

# *Seeking New Civilizations: Race Normativity in the Star Trek Franchise*

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*As with many science fiction works, the Star Trek franchise uses allegory to address contemporary social issues. Taking a liberal humanistic stance, it addresses race and racism using aliens as allegorical stand-ins for humanity. However, the producers of the Star Trek franchise were inadvertently perpetuating the racism they were advocating against. Operating within the framework of normative Whiteness, the producers privilege the White American male as the average human being. The characters of other racial and cultural backgrounds try to assimilate into the normative Whiteness defined by the producers or they are simply in the background to support the White lead characters. By drawing on previous work on the original series and The Next Generation, this article examines episodes from Deep Space Nine, Voyager, and Enterprise to determine how the Star Trek franchise reinscribes, or sometimes destabilizes, the mode of racial and cultural homogeneity assumed by the producers.*

**Keywords:** Star Trek; The Next Generation; Deep Space Nine; Voyager; Enterprise; race; racism; normativity; homogeneity; Whiteness

The original *Star Trek* is among the most famous works of science fiction of the 20th century, becoming a cultural and commercial success despite its failure during its first run on NBC. One of the reasons the original series was able to enter the zeitgeist and social consciousness of the American public was because it addressed many of the social problems that were occurring throughout the country. The Vietnam War was escalating and the Civil Rights Movement was reaching its climax, bringing about social change for women and racial minorities throughout the United

States. The cultural climate was ripe for a socially conscious television series that promoted a humanist and liberal agenda regarding the position of race and gender within traditional American values. Combining aspects of hard science fiction by extrapolating scientific achievement into the 23rd century and soft/new wave science fiction by exploring the social issues of contemporary America, *Star Trek* was able to appeal to not only a broad spectrum of science fiction fans but also to ordinary viewers. Under the guise of science fiction, the production crew of *Star Trek* was able to address social issues that would have been difficult to address in any other genre on television. John Meredyth Lucas, a member of the production crew, is quoted in Bernardi's (1998) book as saying, "we could do anti-Vietnam stories, our civil rights stories . . . set the story in outer space, in the future, and all of a sudden you can get away with just about anything" (p. 37). The security the science fiction genre offered to the writers allowed them to produce scripts that addressed social issues allegorically. Gene Roddenberry created a television series that followed his philosophy of "infinite diversity in infinite combinations" (Bernardi, 1998, p. 30), presenting a vision of the future free of the social problems that plagued America in the 1960s.

One of the social problems addressed in the original series was the prevalent racism found throughout the United States. Although the series was produced after many of the defining moments in the history of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States—Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, peaceful protests; the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing; and the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, which effectively ended segregation in the Southern states—racism was still an important issue when the first episode of the original series aired in the fall of 1966. Several episodes

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throughout its 3-year run addressed racism through allegorical or historical narratives, typically portraying those who practice racism as ignorant and unenlightened. However, although the producers of the original series believed that they were progressively addressing racism in America, they were also writing episodes from a position of normative Whiteness, a condition described by Montag (1997) as the privileging of European Whiteness as the dominant norm. Montag suggests that this condition of normativity arose out of the universalistic theories of philosophers John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, both of whom attempted to create a definition of humanity that incorporated all human beings regardless of race, culture, and place of origin. However, through their framework of universalism and their attempt to define an essentialized human being, they created a definition of humanity that equated being “human” with being European and White, while giving subhuman or proto-human status to Africans and Native Americans. Wagner and Lundeen (1998) ruminate in their article that normative Whiteness is a feature that operates in “anthropology texts where human evolution is pictured (literally) as a parade of successively ‘evolved’ male primates with a European man in the lead,” rhetorically wondering, “why not an Asian woman [at the end of the evolutionary chain]?” (p. 176). Although Gene Roddenberry and his production crew believed they were projecting liberal humanist values to their audience, particularly regarding the issue of racism, they have also created a television series that is a product of the normative Whiteness that has become engrained in American and European culture. The end result is a series that attempts to progressively address the issue of racism but also inadvertently perpetuates the contemporary America’s mode of normative Whiteness, privileging Whiteness as the racial and cultural norm that all other racial and ethnic groups should strive to attain.

Although *Star Trek* addresses the issue of race primarily through allegory, as noted by Robin A. Roberts (2000), who asserts that “all television aliens must be read as ciphers for humanity” (p. 207), it is important to examine the nonallegorical human characters that populate the franchise. The human characters are the characters with whom the audience can readily identify not only because they are the main characters of their respective series but also because they represent a relatable vision of humanity’s future, sharing many of the same emotions and desires found in contemporary America. Acknowledging that the characters featured in each series are the first “ciphers for humanity” the audience sees when they

watch *Star Trek*, each series uses a multicultural cast along with the assumption of race and cultural normativity to portray a future that has overcome 20th-century racism. Wagner and Lundeen (1998) point out that despite the fact that they had peripheral roles, Uhura and Sulu were “among the first television characters to portray African Americans or Asians simply as people whose roles were not inherently linked to an ethnic background” (p. 165). Although this strategy of normativity and multiculturalism may have been considered socially progressive in 1966, it cannot be applied to the more recent iterations of the franchise, as race relations have drastically changed in the 1980s, 1990s, and the new millennium. Although the simple act of casting raced actors to play nonstereotypical characters was forward thinking in a time when such characters were a rarity on television, by the end of the 20th century, the standards and expectations of a socially progressive television series are greater. By considering specific characters and episodes from *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, *Star Trek: Voyager*, and *Star Trek: Enterprise*, this article will examine how the three series consider race and racism within the framework of normative Whiteness that lies beneath the utopian message of the *Star Trek* franchise. Although there are a few episodes that acknowledge the existence of racism and attempt to deconstruct the racial and cultural normativity that defines the franchise, many other episodes simply perpetuate this underlying homogeneity by relying on racial stereotypes, by displaying a general ignorance of race issues, or by simply ignoring race issues completely.

