based on these shows.

Therefore, shows like *Cops* are actually responsible of "cop propaganda" as it gives the audience the illusion of the police institution as the lawful, irreproachable force of good, and criminals as poor, non-white evil people. Evidently, FOX actually portrays police officers as heroes, and disturbing that image can destroy many of their shows. *B99* is responsible of its own "cop propaganda" and influences on its audience. However *B99*'s choices to learn and correct their mistakes, as well as the decision to deviate their

show's original story to insert the reality of police violence, is a unique one. The choice is especially peculiar coming from a show which was aired on a *FOX* Entertainment channel, both known for its diversity and deep Conservatism, and which has a history of close police-media relationship.

## 2.1. The politics of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*.

### 2.1.1. A political show...but to what point?

The most superficial and obvious answer to the question is evidently that *B99* is politically involved. Many episodes deal with societal issues, such as the “Moo-Moo” episode that I will analyze later in this essay.<sup>15</sup> Other episodes focus on sexism and sexual assault in the workplace (“He Said, She Said”)<sup>16</sup>, the difficulties LGBTQ+ people go through as they come out (“Game Night”)<sup>17</sup>, as well as the danger police officers face because of their jobs (“Show me going”)<sup>18</sup>. These types of episode can be either really appreciated by the audience or make them uncomfortable. After all, as a sitcom, *B99* is not expected to be talking about those types of subjects. However, it is a clear choice made by the show runners and writers to develop these themes in *B99*. Goor says that the BLM movement helped them realize that the public has a very difficult relationship with the police, and different than the relation it has with other government officials. Therefore, they decided to talk about it, in a way that still felt truthful to the show. Goor explains that they had to do it, otherwise it would seem like “their head [would have been] in the sand”<sup>19</sup>.

For the creation of the episode centering on police violence, they were helped by their diverse staff and group of writers, as well as the experiences of the actors on the show,

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<sup>15</sup> “Moo-Moo”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 4, Episode 16, Fox, May 2, 2017, *Netflix*, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>16</sup> “He Said, She Said”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 6, Episode 8, NBC, February 28, 2019, *Netflix*, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>17</sup> “Game Night”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 5, Episode 10, Fox, December 12, 2017, *Netflix*, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>18</sup> “Show me going”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 5, Episode 20, Fox, May 6, 2018, *Netflix*, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>19</sup> Thorn, Jesse, “Brooklyn Nine-Nine Co-Creator Dan Goor”, *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*, NPR, 2020, [www.npr.org/2020/03/30/824115843/brooklyn-nine-nine-co-creator-dan-goor](http://www.npr.org/2020/03/30/824115843/brooklyn-nine-nine-co-creator-dan-goor), [last accessed 10 May 2021], 21:13 – 22:58.

like Terry Crews and Andre Braugher. They used the same techniques with other episodes, like the one around the #MeToo movement, and the episode concerning Rosa's coming out as bisexual, shaped after the actress Stephanie Beatriz's own coming out story. Terry's backstory was also shaped after Terry Crews' real life, the difficulties he faced living in his neighborhood, his career in football, his relationship with his father... After the huge BLM movement following George Floyd's death, Goor decided to erase the episodes for the upcoming eighth season that they had already finished in order to redo them. The cast and crew did not want to ignore the movement, and that the show resumed as if nothing had happened. However, the seventh season's audience ratings, season which aired in the middle of the BLM movement, were a lot lower than the show's usual audience ratings. With the entire climate surrounding the show now changed, season 8 was decided to be the final season of the show.<sup>20</sup>

Although I have talked about many episodes focusing on one political theme, most of the social commentaries are made through small jokes in almost every episode. For example, in "Honeymoon"<sup>21</sup>, when Holt wants to quit the police after losing the Commissioner election to a straight, white man whose entire ideology contradicts Holt's, Amy tries to persuade him to stay to fulfill the goals he always had of lowering crimes and improving community relationships. He answers by saying "There's no crime in Brooklyn anymore." and "Everyone loves the police, it's embarrassing." and both answers are met with incredulous looks and denial. The discrepancy between Holt's statements and reality, especially when it comes from a character so serious and factual, is what makes those statements funny. Another example of this is in the fourth season's Halloween special, "Halloween IV".<sup>22</sup> In the episode, Gina complains about how she feels left out of the traditional Halloween competition as she is not a detective and compares her situation to the discrimination during the segregation. She is immediately interrupted by Holt and Terry, and Gina apologizes for taking her point too far. The joke is very quick and can be easily overlooked, however this situation could be similar to what some

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<sup>20</sup> Dumaraog, Ana, "Why Brooklyn Nine-Nine Is Ending After Season 8", *ScreenRant*, 12 February 2021, [screenrant.com/brooklyn-99-season-8-ending-cancelled-reason-explained/](https://screenrant.com/brooklyn-99-season-8-ending-cancelled-reason-explained/), [last accessed 10 May 2021].

<sup>21</sup> "Honeymoon", *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 6, Episode 1, NBC, January 10, 2019, *Netflix*, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](https://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>22</sup> "Halloween IV", *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 4, Episode 5, Fox, October 18, 2016, *Netflix*, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](https://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

people might express to be ‘anti-white’ discrimination (white people being discriminated, even segregated in some areas, because of their skin color). It is a way to remind the audience that the two situations are in not comparable without being preachy.



“Halloween IV”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 4, Episode 5, Fox, October 18, 2016,  
Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562), 19:54-20:07.

Most of the episodes include at least one of this type of scenes, a character says something about a current situation which provokes a reaction from other characters ending as a comedic scene for the viewer. These jokes are quick, and do not interrupt the episode’s story. It is the easiest way for *B99* to be politically active without receiving backlash from the audience. As a sitcom, they are expected to be funny and to make jokes, and to a less observant viewer, the joke may be missed completely. It can also be seen as a way to explain things viewer might otherwise be unaware about, due to the narrative scarcity of the people involved or of the subject discussed.

The political aspect of the character creation is best seen in Raymond Holt. Holt is a black gay man, who suffered a lot of discrimination from the police in his past, and who refuses to see this kind of behavior in his own precinct. It is impossible to understand Holt’s character, his desire, and narratives in the show without talking about his difficult past inside the police force. The whole premise of the show is political from that point on. After decades of being mistreated and discriminated by the police, for being gay and black, Holt wants to show others what he is truly capable of, and to create a new police environment that would be accepting and will never treat people the way he was treated. From gun violence to Holt preventing the return of “stop-and-frisk”, a police practice which allows citizens to be temporarily detained by the police and has been proven to be inherently biased against racial minorities; Holt is by far the most politically involved character in *B99*.

The show also has a deep variety of criminals, such as Serbian mafia, Swedish thieves and Canadian kidnappers... Criminals in *B99* come from all over the world, and are of different genders and skin colors, portraying the diversity present in New York City. It is a deeply political issue, as explained in the first part of this essay. Minorities have historically been represented as criminals or villains at a higher rate than real life statistics show, which contributes to the general perception that minorities are dangerous. It also allowed the show to explore different stories based on different stereotypes and made fun of them.

For example, in “Yippie Kayak”<sup>23</sup>, Jake, Boyle and Gina found themselves stuck in a store in the middle of a robbery on Christmas night. Jake immediately associates his situation to his favorite movie, waiting for his “*Die-Hard* moment”. He also assumes that the criminals are German, and he is really disappointed to discover they are, in fact, Canadian. Instead of choosing nationalities that are perceived as “dangerous”, such as German, Russian, or from any nation that is at odds with the United States of America, the show used the Canadian nationalities. Canadian’s stereotypes are very different from German ones: they are known to be overtly polite and nice to everyone. Thanks to this shift from German to Canadian, *B99* subdues stereotypes to create humor in a dramatic situation (characters held hostage), to make fun of the characters (Jake is disappointed by the nationalities), and to challenge the idea of stereotyping as a whole: the robbers, no matter their nationalities, are very scary and dangerous.

A character that breaks stereotype in a similar way is Doug Judy. Doug Judy is a car thief, known to Jake as “The Pontiac Bandit”. Jake describes him as “his nemesis”, spent several years chasing him down. Judy is also a “big black man”, having the physique that is stereotypically associated with criminals.

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<sup>23</sup> “Yippie Kayak”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 3, Episode 10, Fox, December 13, 2015, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).



*Doug Judy's first apparition. "The Pontiac Bandit", Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Season 1, Episode 12, Fox, January 7, 2014, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562), 01:50.*

However, Judy's intimidation ends a few seconds after his first apparition, as he is shown serenading to Rosa, and then playfully bantering with Jake during the interrogation. Eventually, the squad, and the audience through them, becomes friend with him. Judy has a very similar attitude to Jake's: they are both funny, try to mimic their favorite movies in real life and love the action that their jobs put them through. The only difference is which side of the law they are on, and even that changes as Judy redeems himself after a few seasons, showing that the police is the "good" side to be on, even for criminals. This can be related to the concept of identification: the viewer is offered multiple "surrogate figures" which they can project onto and model their reactions and affects. As Jake is the main character, he is the one figure that the audience will model the most. Therefore, as Jake gradually stops seeing Judy as a criminal and starts being his friend, the audience does the same.

However, *B99*'s enemies are not always criminals, as the show insists on portraying a deeper reality. Just as Doug Judy is a "good" criminal, there are also a lot of "bad" police officers. The most important corrupt character's is season six's villain, John Kelly, the new Commissioner of the NYPD, who reinstates laws that go against Holt's morals like the return to stop-and-frisk, which allows racial profiling to prevail in the police force, and the spying on citizen's data to find evidence and arrest criminals. To counterbalance the "good guys", Goor and Schur made the squad deal with other bad,

dirty cops which obliges them to make a moral decision to stop them, and Goor says that they even might have been “unintentionally modeling what good cops should be like”.<sup>24</sup>

*B99* is politically active in many ways: some characters are inherently political like Holt, and episodes were dedicated to world-changing movements like #MeToo or Black Lives Matter. Sometimes the show’s political involvement is more subtle, small jokes that actually teach something to the audience or point out a difficult situation through humor, or secondary characters whose storylines allow the main characters, and therefore the audience, to grow. But there is only so much *B99* can do, as it remains a sitcom first and foremost, especially in the first few seasons.

Very often in *B99*, the serious moment when the social commentary is made is followed by a joke, building, and relieving the pressure of the scene but also the pressure the audience might feel. *B99* is a sitcom not a drama, and cannot allow itself to be too serious, as it would defeat its goal of making people laugh. For example, in “Game Night”<sup>25</sup>, Rosa comes out as bisexual to her parents and storms off when her parents do not accept her. To relieve the pressure, Jake, makes a joke, which acts as a transition between the dramatic scene to a comedic one. As most sitcoms usually do, the plot of one episode is not often mentioned after it ends, focusing on other stories instead. The message is therefore contained in the episodes that actually spread a message, and not the entire show, which once again limits the show’s abilities to be political. Dan Goor says himself in his interview with Jesse Thorn:

“And one could certainly look at the fact that we’ve done 143 episodes and there are plenty of episodes where only goofy things happen so maybe our heads are partially in the sand still.”<sup>26</sup>

In his interview, Dan Goor explains that one of the reasons they chose a police precinct as the set of the show is that the situation is easy to understand because of the amount of knowledge the audience has on the police. For example: if a robber steals something, the

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<sup>24</sup> Thorn, 20:05 – 21:13.

<sup>25</sup> “Game Night”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 5, Episode 10, Fox, December 12, 2017, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>26</sup> Thorn, 21:13 – 22:58.

audience knows that the police will try to catch them, and no explanation is needed. And like any comedic characters, the characters are based on archetypes.

As we have seen in the introduction of this essay, archetypes are mental models which are culturally enduring, meaning they can be seen and understood by anyone.<sup>27</sup> They are established types of characters that exist since the creation of storytelling (folk tales, myths...).<sup>28</sup> Stereotypes, on the other hand, are culturally specific and once associated to archetypes, lead to a negative representation of the cultural group represented.<sup>29</sup> They rely on “social typing”, meaning on traits “related to social class, age, gender and ethnicity”.<sup>30</sup> Archetypes are very useful to use, especially in the first seasons, to explain something without having to explain much. The goofy protagonist, the overly serious rival, the comedic best friend.... But it becomes problematic when archetypes meet stereotypes. For example, the first “bad guy” shown in the pilot of the sitcom is a big man, with a heavy Eastern European accent. Eastern Europeans have been the bad guys in the many American movies since the Cold War, so his origin is not very surprising. It shows that even a show as progressive as *B99* can sometimes slip up and fall into stereotypes that can be harmful.

As I said previously, the plot of *B99* is inherently political, as it portrays the recent success of a gay black NYPD captain after years of discrimination, but this also implies that there is no discrimination anymore. As Harry Waksberg explains in his article for *Vulture*:

“It’s not entirely accurate to suggest that *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* completely ignores the messy, upsetting history of NYPD’s bigotry. But the ways it addresses them only serve to highlight how strange it is to portray modern NYPD as friendly, cuddly, and color-blind.”<sup>31</sup>

Dan Goor, and *B99* in general, tries to focus on the good guys, who in this case happen to also be police officers. Goor and Schur worked together on *Parks and Recreation*, so

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<sup>27</sup> Kidd, pp. 25–28.

<sup>28</sup> Stafford, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Kidd, pp. 25–28.

<sup>30</sup> Stafford, p.6

<sup>31</sup> Waksberg, Harry, “Can Brooklyn Nine-Nine Ever Accurately Portray the NYPD?”, *Vulture*, 4 February 2015, [www.vulture.com/2015/02/can-brooklyn-nine-nine-ever-accurately-portray-the-nypd.html](http://www.vulture.com/2015/02/can-brooklyn-nine-nine-ever-accurately-portray-the-nypd.html), [last accessed 10 May 2021].

they were used to portray government employees in a different light than the usual public's opinion to make them more likeable. They made the political choice to use kind and strong characters, through the writing as well as through the casting, as Goor describes Amy Poehler and Andy Samberg as kindhearted people who could not possibly hurt others.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, they have always made a point to portray the characters as the "good cops", police officers who get along with their communities. If there is conflict inside the squad it is always within the limits of legal methods, as their goal are similar: they all want to be the best cops, the best squad, the best precinct possible. It could be seen as a projection of what they should do, but in reality, even if their behavior had good intentions, it would not have necessarily worked. "Good cops" like Holt, Jake and Terry, who faced discrimination or have witnessed it and decide to speak out against the system are not rewarded, promoted or even left alone. They are fired or forced to quit the police force after their colleagues treat them as traitors.

Such arguments also only put the focus on the "a few bad apple" logic. By saying there are good cops, and bad cops, *B99* puts the blame on the people inside the system instead of the entire police organization that is problematic. And even though the squad is supposed to be the "good guys", we often see them act irresponsibly but it is seen as endearing for the audience. The characters often go against their commands, deviate from the laws they are supposed to follow, and even threaten to use their badges for their own gain, although it is always met with humor.

The police system allows officers to make big mistakes and continue their career in law enforcement without any problem. The misconducts are regulated internally, and therefore done by colleagues and local prosecutors that they work closely with, which can bend the truth to suit them and avoid charges. And as police officers who speak up are mistreated, police officers actually bury the misconducts. Police officers can delete their personal files and get hired by other police departments without even having their files read and create new problematic situations without being blamed. The law nicknamed "lawful but awful" allows unnecessary or disproportional shootings to happen, and the

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<sup>32</sup> Thorn, 15:10 – 16:00.

police officers responsible are protected by professional lawyers and expert witnesses.<sup>33</sup> This is never mentioned in *B99*, as the villains are inside of the NYPD as police officers or higher-ups, but the institution itself is never questioned. Although past mistakes are represented through Holt's character and his career as a gay black policeman in the 80s, it is as though these issues do not exist in the modern NYPD.

Police officers also do not suffer based on their reputation, even though it does start to change now as they are held accountable for the issues of the system. The cultural perception is that the police are always the good guys thanks to decades of police media showing them as such. Police officers often get presumption of innocence by the juries whereas criminals, and people of color stereotyped as criminals, do not. This leads to not guilty verdicts as people think that the actions the police take are reasonable or for the greater good. This is true also in *B99*, as the squad work outside the laws for the greater good, or to protect themselves and their loved ones. There are many examples of the characters breaking some laws for the “greater good”, like when Jake and Holt access to machine guns as civilians under witness protection to protect themselves against an upcoming attack, or when Holt becomes compromised after he accepts a deal with a known criminal to free Jake and Rosa from prison. The characters do suffer some consequences, like the change to the night shift or the months spent in harsh witness protection, but never longer than a few episodes, and are always seen as the one who were right in the end.

However, *B99* tries to ensure that they are evolving as a show and try their best to rectify when they miss the mark. “The Box” is often considered to be *B99*’s best episode, centered on a police case and shot as a drama instead of a sitcom.<sup>34</sup> It is actually a new take on a storyline that already happened on the first season, the episode intitled “48 hours”<sup>35</sup>. The show was then new, and seeing a black man being arrested by a cop for no reason other than making a joke was problematic. The black community in particular did not find it funny, as black people are often arrested with little to no evidence. “The Box”

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<sup>33</sup> LastWeekTonight, “Police Accountability: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (HBO)”, *YouTube*, 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaD84DTGULo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaD84DTGULo), [last accessed 10 May 2021].

<sup>34</sup> “The box”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 5, Episode 14, Fox, April 1, 2018, *Netflix*, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>35</sup> “48 hours”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 1, Episode 7, Fox, November 5, 2013 *Netflix*, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

has multiple differences. For once, it shows the Black man suspect of the crime enter the police department willingly instead of being arrested on the street for making a joke about Jake. Instead of just being a thief, such as in the “48 Hours” episode, or a known criminal in any shape or form, which is the usual stereotypes for Black Men in media, Phillip Davidson is a successful dentist, his intelligence and wit surpassing both Holt’s and Jake’s. It makes Davidson a smart enemy to defeat as the clock ticks, instead of a kid to trick by getting around the law. Also, when “The Box” episode aired, viewer then knew Jake for five seasons and had no reason to doubt he is one of the “good guys”. The audience had sympathy and believed in him, and therefore when he arrests someone with no evidence, there is no reason to believe that he is wrong. “The Box” was an attempt to fix their past mistake and show a better version of the same trope.



