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Author(s)	RUSSELL, John G.
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FINITE FRONTIER: RACISM, SEXISM, AND THE MYTH OF *STAR TREK*

John G. RUSSELL

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Abstract

This paper examines representation of race, gender, and sexual orientation in *Star Trek*. Since its inception forty-five years ago, *Star Trek* has spawned a number of myths that have generally portrayed it as in the vanguard of socially conscious episodic television. While the original show's liberal pedigree has increasingly come under critical scrutiny by fans and scholars alike, popular discourse continues to praise the franchise for its social awareness and progressive treatment of contemporary issues. However, despite major social changes to the American social landscape in the half-century since the original show's premiere and despite the proliferation of spinoffs that have cemented its position as a mainstay of American popular culture, *Star Trek* continues to cling to enduring conventions in its representation of race, gender, and sexual orientation, presenting a future that remains prosaically homogenous and heteronormative, its representations of alien alterity and human diversity marred by the same racist, sexist, and homophobic thinking it ostensibly rejects.

As good myth-weavers know, the potency of myth lies in the magic of ambiguity. Myth derives its power from twilight, from straddling the here and there, like those optical illusions in psych textbooks that signify different images depending on how you look at them. Strong myth has room for many specific and contradictory functions, political or otherwise, but it always opens up another secret garden.

Erik Davis

I find that the best approach to Star Trek, as to all mainstream popular culture, is to begin with the simple observation that if popular culture told us things about ourselves that we didn't want to know, popular culture would not be popular for long. If Star Trek were to overturn all the myths of gender by which we live our lives, we would not tune into it, and corporate sponsors would withdraw their support.

Diana M.A. Relke

I. COLOR LINES

Since its inception 45 years ago, *Star Trek* (ST 1966-1969) has spawned a number of myths primarily centered upon its position in the vanguard of socially conscious episodic television, boldly exploring contemporary social issues previous dramatic

television programs were reluctant to explore. Although fans and critics have increasingly come to question the original show's liberal pedigree and the progressivism of its spinoff series, popular media discourse and that generated by the shows' creators and less critical loyal fans continue to praise *Star Trek* for its utopianism, social awareness, and "progressive" treatment of contemporary issues (Ott and Aoki 2001, 396-399). Like *Star Wars*, the popular media have elevated the adventures of the *U.S.S. Enterprise* and its sundry crews to the status of a fecund modern myth that has spawned not only an endless parade of prequels, sequels, and assorted paraphernalia but also myths that celebrate a liberal humanism that is more imagined than real.¹ As such, the mythogenic nature of *Star Trek* is not confined to the imaginary landscapes it creates for television and movie viewers; it also includes the perpetuation of the myth that portrays the original series (and at least two of its television spinoffs) as in the vanguard of progressive, socially relevant television.

Certainly with its utopian vision of a future free of racism, sexism, and prejudice, the original *Star Trek* was unlike any previous science fiction program seen on television. Yet as a cultural artifact of the 1960s, the original series was unable to transcend the provincial biases of not only sponsors and network executives but its writers and, most important of all, its creator Gene Roddenberry. Moreover, despite major social changes in the intervening years, *Star Trek* and subsequent series have consistently failed to question let alone subvert enduring conventions in the representation of race, gender, and sexual orientation. For despite its paeans to tolerance and diversity, the *Star Trek* universe remains prosaically homogenous, its representation of alien alterity and human diversity marred by the same racist, sexist, and homophobic thinking it ostensibly rejects and by a paradigm of cultural and social development mired in archaic nineteenth-century social Darwinism and armchair anthropology. While the intergalactic tapestry *Star Trek* weaves may be infinite, its vision remains disturbingly finite and far from inclusive.

By racism, sexism, homophobia I refer to systems of beliefs, assumptions, and practices which maintain, consciously or unconsciously, explicitly or implicitly, that perceived and real psycho-physiological differences determine the behavior, psychology, and culture of particular socially designated groups, which are then ranked on the basis of their possession of superior or inferior traits that are themselves believed to be innate to the groups in question and which privilege one group over others based on the evaluation of those differences. As both creative fiction and corporate product the *Star*

Trek universe consistently privileges whites over nonwhites, males over females, heterosexuals over homosexuals.