Although this article’s main focus will be on the final three iterations of the franchise, it is important to examine the original *Star Trek*, as it is not only the origin of Roddenberry’s “liberal-humanist discourse” (Bernardi, 1998, p. 31), but it is also the origin of the contradictory messages of “racelessness” and cultural normativity, both of which form the basis of the entire *Star Trek* franchise. The first episode of the original series, “The Cage” (Roddenberry & Butler, 1966), was not broadcast on television until 1988, nearly two decades after the series was cancelled. Filmed as a pilot used to sell the series to the broadcast networks at the time, it featured nearly an entirely different cast of characters. With a primarily White cast, the pilot episode focused on feminist civil rights, casting a woman as the second in command of the *U.S.S. Enterprise*. The pilot was rejected by NBC executives for a variety of reasons, including the fact that it portrayed a woman in a position of power, leaving

Roddenberry and his production crew to shoot another pilot and change the cast of characters. Moving away from feminist civil rights, the production crew shifted its focus toward racial civil rights and responded by casting a multicultural and multiracial crew for their second pilot. Several new raced characters were introduced in the second pilot, including Sulu, a pan-Asian American; Uhura, of Swahili origin; and Spock, an alien-human mulatto. Although Spock's mixed-raced heritage makes him a victim of racial prejudice several times throughout the series, the primary function of his racial hybridity is to serve as a reification of the conflict between human emotion and human logic. For Sulu and Uhura, racial and cultural normativity could be seen when the characters were first conceived. In his chapter on the original series, Bernardi (1998) examines the problems of stereotyping and normativity that are found in the two minority characters. For example, in the casting sheets, Sulu is noted as finding "Asians . . . rather 'inscrutable'" (p. 40), eschewing his racial heritage and embracing European culture and history. Uhura is described as a "highly female female" character who entertains the crew by singing (p. 42), becoming an object of exoticization and fetishization. As a highly sexualized Black woman whose function is to entertain and serve a predominantly White crew, the problematization of Uhura is quite evident. In addition to being an object of desire, Nichelle Nichols, the actress who portrayed Uhura, was also greatly aware of her status as "background color" (p. 41), noting that her character had no real role in the show and that there were times when she didn't even have to read the script because she knew that she would be little more than an object on the series. Perhaps as a sign of how unimportant these characters were, both Uhura and Sulu were not given first names. Theirs were strictly background roles, used only to provide "background color" to an otherwise White cast.

The problems of racial normativity and stereotyping found in the original series do not end with the cast of characters. Bernardi (1998) concludes his chapter by noting that there are several episodes throughout the original series that further problematize *Star Trek's* liberal humanist project. He begins his analysis by examining the episode "Let That Be Your Last Battlefield" (Crawford & Taylor, 1969), suggesting that it is a prime example of the values that *Star Trek* wishes to project to its audience. The episode features two aliens racially differentiated from each other by their skin color, where one alien has skin that is White on the left side of his body and Black on the right, while the other alien's skin has the reverse coloring. As the episode

unfolds, it is revealed that these aliens, and their respective peoples as a whole, hate each other because of the difference in their skin color. By the end of the episode, the Enterprise crew discover that their peoples have annihilated each other and that they are the only members of their species left alive (Bernardi, 1998, p. 27). This episode is a representation of how *Star Trek* typically operates, using allegory to depict the consequences of real-world racism. However, the moral didacticism of many of the original series' episodes is often inadvertently undercut by the writers and producers themselves. In the next two episodes Bernardi (1998) examines, the racial normativity exhibited by the production crew supersedes the progressive message of the series. The episode "Plato's Stepchildren" (Dolinsky & Alexander, 1968) is famous for featuring the first interracial kiss on American television, a moment that has become one of the most important events in television history. But, as Bernardi notes, the kiss is problematized not only by the fact that Kirk is forced by aliens to kiss Uhura but also with shots and framing by the director that emphasize that Kirk is physically resisting the aliens as much as possible, showing his "anger and resentment" (p. 39) and signaling to the audience that he is in an undesirable position. In the same scene, there is yet another "forced" kiss, this time between two White characters, Spock and Nurse Chapel. Unlike the interracial kiss, both characters enjoy being forced into this position, and the kiss is shot by the director to emphasize the potential romantic undertones between the two characters (p. 38). The message is unfortunate, as the episode visually suggests that a White man must be coerced into kissing a Black woman and that such a kiss must be avoided at all costs, while also suggesting that a kiss between a White man and a White woman is perfectly natural and inherently imbued with a sense of romance.