*Left: “48 hours”, Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Season 1, Episode 7, Fox, November 5, 2013  
Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562), 05:10.*

*Right: “The box”, Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Season 5, Episode 14, Fox, April 1, 2018,  
Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562), 20:26.*

Just like the “48 hours”<sup>36</sup> episode turned into “The Box”<sup>37</sup>, many jokes and problematic behaviors they had at the beginning of the show evolved with the seasons. Jake, for example, completely changes his outlook on the justice system after he was sent in prison for a crime he did not commit. After seven seasons of the “friendly, cuddly, and colorblind”<sup>38</sup> NYPD, the show has plenty of examples of issues that police officer face today. Racism is touched through a plentitude of jokes throughout the series, but also

<sup>36</sup> “48 hours”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 1, Episode 7, Fox, November 5, 2013 *Netflix*, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>37</sup> “The box”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 5, Episode 14, Fox, April 1, 2018, *Netflix*, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>38</sup> Waksberg, 2015.

through some dedicated episodes such as “Moo-Moo”<sup>39</sup> and the upcoming eighth season of *B99*, which will focus on the BLM movement and the role of the police in the United States after the world-wide protests following George Floyd’s death.

The goal of the show, that the writers and showrunners try to achieve, is to make people laugh and have a good time by telling human stories without focusing on their sexual orientation nor their skin color. But this is a utopic idea and would not work in the real world where such things matter and change how you live your life and how others perceive you. Dan Goor explains that what they have done, a sitcom that shows a diverse cast, and multiple societal problems that they go through (like coming out, or being racially profiled), is possible thanks to the great diversity in the cast and behind the camera, in the writing room in particular. They also realized through making this show to not sugarcoat the issues that people face, as they are real, and people experienced them and knows what will really happen, and that there are heavy consequences to people who take actions against them.

### 2.1.2. *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*’s spin on the representation of black men

In this part, I will analyze the two main black characters and compare them to traditional representation seen in the previous part, to see if the characters conform to these stereotypes or challenge them. As I have said in the introduction, the show has a great diversity, and Sergeant Terry Jeffords and Captain Raymond Holt are the two main black characters of the squad. By creating two characters that fit in the same category, *B99* avoids tokenism, as the viewer cannot determine how the entire group of “black men” behave through the show, and in fact learns that there is a multitude of narratives and therefore “black men” do not fit in a single stereotypical vision.

Although sexism and homophobia are part of what stereotyped black masculinity represent, this aspect is completely absent from the show. This is because the show has a liberal approach of those subjects and displays many examples of anti-sexism and anti-

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<sup>39</sup> “Moo-Moo”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 4, Episode 16, Fox, May 2, 2017, Netflix [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

homophobic statement (seen in the analysis of the show). Therefore, the show's values are associated with and present in all characters.

Terry and Holt have many similarities in the way they live and are perceived by the squad. By being the two highest ranking police members of the police (Sergeant, then Lieutenant for Terry and Captain of the 99<sup>th</sup> precinct for Holt), they do fit in the theme of monetary success for black men. Their success can be seen by the way the squad react to them, but also the way they live. It is important to note that Terry and Holt have very different backgrounds: Holt is the son of one of the first black female judge and Terry grew up in an abusive household. This shows a rather diverse representation of black monetary success, as we see high and low social classes, and further proves that black people live different lives and should not be stereotyped to lower classes and incomes.

Their home life is not often seen in the show, as it focuses mostly on the precinct and their jobs, however the audience can see that their home lives are also very different. Whereas Terry is sometimes seen as struggling financially because he takes care of his children and their future, Holt lives a quite luxurious life with his husband Kevin, in their nice home. In the episode “The Party”, the squad notices the expensive taste of the Captain and how he conforms to higher social class standards; Holt likes classical music, reads *The New Yorker* and watches operas.



*Captain Holt's house. “The Party”, Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Season 1, Episode 16, Fox, February 4, 2014, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562), 08:03.*

Compared to him, Terry has relatively simple tastes, only really talking about his love for yogurts, although he sometimes surprises the rest of the squad, and the audience; he went

to Japan for a year during his studies and likes foreign movies. However, neither of them adopts white supremacist ways of thinking about other black people, which would go against the show's liberal values.

Another quality that Holt and Terry have in common, quite unexpectedly, is the theme of fatherhood. Terry has three daughters throughout the show, and many of his episodic storylines surround his fatherhood or his children. The pilot episode, which is shown to networks in order to demonstrate the show's possibilities and be picked up to run on the air, has Terry completely terrified to go to work after the birth of his twin daughters, Cagney and Lacey.



*Left: Terry shows his twin to Holt and explains why he is not on the field anymore.*

*Right: Terry is terrified and shoots a mannequin during training.*

*"Pilot", Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Season 1, Episode 1, Fox, September 17, 2013,*

*Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562) 06:10- 06:32.*

There are many other episodes where Terry is dealing with issues of fatherhood: his fear for the future of his girls in "The Mole" (Season 2, Episode 5)<sup>40</sup>, drawing a children book for them (Season 2, Episode 11)<sup>41</sup>, wanting more children in "Chocolate Milk" (Season 2, Episode 2)<sup>42</sup>, etc. Although most of Terry's family is not present throughout the show, they do appear in some episodes where Terry's fatherhood and responsibility as a husband are tackled, such as the "Yippie Kayak" episode, where Terry struggles spending time with his family because of his work. Terry talks so much about his family, the YouTube

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<sup>40</sup> "The Mole", *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 2, Episode 5, Fox, November 2, 2014, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>41</sup> "Stakeout", *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 2, Episode 11, Fox, December 14, 2014, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>42</sup> "Chocolate Milk", *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 2, Episode 2, Fox, October 5, 2014, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

channel of the show made a compilation intitled “Terry Jeffords: The Family Man”.<sup>43</sup> This proves that fatherhood, as a theme, is central to his character. In all those episodes, Terry is seen as a great father, who wants to be there for his children and his wife and works hard to give them a good future and completely contradicts the stereotype that black fathers are absent and lazy.

This idea of fatherhood can be related to how sitcoms work, as they choose a close-knitted group of characters who gather at the same place often, so that they can interact with each other and have multiple stories. This means that most sitcoms are either family sitcoms or workplace sitcoms, but both treat the group of characters as a family in order to create interesting dynamics between the characters, such as the father-son dynamic. In season one, in the “Thanksgiving” episode, Jake describes the squad as such:

“So, I'd just like to say I am happy to be here with my family. My super weird family with two black dads, and two Latina daughters, and two white sons, and ... Gina. And I don't know what you [Scully] are. Some strange giant baby? To the Nine-Nine!”<sup>44</sup>

Terry even calls himself a “proud mamma-hen” (Season 1, Episode 18, “The Apartment”) because as a Sergeant, it is his duty to take care of the squad. Throughout the show, Terry teaches lessons to the squad to help them grow as individuals. A compilation of his teaching moments, intitled “Best of TERRY: SQUAD DAD”, was made by the YouTube Channel *Comedy Bites*.<sup>45</sup> Holt's fatherhood is very peculiar, as he has no children. He is seen as a parental figure by the squad as his role of the Captain is similar to a mentor's. Holt teaches lessons to the detectives, both personal and profession: how to break up in “Into the woods” (Season 5, Episode 6)<sup>46</sup> and everything he knows about his work in “The last ride” (Season 4, Episode 15)<sup>47</sup>. Because he is close to the characters, some characters, such as Jake and Amy, call him father in many episodes. Holt's parenting

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<sup>43</sup> Brooklyn Nine-Nine, *Terry Jeffords The Family Man / Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, 2018, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_pGZPqtNQv4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pGZPqtNQv4), [last accessed 22 May 2021].

<sup>44</sup> “Thanksgiving”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 1, Episode 10, Fox, November 26, 2013, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](https://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>45</sup> Comedy Bites, *Best Of TERRY: SQUAD DAD / Brooklyn Nine-Nine / Comedy Bites*, 2021, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rw-mlh0IXeE&t=251s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rw-mlh0IXeE&t=251s), [last accessed 22 May 2021].

<sup>46</sup> “Into The Woods”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 3, Episode 6, Fox, November 8, 2015, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](https://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>47</sup> “The Last Ride”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 4, Episode 15, Fox, April 25, 2017, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](https://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

toward the squad can also be seen in a compilation by the YouTube channel of the show intitled “Captain Holt Father Figure”.<sup>48</sup>

This type of fatherhood, meaning the father-children relationship between Terry and Holt and the rest of the squad is completely different from the stereotypes surrounding black men. First of all, this fatherhood is made by choice and not by blood, and therefore gives the character a sense of agency and good paternity, as they choose to be a father figure for the rest of the squad instead of just colleagues. And because the sitcom shows them interacting constantly, it also completely negates the lazy and absent father.

The archetype of the Brute, and the general association of black men and violence, is present in the show as an outdated stereotype they make fun of. Indeed, the show often plays on the fact that Terry is exactly what people think of a “dangerous black man”. Terry himself, however, is seen as very caring and sweet. His character of “Scary Terry”, who “says what regular Terry is thinking” represents well how *B99* subdues the stereotype: by associating Terry’s frame and angry voice to something as sweet as the farmer’s market shows the audience that Terry is not somebody to be afraid of.



*“This is taking too long! I’m going to miss the farmer’s market.”* “The Slump”,

*Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Season 1, Episode 3, Fox, October 1, 2013, Netflix,*

[www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562), 04:40 – 04:52.

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<sup>48</sup> Brooklyn Nine-Nine, *Captain Holt Father Figure* / Brooklyn Nine-Nine, 2018, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPLnnSHSeLE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPLnnSHSeLE), [last accessed 22 May 2021].

However, the representation of “The Brute” is present in the show as well. Terry often uses his strength to scare the suspects into confessing or scare the squad in order to make them behave. The representation of The Brute is best seen with the “Ebony Falcon”, Terry’s former nickname in the squad.

“Terry: And what does Ebony Falcon do?

Jake: Takes every protection to assure his own safety? (Terry growls) Takes bad guys to justice and bad girls to bed.”<sup>49</sup>

The “Ebony Falcon” checks almost all of the Brute stereotype: he is violent, very sexual and someone people should be afraid of. The show therefore both uses and subdues the same stereotype, which creates a duality in their representation of black men: as a television show, *B99* makes a lot of effort to avoid stereotypes; however the show still uses them sometimes which contradicts their wish of a “realistic” representation of black men.

The show does fall for some stereotyped representation of black men as it sexualized Terry and Holt. Terry’s sexualization by Gina in the first seasons, is seen as flattering, although it is a stereotype in itself. Black bodies have often been oversexualized by White people, who think of it as flattering, whereas it instead objectifies them to things that are there to be pleasing and to please.<sup>50</sup> Gina often comments on Terry’s physique and goes as far as asking him if he is “tethered to his wife” and uses every opportunity to touch or be touched by him. Terry, on the other hand, stays serious, loyal to his wife and reminds the squad of proper sexual conduct in the workplace. The jokes on the subject disappeared after Terry Crews came out as a victim of sexual aggression in the workplace, promptly ending all form of non-consensual touching and sexual comments about his body.

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<sup>49</sup> “The Ebony Falcon”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 1, Episode 14, Fox, January 21, 2016, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>50</sup> hooks, pp. 24-25.



*Gina tricking Terry to put his arms around her. “The Vulture”, Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Season 1, Episode 5, Fox, October 15, 2013, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562), 09:45.*

Holt's sexualization is different from Terry's as it concerns his “straight” character, and not his relationship with his husband or the other gay characters. For many reasons throughout the show, Holt acts as a straight man: in flashbacks, he does so to hide the fact that he is gay; and during the “present” time of the show, he acts straight for undercover purpose or to gain something from someone else. Holt's undercover straight character, as Greg in “Coral Palms” (Season 3, Episode 1, 2 & 3)<sup>51</sup> or as Joe Wozniak in “The Big House Part 2” (Season 5, Episode 2)<sup>52</sup>, are both heavily sexualized. Indeed, Holt has to pass as “straight”, and therefore comments on fake girlfriend’s “heavy breasts” and other secondary sex characteristics such as “thigh gaps” (“That’s my favorite part on a woman. There’s nothing more intoxicating than the clear absence of a penis.”<sup>53</sup>). His comments are based on the stereotype that men only think about sex and can be linked to hooks’ “dick thing” theory presented in part one, where black men are heavily associated with their sexual prowess. However, his overtly sexualized comments about women’s bodies are made to bring humor, as Holt is clearly failing passing as straight, and has no idea what to talk about besides sexual comments about women.

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<sup>51</sup> “Coral Palms: Part 1, 2 & 3”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 5, Episode 1, 2 and 3, Fox, September 20, 27 and October 4, 2016, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>52</sup> “The Big House: Part 2”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 5, Episode 2, Fox, October 3, 2017, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*



*Holt gesturing about the size of his fake girlfriend's "heavy breasts". "The Big House: Part 2", Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Season 5, Episode 2, Fox, October 3, 2017, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562), 11:13.*

Holt is also seen as very charismatic and attractive by many women in the show. Holt does not shy away from this and instead uses it to his advantage, for example to charm a female judge to rush a meeting in "Charges and Specs" (Season 1, Episode 22)<sup>54</sup>. Holt's former partner and nemesis, Wunch, also fell for him when they worked together and Holt's refusal "to bed her"<sup>55</sup> (Season 2, Episode 2, "Chocolate Milk") was thought to be the reason for their animosity.

Holt's representation of a gay black man also does not fit the stereotypical representation. As said earlier, Holt's character fits in the post-racial and post-gay ideology that multicultural sitcom put forward, as most of the mentions about race and sexuality are made through small jokes; Holt still maintains his black and gay identity. Because he is a main character, Holt does not fit in either the "educative" or the "sissy" archetypes. The show actually plays off on the fact that Holt, described by the other characters as "robotic", does not fit the general audience's vision of a flamboyant gay man. The archetypes that fit him are the "respectable gay" and the "homonormative gay". The latter is easily seen by Holt's relationship with his husband, Kevin. They both are successful men, married and living together, with their dog Cheddar. The only thing that

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<sup>54</sup> "Charges and Specs", Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Season 1, Episode 22, Fox, March 25, 2014, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>55</sup> "Chocolate Milk", Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Season 2, Episode 2, Fox, October 5, 2014, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

they do not conform with is their choice to not have children, which is touched upon during the show:

“Terry: Motorcycles are death machines. I have three kids; I’m not risking this.

Holt: Are you saying my life matters less because I do not conform to society’s heteronormative child-centric ideals?

Terry: Are you really playing the gay card right now?

Holt: Yas queen. (snaps fingers)”<sup>56</sup>

The archetype of the respectable gay is both fitting and unfitting of Holt’s character, as the show plays on the stereotypes and are expecting a certain outcome that sometimes does not happen. In his thesis, Martin described them as charming and attractive, which we have seen is possible as Holt charms many women, but also gay men (such as Gordon Lundt in the “Honeypot” episode, Season 6, Episode 7)<sup>57</sup>. He is even considered a “bimbo” by his husband’s coworkers (Season 6, Episode 13, “The Bimbo”)<sup>58</sup>. All of this is, of course, made humorous by the audience’s point of view of Holt, of a very serious and intelligent police captain. Two other characteristics of the respectable gay are “having taste” and being “successful”. As we analyzed Holt’s expensive tastes and success earlier, I will not go further; Holt is indeed successful, and his taste is what is considered “good” in white higher social classes. Once again, the show plays on these stereotypes by sometimes making Holt fall outside of the norms. Although Holt has “tastes”, he also does not confirm to the usual feminine queer stereotypes and is instead very formal, and he also makes fashion mistakes (cold open). His tastes, like his preference for bland food, are also the subjects of many jokes (“There’s nothing better than a plain scone.”).

The last characteristic of a respectable gay is being “chaste”. Indeed, Holt is never seen openly affective with his husband, and what he considers to be public displays of affection is what makes his relationship with Kevin humorous.

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<sup>56</sup> “The Big House: Part 1”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 5, Episode 1, Fox, September 26, 2017, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>57</sup> “Honeypot”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 6, Episode 7, NBC, February 21, 2019, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

<sup>58</sup> “The Bimbo”, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 6, Episode 13, NBC, April 18, 2019, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).



*Kevin and Holt's "PDA in the office". "The Bimbo", Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Season 6, Episode 13, NBC, April 18, 2019, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562), 1:20-1:30.*

But his sexuality is not taboo, indeed, it is talked as much as any other character's. The most evident example of it is the "Skyfire Cycle" episode (Season 4, Episode 5)<sup>59</sup>, which deals with Kevin and Holt's relationship which is suffering from the night shift, and Rosa tells Holt they "just need to bone", which indeed resolves their problems.

One could see Terry as the "Status Quo" because he is physically fit and maintains most standards of black masculinity (a straight man, married with children, who protects and provides for them), and Holt as a "Social Outcast" as he is gay (and therefore outside of black masculinity's norms) and as we have seen, he adopts a lot of white heteronormative standards. However, the characters do not exactly fit in these archetypes. Indeed, as it is a multicultural sitcom, there are actually few chances for either of them to display their black culture, which is essential to the "Status Quo". Also, both characters take from both archetypes: Terry loves fantasy books and is a writer himself, and Holt is never made fun of by other characters and is instead a role model for a lot of them. The fact that the characters are never compared to each other in the show, and that neither tries to "prove" themselves as more black or better than the other, also separates them from the archetypes duo.

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<sup>59</sup> "Skyfire Cycle", Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Season 6, Episode 13, NBC, April 18, 2019, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

To conclude this part, *B99* was created and aired on a channel from the group *FOX* Broadcasting Company. The group has a complex programming and presents very different programs between the Entertainment and the News channel. Whereas *FOX* Entertainment is very liberal and diverse, *Fox News* is extremely Republican and Conservative, so much so that it has influenced previous political elections through their biased news reporting. The difference between the two channels creates a diaphony between *B99*'s openness and difficult subjects such as sexual assault in the workplace and police brutality, and the traditional viewpoint held by the news. *Fox News* has always shown a favoritism towards the police organization, going as far as villainizing movements which aim to reveal its fault such as BLM. And even though *FOX* Entertainment is more liberal than its news counterpart, the relationship between the channel and the police is largely in favor of the latter, representing police officers as a force of good. Therefore *B99*'s decisions to talk about police violence is a unique one on *FOX*.

*B99* does have some moments of political involvement whether it be through the character's backstory, the character's narrative and small jokes splattered through the episodes. And although it had had some problematic episodes or jokes, like "The Box"<sup>60</sup> or Gina's sexualization of Terry, the showrunners did not continue the show like nothing happened but tried to rectify their mistakes. They also acknowledged the current situation with the BLM movement and the shift that happened within the country. *B99* is a show that grows with its audience, by allowing themselves to be wrong and rectify their mistakes, and by acknowledging what happens in the real world. They make changes not only to suit the audience's perception of the show, but also because those subjects are important to the actors and the show runners. The ambiguity of their representation of minorities is also present in their representation of black men, through Terry Jeffords and Raymond Holt. Although both characters subdue or completely turn around certain stereotypes (Terry being a "gentle giant" instead of a Brute, or Holt being a "robot" instead of a Sissy), the show still uses some stereotypical representation.

