The Black Image in the White Mind
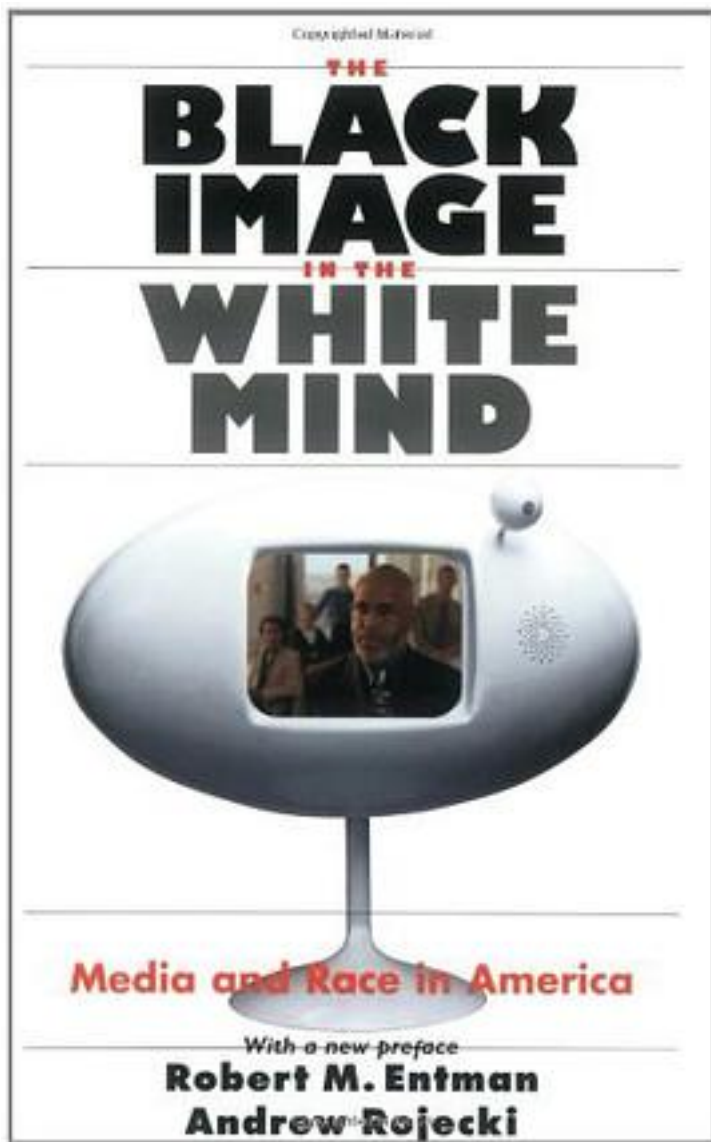

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Living in a segregated society, white Americans learn about African Americans not through personal relationships but through the images the media show them. "The Black Image in the White Mind" offers the most comprehensive look at the intricate racial patterns in the mass media and how they shape the ambivalent attitudes of Whites towards Blacks. Using the media, and especially television, as barometers of race relations, Robert M. Entman and Andrew Rojecki explore but then go beyond the treatment of African Americans on network and local news to incisively uncover the messages sent about race by the entertainment industry - from prime-time dramas and sitcoms to commercials and Hollywood movies. While the authors find very little in the media that intentionally promotes racism, they find even less that advances racial harmony. They reveal instead a subtle pattern of images that, while making room for Blacks, implies a racial hierarchy with Whites on top and promotes a sense of difference and conflict. Commercials, for example, feature plenty of Black characters. But unlike Whites, they rarely speak to or touch one another. In prime time, the few Blacks who escape sitcom buffoonery rarely enjoy informal, friendly contact with White colleagues - perhaps reinforcing social distance in real life. Entman and Rojecki interweave such astute observations with candid interviews of White Americans that make clear how these images of racial differences insinuate themselves into Whites' thinking. Despite its disturbing readings of television and film, the book's cogent analyses and proposed policy guidelines offer hope that America's powerful mediated racial separation can be successfully bridged.

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