Bernardi (1998) ends with an in-depth analysis of "The Paradise Syndrome" (Armen & Taylor, 1968), an episode in which Kirk is struck with temporary amnesia and integrated within a Native American tribe that has mysteriously been placed on another planet. He notes that this episode displays ignorance of specific Native American tribes, condensing the traits of several tribes into one fictional tribe, ignoring the advice of an expert who attempted to fix these errors (Bernardi, 1998, p. 48). The episode is also an example of the fetishization of Native American culture and is an example of the "noble savage" myth prevalent in Western culture, as it presents a fictional idealization of precolonization Native Americans

(Bernardi, 1998, p. 45). Not only does it create an idyllic and fetishized Native American space, the episode also privileges Whiteness and American culture, as Kirk is turned into a god as a result of his “natural” intellectual superiority over the Natives (Bernardi, 1998, p. 47). And although he is married to a Native American girl in the episode, the story evokes the standard “white/red miscegenation narrative” in which the Native American girl dies, after she is stoned by her fellow Native Americans for siding with Kirk, to allow the White male hero to escape his marriage and his allegiance to the inherently primitive nature of the Native Americans and regain his status as a racially, culturally, and intellectually superior White male (Bernardi, 1998, p. 49). This episode is a prime example of Montag’s “normative Whiteness,” as the White male is inherently superior and therefore more “human” than the savage and backward Native Americans. That the episode ends with the White captain rejecting this idyllic Native American society and reintegrating into the technologically and morally superior normatively White society emphasizes the episode’s privileging of Whiteness over other races and cultures.

It is not surprising that *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, the second series of the franchise and the last series for which Roddenberry was directly responsible, operates within the same framework as the original series, producing several episodes that are similar to “The Paradise Syndrome.” Many critics, including Bernardi, Wagner, and Lundeen, have examined episodes such as “Code of Honor” (Powers, Baron, & Mayberry, 1987), which, in the words of Wagner and Lundeen (1998), depicts a tribal society that is a “caricature of Islamic West Africa” (p. 162). Not only do many of the episodes operate in the same way, but the demographic of the cast is also similar to the original series, complete with a human-alien mulatta character, African American characters, and a recurring Asian character whose raced nature does not play into the series at all. They exist solely to provide an example of how raced peoples have assimilated into the cultural and social norms of an American, or perhaps European, future. Even after Roddenberry’s death, the series continued to exhibit the assumption of normative Whiteness in the 24th century, projecting a liberal humanist future that is supposedly void of racism, sexism, and classism. In “Time’s Arrow, Part 2” (J. Taylor & Menosky, 1992), an episode in which Samuel Clemens is transported to the 24th century via an alien time portal, Clemens expresses his doubts on the future of humanity

because of what he has experienced in the 19th century. Skeptical of the utopian future that he sees around him, he asks Deanna Troi, “I come from a time when men achieve wealth and power by standing on the backs of the poor . . . when prejudice and intolerance are commonplace . . . where power is an end unto itself. . . . And you’re telling me that isn’t how it is anymore?” (J. Taylor & Menosky, 1992). A bemused Troi simply replies, “That’s right” (J. Taylor & Menosky, 1992), thereby summarizing not only the simplicity and totality of *Star Trek’s* position on the future of humanity but also reminding the audience that the franchise does not provide any explanation as to how this utopian future is constructed. This is a future that is absent of any influence from African, Asian, Middle Eastern, and South American members of humanity, implying that a utopian society can only be formed out of a cultural and racial normality based on Western norms and ideals. The cultural and racial homogenization exhibited by *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is simply a continuation of the future projected by the original *Star Trek*. Roddenberry’s liberal humanistic project is very much alive, as is the project’s privileging of Whiteness and Western cultural norms. This is important because many of the producers and writers of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* went on to control the next three series in the franchise, carrying with them their liberal ideals but also their cultural and racial biases.

The first two series in the franchise, and to a lesser extent the movie franchise, are the foundation on which the last three series were built. In addition to the continuity of plot, character, and setting, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, *Star Trek: Voyager*, and *Star Trek: Enterprise* also continue to express liberal humanistic ideals, reiterating the raceless and classless future envisioned by Roddenberry. The three latter series also exhibit the pattern of normative Whiteness and cultural homogenization shown in the first two series, continually and unwittingly undermining the message of human social evolution with each episode produced. *Deep Space Nine* falls into this paradox, reproducing the very racial and cultural biases that the franchise is trying to dispel. For example, Winn (2004) notes in his article that Nog, a Ferengi,

makes the “right” and “noble” choice and rises above his despised race to embrace the values of the dominant culture [of humanity/the Federation]. Nog proves that a Ferengi can abandon his “detested” culture’s values and become a “credit to his race” from the dominant culture perspective. (para. 44)

Like Sulu, who finds Asians inscrutable and learns to assimilate into the American-centered *Enterprise* crew, Nog learns to grow beyond his “primitive” culture and assimilate into the culture of the racial and culturally homogeneous and “morally advanced” Federation, a futuristic projection of the United Nations headquartered on Earth. However, despite expressing the same contradictory message as the previous series in the franchise, there are times when the producers of *Deep Space Nine* are aware of the problems exhibited in *Star Trek*’s supposedly liberal humanistic ideals. Skepticism of the Federation is openly discussed in several episodes. For example, in the episode “The Maquis, Part 2” (Behr & Allen, 1994), a character is given the opportunity to criticize the Federation:

The trouble is Earth—on Earth there is no poverty, no crime, no war. You look out the window of Starfleet Headquarters and you see paradise. It’s easy to be a saint in paradise, but the Maquis do not live in paradise. Out there in the demilitarized zone all the problems haven’t been solved yet. Out there, there are no saints, just people—angry, scared, determined people who are going to do whatever it takes to survive, whether it meets with Federation approval or not.

This is one of the first times in the franchise that the values of the Federation are called into question. Similar to many real-world modern governments, the Federation fails to protect its most vulnerable and marginalized citizens, dispelling the blanket utopianism that was integral to the first two series.