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<sup>60</sup> "The box", *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 5, Episode 14, Fox, April 1, 2018, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

The limits of their political involvement lay inside the limit of the genre they choose to create: a comedy. Of course, if *B99* had been a drama or a documentary, they could have gone a lot further with the same ideas. But it also might have less impact, or impact on less people, because as much as we expect such things to happen in a drama, we do not see it coming in a sitcom. Therefore, uninformed people watching the show for entertainment might actually learn something through the show unknowingly.

The actors and show runners stated in multiple previous interviews that their intention is to represent people, and that they would like one day to see those characters as nothing more. Although the show's ambition is noble, it is also unrealistic. The world we live in gives importance to things that constitute an individual's identity: origins, skin color, sexual orientation... To actually believe in a world where none of those would affect the way we leave and are treated is utopic. But striving toward that world is also what makes their representation so realistic and important: they avoid stereotypes by creating characters whose characteristics and personality are not defined by their gender or race, avoiding stereotypes with their diverse crew of writers, which creates a diverse cast of characters. To make their ambition true, more sitcoms need to try and be as inclusive and follow the path that *B99* has paved, and further it to make it even better. But this has proven to be difficult even in their own franchise: *B99*'s Canadian spin off faced some backlash from the fans and the crew, as they replaced the two Latina actresses by two white actresses, arguing that there is not such a big Latina community there. This argument does not really stand, if the Latin community is not really that important that they thought the minority group would not appear twice in the show, then the two actresses could have been replaced by any other minority group present in Canada, which is also a country with many immigrants.

In my opinion, *B99* is one of the most progressive shows on television, showing a good example of what minorities representation should look like. By including several minorities, and several characters of the same minority group, *B99* avoids tokenism. If we look at *B99* through the “narrative plentitude and narrative scarcity” theory I have explained in the first part, *B99* does a good job of avoiding narrative scarcity. When someone who has not seen a lot of Black representation, or Latina representation, watches the show, they cannot say this character is what every member of this minority group looks like, because there is another member of this group in the show. Ultimately, *B99*

will never be a true reflection of the world, as the reality of the police system is not something to laugh about. The police system needs real change to change the public's opinion, especially people of color's as they are more likely to be the victims. A funny sitcom about them might not seem as police propaganda but it is, as the police has a history of being represented as the "good guys" ignoring the reality of the many victims of police brutality.

### **3. Police and minorities: a look at their relationship through sitcoms**

After analyzing *B99*'s characters and comparing them to stereotypical representations of black characters in sitcoms and analyzing the show's involvement in the representation of American societal issues, I will now analyze an episode of *B99* to see how exactly the show has chosen to represent those issues. However, in order to see how *B99*'s episode regarding police violence has been conceived, I will compare it to episodes of other police sitcoms. Therefore, I will analyze shows similar to *B99* to put the representation in perspective and determine possible continuities or evolutions. By looking at the history of police sitcoms in the United States and seeing how they represented black men and police brutality, I shall be able to determine *B99*'s specificities. I will start by analyzing the most popular shows of the time, from two very distinct periods important for Black Americans, but also relevant to *B99*'s history: the 1960s, time of the Civil Rights Movement, a founding moment for American history, and the 1970s to 1980s, time where the character Raymond Holt started his career in the police and faced many discriminations because of his race and sexuality. This period is also anchored in racism and homophobia, and the beginning of the liberation of these minorities, which is another reason why it will be interesting to see how shows from that period represent minorities.

The comparison between *B99* and previous police shows, and their ability to accurately portray the police as well as their issues surrounding race, has been made by Harry Waksberg in 2015 article for the *Vulture* magazine.<sup>1</sup> In this article, Waksberg writes that, as I explained in part two, sitcoms are arguably not designed to discuss political issues, and can choose not to do it, as it anchors the show in its time and therefore makes it stale for future watchers. However, Waksberg raises the question of the point of choosing a specific sitcom setting if it does not lead to a discussion about the specificity of this settings, its issues and stories come from it. He then proceeds to make a parallel between *B99* and previous police sitcoms, more notably "*The Andy Griffith show*" (*TAGS*) and "*Barney Miller*" (*BM*). *TAGS* and *BM* seem, to me, to offer the most interesting contrast with *B99*. Both ancestors of *B99*, *TAGS* and *BM* are shows that

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<sup>1</sup> Waksberg, 2015.

portray the police in very interesting regions and time periods: a small fictional town in a Southern State (North Carolina) in the 60s, known to be the places of lynching and segregation, and New York in the 70s and 80s, known for its diverse citizens and fights for social change. Thus, I have chosen to study “*The Andy Griffith Show*” and “*Barney Miller*” to compare it to *B99*. One of these shows has an episode concerning police violence against black people, that I will also analyze later to see how these shows previously represented this subject, and the other does not, which is also a statement from its own time. Therefore, we will be able to see what changed throughout the years concerning the representation of black people and police violence against them.

I will look at some common themes in the three shows. The representation of minorities in general will be analyzed, to see if how the shows represent the Other – as part of the community or outside of it – and the choices made in the representation. Then there is the question of power and violence of the police force. I will look to see how these shows balance fictive and “realistic” portrayal of these themes. I will also look at the political engagement of these shows to see if the shows represent some taboo themes, and if it affects the representation of minorities. By analyzing those themes, we will see how ideologies are present in an entertainment show and we will be able to see if those sitcoms choose to reproduce norms of representation or choose to subdue stereotypes.

### **3.1. Analysis of the shows and the characters**

#### **3.1.1. *The Andy Griffith Show***

*The Andy Griffith Show* (or TAGS) aired on CBS, from 1960 to 1968. Although originally in black and white, colors were introduced in the show in 1965. Andy Griffith played the role of Andy Taylor, a widowed sheriff of the fictional city Mayberry, in North Carolina. Barney Fife, played by Don Knotts, the sheriff’s cousin, and an incompetent deputy compared, he serves as Andy’s comic relief. TAGS was very popular at the time, being at the top of the ratings on CBS, and has had many spin-offs. In a 1996 interview with the *Today Show*, Don Knotts and Andy Griffith explain the popularity of TAGS by saying the

show “had a feeling of the 30s”.<sup>2</sup> By using past period (the 30s), even in the time they filmed it (the 60s), the show gave its audience a sensation of nostalgia. The characters remained pure, and in a town where almost no crimes happened, Mayberry seems like a safe haven compared to the tragedies and social issues that people faced in that decade. The show is still popular today, being on the air constantly since its creation to the 2000s, and now available on platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime.



*Sheriff Andy Taylor helping Deputy Barney Fife whose finger is stuck in a revolver.*  
Wikipedia, wikipedia.org/wiki/The\_Any\_Griffith\_Show, [last accessed 24 May 2021].

Although the show is a police sitcom, there are actually few episodes which discuss the crimes committed in Mayberry, instead of focusing on the life of the town and issues in Andy Taylor’s personal life. The show chooses to place nonviolence to the forefront of a police sitcom. The lack of crime in the town is even the plot of one of the show’s episode, “Crime-Free Mayberry” (season 2, episode 7)<sup>3</sup>, where two men pretend to be an F.B.I. agent and a journalist praising the town’s lowest crime rate in the entire country. In this episode, Barney explains the lack of crime in the town is due to their “raw courage” and their “fearless[ness]”.

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<sup>2</sup> LastWeekTonight, “Police Accountability: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (HBO)”, YouTube, 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaD84DTGULo, [last accessed 10 May 2021].

<sup>3</sup> “Crime Free Mayberry”, The Andy Griffith Show, Season 2, Episode 7, CBS, November 20, 1961, Netflix, www.netflix.com/title/70155574.

“Well, I guess to sum it up, you could say, there's three reasons why there's so little crime in Mayberry. There's Andy, and there's me, and (patting gun) baby makes three.”

Barney Fife, Season 2, Episode 7, “Crime Free Mayberry”.

Indeed, the crime is so low in Mayberry that the Sheriff does not even have a gun, and Fife only has one bullet that he keeps in his shirt pocket. Besides, the rare times Fife does use his gun, he is most likely to injure himself than use it against others, which proves that his non-violence is also made of necessity, for his own protection.

Andy and Barney are the only two “peacekeepers”, as Taylor likes to say, of the town. But they are two very different people, with two different approaches to police work. In his article, Dobrin describes Barney as the “professional policing model” and Andy as the “community-oriented” officer.<sup>4</sup> Whereas Barney's focus is on crime fighting, Andy is rather interested in the quality of life of the citizens. Fife knows every law and town's cases by heart and puts no one above the law, not even the Governor when he parks illegally in Mayberry (season 3, episode 5, “Barney and the Governor”) and goes as far as arresting himself after making an illegal U-turn (season 4, episode 11, “Citizen's Arrest”). Barney's intransigence with the law alienated him from the community, but Andy proved to be more flexible with the townspeople, who saw him more than just a Sheriff. He often used words like “peacekeeping”, or “peacekeepers”, to describe his role in the town, and thought that enforcing the law was a minor part of his duty, which goes along with the fact that very few episodes actually revolve around crimes. As Dobrin writes: “He helped kids across the street, put lids on trash cans, gave safety lectures at the high school, passed out Christmas baskets, and kept tabs on elderly residents”. Although years later, Griffith reveals in his interview with *The Today Show*<sup>5</sup> that the real reason he never wore a gun is because the actor did not want to wear the weight of the fake gun, Andy Taylor's given reason is different. He never wore one because his goal was to help the community, not be feared.

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<sup>4</sup> Dobrin, A., ‘Professional and Community Oriented Policing: The Mayberry Model’, *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, n°13, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> spsimmons, “Andy Griffith & Don Knotts on The Today Show”, YouTube, 2007, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ahbyf9cbEU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ahbyf9cbEU), [last accessed 10 May 2021].

“When a man carries a gun all the time, the respect he thinks he’s getting might really be fear. So I don’t carry a gun because I don’t want the people of Mayberry to fear a gun; I’d rather they would respect me.”

Andy Taylor, Season 5, Episode 23, “TV or Not TV”.

The professional versus community-oriented policing theory can also be seen in the “Crime-Free Mayberry” episode. Indeed, the episode starts with Otis, the town’s drunk who is the one who spends the most time in the police jail, enjoying Taylor’s singing. When Fife arrives, he admonishes the behavior and compares it to a “nightclub”, whereas Taylor just wants to ensure Otis is well and happy, even though he is in jail. The placement of the camera behind the bars, next to Otis, gives the audience the impression that the ones arrested are the police officers and not the town’s drunk. Otis eventually takes the key to open his cell himself and sees himself out of the building with no problems, once again proving that Mayberry has so little crime, there is no need to distrust the citizens who live there.



*Taylor, Fife and Otis, the town’s drunk. “Crime Free Mayberry”, The Andy Griffith Show, Season 2, Episode 7, CBS, November 20, 1961, Netflix,  
[www.netflix.com/title/70155574](http://www.netflix.com/title/70155574), 0:40.*

Although the show is still popular today, it is also massively criticized for his lack of social and political involvement, especially for a show which aired in one of the most prolific decades of social change. Some of the few social commentaries actually made in the show are about sexism, especially in the politics of the town. It can be seen in the twelfth episode of the first season (“Ellie for Council”). Andy’s girlfriend, Ellie, runs for

Council, wanting more women representation in politics.<sup>6</sup> Ellie's choice makes Andy and the whole town of Mayberry confront their misogynistic behavior and thoughts. Ellie leaves the show and is then replaced by Helen Crump, and the feminist messages becomes unclear. In the first episode of the seventh season ("Opie's girlfriend")<sup>7</sup>, Opie, Andy's son, loses to a girl, and "peace" is eventually restored as Helen convinces the girl to allow Opie to beat her, and Opie's ego is rebuilt.

Therefore, even the few social commentaries that can be found in the show must be taken with precaution, as they might be later negated by the show. The show chooses to respect the norms of white supremacy, which creates a peaceful fictional town where no violence is committed, but also where no social conflicts can be fought, such as sexism, homophobia or racism. Its representation of the world is sugarcoated and at the expense of the reality of the many social changes of the time.

There is a lot less commentary concerning racial differences, but, when there are some, the characters are often visitors or chased away from the town. Dobrin<sup>8</sup> explains that Andy's community-oriented approach to policing marks a clear difference between how outsiders are treated compared to Mayberry citizens. In the episode "The Gypsies"<sup>9</sup>(Season 6, episode 23), Mayberry is visited by a group of Romani. The representation of the Romani people is extremely stereotyped, as explains Gregor Maučec in his article: they are represented as flirty women in traditional clothes, and criminal men, living on the edge of the towns in caravans.<sup>10</sup> All of these stereotypes are present in the TAGS episode. The young Romani woman flirts and compliments Andy and wears a pink traditional Kaldarashi costume. They live in their caravans, just outside of the town. They trick the townspeople into believing in their far-fetched tales and magic tricks, until they are driven out of the town by Andy who catches them conning citizens of the town. This

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<sup>6</sup> "Ellie for Council", *The Andy Griffith Show*, Season 1, Episode 12, CBS, December 12, 1960, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70155574](http://www.netflix.com/title/70155574).

<sup>7</sup> "Opie's girlfriend", *The Andy Griffith Show*, Season 7, Episode 1, CBS, November 7, 1966, Netflix, [www.netflix.com/title/70155574](http://www.netflix.com/title/70155574).

<sup>8</sup> Dobrin, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Although throughout the episode, everyone refers to the newcomers as "gypsies", this term is now recognized as a slur to the Romani community. Therefore, I will use the term "Romani" to describe them in this essay.

<sup>10</sup> Maučec, Gregor, "Identifying and changing stereotypes between Roma and Non-Roma: from theory to practice", *Innovative Issues and Approaches in Social Sciences*, n°6.3, 2013.

representation of the racial Other in *TAGS* is therefore stereotyped and problematic, and could explain the lack of diversity in Mayberry, as everyone who is disliked by the White and protestant citizens are immediately rejected.

Only one black character has a speaking role in the entire show, a black athlete named Flip Conroy, who visits the town to coach the football team. Once again, the town escapes racial diversity by making the diverse characters only visitors of Mayberry instead of actual citizens. The fact that the only black character is an athlete goes along with the stereotypes of Black men representation that we have seen in the first part of this essay. The town's all whiteness is not surprising given the time of the creation of the show. Television in the 1960s was still segregated, sitcoms with only white characters or only black characters were the norm. Given the lack of racial diversity, it is not a surprise to see that there are no episodes surrounding Black Identity or issues faced by Black people, like police violence.

However, the 1960s were a time of social change, the most famous one being the Civil Rights Movement, which gave rights to the Black population and ended the segregation. Mayberry, as a city, would have been in the middle of the same debate of racial segregation as other cities in the South. But no such things are ever mentioned in the show. In fact, not one important moment of the decade is represented in the show (the president's assassination, the riots, the war in Vietnam...). This gives the impression that Mayberry is a fantasy town, in an all-white south, with no problem of racism, as Black people do not live there. The omission of black characters can be seen as a political stance in itself, as Mayberry could have had black characters and still say nothing of the current politics, which would have legitimized and normalized the presence of Black citizens in towns like Mayberry. However, Mayberry feels nostalgic and a town "like the 30s" because it does not have to deal with racial tension and political dilemmas, which is the reason why the show was and still is popular today.

Therefore we can see that the representation of the racial Other, especially of the Black Other, is non-existent in *TAGS*, which follows the norms of traditional representation and is stuck in the step before racial representation exist: the omission of the racial minority.

### 3.1.2. *Barney Miller*

*Barney Miller*, or *BM*, is a police sitcom which aired on ABC from 1975 to 1982. It focuses on the 12<sup>th</sup> Precinct of the NYPD. The squad is composed of Captain Barney Miller, and his squad of detectives, who change slightly over the years: Detective Stan “Wojo” Wojciechowicz, Detective Ron Harris, Deputy Inspector Franklin D. Luger, Sergeant Philip K. Fish, Sergeant Nick Yemana, Sergeant Miguel “Chano” Amengual, Detective Arthur Dietrich and Officer Carl Levitt. The characters have strengths and weaknesses, that make them good detectives, but also prone to mistakes and errors that they can learn from thanks to the squad’s help in a dramatic finish. In each episode, there are multiple subplots, each focusing on one part of the squad and different crimes committed, and sometimes their personal issues. The show is mainly filmed on the set of the 12<sup>th</sup> precinct so as to reflect the real-life police work of the detectives, instead of focusing on the action on the street as previous television shows and movies have done. During the entirety of the show, *BM* attracted a great number of audience and was a favorite amongst real-life police officers, who deemed the portrayal of the show realistic.<sup>11</sup> Today, the show is still recognized to be one of the most diverse shows of its time, having compelling stories and good actors.

In an article of the *International Business Times* (*IBT*), Dr. Lance Strate discusses *BM*’s importance on American popular culture.<sup>12</sup> As we have seen earlier, the 1960s were tumultuous and socially and culturally changed the country. *BM* followed the path that other shows took after that decade, by putting emphasis on social issues. However, after the Watergate scandal, television network found that Americans rather watched nostalgic shows to escape the problematic reality they lived in. Therefore, *BM*, who “straddled the two periods”, has a little bit of both currents. Many episodes are absurd and deal with minor crimes, while others are socially relevant. The most important thing was to represent the police as sympathetic, as the 1960s developed a growing hate toward the police, who were seen as “pigs” and hostile.

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<sup>11</sup> Howard, Douglas L., and David Bianculli, eds., *Television Finales: From Howdy Doody to Girls*, New York, Syracuse University Press, 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Ghosh, Palash, “Barney Miller: Forty Years Later, The Most Intelligent, Literate US Sitcom Ever”, *International Buisness Times*, 19 February 2014, [www.ibtimes.com/barney-miller-forty-years-later-most-intelligent-literate-us-sitcom-ever-1556406](http://www.ibtimes.com/barney-miller-forty-years-later-most-intelligent-literate-us-sitcom-ever-1556406), [last accessed 10 May 2021].

The show was created and written by Danny Arnold and Theodore J. Flicker. Danny Arnold was known to be a perfectionist, who sometimes rewrote the scripts until the last second, changing them until he was satisfied with his work. Hal Linden, Barney Miller's actor, explains in his interview with the Television Academy Foundation<sup>13</sup> that he was the reason as to why the show was not filmed in front of a live audience, as Arnold would change the script throughout the taping of the show. He also says that Arnold would not budge on his decisions, and that he refused to bow down to the censors, and says "he had the guts to say, 'we're shooting our shows the way we wrote them'." Arnold also was a reason as to why the show was so diverse, as he worked closely with the activist group the Gay Media Task Force to create more LGBTQ+ representation in media.

One of *BM*'s great strength is its incredibly diverse cast of characters. In his interview, Hal Linden explains that the actors were chosen for their acting and not their comedic talents, which allowed them to best portray Danny Arnold's writing. And because Danny Arnold created a very diverse cast, he was able to include many specific narratives into the series. In the squad, there are three Jewish men (Miller, Fish and Levitt), a Catholic Polish man (Wojo), a black man (Harris), a Japanese man, (Yemana), a Puerto-Rican man (Chano) and two white men (Luger and Dietrich). The show also had regulars with diverse backgrounds, such as Marty Morrison who is an openly gay man often brought in the precinct as a suspect or a complainant. Marty's representation of gay man is problematic on its own, because of his effeminate and dramatic character and the fact that he was seen often as a suspect, in a time where homosexuality is still seen as a crime or a sin in the eye of the public.

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<sup>13</sup> Television Academy Foundation, "Hal Linden", *The Interviews*, 2017, [interviews.televisionacademy.com/interviews/hal-linden](http://interviews.televisionacademy.com/interviews/hal-linden), [last accessed 10 May 2021].



*A picture of BM's squad. From left to right, top row: Wojo, Chano, Yemana, Harris, Fish. Bottom row: Liz and Barney Miller. Sitcomsonline.com, www.sitcomsonline.com/photopost/showgallery.php/cat/706, [last accessed 10 May 2021].*

Barney Miller was considered “the straight man”: he is “the one ‘normal’ character in the work group, the long suffering official who must tolerate the daft behaviour of the leading characters”.<sup>14</sup> The squad is compared to him and look up to him, but he is also a Jewish man who is compassionate and a father figure to some characters such as Wojo. According to Linden, Arnold specifically chose him to play Miller without even auditioning for it first because he had “a sense of Talmudic justice” that Miller needed in order to be compassionate and patient with the squad. By using Jewish culture to create a Jewish character, instead of focusing on stereotypes, Arnold created a character that goes against traditional Jewish stereotypes (such as villainy and selfishness).

Captain. Miller’s character was not the only one who was planned to be part of a minority group. Ron Glass, who played detective Ron Harris, was not the original actor chosen for the show, but both of them were black. But, in his interview with *Pop Goes The Culture TV*<sup>15</sup>, Glass says that Harris is not “just a ‘black guy’ sitting in the room [...] we ended up with a well-rounded character”, thanks to the sensitivity of the writers. Harris is a criminologist as well, which makes him an intellectual who has a refined taste.

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<sup>14</sup> Stafford, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Pop Goes The Culture TV, “Ron Glass Talks about Barney Miller, Firefly and His Career- Part 1 of 3”, YouTube, 2019, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlvFCukFZmo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlvFCukFZmo), [last accessed 10 May 2021].

According to Glass, Arnold put in each character a side of his own personality, and Harris had his “connoisseur” side. A Black representation stereotyped that we have seen in the first part is the intelligent Black men, who ends up associated to whiteness due to his intellect and success and ends up denying his own Blackness. However, Harris does not fit in this stereotyped representation, as he often reminds the squad and the audience, through jokes and some storylines (such as the “Harris Incident” that I will analyze later), that he is black.

Therefore, by deliberately choosing to create a diverse cast of characters, with their unique storylines which mentions the social issues of the time, *BM*’s representation of minorities is anchored in reality and does not sugarcoat what minorities, and some of their audiences, go through.

Dr. Lance Strate also discusses *BM*’s diversity with the *IBT*.<sup>16</sup> Strate explains that *BM* worked “against stereotypes regarding the police, even if the stereotypes were accurate.” This is why, although the cast is very diverse, there is no Irish or Italian detective, as these two ethnic groups are historically associated with toughness and the NYPD. They also avoided stereotypes through the flaws of their characters, which are universal. Yemana, instead of being “cold, efficient, hard-working, sober, disciplined, conscientious East Asian”, he was “lazy, slovenly, unambitious and overly fond of gambling”. The character who is most often linked to his ethnicity is Wojo, as “Polish ethnicity remained an easy target” at the time. It also had to deal with the fact that Wojo had the “fool” archetype, who counterbalanced Miller’s “wise” archetype. Because of this, these two characters have a “Father-son” relationship, where Miller teaches Wojo things, which is similar to Jake and Holt’s relationship in *B99*.

Violence and criminals are a huge part of *BM*. Since the very first episode of the show, violence is presented as a consequence of the detectives’ works but is dealt with humor. The first episode, “Ramon”, the detectives are hostage to a Puerto-Rican junkie who refuses to go to jail, but the situation is not seen as scary or dramatic, but humorous, especially thanks to the laugh track. Most of the criminals that come to the precinct are not dangerous, and oftentimes the matters are resolved thanks to the detectives, especially

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<sup>16</sup> Ghosh, 2014.

Miller, who investigate and eventually fix the situation. However, as the show develops, the detectives start to deal with matters who cannot be fixed in twenty minutes, such as “Rape”<sup>17</sup>, episode where a woman charges her husband with rape.

To compare it to *TAGS*, Miller is definitely closer to the “community policing”, just as Andy was. The squad is always sympathetic with the criminals that come to the precinct, and even if trouble starts, they do their best to help people resolve things peacefully. However, when violence does occur, the police officers often suffer from it. For example, in the first season, episode 13 “The Hero”, Chano deals with depression after having killed two bank robbers who took hostage, even though he is seen as a hero. The characters are seen as flawed and more humane than the pacifist peacekeepers, who never dealt with violent crimes, that Andy and Barney were in *TAGS*. As Strate says in IBT<sup>18</sup>:

As a comedy, this was not a show about cops and robbers, good guys and bad guys, and depicting the criminals as victims allowed the main characters to treat them with sensitivity, kindness, even sympathy. It also reflected the liberal values coming out of the 1960s and early 1970s, in which criminality had come to be seen either as a form of mental illness in need of treatment rather than punishment, or as a product of a corrupt and unfair social system, for which the criminal is not to blame.

Because the criminals are also portrayed as victims, it is difficult to see them as simply bad, especially when the behavior of the detectives is sometimes not that good as well. However, the cast of detectives did not go against the law very often, and when they do it seems to be for the greater good of the community – which once again is similar to Andy’s community policing. In his interview, Linden explains that Arnold never wanted them to be funny just for the sake of it, as they always had to maintain a certain legitimacy; as “[they had] to be someone, anyone could go to for help”<sup>19</sup>.

Contrary to *TAGS*, the show did not shy away from current events. There are many references to current issues and politics, from just small jokes and scenes, like in the

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<sup>17</sup> “Rape”, *Barney Miller*, Season 4, Episode 15, ABC, January 16, 1978, *Amazon Prime*, [www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20).

<sup>18</sup> Ghosh, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Television Academy Foundation, 54-55:30.

episode “Protection (Season 2, Episode 14)<sup>20</sup> where the squad listens to President Ford’s speech promising to continue to finance the NYPD, to entire episodes revolving around politics, such as “The Election”<sup>21</sup> (Season 3, Episode 5) which deals with the squad working on election night. There are also multiple references to budget cuts and how the police were treated, also going from small remarks from the detectives or their families about the situation and the danger they go through, to two entire episodes dedicated to the Police strikes known as the blue flu, as police officers refused to go to work because of their new hostile reputation and budget cuts (Season 3, Episodes 21 and 22, “Strike”)<sup>22</sup>. Even the finale of the show<sup>23</sup> references the monetary situation of the police then, as the precinct is sold to a dentist and the squad is dismantled and sent elsewhere.

Because Arnold was not afraid to be political and encouraged diverse representation, the show dealt with very sensitive issues throughout the seasons. Many of the storylines dealt with the race issues in the country, with episodes such as the “Harris Incident” (Season 5, Episode 10) that I will analyze later, which deals with police brutality against black people. Jack Soo’s time in American camps in 1942, because of his Japanese origins, also made it in the show through jokes in multiple episodes. Another example is the “The Librarian” (Season 7, Episode 13)<sup>24</sup>, which deals with Romani and Nazism, as a survivor of a concentration camp recognizes the Nazi who was in charge of him and draws swastikas on his library. Other current issues tackled by the show are sexual aggression – with the marital rape episode seen above, but also through episodes such as “The Dentist” (Season 6, Episode 11)<sup>25</sup>, where a woman was molested by her dentist

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<sup>20</sup> “Protection”, *Barney Miller*, Season 2, Episode 14, ABC, December 18, 1975, *Amazon Prime*, [www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20).

<sup>21</sup> “The Election”, *Barney Miller*, Season 3, Episode 5, ABC, October 21, 1976, *Amazon Prime*, [www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20).

<sup>22</sup> “Strike”, *Barney Miller*, Season 3, Episode 21 et 22, ABC, March 24 & 31, 1977, *Amazon Prime*, [www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20).

<sup>23</sup> “Landmark: Part 3”, *Barney Miller*, Season 8, Episode 22, ABC, May 20, 1982, *Amazon Prime*, [www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20).

<sup>24</sup> “The Librarian”, *Barney Miller*, Season 7, Episode 13, ABC, February 19, 1981, *Amazon Prime*, [www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20).

<sup>25</sup> “The Dentist”, *Barney Miller*, Season 6, Episode 5, ABC, December 27, 1979, *Amazon Prime*, [www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20).

while dosed – modern day slavery (“The Slave”, Season 6, Episode 5)<sup>26</sup>, cults (“Abduction”, Season 3, Episode 16)<sup>27</sup> and many more.

As the violence committed and seen by the police is not hidden by the show, *BM* chooses a different approach than *TAGS*. It gives the audience the representation of a world closer to reality, through jokes and comedy, and allows them to learn and to get familiar with subjects they might have otherwise not known.

*BM* is known to be a police favorite. Often described as realistic, *BM* shows the “grunt work”, as Linden says in his interview, instead of movie fights and chases. The fact that the officers are also humanized by the consequences of their works, such as the difficulties of dealing with having shot someone, and work taking priority over their personal lives, this representation of police seemed to please real-life police officers. As quoted in the book *Moving Toward the Future of Policing*<sup>28</sup>, Lieutenant John Sullivan describes the show in a positive light:

“For me Barney Miller was just about right in my appreciation of the day-to-day feelings... Police work is routine, mundane boredom, punctuated by sheer terror, mayhem, crisis, excitement, and bureaucratic blunder. On top of this add valor, compassion, and drama. It strikes at the core of human life and experience (in all weather) ...”

The show could certainly be seen as police propaganda, as the detectives deal with various serious crimes, but try their best to resolve things without violence and are genuinely upset when they have to use violence.

Besides all the diversity and episodes concerning societal issues current for the era of the sitcom, *BM* is not without failure. The two recurrent gay characters, Marty, and his lover Darryl, were indeed among the earliest recurring gay characters on American television, but they were heavily stereotyped as very effeminate, through their clothes and mannerism. Seasons after seasons, the characters eventually mellow down, which could

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<sup>26</sup> “The Slave”, *Barney Miller*, Season 6, Episode 5, ABC, October 18, 1979, *Amazon Prime*, [www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20).

<sup>27</sup> “Abduction”, *Barney Miller*, Season 3, Episode 16, ABC, February 3, 1977, *Amazon Prime*, [www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20).

<sup>28</sup> Treverton, Gregory F., et al., “Policing Today”, in *Moving Toward the Future of Policing*, RAND Corporation, 2011, pp. 15–42.

be the result of working with the Gay Media Task Force. Later, the show introduced Officer Zitelli, a gay police officer who writes an anonymous public letter to prove to the population a gay man can be a functional police officer.<sup>29</sup> Zitelli is not stereotyped at all, and on the contrary, hides his sexual identity to work in the police without the insults of his coworkers and “mandatory psych evaluation. But he also has his own personality outside of it, the character having been on the show a few seasons before his coming out storyline, and was seen as blunt and sarcastic, but also intelligent.”. The fact that Zitelli has to hide his identity is true to what LGBTQ+ officers went through at the time. Eventually, Zitelli is outed by Wojo accidentally, which in the end benefits him as he is promoted (Season 7, Episode 9, “Movie (1)”). This storyline can be seen as hopeful to the LGBTQ+ audience that watches the show, but also political as often leaders put minorities on higher position to be seen as not bigoted and to give themselves good press. By adding more LGBTQ+ characters, who do not all act the same or fit the flamboyant stereotype, *BM* manages to provide a representation for a minority who was still persecuted and ignored at the time.

Another failure that could be seen is the lack of female representation in *BM*. Indeed, the only female main character was Barney’s wife, Liz, who eventually stopped appearing on the show as it moved away from the detectives’ personal lives. And although there are some female police officers, they are still absent from the show compared to the number of male police officers. It is also important to note the context of the time. The 1970s were fundamental for female officers, as it allowed them to finally not be discriminated because of their gender. Betsy Smith, a former Sergeant from Chicago, writes in her article for Police1:

“During the 1970s the presence of female officers in police departments became increasingly accepted by the general public, as is evidenced by the popularity of TV programs such as *Policewoman* and *Get Christie Love*. In 1972, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act was implemented outlawing gender discrimination in public agencies — including police departments — and further expanding opportunities for women in law enforcement. In July of that year JoAnne Misko and Susan Malone became the

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<sup>29</sup> “Inquisition”, *Barney Miller*, Season 6, Episode 1, ABC, September 13, 1979, *Amazon Prime*, [www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20).

first fully sworn FBI agents in the U.S. Finally, the women's movement in this country generally made female service in formerly male-dominated roles increasingly acceptable, and law enforcement was no exception to this trend.”<sup>30</sup>

This is somewhat reflected in *BM* by two characters: Detective Janice Wentworth and Detective Maria Baptista. Wentworth was a very enthusiastic police officer, eager to prove herself as a female detective, but appreciated by the rest of the squad as she did a very good job. She was present in the first two seasons of the show and was a love interest for Wojo. Battista was only there for two episodes in the third season; to try to replace Wentworth. She is also passionate and good at her job, even better than everyone in the precinct (“Do you realize that you've made more busts this week than all of us put together?”, Barney to Baptista in “Smog Alert”, Season 3, Episode 12). However, the character never appeared again. It is also interesting to see that the crimes dealt by Wentworth and Baptista are almost specific to their gender. They dealt with “female” crimes (sexual graffiti in the women's bathroom in “Smog Alert”, and even rape in “Heat Wave”<sup>31</sup>, Season 2, Episode 5) or played a female role (like in “Grand Hotel”<sup>32</sup> Season 2, Episode 7; Wentworth is undercover as Wojo's wife). Because of that, and especially as the 1970s were important for female officers, one could say *BM* failed the representation of female detectives.

Behind their general truthful representation of the world and social issues their characters might go through, *BM* still lacks or fails some of their representation. This can be explained by the genre of the sitcom, which does not allow social issues to be discussed at length or “bad endings” which would turn away some of their audience.

### 3.2. Analysis of the episodes

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<sup>30</sup> Brantner Smith, Betsy, “Police History: The Evolution of Women in American Law Enforcement”, *Police1*, 28 March 2019, [www.police1.com/police-history/articles/police-history-the-evolution-of-women-in-american-law-enforcement-wMo8P1wLSxGQRes9/](http://www.police1.com/police-history/articles/police-history-the-evolution-of-women-in-american-law-enforcement-wMo8P1wLSxGQRes9/), [last accessed 10 May 2021].

<sup>31</sup> “Heatwave”, Barney Miller, Season 2, Episode 5, ABC, October 9, 1975, *Amazon Prime*, [www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20).

<sup>32</sup> “Grand Hotel”, Barney Miller, Season 2, Episode 7, ABC, October 16, 1975, *Amazon Prime*, [www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20).

Now that we have an idea of what police sitcoms looked before *B99*, I will focus on episodes which portray police violence against black men. As I have explained in the previous part, social commentaries of any kind are very rare in the *TAGS* universe. The show completely ignored the Civil Rights movement, and with so few episodes concerning social issues and the Racial Other, the show has no episode revolving around police brutality. This take on such issues is totally understandable for such a show, especially in the context of the 1960s. Sitcoms are supposed to be light and fun to watch, offering an escape from the real world and its problems, whereas such subjects are very controversial and meant to make the reader realize the necessity of changing the system. Although the 1960s were tumultuous for various reasons, shows born before that time were racially homogenous, and eventually died in the decade, due to the recognizance of issues such as the lack of racial diversity.

*BM* and *B99*, however, chose to represent various societal issues through their very diverse cast of characters. This opposition between the sitcom's nature and the episodes' content is what makes these episodes interesting to analyze, as they try to denounce a very serious problem through comedy. Both sitcoms have a recurrent black character who is a part of the police squad and who, in an episode of the show, experiences police violence. Therefore, in this part, I will first analyze *BM*'s episode intitled "The Harris Incident"<sup>33</sup>, and then go on to analyze *B99*'s episode, "Moo-Moo".<sup>34</sup>

In the two sitcoms, the plot of the episodes revolving around police brutality is similar: a black policeman, part of the show's main characters, experiences police brutality. The character then confronts those responsible. The police squad try to help the character through this difficult experience, but through disagreements or ignorance, the characters fight. However, by the end of the episode, the squad is brought together by friendship. By making these main characters face police brutality, instead of other black characters created for the episode in question, the sitcoms count on the audience's love for the character to be a motivation to understand that what is happening is wrong. The audience might otherwise feel lectured by the shows and not inclined to watch these episodes;

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<sup>33</sup> "The Harris Incident", *Barney Miller*, Season 6, Episode 5, ABC, November 30, 1978, *Amazon Prime*, [www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20).

<sup>34</sup> "Moo-Moo", *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 4, Episode 16, Fox, May 2, 2017, *Netflix* [www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562).

therefore, the showrunners and writers have to be careful about what they choose to show and take the audience by the hand to the controversial topic.

In an interview for the *Washington Post*, Goor says that he wanted to do an episode dedicated on racial profiling for a long time, but was discouraged because the show portrays police officers as the “good guys” who get along with their community.<sup>35</sup> In the episode’s Sneak Peak video, the actor Terry Crews explains that they made this episode because they did not want *B99* to “become a cartoon”.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the episode aired in 2017, a few years after the BLM movement became widely popular throughout the country and throughout the world, after the protests to denounce the deaths of Trayvon Martin, in Missouri, Michael Brown in Ferguson, Eric Garner in New York City, and many more. The episode also aired a few months after Donald Trump took his presidency, which lead to a lot of tension in the country. This forced the showrunners and writers to really look at the structure of the episode, as they have a multitude of goals and ambitions. They have to portray this important issue for the black community, by being truthful to the situation today, but still being respectful of both the black community victims of these crimes and the policemen represented through the characters, while still making people laugh at the same time. Although I was unable to find a reason as to why *BM* included this episode in the show, the fact that it is included is not very surprising. As we have seen earlier in the presentation of the series, a lot of *BM*’s episodes revolve around subjects that affect the life of American citizens and the police force. As Arnold did not shy away from recognizing the police wrong-doings, *BM*’s “Harris Incident” could have been made to open a discourse around the reality of police brutality; that the showrunners and the actors expose.