Beyond the skepticism of the government body to which most of the main characters in *Star Trek* answer, *Deep Space Nine* diverges from the other series in the franchise on several other fronts. The series is set on a space station that becomes embroiled in an intergalactic war that threatens the very existence of the Federation, rejecting the starship-based, alien-of-the-week episodic nature that formed the narrative basis of the other series. This war provides an opportunity to critically examine the Federation and the morality of Starfleet officers who serve the Federation. Unlike Captains Kirk and Picard, Starfleet officers in *Deep Space Nine* make morally ambiguous choices, all in the name of ensuring victory in the war against the Dominion. The moral relativism of these Starfleet officers can be seen in episodes such as “Paradise Lost,” “Inter Arma Enim Silent Leges,” and most strikingly “In the Pale Moonlight” (M. Taylor & Lobl, 1998), an episode in which the main character of *Deep Space Nine* facilitates the assassination of a Romulan ambassador to trick the Romulans into joining

the Federation’s war against the Dominion. It is also the only series that resists the heteronormativity that is present in the rest of the franchise, most notably in “Rejoined” and the “Mirror Universe” episodes, even if its representation of bisexuality is problematized. Most important, the series diverges from the franchise in its main character, an African American Captain named Benjamin Sisko, portrayed by Avery Brooks. In addition to portraying the first African American captain to lead a *Star Trek* series, Brooks is also attributed with introducing 20th-century race issues into the series, without relying on the crutch of allegorical alien stand-ins, because of his involvement in various civil rights organizations. This awareness of contemporary race issues can be seen in the character of Benjamin Sisko himself, who is designed to be a positive role model for the African American audience. Throughout the series, Sisko is forced to juggle the demands of his career, which include being a soldier, while trying to raise his young son, Jake. Sisko becomes a widower in the opening moments of the pilot episode, forcing him to become a single father trying to learn to raise his son while learning to cope with the death of his wife. The depth of his personal life allows for a positive portrayal of an African American family on television. Accordingly, there are several individual episodes that focus solely on Benjamin and Jake’s father-son relationship, such as “The Jem’Hadar,” “Explorers,” and “The Visitor.” This positive representation of an African American family was so important to Brooks that he asked the producers to change the ending of the series in “What You Leave Behind, Part 2” (“What You Leave Behind,” 2006) so that this father-son relationship would not end. The Sisko family was given further prominence when Joseph Sisko, Benjamin’s father, and Kasidy Yates, Benjamin’s eventual second wife, were introduced later in the series.

By giving Benjamin Sisko a family and a permanent love interest, the producers created a fully developed character, humanizing him further than any of the other *Star Trek* captains in the franchise, all of whom were single and childless. In addition to having a full personal life, Sisko is also aware of Earth’s, and specifically America’s, history of racism. His awareness of 20th-century racism allows the writers to introduce and address racism within humanity directly for the first time in the franchise, without relying on metaphor and allegory. However, even when candidly addressing the issue of racism in a modern context, there are times when *Deep Space Nine* perpetuates the racial normativity found in the first two series. In the episode “Badda-Bing, Badda-Bang” (Behr, Beimer, & Vejar,

1999), the crew of *Deep Space Nine* takes part in an adventure set in a holographic reproduction of a 1962 Las Vegas casino lounge. When Kasidy asks Sisko to participate, he has reservations about a recreation that ignores the segregation of Whites and Blacks, noting that it's a "lie" and that in a Las Vegas casino in 1962, Blacks could only be "performers or janitors, but customers? Never" (Behr et al., 1999). Kasidy responds by saying that even if it isn't accurate, it is a recreation of "the way things should have been" and ends the conversation by suggesting that the holographic reproduction "reminds us that we are no longer bound by any limitations, except the ones we impose on ourselves" (Behr et al., 1999) and that there isn't anything wrong with having a little fun as long as they don't forget about the past. The message is a positive one, declaring that the characters should not feel ashamed of trying to enjoy a holographic reproduction of the past despite the fact that they would have been discriminated against if they were to enter a real Las Vegas casino lounge in 1962. This is a message that could only apply to a society where racism has been completely eliminated and has become an anachronism. Even if the issues of normative Whiteness in the *Star Trek* franchise are set aside, this message is highly problematic in a 20th-century context. The producers appear to suggest that contemporary African Americans should be able to enjoy romanticizations of the past in the form of cinema, television, and other artistic media as long as they do not forget the racism they and their ancestors experienced. At best, it is an idealization of race issues in contemporary America; at worst, it is a patronizing demand to a disenfranchised minority, asking them to bury and forget some of the more troubling aspects of American history and demanding that they absorb into the mainstream, which is defined by normative Whiteness. Additionally, the episode would also seem to suggest that White Americans should be able to enjoy romanticizations of the past without feeling any guilt over the racism of their ancestors.

Issues regarding race in 20th-century America are directly addressed in the episode "Far Beyond the Stars" (Behr, Beimer, & Brooks, 1998), in which Captain Sisko experiences a crisis of confidence after one of his close friends is killed in action. As he considers leaving the war behind him, aliens known as The Prophets give him a dream-vision to help him overcome his doubts about the war. In this dream, he is transported to an American town in the 1950s and takes on the role of Benny Russell, a writer who works at a science fiction magazine called "Incredible Tales."

His dream becomes a recreation of the African American experience in 1950, as Benny Russell and the rest of his friends, including Willie Hawkins, one of the first African American baseball players to play in a White league, and Jimmy, a disenfranchised street youth, deal with racism in their daily lives. In one scene, Russell is asked not to come to work when author photographs will be taken for the magazine, because "the average reader is not going to spend his hard earned cash on stories written by Negroes" (Behr et al., 1999). In another scene, Hawkins is asked why he doesn't move to a better neighborhood when, as a famous baseball player, he clearly has the means to do so. He replies, "Are you kidding? They can hardly get used to the idea of me playing along side them. Living along side them is a whole other story" (Behr et al., 1999). From these scenes, it is clear that the episode is attempting to realistically portray issues of racism and segregation in America's past. Rather than examine racism as an anachronism of an unenlightened past, as the franchise has done up until this point, this episode addresses racism directly and acknowledges that it was a part of human history.

In a moment of self-awareness, the plot of this episode involves Benny Russell writing a science fiction story based on *Deep Space Nine* featuring an African American captain named "Ben Sisko." This metafictional conceit is used to show the audience that Russell isn't simply writing fiction but is in fact writing what will and has happened in the future, as the audience knows that *Deep Space Nine* and Ben Sisko are real. When Russell's story is rejected by his editor because it features a Black captain, Jimmy is not surprised: "A colored captain? The only reason they'll let us in space is if they need someone to shine their shoes! ... As far as they're concerned, we'll always be niggers" (Behr et al., 1999). In spite of this setback and Jimmy's dose of pessimistic realism, Russell becomes obsessed with writing more "Ben Sisko" stories to the point where his editor is eventually convinced to publish the story as long as it is changed so that "Ben Sisko" is only a dream of a poor African American man hoping for a better future and not a real character. Despite this small victory, Russell's problems begin to mount as the racism of his world begins to decisively assert itself and overwhelm him. His friend Jimmy is shot by two White police officers, knowingly played by the same actors who play the roles of the villains in the series itself, for committing a petty crime. When Russell angrily confronts the police officers, they beat him in the middle of a public street in front of a crowd, knowing

that they would suffer no penalty. After a long recovery, he returns to the magazine's office only to discover that the publisher of the magazine has pulped the entire run of the issue that contained his story and that he has been fired. He begins to have a mental breakdown, but before he collapses and is taken away to an asylum, he declares, "I am a human being, damn it! You can deny me all you want, but you cannot deny that Ben Sisko exists!" (Behr et al., 1999), insisting that his fictional creations, Ben Sisko and Deep Space Nine, are real to the bitter end.

It would appear that institutionalized racism has driven Russell crazy, forcing him to regress into the fictional world of his story, but the audience empathizes with Russell because in the context of the series, Deep Space Nine and Ben Sisko are, in fact, "real." By insisting that Ben Sisko is a real person up until the moment he is taken away, Russell refuses to give in to a society that does not believe that an African American man could possibly become the captain of a space station. Russell's perseverance inspires the "real" Benjamin Sisko, who on waking from his vision realizes that he must continue to fight in the war and believe that he will emerge victorious, even if everyone around him believes the contrary. Russell's experience also becomes a comment on contemporary science fiction and contemporary society, where an African American captain can be written into a nationally and internationally syndicated television series without fear of censorship or economic penalty. This episode must be given credit for not only addressing racism directly in a way that no other series in the franchise had ever addressed, to the point where the main character himself becomes the target of racism, but for also questioning the position of normative Whiteness in American society. That the writers end Sisko's vision with Russell internalizing the pain of racism could be seen as the ultimate tragedy arising out of America's racist past.

The fact that Russell's only escape from racism is to be mentally overwhelmed and descend into insanity problematizes the message of the episode. The writers made a conscious decision not to have Russell fight or resist the racism that surrounds him, despite the fact that during this timeframe the Montgomery bus boycotts occurred, along with the creation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. And although it may not have been believable to have him fight back against the racist society given that the Civil Rights Movement was in its infancy, it is widely believed that the writers had written a positive ending that was cut from the script. The original ending

would have shown Russell on the sound stage of a television series called *Deep Space Nine* ("Far Beyond the Stars [DS9 Episode]," 2006), showing that the racist society had not succeeded in suppressing his "Ben Sisko" stories and that he was finally given the opportunity to tell his story. This ending was not used because it would have affected the continuity of the entire *Star Trek* franchise. Despite the problematic ending of "Far Beyond the Stars," it is the only episode in the franchise to depict racism in a historical context, disrupting *Star Trek's* usual stance of race normativity. In fact, a parallel can be drawn between the publisher and editor of "Incredible Tales" and the producers of the *Star Trek* franchise, as both the fictional magazine and the television series choose to ignore race by presenting a vision of the future with only a single cultural and racial norm.

Although *Deep Space Nine* is the only series that addressed racism without resorting to allegory, it is not the only series that attempted to destabilize the concept of a racially homogenous future. Returning to the episodic, traveling-starship narrative found in the original series and *The Next Generation*, the fourth series in the franchise, *Star Trek: Voyager*, featured a multicultural ensemble cast, including a half Latin American/half Klingon character named B'Elanna Torres, a Native American character named Chakotay, an Asian American character named Harry Kim, and a Black Vulcan character named Tuvok. Although Harry Kim's and Tuvok's racial background are largely overlooked, race plays an important part in both Chakotay's and B'Elanna Torres's character development. Although Chakotay is used primarily as a supporting character on *Voyager*, delivering lines of exposition to further the plot, the series incorporated his Native American heritage into his role. In the first two seasons, he often helped the crew with vision quests and by using typical Native American accoutrements such as dream catchers and medicine bundles. As a result of his Native American background, the writers gave him an inherent spirituality not afforded to any other members of the crew, perpetuating the same "noble savage" stereotype found in the original series episode "The Paradise Syndrome." Chakotay's Native American heritage and spirituality play a major role in the second season episode "Tattoo" (Piller & Singer, 1995), in which Chakotay discovers the origin of the tattoo on his face and consequently the origin of Native American spirituality. Framed within a typical episode involving *Voyager* searching for resources, the story of Chakotay's youth and his anxiety over his Native