As both plots are very similar, the themes that can be found in these episodes are relatively the same as well. Four common themes can be seen in the two episodes, the first one being the actual scene of racial prejudice. As it is the central theme of the episode, it is vital to analyze what is actually portrayed during the scene of racial prejudice as it

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<sup>35</sup> Rosenberg, Alyssa, “Showrunner Dan Goor on the “Brooklyn Nine-Nine” Stop-and-Frisk Episode and the Talk”, *Washington Post*, 3 May 2017, [www.washingtonpost.com/news/act-four/wp/2017/05/03/showrunner-dan-goor-on-the-brooklyn-nine-nine-stop-and-frisk-episode-and-the-talk/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/act-four/wp/2017/05/03/showrunner-dan-goor-on-the-brooklyn-nine-nine-stop-and-frisk-episode-and-the-talk/), [last accessed 10 May 2021].

<sup>36</sup> Brooklyn Nine-Nine, “Brooklyn Nine-Nine - Making a Statement (Sneak Peek)”, *YouTube*, 2017, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEkeTI\\_B0GI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEkeTI_B0GI) [last accessed 10 May 2021].

will most likely give the tone to the rest of the episode. The second one is the taboo surrounding the word racism. Race plays a huge part in people's life in the United States because of their deep history surrounding discrimination and segregation up throughout history and still today. Therefore, it is important to see how the act of police brutality is called and talked about in the episode. The third theme is the difficult explanation of racism in America. Both episodes include characters who, by their age or ignorance on the subject, do not know how to deal with what is happening to the characters who suffered police violence, and throughout these characters, the shows can denounce how racism affect people in the United States. Finally, the last theme is the repression felt by the character and the solidarity expressed by the supporting characters. The character victim of racial prejudice feels repressed, rightfully so, as their actions is limited, but the supporting characters try to help the character feel less alone in this situation. By contrasting these themes and seeing how they were chosen to be represented, we can see the point of view of the writers and showrunners on the situation at the moment the episode aired, and the evolution of these themes throughout time.

### 3.2.1. *Barney Miller*, Season 5, Episode 10, “The Harris Incident”.

To understand this episode of *BM*, we have to look back at how the episodes are structured in the show. A *BM* episode lasts around 25 minutes. The show uses the minutes before the opening credits to introduce the plots of the episode, the crimes, and criminals of the week. The episodes have multiple storylines, following the detectives in charge of the crime, or sometimes following them into their personal lives. The sitcom is filmed with a single camera and almost always takes place inside the precinct, showing each side of a conversation in shots and reverse shots.

In the “Harris Incident”, the episode starts with Wojo’s arrest of a begging man who is actually rich, and the opening credits starts after Miller answers a call which informs him that Harris was shot by another police officer. Although, for the rest of the episode the two plots have nothing in common, in the introduction of the episode Wojo’s plot serves as a sort of parallel to the Harris’ one. When Miller learns Wojo’s arrest has nothing to do with actually breaking the law, he says to him that “It’s not our job to make moral judgments”, therefore foreshadowing Harris’ plot where two police officers made

the moral judgment that a black man is immediately the suspect. The introduction of the show is quite humorous in itself, Dietrich and Miller bantering on the bad coffee, and the beggar's funny answers to the detectives' questions. The humor stops when Miller takes the call, shouting in anger, and announces that "Harris was shot at, by another cop", but it quickly comes back with Dietrich answering "don't look at me", as Dietrich and Harris have a well-known rivalry in the precinct. The jokes lighten the situation and make a fluid transition to the upbeat opening credits to start without the two tones being jarringly different.

- **The actual scene of racial prejudice.**

In order to make an episode about police brutality against black men, the show must portray the scene of racial prejudice on screen. The actual scene of racial prejudice is actually not shown in *BM*'s episode, but it is not very shocking. Indeed, almost every scene of the show's eight season take place inside the precinct, even though at the beginning some took place inside the home of the detective or during stakeouts. Because of that, there are very little action sequences in the show. It might also be because actually witnessing the crime would be much scarier, and therefore damper the humorous tone of the show, than telling the story through the characters. Hence, the actual scene of racial prejudice is related by Harris and the two officers who shot him. Both sides are obviously biased and want to prove the other wrong.

Harris is in the middle of his explanation with Miller in his office when the opening credits are finished. While he is arresting a man, that he catches during a breaking and entering, Harris is shot by two other police officers. They asked him to throw his gun and was searched, he then told them he was a police officer. He is uninjured, but because of his anger, he punches one of the officers, breaking his nose. The camera is mostly focused on Harris, as he expresses himself dramatically through his face, his gesture, and his voice, although there are some reaction shots to show Miller asking questions to Harris. This puts the emphasis on Harris' characters, and shows that he is the main character of the episode, although he was not present on screen until that moment. The description of Harris' experience is interrupted by jokes (like the double meaning of the word 'collar', the shirt, and the suspect) and the laugh track reacting to the story or at Harris' dramatic gestures and sarcastic remarks.



*"The Harris Incident"*, *Barney Miller*, Season 6, Episode 5, ABC,  
November 30, 1978, Amazon Prime,  
[www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20), 04:55, 08:00.

For example, the laugh track can be heard when Harris says that he heard the other police officers saying “Police! Drop it.”, or when Harris sarcastically answers Miller’s questions: Miller: “What did you do?” Harris: “Well, not being invincible, I dove.”, Miller: “The hospital? They were hurt?” Harris: “Well, I tried.” [laugh track]. Harris himself interrupts the story to give him details about his gun’s improvements being broken and his clothes being ruined, as Harris is known to be vain and fashionable. All of this gives the impression that what happened to Harris is not that grave, as everything is made to make the audience laugh.

When the two police officers arrive to the precinct, it is their turn to describe what happened with Harris. They talk to Harris as if they were old friends (“Hey pallie”, “no hard feelings”) whereas Harris is visibly angry at them and ignoring them to get to Miller. They start the story by presenting themselves and saying they are “real sorry about what happened”, finally giving their report to explain the situation. There is a clear age difference between the two officers, and the older officer, Officer Slater, is the one who does the talking and the explaining, the younger one, Officer Darvec only repeating what his partner says and giving more details, therefore interrupting the story.

Although the officers apologize, it does not seem very sincere as only one of them actually says they are sorry and because of the fact they immediately try to leave after that, even after Miller asks them what really happened. They tell Harris’ story from their point of view, Darvec officer retelling the story again with details that sounds like police-talk. Slater tries to blame his action on the fact that Harris does not dress like a police

officer, and that his clothes are “flashy”, but he interrupts the younger officer just as he is about to mention Harris’ race.



*Ibid, 06:55 – 08:11.*

The fact that the Slater used Harris’ appearance to explain their action is not uncommon. Many victims of racial discrimination are often judged by their appearance being not “professional” or have heard people saying that they “look dangerous” because of the way they dress and act. Even Miller, during Harris’ explanation, comments on his suit, which proves that his appearance does not coincide to what detectives usually wear. However, the tone of the episode shifts when Darvec almost mentions Harris’ race.

When Slater tries to move on from the incident and convince Miller that this was simply a mistake coming from his partner’s inexperience (“seven and a half weeks” on the job), he leans toward Miller. Because the camera focuses on him, pivoting and zooming on his face, it gives the impression that the audience feels that he is getting closer to them as well.



*Ibid, 9:16 – 10:20.*

Slater describes his partner as “overzealous” and he tells Miller they “shot without thinking”, and he was himself “caught up in the moment”. It gives a sense of intimacy, amplified by the hushed tone of the two characters. However, instead of Slater

intimidating Miller in order to leave the precinct, it is Miller who intimidates Slater, saying that he was shooting himself, and he has a lot more experience than his partner. By blaming their action on Harris' suits or the inexperience of the younger officer, they blame everything but themselves, which is once again used to diminish the experience of victims of racial discrimination.

- **Racism, a taboo word.**

It is important to know how the show deals with racism, which is a taboo word in American society, and is very difficult to talk about, especially in the 1970s. First decade after the Civil Rights Movement, the discrimination against African Americans still was very present in society and at the same time, black people were involved in politics and media. In this episode, it is never explicitly said that the detectives did it because of a racial bias that perpetuates the image of black men being dangerous, although skin colors are brought up by Harris and eventually Miller. Slater interrupts Darvec every time he tries to mention the fact that Harris is black, which is not missed by Harris, who is upset, and Miller, who wants to have more information. The audience also cannot miss these interruptions, as they can hear either the laugh track, or gasps.

Darvec: "It's true! We saw him and thought he was just another b-"

Slater: "Darvec!" [gasps]

Harris: "Hold that thought!"

In Miller's office, as Slater and Darvec continue their story about how they came to shot Harris, Slater gives an analogy to explain exactly what happened.

"Slater: Sometimes it is hard to get the player right without a score card.

Harris: Especially if he is black.

Slater: You are putting words into my mouth!

Harris: Fits like a glove!"

The fact that Slater used a sport metaphor ("player" and "score card") to explain the situation could be attributed to his racial bias, as black men are often linked to sport. Also, it is Harris who brings out the race issue of the episode, by explicitly saying that he is black. Slater vehemently denies, however. This is also similar to what real-life racial discrimination looks like. Many times, racist behavior goes unnoticed until the victim

speaks out, as it is integrated in our society. Of course, Staler will never admit to people that he did what he did because of Harris' skin color, it would not be beneficial for him, so instead he blames it on other things as we have seen earlier. Another time race and racism are mentioned, without ever it being explicitly said, is when Slater says to Harris that he is "making an issue" out of it. This angers Harris, who answers "Issue? An issue, you cream colored-!" before Miller interrupts him. Once again, Harris is the one who brings out race as the source of the problem. By bringing out Slater's face, Harris points out that only a white man will call racism and almost being shot to death as an "issue", instead of a systematic and problematic behavior that affects every minorities' lives, and especially black people.

The consequences of racism are also taboo and made clear through this episode. *BM* wanted to show that perpetrators of racial prejudice often go without any problem from the law. As the two other officers leave, Harris asks Miller what will happen to them. Miller does not answer, but Dietrich does, and says that they will have to go through a lot of hearings, and different institutions to finally maybe be suspended, or fined, but that they will also maybe walk freely, a comment that Miller disapproves. Of course, Harris knew all along, but wanted Miller to acknowledge that nothing will happen to these men. Miller is the Captain of the precinct, and therefore his word is almost law, but the fact that he chose to be quiet also shows how the law does nothing for victims of racism. This is why Harris decides to deal with this on his own before Miller stops him.

Miller: "It's already in progress, Harris. We go by the book."

Harris: "You mean the book, written by the man!"

Harris yells this line, and the lack of comment of other characters and the fact that the laughter track does not react to it, makes it a powerful moment in which Harris gets to express his anger. Of course, the moment is immediately interrupted by Officer Levitt who barges in the room. This deflates the tension of the characters, but also the tension felt by the audience.

In this scene, Harris is genuinely angry at Miller's reaction, because nothing will be done to those who wrong him. The camera is following Harris and is doing reaction shots of the other characters. It puts the emphasis on his reaction, and his anger, which might be felt directed to the audience as they see it firsthand. The expression used by Harris,

“The Man”, describes the person in power in society, the figurative man in charge of what works and what does not and is sometimes used as a positive compliment. However, here it describes the man in charge of the laws, and the “white” is implied, as it allows injustice because of Harris’ skin color. The book is therefore not there to help him and is excluded by it. Harris also says that it happens every time he is shot at, making it known for the audience that this is not the first time that such things happened. Once again, with just one comment, *BM* makes a commentary on a situation that Black men go through on a regular basis and denounces just how common these sorts of things are.



*Ibid, 11:05 -13:00.*

This can be linked to *B99*’s character, Holt Raymond, as his character lived in that time. In *B99*, Holt often describes his first years as a black, gay detective as difficult and having to choose between racism or homophobia and never having the respect of the help of his colleagues. This gives us an example of what Holt might have lived through before he became Captain of his own precinct.

- **Racism, a difficult explanation.**

The main explanation about racism is not done by Harris, but by Miller. Harris retracts himself from his other officers, as they do not understand what they are going through. Wojo then has no choice but to ask Miller, the captain being the “wise” and “straight” man of the squad. It is interesting to see that the writers decide not to put Harris as the one who explains what happened to him, as some might say Miller also does not know what he is talking about as he is not black. But it might also be explained otherwise: black people, especially after such a traumatic event, might not wish to explain and tell others what to do. They are, after all, not responsible for the ignorance of others, and do not have the duty to explain what is happening or how to act. The explanation is also helped by the fact that it is Wojo who asks the question. Wojo and Miller have a father-

son relationship all throughout the series, and Wojo is seen as the young, naïve detective who has a lot to learn to the older and wiser Miller.



*Ibid, 16:52- 19:10.*

The explanation that Miller gives to Wojo is not there to explain racism, but to explain the situation Harris is in. Wojo says that he does not know what to do about the situation with Harris, to which Miller says they will just have to learn how to deal with Harris being different, because he is black.

“Wojo: I thought those differences weren’t important.

Miller: Well, they are not. (pause) But they are.”

It is important to note that Miller acknowledges that what happened is a consequence of the racist bias of the two officers. After all, Miller could have, just like Slater did, blamed it on other things and chose to ignore Harris’ remarks. If we compare this to what we already know of *B99*, as Holt started his career in this era, it would not have been uncommon for superiors to ignore or even to encourage such behaviors. However, Miller was made to be a representation of Talmudic justice, which is why he agrees with Harris, and tries to help Wojo understand the situation. Also, the fact that Miller says those differences are both unimportant and important can be linked to *B99*’s ideal of a world where things such as gender, sexuality or race would not matter, which is different from our reality in which all of those things impact the way we live.

Miller explains racism to Wojo by referencing to Wojo’s ethnicity: because Wojo is Polish, he will not like a joke that makes fun of Polish people. But Miller, who is not Polish, will not feel that anger or hurt that Wojo feels. Miller says that “[he] might understand it, but [he] will not feel it.” This is similar to what happens earlier in the show. Harris is forced to leave, by Miller’s order, to calm down after his anger outburst. After

he comes back to work, he is greeted by everyone in the precinct, and the situation feels awkward. Miller asks Harris if he feels better, but Harris tells him he has “nothing to feel better about”. Miller’s question proves that what Harris went through earlier in the episode is not felt by the other characters, nor what he goes through everyday living as a black man. Indeed, if Harris has nothing to feel better about, it is because nothing has changed. The men who attacked him still walk freely while he has to look over his shoulder all the time – a paranoia shown as a joke in the episode, as Harris asks Levitt to cover him as he leaves the station. Harris can understand that he is hurt, because he understands the situation, but that does not mean he feels what he feels, and therefore cannot say to Harris how he should feel or react.

Humor is brought in this situation when Wojo asks Miller to tell him his “Polish joke”, which insults Polish people’s intellect, and Wojo falls for it by using another answer that actually proves the joke right. This remark, and the fact that Wojo proves it right, is not unusual in the show. As we have said in *BM*’s analysis, Polish jokes were a common occurrence at that time, and not seen as something racist. The fact that the show used a racist stereotype, and proves it right, can be seen as a disadvantage to the episode, which aims to dismantle the stereotype that black men are dangerous, which eventually leads them to be attacked or killed by police officers for no reason.

In the other room, another explanation is made, but for the audience this time and under the disguise of humor. Harris, who has been ignoring the rest of the squad, is interrupted by Levitt. Levitt talks to Harris to tell him he knows what it is like to be a minority because Levitt is short. Harris does not say a word to him but sighs and turns around.



*Ibid, 19:10 – 19:40.*

This can be linked to what many in the audience might feel: discrimination based on a certain characteristic. This feeling can be proven as false, such as white discrimination in favor of racial minorities. However, even if Levitt does feel discrimination because he is short, it would not be similar to what Harris feels. Even racism changes depending on the race and the country of an individual: for example, racism against Black people in the U.S.A. is anchored in slavery and segregation, whereas racism against Asian people in the U.S.A. is more based on massive movement of immigration and the consequences of the Second World War. And the fact that Levitt feels “discriminated” because of his height, has nothing to do with Harris’ race, as short black men exist. If such discrimination exists, the individual will suffer a particular discrimination, because of their intersectionality. In the episode however, the remark is made to make the audience laugh, as the laugh track can be heard, and to prove to the audience that those two situations (being black and being short) have nothing in common.

The difficulty of the explanation can be seen through the squad’s conversation about what happened. Because they do not understand what is going on with Harris, the squad tries to talk to him, but ends up making him madder. No one, not even Harris who claims the squad will never understand, seem to be ready to have this conversation. Which is why Miller is, once again, playing the wise role of the Captain who says they have to talk about it. Miller does add that he never thought this would happen, as no one did in the squad. This gives the squad a sense of innocence, of people who did not judge Harris by his skin color. Wojo even tells him “Maybe I can understand! I never thought of you as black！”, which Harris points out to be the problem. Indeed, being black is part of his identity, just as being a police officer is one. He cannot dissociate the two, although everyone around him does. He is seen as just a police officer by his colleagues, and just another black man by the people outside the precinct. Although the show does explicitly say that Harris knows that the intent is not to hurt him, it does portray the characters going at it wrongly, to portray a reality in which Black people must suffer from the ignorance of other people when it comes to such issues. The episode ends on Dietrich saying that it only takes two people to make a dialogue. This comment is obviously addressed to the audience, who is encouraged by the show to talk about the matter with their friends and family, in order to make a change.

- **Repression and Solidarity.**

The squad's first reaction to the incident is to ask Harris to calm his emotion and actions, which represses Harris who is not at liberty to react the way he wishes to. The way the show deals with repression is by making it obligatory because of the law. Indeed, if Harris cannot go deal with it on his own, or be angry inside the precinct, it is because it endangers people and does not "follow the book". In his interview with *Pop Goes The Culture TV*, Glass retells the story of the episode, which was changed because of him. Arnold wanted Harris to apologize to the squad, but Glass thought it was a denial and a cop-out for the characters, but also a betrayal of what they have talked about in the episode and in the writing room. Glass was so angry about it, for his character, but also because of what he experienced himself, that he got angry explaining his point of view. Arnold used Glass' anger outburst and the exact words he used to explain Harris' point of view of the situation and to wrap up the episode. Glass wanted the episode to not present the issue of police violence against black people as something that can be solved in twenty minutes, by a victim's apology for reacting to such event, and moving on the next episode as if nothing happened.

The repression is also shown by Miller. He is the one who tells Harris to leave, and he physically put himself between, not only the officer who shot Harris and Harris himself, but also between Harris and the rest of the squad.



*Ibid*, 21:40 – 24:30.