American heritage unfolds through a series of flashbacks. Young Chakotay, his father Kolopak, and a few other men from their unspecified tribe are on a quest in a Central American jungle to find their ancestral relatives called the "Rubber Tree People," a group of Native Americans who have isolated themselves from mainstream society for several centuries. In the first flashback, the cultural differences between Chakotay and the rest of his tribe are made clear: He is divided from them by a linguistic barrier because he does not speak his tribe's language, and he is divided from them visually through his costuming, as he is the only member of the expedition who does not carry a backpack. Described as a "contrary" (Piller & Singer, 1995) from the moment of his birth, young Chakotay rejects the spiritual and natural wisdom of his tribe and embraces the future represented by Starfleet and the Federation. When young Chakotay tells his father that he is joining Starfleet, he declares, "Our tribes live in the past. A past of fantasy and myth. . . . Other tribes have learned to accept the 24th century, why can't ours?" (Piller & Singer, 1995). His father angrily replies that if he leaves the tribe to join Starfleet, he will "be caught between worlds" (Piller & Singer, 1995), finding a place neither in Starfleet nor his tribe. The distaste young Chakotay feels for the primitive nature of his tribe is finalized when the expedition makes contact with the Rubber Tree People; his father embraces his ancestral cousins while young Chakotay physically rejects them, pushing them away when they try to adorn him with one of their facial tattoos. Through young Chakotay's rejection of his culture, the episode seems to acknowledge that the Federation is culturally homogenous and that those who wish to become active members of the Federation must give up their own cultural heritage.

However, although the episode promotes an awareness of the racial and cultural normativity integral to the franchise's utopian future, it also perpetuates the noble savage myth and fetishizes Native American culture. As the episode continues, the Chakotay of the narrative present is captured by aliens who wear the same facial tattoo that he does. Recognizing this connection, he attempts to communicate with them by using the few words he remembers from his father's unspecified Native American language and makes peaceful contact. He learns that these aliens, known only in Native American mythology as "Sky Spirits," visited Earth 45 millennia ago and made contact with the first human beings to have crossed over the land bridge through the Bering Strait

to North America. Recognizing that these early nomadic Native Americans had a "respect for the land and for other living creatures," the Sky Spirits "genetically bonded" with them to help them flourish in North America. For more than a minute, the first meeting between Sky Spirit and Native American is shown superimposed over footage of an unaltered, unexploited, pristine Arctic, reifying the Native American's inherent desire to protect nature from destruction. In *Star Trek's* reality, Native Americans are genetically superior to Europeans who "ravaged" North America with war and disease. The franchise's incessant romanticization and essentialization of Native Americans shows the fallacy of its liberal humanist project, as the producers have created a universe where race and culture have either become homogenized by the normative Whiteness that defines this version of humanity's future, or caricatured and essentialized, where an entire civilization is defined by a few stereotypes.

Serving as a counterpoint to Chakotay's essentialized character, B'Elanna Torres's racial background, half human/half Klingon, is used by several writers to question the racially homogeneous nature of the franchise's projected future. Torres's Latina heritage is largely ignored, and her character is primarily an allegorical representation of the "tragic mulatta" stereotype (Roberts, 2000, p. 206), but the anxiety her character expresses over her racial hybridity is one of the few moments in the *Star Trek* franchise that destabilizes its own racial normativity. Following the typical tragic mulatta narrative, it is revealed that Torres's human father abandoned her Klingon mother early in Torres's childhood because he couldn't live with Klingons. As a result, Torres learned to loathe her Klingon heritage, blaming herself for the destruction of her family. Her angst over her racial hybridity features in several episodes throughout the series' seven-season run. Torres's struggle begins in the first season episode, "Faces" (Biller, Glassner, & Kolbe, 1995), in which her Klingon and human halves are separated by an alien scientist. Although the human Torres first believes that being separated from her Klingon half is a blessing, she later feels that she is "incomplete" (Biller et al., 1995). However, her acceptance of her Klingon heritage is tempered by the fact that she is forced to reincorporate her Klingon half to survive. The episode ends with her resigned to her inescapable hybridity, as she says, "I just have to accept the fact that I'll spend the rest of my life fighting her" (Biller et al., 1995). At this point in Torres's character development, she admires the strength her Klingon heritage affords her, but she also wishes that

she was fully human, a tacit acknowledgement of the racial normativity inherent to Starfleet and the Federation.

In the seventh season, Torres remains ambivalent about her Klingon background, despite having learned to embrace aspects of her Klingon heritage in previous episodes. In "Lineage" (Kahn & Lauritson, 2001), Torres learns that she is pregnant and begins to prepare for her daughter's birth. Because she conceived her child with her husband, a human being, she believes that her child will be free of any distinctive Klingon features, such as the ridged forehead. When she learns that her daughter will still look like a Klingon, she has a personal crisis and begins to remember her own troubled childhood. Using a flashback narrative structure similar to the one found in "Tattoo," the episode reveals that young Torres had difficulties trying to fit into a human society. Not only was she "treated like a monster" (Kahn & Lauritson, 2001) by the other human children because of her mixed heritage, but she also learned that her father had doubts about marrying a Klingon and having a half-Klingon child. Believing that she can spare her child from experiencing the same pain and anxiety that she felt as a child, she devises a plan to remove the Klingon genetic markers from her fetus, hoping to give birth to a "fully" human child. The episode suggests that the anxiety she feels for her daughter is a result of her "Othered" status within a racially homogeneous society. In one scene, she creates two holographic simulations, one in which her daughter is one quarter Klingon and another in which her daughter is fully human. The two versions of her daughter are physically distinct from each other; the Klingon version has black hair and a ridged forehead, whereas the human version has blonde hair and a smooth forehead. The director further differentiates them with the camera by shooting the Klingon version at a distance and the human version in a tight close-up, lingering on her lack of Klingon facial features. The different shots reveal Torres's internalized self-loathing, emphasizing that she prefers and identifies with her humanity more than her Klingon heritage. When her husband discovers that she wants to genetically change their daughter so that she will appear completely human, he tells her that their daughter will be accepted regardless of her racial identity. She responds, "When the people around you are one way, and you're not, you can't help but feel that there is something wrong with you" (Kahn & Lauritson, 2001), bringing to light the fact that they live in a society defined by an underlying racial normativity