This has to do with Miller's "straight man" character, who does not let his emotions take over him, even in sensitive situations such as this. He is the reason why the conversation happens in a more neutral way. Although it allows the audience to better understand what is going on, it also represses how the characters feel, as Harris cannot show his anger at the situation, just as Wojo cannot show his incomprehension toward Harris' attitudes. However, without Miller, the conversation might also have never

happened, as most people in the show did not want to talk about the matter before Miller forces them to: Slater wanted to leave, Harris wanted to hurt the officers responsible or ignore the squad, while Wojo's insistence on the matter only aggravated things.

However, as I said earlier, the squad tries their best to help and understand Harris, which proves a form of solidarity. Indeed, every character tries to talk to Harris, or even show compassion, but Harris ignores them. Indeed, even if the way they go about it angers Harris, they do try to show compassion toward him, by apologizing and trying to understand. This solidarity can be shown through Wojo's dialogue with Harris, after saying he never saw him as black.

“Wojo: Well I thought of you as a man, as a friend, as a partner. If you want me to think of you as black, fine, whatever you want. But just let me know! So I don't do offending you when I don't even know I'm offending you!”

This gives innocence to Wojo's character, who is seen as “colorblind”, and therefore fair. But it also shows how the squad sees Harris, as a person they like and admire, and do not wish to upset. This gives the squad a sense of friendship and solidarity, as although they might go about it poorly and anger Harris in the process, their intention comes from a good place. This is reinforced by the fact that Miller says that they will probably be other days like this one, but Harris confirms that they will be. However, Miller's point is that the squad will be there to handle it, which leads to a close-up to Wojo's face agreeing to what his captain is saying, which makes Harris thankful. It gives the audience the impression that Harris is not alone in his struggle, and that he can depend on the support of his friends and his squad.

### 3.2.2. *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, Season 4; Episode 16 “Moo Moo”.

To understand this episode of *B99*, we have to look back at how episodes are structured in the show. A typical *B99* episode lasts 22 minutes, and starts with a cold open, a technique saved by Schur from his days on *Saturday Night Live*.<sup>37</sup> The cold open often has no links to the rest of the plot and is just a funny bit that introduces the episode before

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<sup>37</sup> Thorn, 3:50–4:30.

the opening credit. Then the rest of the episode is divided in different storylines (“A-plot”, “B-plot”, and sometimes even “C-plot”. The sitcom is filmed in a fake documentary style, the camera never being completely still, with a single camera and most scenes are filmed using over the shoulder shots and reversed shots. Of course, as it is a sitcom, there are a lot of cuts so that the show appears to be quick and energetic.

In the *Moo-Moo* episode the A-plot is about Terry being racially profiled, and the B-plot is about Jake and Amy babysitting Terry’s twin who asks them some thorny questions about race and discrimination. The real “A-plot” is introduced about five minutes after the beginning episode. Before that, it shows “normal” precinct stories, Terry wants more responsibilities and Holt agrees to help him. The audience will not know what the plot really is about until a little while. This allows the show to attract the audience to the episode without immediately saying that this is about police and racial prejudice. It happens naturally, and takes the audience by surprise, so they can relate to Terry who also was not expecting to be arrested right in front of his home.

- **The actual scene of racial prejudice.**

One of the questions they had to answer is what could have happened to Terry that night. It had to be something important and grave enough to disrupt the light mood the sitcom and move it into the realm of drama, without it being too tragic, and therefore violent, as they risked losing their audience. But choosing to portray this violence would make it a more realistic representation. They also had to account that the representation of violence of a White man over a Black man is traumatic for many.

This is what the show decided on: after Jake and Amy lose one of his daughter’s blanket called Moo-Moo, Terry goes and searches for it in his neighborhood. When he retrieves the toy, he is spotted by a policeman and arrested. The policeman interrupts Terry, who approaches him, but he cannot finish his sentence without the policeman grabbing his gun. Terry tries to talk but is interrupted by the police officer, who demands he keeps his arm up. He asks Terry to drop his daughter’s toy, treating it as a possible weapon. The scene ends as Terry drops Moo-Moo on the ground. The scene lasts less than thirty seconds, but dramatically shifts the scene, the mood, and the plot of the episode.

This is helped by the construction of the episode, playing with suspense and ellipsis. As the scene cuts, the audience does not know what really happened to Terry or how far it really went, allowing their imaginations to think back to what they know has happened in those situations. The actual violence, Terry's unjust arrest, comes in the second part of the scene, as a flashback as Terry explains what happened to his crew. The scene of the arrest itself had to undergo a series of question: how to switch from comedy to drama? How far should the violence be seen on screen? Through which point of view should the scene be portrayed?

The actual representation of the scene resembles closely to a drama, from the music to the composition. The lightening in the scene is quite dark, as the scene happens at night. From the dark clothes and deep blue uniform, and the darkness that surrounds the characters, the scenes feel quite gloomy and threatening. Before the policemen arrives, the audience sees Terry in a position of vulnerability: alone in the darkness, looking for a toy, giving his back to an unknown threat. The non-diegetic music that is playing at the beginning of the scene changes from a playful tone into an eerie one as soon as the cop appears on the screen. The fact that the police officer is heard before being seen, surging from the offscreen space while Terry is vulnerable, is similar to villains in horror stories, and also contributes to the unsettling feeling.



*"Moo-Moo"*, Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Season 4, Episode 16, Fox, May 2, 2017, Netflix,  
[www.netflix.com/title/70281562](http://www.netflix.com/title/70281562), 05:25 – 5:31.

The policeman also addresses Terry as “buddy” and later on as “big guy”. It is a way for him to belittle Terry and therefore assert his dominance over him. In all the shots, Terry and the policeman are opposed to one another: it opposes Terry to the policeman, who are facing one another, which makes them look like complete opposite on screen. The scene is also filmed at eye level as if the audience were a witness to this injustice.

It is not a coincidence that the policeman asks Terry to drop his daughter's toy and that he treats it like a possible weapon. There is a long history of black men being killed because they held something in their hands, that to the police officers that killed them, appeared to be a gun. This is a reference to cases like Tamir Rica, a 12-year-old who was shot for holding a toy gun, or Stephon Clark, shot twenty times in his grandmother's backyard as he held a phone. Terry complies and drops the toy and looks confused by the situation. The ending shot emphasizes this confusion and feeling of powerlessness. Terry occupies almost the entire screen, whereas the audience can only see the officer's hand in the right corner of the screen. But Terry looks completely defenseless and at the policemen's mercy, his life literally in his hands.



*Ibid, 05:34.*

Terry's arrest ends in a later scene, as a flashback. After Terry drops his daughter's toy, the situation that the audience saw earlier worsens. The officer demands to know what Terry is doing there, and Terry tries to explain his situation, but the officer will not let him talk and asks him to "watch his tone". This is a reference to black stereotypes such as the "dangerous black man" or the "angry black woman". Black people have been historically portrayed as dangerous to white people, and therefore they have always been represented as loud, angry people with sassy comebacks. In this scene, it is said to emphasize the difference between what the officer perceives and reality: the only one being violent and suspicious is the officer himself. In fact, throughout the show and especially in this scene, Terry and the officer are always opposed to each other, from reversed shots and the two of them standing at the opposite side of the screen, to completely opposite behaviors. Terry stays calm throughout the arrest, even though his face shows the anger he is feeling, but the officer is visibly nervous and rash, taking an extreme approach to everything Terry does or says. The only time the two of them are

actually shown side by side, is when the officer has a gun on him, or when he is manhandling him.



*Ibid, 06:29 -06:36 .*

- **Racism, a taboo word?**

Racism is first approached through Terry's arrest, the first scene I analyzed in this essay. But the scene only shows what happened without explaining it. The explanation occurs in the next scene, as Terry goes in the break room to explain what happened to his squad in a flashback of the scene of his arrest. When Terry says he has been arrested "for walking", the squad express their sympathy after wordlessly understanding what happened to him. But Scully, a character known for not being a good cop because he is lazy and quite stupid, does not understand what his happening ("Oh, jeez. I have no idea what's going on."), which is followed by Hitchcock's response "He got stopped for being black. Get woke, Scully.":

The character that offers him an explanation and admonishes him using popular youthful slang, is his partner who has the same reputation as him, which makes his direct response true but humorous above all. Hitchcock is the first person to actually bring up Terry's race as the reason he was arrested, until then the reason why was implicit. Terry was arrested, and every knows, including the audience, it is because of his skin color, but it was never directly addressed. The fact that an older white man, who has been a cop since the 80s, is the one to actually bring this up really changes from the *Barney Miller*

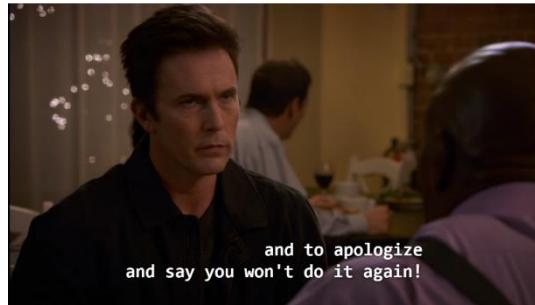
episode, where the white men present and responsible for the shooting always tried to avoid saying words like “black” or “racism” out loud.<sup>38</sup>

It is also the first scene where the policeman who arrested Terry is referred by his name and title, Officer Maldack, long after he is no longer on screen. This is unusual, as a sitcom often tries to introduce the characters, the scene, and the story as quickly as possible to stage the narrative without losing the audience. This is why stereotypes and archetypes and general knowledge are often used in sitcoms, it explicitly tells what happens without needing too much set-up time. The scene where Terry is arrested also does not need a lot of explanation, which is why the officer’s name was not given: he was just a nameless policeman for the audience just as Terry was a nameless but dangerous black man for the officer. What matters the most at the time, was their skin color and clothes, all the explanation being implicit. However, by naming the character, the showrunners and writers give him an identity and a real role in the story. Instead of being a story about policemen versus black men, it becomes a story of Terry versus Maldack, and later on of Terry versus Holt. This way, the showrunners still can talk about the injustice black people face and racial prejudice in the police, while also steering away from a generalization like “all police officers are bad”, as it is only one bad officer among so many others who do a good job.

Terry’s conversation with Maldack is the peak of implicit racism in the episode. Terry confronts him and wants him to admit that he has done to him was wrong and promise to never do it. Maldack gives some sort of apologies and tries to give various answers as to why he did what he did, even blames Terry for what happened and finally rolls his eye when Terry brings up his skin color as the reason why Maldack stopped him. This is what a lot of victims that went through racial prejudice experience. Victim shaming and shifting blame toward the victim is a very common tactic to any victim of violence, whether it be racial or sexual.

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<sup>38</sup> “The Harris Incident”, Barney Miller, Season 6, Episode 5, ABC, November 30, 1978, *Amazon Prime*, [www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001AM2LN6?tag=deciderrg-20).



*Ibid, 09:15 -10:30.*

If the conversation between Terry and Maldack show the peak of the implicit, the conversation at Holt's home between Terry and Holt are peak of the explicit during this episode. While the conversation with the squad were forcibly explicit because they did not understand what was happening to Terry, never having experienced such things, so they needed to word it out to make a point, but here the conversation is explicit for the opposite reason. Holt did experience the same thing, but his choice of not supporting Terry forces them to talk explicitly about race and racism in the police, to be able to reach an accord.

"When I got stopped the other day, I wasn't a cop. I was not a guy who lived in a neighborhood looking for his daughter's toy. I was a black man, a dangerous black man. That's all he could see: a threat."

Only then, Terry openly says that he was harassed as black man, perceived as a threat, and denounces his arrest as racial profiling, which until this point was always described as "something wrong" or "what Maldack did" but never explicitly explained. And even though this is the moment where the show is at its most explicit, it stays relatively mild. It never actually calls out Maldack as a racist, or what he has done has a racist act.

The word "racism" is actually pronounced five times in the episode, but all in the same scene and all by the same character, Gina. Gina is another white character known for being obnoxious and dramatic, she is also the only one who is not a cop. She is the first and only one to actually say the word "racism" in the episode, and she even gives the real reason why Terry was arrested, that I will analyze in the next section. The fact that the officer is not outwardly called a racist for what he has done to Terry may be for multiple reasons. It may be because it is very apparent for the audience that what happened was an act of racism, and the writers and showrunners decided not to exploit

this angle too much as it is obvious and does not add anything more to the scenes and the episode in general. But it also might be because calling him that would create tension between the show and its audience, that is composed of police officers, relating to these characters. Calling them racist would have had a negative impact on the show, as they would have lost some audience and they could have gone on the internet and ask for them to remove the episode as it depicts them in a negative way. By avoiding such explicit language, the message was still clear even though it is implicit, and they did not give ammunition toward people who did not like the episode. Another reason is that the word “racism” is still taboo in American society. Being confronted to these situations is rather difficult in itself, so by avoiding pronouncing and by not explicitly voicing out what is happening, the writers and showrunners alleviate a situation that might be uncomfortable for the audience, who might feel attacked or lectured by the show.

- **Racism, a difficult explanation.**

Another important theme in the episode is explaining racism, its function, and its inner workings. It is represented through its B story, as the squad tries to explain to Terry’s twin why their father was arrested, but also through the involvement of characters that have not experienced what Terry went through but that are still present in Terry’s story. These characters, along with Terry’s twin, try to understand and define racism and how it impacted their life and the lives of others around them.

Multiple characters try to explain how Terry’s arrest wrong, drawing parallels from their personal lives. Jake for example, does not understand how this might have happened to him, as he himself did a lot worse without being arrested. The show draws a parallel between Terry’s arrest and one of Jake’s prank. Compared to the other scenes, this happens in bright daylight, as Jake is wearing a ski mask and is breaking in an apartment. The situation could not be more suspicious, but the policeman simply interrupts him to ask what he is doing and then lets him carry on once he explains it is a joke, even encouraging him by giving him a thumbs up. By making the situation so obviously criminal, and the policeman such a good sport about it, it creates something so grotesque it loses touch with our world. Compared to Terry, who was stopped for just walking in his own neighborhood and who was not allowed to even talk to the officer without being threatened, *B99* contrasts how different police officers react to black men

and white men. As a sitcom, *B99*'s world is just a representation of our own, and the show admits its own artificiality through scenes like these and uses it to make a point about the real issue meant to be represented to the audience. The absurdity of Jake's situation, which could have led to be very tragically comic quid-pro-quo, is just a parallel to the absurdities of Terry's situation, which could not have been more normal.



*Ibid, 06:43 – 06:55.*

When the twin girls ask the couple if being black is a bad thing, and if they are going to get in trouble like their father, Jake and Amy decide it is time to explain to them what happened. Amy tries to explain Terry's arrest to the twins by comparing the situation with something she experienced and explains that the world is harder for women than for men. Amy's parallel of misogyny and racism does not make sense to them, as they are not aware that the world is prejudiced against them. This is a hint toward intersectionality. As both members of the black community and women, the girls will have to face both racism and misogyny.



*Ibid, 14:40 – 15:23.*

The conversation between Jake and Amy versus the twins is very different from the two others (Terry versus Maldack, and Terry versus Holt) as it is not confrontational. The girls are simply asking an awkward question that is very difficult to answer as they

are young. This conversation is mainly showing Terry's twin as innocent children, who do not know how to handle this situation as they are "pure" from the world. The decision to shoot the conversation in reverse shot, opposing the babysitters and the twin girls does not stand out in the show, as reverse shots are the usual chosen edit, but it also shows a deeper reality that the babysitters try to deny. In the first part of the storyline, even though the subject is centered around the twin girls, they are excluded from the "race" conversation by the babysitters who think they are too young. The exclusion is also apparent on screen, as they do not appear a lot in the first part of the storyline and other adults are included in the conversation, although none of them are black. It also adopted the opposite point that the couple is trying to make when they pretend nothing is going on, the twins are sceptic and push back, wanting answer and a reason for what happened. The reality of "pure children" is shattered when they couple is not even the one to explain to the girls that the reason their father was arrested is because of his skin color, the twins understood it by themselves and voiced it aloud. The reverse shots show the difference between the awareness of something wrong going on by the twin girls, and the attempt to deny the situation by the adults. The twins are therefore responsible for the switch from the "polite euphemism" explanation to the message of denouncing racism in the police and police brutality. This message could have turned the audience away, as it might as felt like the show was attacking the police, but by making the children actually denounce it, the audience might find the message more acceptable and helps the episode get away with its relative preachiness.

Humor is brought by Jake's presence in the scene, as well as the misunderstandings between the adult and the children. Even though Jake is sitting next to the adult and completes the "adult" duo, he is really siding with the twins for most of the conversation and therefore he looks as innocent as the girls by association. It is not very surprising, as Jake is described as a "man-child" since the first season, but it does contribute to the audience's view of Jake as a man with an innocent outlook on life: he "can't believe" Terry went through this, as though racism does not exist in his world, he does not understand Amy's explanation of the word "prejudice" and in contrast to Amy, he uses simple words to explain the situation to the twins. Jakes explains that a cop did a bad thing and says a couple times that he was in the wrong, not their father. Using simple words as "bad" and "wrong" is an easy way to explain to the twins what happened without

actually explaining what happens, drawing to easy concept that children understand: good and bad, right, and wrong. If the cop is the “bad” one, then their father represents the “good” side, and therefore they have nothing to worry about. It helps the audience sympathize with Jake instead of criticizing him as part of the problem. Jake is a white policeman and could be seen as the enemy Terry’s trying to fight. But his childish persona makes him likeable, and the audience might feel this does not involve him as they cannot see him ever being racist.

In reality, racism is not a conscious choice for the most part, its ingrained in society and the institutions through centuries of systematic oppression and validation of racist behavior by society. Therefore, Jake’s answer can be seen as oversimplified, as it does not go in the details to why the policeman did what he did, or how it will affect the twin girls in their future life. But *B99* does give a real answer to its audience, which is as usual for the show, immediately followed by a joke. In this case, Gina is the one to explain why the twin’s father was arrested.

“Gina: Just explain the deep-rooted institutionalized racism that remains pervasive in this country to this day.

Jake: Gina, they’re children.

Gina: So put it in a song, Jake. Watch this: [singing] racism, racism, racism.”

America is a country where race is entrenched deep in its institution because of its past of slavery and segregation, which means that still today, people are unaware of their racist bias as they are the norm. Although it is quite complex and difficult to explain, she manages to do it in a short sentence. Of course, the sitcom cannot just give this serious answer and let moment hang on for too long as it defeats the purpose of making people laugh, so the answer is followed by Gina’s singing of the word “racism”, over and over, until Jake hangs up. It releases the tension of the scene, and therefore the tension that the audience feels, and turns it around as the scene returns to its previous comedic mood.

- **Repression and solidarity.**

One of the biggest storylines of the show is Terry’s and Holt’s conversation and confrontation about what to do with this situation. It shows two sides, two opposites arguments, on what is the right thing to do. It was actually actor portraying Holt’s character, Andre Braugher, who pitched the idea to Dan Goor that Holt would not support

Terry's decision to act on the situation. Based on Holt's history of repressing these things in order to raise through the ranks and have his own precinct, he felt that Holt would want Terry to do the same thing he did. Goor was shocked by the idea but agreed with his sentiment. It also helped them portray a reality that a lot of black police officers face, as they can be divided in such matters and feel "alienated" from both sides.



*Ibid, 12:13 12:26.*

This humoristic scene is in itself the explanation of the conflict between Holt and Terry. They might both be black men, but they are in different sides and in different worlds. While Terry arrives at Holt's house distressed and angry, Holt opens the door stoically. Holt stands at the threshold, both in depth and in right/left composition, which makes him the link between Terry and the mostly white characters that occupy the other half of the frame. It shows Holt's duality: a black man that has to face discrimination but still enjoys some of the upper-class advantages. This composition explains the later conversation and introduces some of the reason why Holt will not help Terry submit the complaint.

Contrary to the first conversation between Holt and Terry at the beginning of the episode, where Terry where he introduces himself with a very elaborated language, ("Hello Captain Raymond Holt, it is I, Sergeant Terrance Jeffords, your friend but more importantly, your employee.") Terry's words are now crude ("It's me, Sergeant Jeffords. I'm the guy whose damn complain you don't want to submit, and I can't think of a damn reason why!"). The change in language is symbolic of Terry's inner turmoil. At the beginning of the episode, Terry tries his best to please Holt and therefore speak imitating Holt's speech pattern, meaning long sentences "rife with information". But now, Terry is mad at him, and they are in conflict, and he resorts to a more normal speech pattern, even

though it is obviously disconnected to Holt's reality of an upper-class household hosting a dinner party with important people.

This leads to the most important and long part of the episode: Terry's and Holt's conversation about race and police brutality, interrupted by Holt's guests and the B-story, as a way to lighten the mood. Although the other conversations in the episode were not interrupted by jokes, it makes sense that this one is. It is a long conversation, and the subject is very heavy, and *B99* is a sitcom at its core and its goal is to make people laugh. The jokes can have different reactions, some might say that this undermines the subject and the seriousness of the scene, while others might think it keeps it lighter and therefore is easier to be seen by a diverse audience. Even though most of the scene is still shot in over the shoulder shots, and reversed shots, the scene also includes some shots showing the two characters side by side. The conversation can be seen as similar to the Terry versus Maldack conversation, the two of them being on opposite ends and disagreeing with one another. But they eventually get closer to each other and this convey the feeling that the two of them are not as opposed as Maldack and Terry were, they are actually in the same situation and it seems they are trying to reach a middle ground and agree on a solution.



*Ibid*, 12:27 – 14:00.

Terry and Holt finally discuss why they are on opposite sides. Whereas Holt is afraid that this will backfire and might destroy Terry's chance of rising through the ranks, Terry is more afraid of what Maldack can do to others like him who do not have the power to stop him with the "cop card", like his daughters. The duality of their reasonings can be simplified by two simple opinions: suffering in the present to go further in the future, or suffering in the future, to make a better present. Holt's entire career and backstory is based on past sufferings that made him able to have his own precinct. But Terry's character is a family man, who is willing to put his career aside for the good of his daughters. As I

wrote in the first part of this essay, black men often adopt white supremacist ways of thinking when they have monetary success. This is present in Holt's character. The only option he had to rise through the ranks was to cast a blind eye to the racism and homophobia toward him. He wished Terry would do the same and achieve the same success as him. Terry, on the contrary, completely breaks the stereotype associated with the "absent black father", as he is willing to go through personal suffering for a small chance that in the nearby future, his daughters do not go through what he went through with Maldack.

During the confrontation scene between Maldack and Terry, the two characters are never seen side by side, but always in over the shoulders and reversed shots. This further conveys the feeling of confrontation between them. Actually, Terry is alone for most of the episode. Even when he is surrounded by his squad, or sitting down next to Holt, nobody seems to be on his side. This further establish that Terry not only feels alone in this fight, but also that something is making him separated from the others, and it is his skin color and his experiences with racism. But the same could be said with Holt, who is also alone on his side of the screen. This conveys the feeling that Terry is alone in this fight against Maldack, even though he has support through his squad, nobody is actually on his side, and can relate to what he has been through. The only one who could possibly understand is Holt, as he is also a black man, and his past is shaped by the discriminations he faced.



*Ibid* 10:31 -11:00 .

Terry's explanation as to why he wanted to become a cop is the perfect example of support in the black community. In a flashback of Terry's childhood, the audience sees a young Terry trying to fight off bullies and he is helped by a black policeman. He explains he wanted to be a superhero and help people just as that cop did. This shows that Terry

finds it important to help his own community, as they will not go through what he did as a child. This flashback is a very different from the flashback of Terry's arrest. The two policemen, Maldack and Terry's hero, are very different. Both appearances took Terry by surprise, but the Hero's one is surrounded by light, and he occupies the center of the screen, as Terry is looking up to him. The cop looks powerful, and most importantly, good. As he has no name, he represents what the "Good Cop" should be like: helping children from their bullies, protecting the community.



*Ibid, 16:19.*

Holt and Terry have another conversation on the roof, where Holt apologizes to Terry and explains his behavior. He admits that is advice "is from another time" and agrees to help Terry. The two of the shares the center of the screen, side by side, and completes the previous shots of the two characters getting closer to each other as they debated, culminating in this handshake, symbolizing their union. It conveys the sentiment that the disagreement is over and that through hardships they faced, they found support in one another. The same message is conveyed when Holt and Terry share a drink after a difficult week, and wallow together on the hardships they have endured. They agree to "doing the right thing" which in this case, means not letting things like profiling and racism in the police, slide anymore and to hold people accountable for their actions. It also shows that the world that *B99* is set in is not a sweeter version of the real world. Terry face consequences as Holt warned him, he did not get the job he applied to at the beginning of the episode and they both know this is because of his complaint, although it would never be confirmed.



*Ibid, 18:10 – 19:19 & 20:00 – 21:00.*

To conclude this third part, *B99* is the successor of police sitcoms, such as *TAGS* and *BM*. It is important to see how past shows presented their characters, minorities and social issues to see how such problems were seen in the media at the time and to look at how they have changed over the years. In *TAGS*, we see the results of the segregation and the discriminatory behavior. Although never showing actually racist acts, the show completely put aside all minorities, gender, racial and sexual, to put up a front of a city from the south run by white men. The lack of racial Other in Mayberry is preserved as even if minorities do come in the town, they are visitors and eventually leave by the end of the episode. In *BM*, we see a modern representation of the city of New York, where detectives must deal with a lot of difficult issues that plague society. Although uncharacteristic of sitcoms, the sensitive issues and activism in the show was possible due to the creator's intention of portraying more diverse characters, even though some 'failures' can be seen such as the lack of female representation or stereotyped gay representation. Therefore *BM* proves that a police sitcom can make people laugh and think about social issues at the same time.

The three shows have some similarity, for example the choice to make the leader of the squad a rather non-violent and wise person. The three captains, Andy Taylor, Barney Miller, and Raymond Holt are nice people, very competent at their job as they are determined to do good, and they bring a kindness and a civility to the police world. However, since *TAGS* do not bring up current even, *BM* and *B99* are more similar to each other, both anchored in their current time and specific settings. By not ignoring social issues and minorities, it allows the shows to develop unique storylines about things that impact the characters as well as the audience who watches them.

*BM* and *B99* both have episodes concerning racial prejudice and violence against black men by the police. Both shows also have similar themes inside the episode, such as the racism felt by black men through the action of police officers, the taboo of racism and its consequences, and the difficult didactic of racism to other people who might not understand what is going on, as well as the repression and solidarity that the victim might feel after such attacks. However, there is some differences as well, as *BM* implies the racist issue whereas *B99* calls it out. *B99* also has multiple black characters, which enables a discussion around what is the proper way to react to such attacks, while *BM* only has one black character and shows how a police officer has to deal with it with his white colleagues and the law not doing anything to help him.

## Conclusion

To conclude, this essay started as an analysis of the representation of minorities in sitcom, with the example of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, which has a very diverse cast. However, with the Black Lives Matter movement which influenced the entire world, it shifted to the representation of black men and the police in sitcoms, and the analysis of episodes centering around them.

The stereotyped representation of Black men, which I called “traditional representation” shifted through the years, depending on the social context and advancement of the time. Indeed, each stereotype either completes or negates the previous one, in an attempt to better or worsen the situation. The traditional representation of Black men is anchored by the stereotyped vision of blackness stemming from white supremacy: violent black men, idiotic or sexualized, it is a mean to degrade and even create tension inside the black community.

*B99* subdues these stereotypes by choosing to represent two black characters, which allows the show to avoid tokenism, and by making their characters based on the opposite of the stereotypes. Terry’s muscular figure is not threatening as he is seen as afraid for his daughter and himself, and with niche interest that make him more of a well-rounded character instead of a flat, one-dimensional character, who follows the traditional representation of black men. Holt is intellectual and almost robotic, but does not erase his blackness, nor his gayness, in order to fit in. His entire character is based on overcoming challenges to be able to be himself, and frequently plays on the fact that he is so different than the stereotype image of the black gay man. They challenge the traditional representation of black masculinity by picking and choosing which stereotypes they go against, and which they follow.

*B99* has a lot of political involvement, because of their characters such as Holt, and because of their wish to represent a more truthful version of the world. They often go out of their way to make some political statement through jokes and episodes revolving around sensitive issues that affected American society, such as BLM or #MeToo. It also subdues stereotypes, through small jokes and creation of characters who do not fit in these stereotypes, in order to be humorous but also to denounce these stereotypes and make the audience think about them.

However the show has its limits, as it is a sitcom, and its most important goal is to make people laugh. Therefore, the statements only really appear in certain episodes and can be missed by the audience. Sometimes, the show fails in its representation as well, using stereotypes to develop their characters and their storylines. *B99* can also be seen as police propaganda, as although it does denounce some sort of police failures, such as briberies or criminal behavior inside the police, it still represents their characters as the “good” ones, which reinforces theories such as “a few bad apples”, which puts the blame on the individuals instead of the institution. But *B99* makes a point of trying to rectify their mistakes by recreating certain episodes or stopping problematic behavior.

The show is also airing on the *FOX* channel. At first glance, the association between *FOX*, linked to Fox News its sister channel, and the liberal show that is *B99* can be surprising. However *FOX* is the entertainment broadcasting channel, which aimed to attract audiences that were not marketed before and therefore created unique and diverse content. *FOX* shows therefore have a diverse cast and unique storytelling, which can include sensitive topics and a point of view of political issues which contradict its sister channel. *Fox News*, on the other hand, wanted to attract a more conservative audience from the start. Its popular bias reporting is linked to the election of Conservative President, such as Donald Trump in 2016.

Their representation of minorities is often linked to other political issues such as terrorism. Even though the channels are very different, their representation of the police is similar, as they both show it as a force of good. On *FOX*, it is by making them heroes on fictional and reality shows, sensitizing the violence of their job and developing an ideology that criminals are less than human. On *Fox News* by comparing them to forces of “evil” such as the BLM movement. The police therefore are heroes who stand up for what is right and protect American values. Simultaneously, *Fox News* shows BLM as a threatening group which is endangering American values. *FOX*, surprisingly, has very little representation of BLM, which may be explained by the channel’s need to be close to the police in order to preserve their relationship for the need of their shows.

I analyzed shows before *B99* to see whether or not they dealt with the same issues concerning representation of minorities and police violence. Using *The Andy Griffith Show* and *Barney Miller* as previous examples of police shows. *TAGS* was proven to be completely cut off reality and chose not to represent sensitive politic issues at all. But it

also made the choice to not represent minorities in the town of Mayberry. The Others, racial, sexual or political, did not appear on screen or appeared as visitors of the town, for just a few episodes. The few time an Other was actually represented, it was often stereotyped, or the episode finished when the status quo of the town was established. The main characters were two white men, as were most people in town. They were not forced to use violence, because the town could be seen as unproblematic as there is no need to fight when everyone thinks and is the same.

*BM* has a very diverse cast, which is the result of the creator's activism. Jewish, Asian, Black and LGBTQ+ characters were present throughout the show. Even though some of these representations started as problematic, the show eventually learned from their mistakes and rectified their errors. Although, one could say that the lack of female representation is also a failure of the show. Because, contrary to *TAGS*, the show was anchored in the New York of the 1970s and 1980s, the show was able to talk and mention important political issues of the time. It went about it in a similar way that *B99* did decades later, through entire episodes dedicated to these issues but also through small jokes in many episodes.

Since *TAGS* did not represent political issues at all, which is expected from a sitcom whose goal is to make people laugh, the show did not have an episode centered around police brutality against black people. However, *BM* and *B99* did, and their analyses showed that the themes of the episode were similar, although their characters reacted differently to what happened to them. This shows that *B99* is not the first police sitcom to have represented these issues, although they are in the minority as not many did it before. However, *B99*'s gave the episode a different interpretation of what happened than *BM*, in large part due to the fact that the show has multiple black character who can discuss what happened as they both can understand it, contrary to *BM* whose discussion was centered on how to talk about this with others.

Therefore, the representation of the minority and the police in sitcoms depend on the point of view of the channel, and the choices creators and writers make when creating the show and the episodes. The first step to represent minorities and the police is to create characters who represent their community truthfully, without stereotyping the characters which could harm people. *B99* managed to do so by creating characters who do not fit a single stereotype, and by creating multiple characters from multiple minorities which

avoids tokenism. *B99* also made the choice to address political issues that would affect their characters, which was possible because the *FOX* channel's history was to create unique storylines but also because the people involved in the show wanted to represent what happened in the real world in their show. Not all sitcoms choose to do so, some sitcoms decide to ignore all political issues like *TAGS*, while others addressed them before *B99*, like *BM*. And even though shows represented the same issues, *B99*'s representation of them is specific to its time, thanks to their diverse characters and crew.

## **Partie Didactique (en français)**

Cette partie se concentrera sur la didactisation du thème de ce mémoire, c'est-à-dire la relation entre la police et les noirs aux Etats-Unis. Ce mémoire a été basé sur les stéréotypes des hommes noirs dans les sitcoms, ainsi que la présentation de la violence policière dans les épisodes des séries de ce genre. Cependant, afin de pouvoir comprendre et analyser correctement ce genre et ces stéréotypes, il faut tout d'abord avoir une grande connaissance des stéréotypes, intrinsèquement lié à l'histoire des Etats-Unis, et une analyse filmique profonde des épisodes en question qui se repose beaucoup sur la culture américaine et sur l'implicite. Il me semble donc trop compliqué de rester sur ce domaine si précis pour faire une séquence d'anglais au collège et lycée.

J'ai donc fait le choix de me concentrer sur le domaine plus large qu'est la représentation de l'histoire des noirs américains dans l'art, qui reflète la société américaine de l'époque. En se basant sur différentes périodes de l'histoire, on pourra alors étudier l'histoire américaine en générale, mais en particulier l'histoire des noirs américains et leurs relations aux médias. Je diviserais la séquence selon les périodes de l'histoire américaine et choisirai des œuvres d'arts qui reflètent la condition des noirs américains, de l'esclavage à aujourd'hui. La violence policière dans les sitcoms sera donc vu lors de la partie sur Black Lives Matter, qui reflète la condition des noirs américains de nos jours. Afin d'ancrer la séquence dans la culture américaine, la séance se fera lors du mois de février, mois du « Black History Month ».

Ce sujet rentre donc parfaitement dans l'axe d'étude « Art et Contestation », présente dans la thématique de terminale Langue Littérature et Civilisation Etrangère. Puisque la thématique fait partie de la classe de terminale et est en option, il sera tout à fait adapté d'étudier non seulement l'histoire américaine, mais également les œuvres d'arts de la séquence. De plus, la classe de terminal devrait être assez mature pour pouvoir étudier des œuvres d'arts qui sont sensibles, tels que des œuvres d'arts sur l'esclavage, la ségrégation et la violence policière. Il y aura bien entendu un triage à faire sur les œuvres d'arts choisi, afin de ne pas exposer les élèves à du contenu inapproprié, tel que des scènes de violence.

La tâche finale se fera lors de la septième séance. Dans la classe d'anglais, nous ferons une exposition pour le « Black History Month ». Chaque classe d'élève aura un rôle à faire selon leurs niveaux de langue. Les terminales LLCE seront les guides des élèves visitant la classe, et devront présenter une œuvre d'art de leurs choix, qui présente un moment de l'histoire américaine, de l'esclavage à nos jours. Etant donné que je n'ai pas eu de classe cette année, toute cette séquence a été créer pour une classe hypothétique.

### Tableau synoptique :

BLACK HISTORY THROUGH ART		
Terminal (B2/C1)	ART ET DEBAT D'IDEE	ART ET CONTESTATION
<b>PROBLEMATIQUE</b>	La condition des noirs aux USA à travers l'art (livre, série, chanson...)	
<b>TACHE FINALE (EO)</b>	<p>Your class will contribute to the <b>Black Lives Matter exhibit</b> on Black History Month. You will be a <b>guide</b> for other students that will visit.</p> <p>You will <b>choose a piece of art</b> (painting, book, movie or other medium) that represent a <b>moment of protest in African American history</b>, from slavery to nowadays.</p> <p>You will <b>present the art</b> (WH- question) and <b>describe or summarize it</b>.</p>	
OBJECTIFS		
<b>LINGUISTIQUES</b>	<b>LEXICAUX</b>	
	<b>Black history:</b> slavery, segregation, civil rights movement, police violence, black lives mater	
	<b>Art:</b> medium, photography, book, movie, short film	
	<b>Description:</b> to convey emotions, location (background-foreground)	
<b>Contestation:</b> protest, to argue, to demonstrate		
<b>GRAMMATICAUX</b>		

	Les temps du passé (-ED / HAD V-EN / -ING) et leurs utilisations
	<b>PHONOLOGIQUES</b>
	Prononciation du -ED Accent tonique des mots (slavery, protest...)
<b>SOCIOLINGUISTIQUES</b>	Accent américain, abréviations américaines
<b>PRAGMATIQUES</b>	Faire une analyse de document
<b>CULTURELS</b>	La condition des noirs aux USA
<b>CITOYENS</b>	Respecter les différences, mettre en avant l'idée d'égalité de la république,

## Déroulement de la séance :

### Séance 1 : Esclavage

Lors de la première séance, j'exposerai le plan de la séquence en entière ainsi que la tâche finale, puisque le projet est assez conséquent et les élèves doivent se préparer en avance. La première séance se concentrera sur l'esclavage. Je commencerai la séquence avec un rappel historique à partir des connaissances des élèves, que je compléterai si besoin, pour une durée de dix minutes.