that privileges humanity. Having been ostracized as a child, she has seen the effects of racial normativity firsthand, making her want to take the drastic step of genetically modifying her daughter to make her human. The episode reveals that her anxiety is caused by her fear that her husband will leave her for the same reason her father did, but the root of her fear is the racial normativity in which she grew up. Even though racism and prejudice has been purged from *Star Trek's* projected future, the homogeneous nature of this projected society still rejects those who do not fit the norm. Although critics such as Burmedi (2000) suggest that Torres is on "a path of spiritual reintegration" (p. 325), the fact that she is unable to reconcile her hybridity until the end of the series highlights the inherent problem of a raceless society. By privileging specific attributes and characteristics as normal, those who exhibit different attributes and characteristics are automatically considered abnormal, regardless of how tolerant the society may be.

The final iteration of the *Star Trek* franchise does not continue the trend of destabilizing racial normativity exhibited in the previous two series. Instead, *Enterprise* reaffirms the racial normativity found in the original series by once again assuming that racism has become an anachronism in the future. In line with the original series, issues involving race and racism are only considered allegorically, as doing otherwise would contradict the assumption of race normativity. *Enterprise* featured a multicultural cast, including Hoshi Sato, a Japanese woman, and Travis Mayweather, a character of African American descent born on a deep space cargo ship, but as in the original series and *The Next Generation*, the racial background of the characters does not play a role in the series. For the most part, Sato is a supporting character on the series, featured in only a handful of episodes. Like Uhura, however, she serves as an object of fetishization for both the crew of the *Enterprise* and the audience, as in "Shockwave, Part 2" (Berman, Braga, & Kroeker, 2002), where her character is placed in a position where she accidentally loses her top and bears her breasts to her crewmates and the camera. Mayweather is a supporting character who features even less than Sato despite being one of the most experienced members of the crew. The only time he moves beyond his supporting role is in "Horizon" (Bormanis & Conter, 2003), when he temporarily leaves the *Enterprise* to return to his family's cargo ship. The fact that the characters exist solely to support the rest of the crew emphasizes the racial normativity of the series. Only when the

characters leave the confines of the Enterprise are they able to express themselves and move beyond their supporting roles.

Like the other series in the franchise, *Enterprise* perpetuates the message of race normativity by assuming that racism within humanity has been eliminated, relying strictly on allegory to address the issue of racism. For example, "North Star" (Goodman, 2003) features a group of humans who are descended from humans who were abducted from America's "wild west" by aliens called the Skagarans. Turning the tables on their abductors, the humans revolt and subjugate their former captors. By the time Captain Archer and the *U.S.S. Enterprise* arrive, the descendants have completely taken control, treating the Skagarans as their racially inferior slaves. In the context of the episode, the Skagarans serve as an allegorical representation of 19th-century African Americans. To emphasize this point, the episode resorts to many visual codes and historical stereotypes. Despite being 200 years removed from their abducted ancestors, these humans live in a replica of a town from the "wild west," complete with dirt roads, a saloon, and a jail. Like 19th-century African Americans, the Skagarans are not allowed to be educated, so a young woman named Bethany takes it on herself to teach them how to read. When Captain Archer first meets Bethany, he tells her that he is from the "North" to convince her that he is sympathetic to her cause, perpetuating the American Civil War stereotype of a racist South and a racially tolerant North. By drawing these parallels, the episode reminds the contemporary audience of America's history of racism but also glosses over much of its racist past. The humans in this society are racially homogeneous, suggesting that the original abductees were either all White or that all of the non-White abductees were killed or denied the opportunity to have children. It is possible that the original White abductees may have had African American slaves or may have killed Native Americans for their land, and it is also possible that when the group was abducted, the White members ostracized those who did not conform to the racial norm. That the descendants of these abductors continue the western frontier lifestyle of their ancestors suggests that they may be racist toward the Skagarans and to nonracially conforming human beings as well. Not considering this point and assuming that racism has simply disappeared calls into question the overall message of the episode. When Captain Archer tells Sheriff MacReady, the man who is in charge of this society, that they must overcome "intolerance and prejudice" (Goodman, 2003) before they can return to Earth, it is clear that Archer is referring to the

treatment of the Skagarans. That MacReady and the other humans in this entirely White society may be racist toward humans of color is not even a consideration. By not considering racism in a 19th- or 20th-century human context, this episode assumes that these White humans represent all of humanity. As with episodes from the previous series, the message of this episode may be "positive," but it is entirely undermined by its production, calling into question the efficacy of *Star Trek's* message of tolerance.