L'activité de la séquence sera autour de la vidéo sur Harriet Tubman (voir Annexe séance 1). Les élèves analyseront la vidéo afin d'apprendre qui est Harriet Tubman, figure importante de l'histoire américaine, et de voir les « underground railroad ». L'analyse prendra trente minutes. J'ai choisi de faire une séance sur l'esclavage qui présente le point de vue des esclaves, plutôt que des esclavagistes, car ce point de vue est moins étudié par les élèves. Cela permettra aussi d'étudier le média de la chanson grâce au « underground railroad ».

La trace écrite sera donc une biographie de Tubman, ce qui permettra de revoir les temps du passé en tant que Pratique Raisonnée de la Langue (PRL), ainsi que l'histoire des « underground railroad » et de leurs importances dans l'histoire des noirs américains. La trace écrite durera donc entre quinze minutes, en incluant la PRL sur les différents

temps du passé qui seront revu plusieurs fois durant la séance, à travers les différents documents.

### **Séance 2 : Etude de document « The Drinking Gourd »**

Cette séance commencera avec un rappel de la séance dernière d'environ cinq minutes, afin de se rappeler de qui est Tubman et de l'existence des « underground railroad ».

Ensuite, je passerais la chanson « The Drinking Gourd » (Séance 2, Annexe) une ou deux fois, afin que les élèves puissent bien l'entendre et comprendre les paroles. Cette étape durera environ cinq minutes. Nous analyserons ensuite les paroles de la chanson afin de voir comment les esclaves réussissaient à communiquer entre eux afin de s'entraider. Cette analyse durera cinq minutes.

La PRL de cette séance sera sur les accents toniques des mots de la chanson, en repassant la vidéo et en faisant répéter les paroles aux élèves. Cette étape durera dix minutes. La trace écrite durera dix minutes également et sera sur l'utilisation de l'art en tant que moyen de se libérer , ainsi qu'un point sur l'accent tonique. Les devoirs porteront sur l'histoire de la ségrégation, qui sera à revoir, ainsi que de s'entraîner sur l'accent tonique des mots qu'on l'on a vu avec les élèves.

### **Séance 3 : Ségrégation**

Cette séance se fera en salle informatique, et commencera par un long rappel historique, d'une dizaine de minutes, sur la ségrégation à partir des connaissances des élèves. Une fois que toute la classe aura les mêmes informations, je leurs ferai passer le document de la séance 3 (Annexe) qui montre quatre images de mouvement de protestation du mouvement des droits civiques des années 1960.

Les élèves, individuellement, devront choisir une de ces images afin de réaliser le travail intermédiaire (consigne ci-dessous). En faisant des recherches, ils pourront approfondir leurs connaissances sur la ségrégation et le mouvement des droits civiques,

et en même temps s'entraîner pour la tâche finale. Cette activité durera jusqu'au reste de la séance. Le travail à rendre sera à faire soit durant la séance, si les élèves ont fini, soit chez eux. Les élèves ayant bien réussi auront leurs travaux transférer aux autres élèves de la classe et pourront être passer lors de l'exposition.

**Tâche intermédiaire:** You are a touristic guide in a museum on the Civil Right Movements. Choose a picture of the time and describe what moment of the Civil Right Movement it represents. Record yourself on a MP3. (EO)

#### **Séance 4 : Etude de document, the 1968 Olympic Game salute**

La séance numéro quatre restera sur la même période et se concentrera sur le salut lors des jeux olympiques de 1968. Après un rappel de cinq minutes sur la séance dernière, nous analyserons les deux images (Séance 4, Annexe) et formuleront des hypothèses, qui seront confirmer ou non pas la vidéo explicative (Séance 4, Annexe). Toute cette activité durera trente minutes environ.

Une PRL sur l'accent tonique et la prononciation, notamment la prononciation du passé, sera faite selon les résultats de la tâche intermédiaire. Cette PRL durera dix minutes, et sera suivi d'une trace écrite de dix minutes également sur la remédiation et sur l'utilisation de l'art pour commémorer une contestation (à travers ici la photographie et la sculpture).

#### **Séance 5 : Black Lives Matter**

Cette séance commencera non pas avec un rappel des séances précédentes mais avec un rappel de ce qui s'est passé au début de l'année 2020, avec les mouvements Black Lives Matter qui ont suivi le meurtre de Georges Floyd, aidé des photos des manifestations (séance 5, document 1, Annexe). Ce rappel durera dix minutes.

Nous verrons d'où vient le mouvement BLM grâce à un article de journal du New York Times (séance 5, document 2, Annexe), que j'ai modifié afin qu'il soit plus

compréhensible par les élèves. Cet article nous permettra de revoir les temps du passé, et son analyse durera vingt-cinq minutes environ.

Une fois que l'analyse de l'article de journal sera faite, nous verrons un exemple de violence policière à travers la sitcom *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, à travers un court extrait de quelques minutes où l'on voit Terry, un homme noir, être arrêter brutalement par la police sans raison. L'analyse de l'extrait durera environ dix minutes, et la trace écrite sur le mouvement BLM durera également 10 minutes.

Comme cette séance est celle qui est la plus proche de mon mémoire, j'ai également créé une fiche (Séance 5 Activité, Annexe) que les élèves suivront lors de la séquence. Cette fiche montre l'accroche de la séance (les photos des manifestations, questions qui partent des connaissances des élèves), la compréhension générale de l'activité (le document 2, les questions en WH-, les questions spécifiques au document), la compréhension détaillée (les questions sur Trayvon Martin et George Zimmerman). Le réinvestissement sera fait lors de l'analyse du document 3 et de la rédaction de la trace écrite. Cette fiche montre aussi comment les élèves pourront répondre aux questions et les objectifs de la séquence.

## **Séance 6 : Etude de document , *The Hate U Give***

La séance six sera la dernière séance avant la tâche finale. Je commencerai avec un rappel de la dernière séance de cinq minutes, afin de se rappeler du mouvement BLM et de la violence policière. On analysera ensuite le chapitre deux, du livre *The Hate U Give*, pendant environ vingt minutes, qui raconte l'histoire d'une jeune fille noire voyant son ami noir être victime de violence policière.

Cet extrait permettra de voir les abréviations américaines qui dérivent de l'accent tonique, et ainsi montrer l'importance de mettre l'accent au bon endroit. La trace écrite, de dix minutes, sera sur l'utilisation de l'art afin de dénoncer une situation grâce (ici à travers un livre, puis une adaptation filmique et une série télé). Puis la séance se terminera avec l'explication de la tâche finale et des exemples des œuvres d'arts pouvant être choisi par les élèves.

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## Annexe

### Séance 1 :



CC Stockbyte Jupiterimages Getty Images

A screenshot of a TED-Ed video player. The video shows a close-up of a person's face, likely Harriet Tubman, with a determined expression. The video progress bar indicates it is at 1:17 / 4:48. Below the video, the title reads "The breathtaking courage of Harriet Tubman - Janell Hobson". The video has 824190 views and was posted on July 24, 2018. It includes options to share, download, and subscribe. The TED-Ed logo is visible in the bottom left corner.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dv7YhVKFqbQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dv7YhVKFqbQ)

## Séance 2:

Follow the drinking gourd, follow the drinking gourd  
For the old man is a-waitin' to carry you to freedom  
Follow the drinking gourd

When the sun goes back and the first quail calls  
Follow the drinking gourd  
The old man is a-waitin' for to carry you to freedom  
Follow the drinking gourd

Follow the drinking gourd, follow the drinking gourd  
For the old man is a-waitin' to carry you to freedom  
Follow the drinking gourd

Now the river bed makes a mighty fine road  
Dead trees to show you the way  
Ant it's left foot, peg foot, traveling on  
Follow the drinking gourd

Follow the drinking gourd, follow the drinking gourd  
For the old man is a-waitin' to carry you to freedom  
Follow the drinking gourd  
The river ends between two hill

Follow the drinking gourd  
There's another river on the other side  
Follow the drinking gourd

Follow the drinking gourd, follow the drinking gourd  
For the old man is a-waitin' to carry you to freedom  
Follow the drinking gourd

*Follow the Drinking Gourd*  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=pw6N\\_eTZP2U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pw6N_eTZP2U)

### Séance 3:



*MLK leading the Selma march*



*The bus Rosa Park sat on and started the Montgomery bus boycott*



*A picture of some members of the Black Panther Group*



9K3330 [RM] © www.visualphotos.com

*A picture of the sit-ins in Greensboro that started a national movement*

## Séance 4:



1968 Olympic Games Salute (Getty Images)

Statue at San Jose State University (Wikipedia)



[www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3wjBlnxNek](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3wjBlnxNek)

## Séance 5:

### Document 1:



Seoul, South Korea - Ahn Young-joon



Paris France - Michel Euler



Cologne, Germany - Martin Meissner



London, United Kingdom - Alberto Pezzali

**Document 2 :**

## The New York Times

### ***Justice Department Investigation Is Sought\* in Florida Teenager's Shooting Death***

**By Lizette Alvarez** March 16, 2012

MIAMI — Nearly three weeks after an unarmed teenager was killed in a small city north of Orlando, stirring an outcry\*\*, a few indisputable facts remain: the teenager, who was black, was carrying nothing but a bag of Skittles, some money and a can of iced tea when he was shot. The neighborhood crime watch volunteer who got out of his car and shot him is white and Hispanic. He has not been arrested and is claiming self-defense.

Beyond that, however, little is clear about the Feb. 26 shooting death of Trayvon Martin, 17. [...]

The police in of Sanford, where the shooting took place, are not revealing details of the investigation. Late Friday night, after weeks of pressure, the police played the 911 calls in the case for the family and gave copies to the news media. On the recordings, one shot, an apparent warning or miss, is heard, followed by a voice begging or pleading, and a cry. A second shot is then heard, and the pleading stops.

“It is so clear that this was a 17-year-old boy pleading for his life, and someone shot him in cold blood,” said Natalie Jackson, one of the Martin family lawyers.

The police maintain that under state law they cannot arrest George Zimmerman, the 28-year-old neighborhood watch volunteer who was licensed to carry a concealed weapon, without probable cause. [...]

Florida’s self-defense law, known as Stand Your Ground, grants immunity to people who act to protect themselves if they have a reasonable fear they will be killed or seriously injured.

“Stand Your Ground is a law that has really created a Wild West type environment in Florida,” said Brian Tannebaum, a criminal defense lawyer in Florida. “It allows people to kill people outside of their homes, if they are in reasonable fear for their lives. It’s a very low standard.” [...]

Echoing a view held by many blacks in Sanford and elsewhere, the family’s lawyer, Benjamin Crump, said the police appeared to be protecting Mr. Zimmerman.

“Had Trayvon been the person who was the triggerman, they would have arrested him from Day 1 and they wouldn’t have given him bail and he would be

sitting in jail," Mr. Crump said. "Zimmerman is free and sleeping in his own bed at night." [...]

\*: (Seek, sought, sought) look for, try to obtain

\*\*: causing public disapproval

**Document 3:**



*Extract from the sitcom Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Season 4, Episode 16, "Moo-Moo".*

*Terry is racially profiled.*

## Séance 6:

When I was twelve, my parents had two talks with me.

One was the usual birds and bees. Well, I didn't really get the usual version. My mom, Lisa, is a registered nurse, and she told me what went where, and what didn't need to go here, there, or any damn where till I'm grown. Back then, I doubted anything was going anywhere anyway. While all the other girls sprouted breasts between sixth and seventh grade, my chest was as flat as my back.

The other talk was about what to do if a cop stopped me.

Momma fussed and told Daddy I was too young for that. He argued that I wasn't too young to get arrested or shot.

"Starr-Starr, you do whatever they tell you to do," he said. "Keep your hands visible. Don't make any sudden moves. Only speak when they speak to you."

I knew it must've been serious. Daddy has the biggest mouth of anybody I know, and if he said to be quiet, I needed to be quiet.

I hope somebody had the talk with Khalil.

He cusses under his breath, turns Tupac down, and maneuvers the Impala to the side of the street. We're on Carnation where most of the houses are abandoned and half the streetlights are busted. Nobody around but us and the cop.

Khalil turns the ignition off. "Wonder what this fool wants."

The officer parks and puts his brights on. I blink to keep from being blinded.

I remember something else Daddy said. *If you're with somebody, you better hope they don't have nothing on them, or both of y'all going down.*

"K, you don't have anything in the car, do you?" I ask.

He watches the cop in his side mirror. "Nah."

The officer approaches the driver's door and taps the window. Khalil cranks the handle to roll it down. As if we aren't blinded enough, the officer beams his flashlight in our faces.

"License, registration, and proof of insurance."

Khalil breaks a rule—he doesn't do what the cop wants. "What you pull us over for?"

"License, registration, and proof of insurance."

"I said what you pull us over for?"

"Khalil," I plead. "Do what he said."

Khalil groans and takes his wallet out. The officer follows his movements with the flashlight.

My heart pounds loudly, but Daddy's instructions echo in my head: *Get a good look at the cop's face. If you can remember his badge number, that's even better.*

With the flashlight following Khalil's hands, I make out the numbers on the badge—one-fifteen. He's white, midthirties to early forties, has a brown buzz cut and a thin scar over his top lip.

Khalil hands the officer his papers and license.

One-Fifteen looks over them. "Where are you two coming from tonight?"

"Nunya," Khalil says, meaning none of your business. "What you pull me over for?"

"Your taillight's broken."

"So are you gon' give me a ticket or what?" Khalil asks.

"You know what? Get out the car, smart guy."

"Man, just give me my ticket—"

"Get out the car! Hands up, where I can see them."

Khalil gets out with his hands up. One-Fifteen yanks him by his arm and pins him against the back door.

I fight to find my voice. "He didn't mean—"

"Hands on the dashboard!" the officer barks at me. "Don't move!"

I do what he tells me, but my hands are shaking too much to be still.

He pats Khalil down. "Okay, smart mouth, let's see what we find on you today."

"You ain't gon' find nothing," Khalil says.

One-Fifteen pats him down two more times. He turns up empty.

"Stay here," he tells Khalil. "And you," he looks in the window at me. "Don't move."

I can't even nod.

The officer walks back to his patrol car.

My parents haven't raised me to fear the police, just to be smart around them. They told me it's not smart to move while a cop has his back to you.

Khalil does. He comes to his door.

It's not smart to make a sudden move.

Khalil does. He opens the driver's door.

"You okay, Starr—"

*Pow!*

One. Khalil's body jerks. Blood splatters from his back. He holds onto the door to keep himself upright.

*Pow!*

Two. Khalil gasps.

*Pow!*

Three. Khalil looks at me, stunned.

He falls to the ground.

I'm ten again, watching Natasha drop.

An ear-splitting scream emerges from my gut, explodes in my throat, and uses every inch of me to be heard.

Instinct says don't move, but everything else says check on Khalil. I jump out the Impala and rush around to the other side. Khalil stares at the sky as if he hopes to see God. His mouth is open like he wants to scream. I scream loud enough for the both of us.

"No, no, no," is all I can say, like I'm a year old and it's the only word I know. I'm not sure how I end up on the ground next to him. My mom once said that if someone gets shot, try to stop the bleeding, but there's so much blood. Too much blood.

"No, no, no."

Khalil doesn't move. He doesn't utter a word. He doesn't even look at me. His body stiffens, and he's gone. I hope he sees God.

Someone else screams.

I blink through my tears. Officer One-Fifteen yells at me, pointing the same gun he killed my friend with.

I put my hands up.

*"The hate u give"*, Angie Thomas, 2017. Chapter 2.

## Séance 5: Activité

### Document 1:



#### What is it? What do you know about the movement?

It is four pictures from Black Lives Matter Protest, in different cities around the world. It is a movement to protest police violence against black people. It started in the USA. (Obj. lexicaux: police, violence, protest...)

### Document 2:



#### Read and describe it. (WH- questions).

This is an article from the New York times, written by Lizette Alvarez in 2012. It describes the shooting of black teenager on February 26 in Florida.



#### Summarize what happened the night Trayvon Martin died.

Trayvon Martin was walking (*action longue*) when he was shot by George Zimmerman (*passif passé*), a neighborhood crime watch volunteer. Zimmerman shot (*action courte*) twice and the second ball killed (*action unique*) Trayvon. Trayvon was carrying (*description*) a bag of Skittles, some money **and** a can of iced Tea. (*liste*)

#### What is the outcome of the story? Why is it causing an outcry? (Multiple reasons)

Zimmerman is still free even though he killed an innocent young man.

- The police appeared to be protecting Mr. Zimmerman.
- If Zimmerman were the victim and Trayvon the shooter, as a black man he would have been arrested.
- The “Stand your ground law” in Florida protects Zimmerman. (obj. culturel)

### Document 3:



#### Look at the extract and describe it (WH- questions). Is it surprising?

It is a picture of an extract of the sitcom *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. In it we can see one of the characters, who is black, he is being arrested for walking. The police officer arrives behind him, which is scary.

Because it is a sitcom, it is supposed to make people laugh. But the show portrays police violence to denounce the situation.

#### What is its link with the article?

This is linked to the police violence against African Americans. The character is arrested and attacked for nothing. The show references what happened to people like Trayvon Martin.

Because it is a sitcom, it is supposed to make people laugh. But the show portrays police violence to denounce the situation.

## Résumé du mémoire :

In this essay, I will analyze how black men and black gay men are represented on television, especially in sitcoms, and their representation of their relationship with the police, by taking the example of the show *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*.

By analyzing how American society perceives black men, the stereotypes that surrounds them and then through the analysis of black character in sitcoms, I will paint a portrait of traditional black men and black gay men representation.

Then I will analyze the show *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, to see how this sitcom manages to be politically involved and comment on social issues of its time, and I will analyze the original channel of the show, *Fox*, as well, to see if their representation of black people and the police correspond to the one on the show. I will also compare the two black characters of the show, Terry Jeffords and Raymond Holt, to the traditional portrait of black representation that I have established in the first part.

Finally, I will analyze previous police sitcoms, in order to see the relationship between the police and minorities in sitcoms throughout time. I will analyze the shows *The Andy Griffith Show* and *Barney Miller*, both staple shows of their time. Through their analysis, we will see how minorities are approached and how the police institution is represented. Then, I will analyze specific episodes that relate to police violence against black people, in the shows *Barney Miller* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, to see how the subject is treated in those shows and the evolution of the representation of police brutality.

Dans une partie didactique rédigée en français, je présente une séquence possible sur la représentation de l'histoire des noirs Américains à travers l'étude de différents œuvres d'arts.

Mots-clés: sitcom, black people, police representation, minority representation, black lives matter