The allegorical examination of racism continues in the two-part episodes "Demons" (Coto & Burton, 2005) and "Terra Prime" (Reeves-Stevens, Reeves-Stevens, & Coto, 2005). Invoking the post-September 11th paranoia found in America, the episodes take place a year after an unprovoked alien attack on Earth. A group of xenophobic human extremists, calling themselves Terra Prime, use the attack to generate "racial" hatred for all nonhumans on Earth. Using Nazi rhetoric, it is revealed in "Demons" that the ultimate goal of Terra Prime is to ensure the genetic purity of humanity by preventing breeding between humans and aliens. The allegorical messages are not subtle, the alien surprise attack on Earth and the subsequent response by Terra Prime is a reminder of the prejudice that Muslims faced after the September 11th attacks. The demand for racial purity is a reminder of the many Nazi eugenics projects started in an attempt to create an Aryan nation. Characters in the episodes use rhetoric reminiscent of both the Nazis and anti-Muslim prejudice. Josiah, trying to rally a crowd of humans to their cause, says, "Seven million people, killed by aliens . . . and now [our leaders] want to work with [aliens]?" (Coto & Burton, 2005), drawing on the belief held by some in the United States that all Muslims should be held accountable for the September 11 attacks. Paxton, the leader of Terra Prime, creates a human-Vulcan hybrid child to prove that the purity of humanity is in danger. He says that the baby "is a danger to [our species]" and calls it a "cross-breed freak" (Reeves-Stevens et al., 2005), reflecting racist rhetoric of many organizations in human history.

However, as with "North Star," the message of "Demons" and "Terra Prime" is complicated by the racial normativity found in the episodes. Reversing the racial homogeneity of the group of humans found in "North Star," the human extremist group in "Demons" and "Terra Prime" is diverse, portrayed by actors from several different ethnic and racial groups. By using racially heterogeneous characters to represent this xenophobic terrorist group, the episode suggests that despite their differences, human beings would unite in

a shared hatred of aliens. To emphasize this unity, much of the anti-alien rhetoric is given to African American members of Terra Prime, including Josiah, mentioned in the previous paragraph, and Daniel Greaves, who accuses Trip of fathering a “half-human thing” (Reeves-Stevens et al., 2005). By giving the “racist” rhetoric to the minority characters, the episode ironically suggests the fallacy of their beliefs, especially in the context of the racism and antimiscegenation laws historically directed at African Americans. In fact, the two episodes feature a subplot involving an interracial relationship between Gannet Brooks and Travis Mayweather, further emphasizing the irony of Josiah and Daniel Greaves’s comments. Although the audience may realize the inherent problems with their beliefs, the irony is lost on both the characters in these episodes, who remain willfully ignorant of the fact that they are using the same rhetoric as many segregationists in American history and the producers of the series, who simply assume that racism in this homogeneous society has become an anachronism. The very fact that neither Josiah nor Greaves are troubled by co-opting the racist rhetoric used to subjugate their 20th-century ancestors emphasizes the homogeneous nature of humanity in *Enterprise*’s projected future, a future that suggests that minoritized groups have adopted the norms of a privileged majority, seemingly believing that racism should be footnoted in history. As with several previous episodes in the *Star Trek* franchise, “Demons” and “Terra Prime” allegorically promote a message of racial tolerance. Unfortunately, the means by which this message is delivered simply perpetuate the racism that the producers are trying to eliminate.

In examining each *Star Trek* series, it is clear that the liberal humanistic message of the producers is undermined by their assumption of racial and cultural norms. Although casting a racially diverse and multicultural crew was considered progressive when the original series debuted in 1966, the 21st-century audience expects more from a franchise that claims to espouse liberal values. To truly advance a liberal humanistic cause, any future *Star Trek* television series would have to address the racial and cultural normativity of its predecessors. Instead of projecting a future that is ostensibly European and American, the producers of the next *Star Trek* series could project a future that acknowledges the contribution of other cultures and nationalities. An example of this type of projected future is seen in Joss Whedon’s science fiction television series *Firefly*, which imagines a universe based on a Sino-American alliance and features characters who

switch between English and Mandarin dialogue. Additionally, characters in *Star Trek* should be given the opportunity to criticize the homogeneity of the Federation or at the very least be allowed to exhibit cultural and racial characteristics that differ from the norm. Although the *Star Trek* franchise typically features “raced” (non-Caucasian in *Star Trek*’s racially normative world) characters who have adopted American or Western norms, a future series might feature similarly “raced” characters that exhibit values of other human cultures, or this hypothetical series could feature a “nonraced” (Caucasian) character that has been raised in a non-American and non-Western society. Such characters would destabilize the normativity found throughout the franchise and would present a future more inclusive than the one it currently projects.

The liberal humanist message of the *Star Trek* franchise, which advocates a future without racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice, is admirable. Gene Roddenberry’s vision of humanity’s future was celebrated by Martin Luther King Jr., who believed Uhura was one of the only positive representations of a Black woman on television. However, this utopian vision of the future is undermined by the inadvertent assumption of racial and cultural normativity. By relying on allegory to address the issue of race, the producers created a future that privileges one race as normal as opposed to a future without racism. Although allegory was the only way to address the issue of race in the 1960s, perhaps excusing the original series, the last three iterations of the franchise are not so easily excused. With notable exceptions, *Deep Space Nine*, *Voyager*, and *Enterprise* continue to assume a stance of racial normativity despite having the freedom to address race and racism in a contemporary, human context. *Star Trek*’s progressive message is one that definitely has a place on American television, but the producers of any future *Star Trek* series must realize that all races and cultures should be given an equal opportunity to contribute to a future that is free of racism and prejudice.

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