Bernardi (1998) has pointed out that like Hollywood films and commercial television in general, *Star Trek* constructs white as normal and normative. Pounds (1999) argues that far from being progressive, *Star Trek* is mired in stereotypical ethnic images that go back to the earliest days of racist imagery in American commercial film. Ethnic representation in *Star Trek*, he notes, relies on “old negative stereotypes that associate ethnic characters with body-service occupations, machine operation, violent behavior, and sexual aggression” (184), adding that “after almost thirty years of programming, *Star Trek* [. . .] not only fails to carry forward the original series’ interest in examining social problems that surround the issue of race but actually has retreated from even cursory treatments of this theme” (183).

While network executives and American television broadcast standards have often been blamed for reining in the franchise’s imaginative drive, *Star Trek*’s conceptual conservatism owes less to network censorship than to the temerity, prejudices, and “common sense” assumptions of its creators. Indeed, a more accurate interpretation is that both the franchise’s creators and network executives were simply unwilling to thoughtfully discern, let alone interrogate, the mythologies of race and gender embedded in American thought and practice. One manifestation of this unwillingness can be seen in the tendency of Hollywood and network television to normalize whiteness, or, as Bernardi puts it, to construct “whiteness as the norm in comparison to which all ‘Others’ necessarily fail” (21).

From its inception, *Star Trek*’s project was inherently self-contradictory. Although it depicts a color-blind future, in order to populate that future, to give it physical form, Roddenberry and his creative successors consciously had to exercise color consciousness to cast their shows with nonwhite actors. Ironically, while Roddenberry’s goal was laudable, the introduction of nonwhite characters that defied contemporary stereotypes was accomplished through the erasure of racial and ethnic differences that made them more palatable to mainstream (white) audiences and relegated white ethnic continuing characters such as Scotty and Chekov to stereotyped, semi-comic relief. With the expansion of the franchise, the illusion of colorblindness was maintained at the same time that it was being finessed, “color” gradually being added to the shows through the addition of alien characters portrayed by non-white actors. Eventually, color would be reintroduced through the darkening of the *Star Trek*

universe with the emergence of “black” Vulcans, Romulans, and Klingons, providing the illusion of heterogeneity to what had been a primarily white universe populated by white actors in xenoface. From its inception, however, the show’s aliens were racialized and employed as substitutes for actual racial groups upon which certain racial stereotypes could be embodied without them necessarily being read as such by viewers.

If discussions on Internet forums are representative, many *Star Trek* fans believe that the conditions of race and gender the original *Star Trek* addressed are no longer as prevalent in American society as they once were. Consequently, new incarnations of the show are believed to reflect America’s transitioning toward a “post-racial” consciousness. For example, a common rebuttal to critics who express dissatisfaction with the series’ depiction of blacks or who posit a resemblance between the various aliens depicted on the shows and existing social races, has been to argue that such readings contradict the premise and philosophy of the franchise’s creators whom, it is implied, have somehow managed to free themselves of contemporary racial attitudes rather than simply reproduce them on a metaphoric or allegoric level. The *Star Trek* universe cannot be informed by race, it is argued, because by definition it is set in a, to use the contemporary term, “postracial” future where racial differences are no longer recognized or socially meaningful. According to this view, alien Others should not be read as representing actual human racial and ethnic groups because they are meant to represent aliens regardless of the racial or ethnic affiliations of the actors who portray them or the type of cultural and physiognomic characteristics bestowed upon them by the show’s writers and makeup artists. As one poster on a site devoted to discussions of *Star Trek* has put it: “Black actors or dark-skinned aliens are not black because they are supposed to represent aliens. You can’t say alien A is black just because they [*sic*] have dark pigments or because the actor himself is black.”² However, as I will elaborate later in this paper, the fact that successive series – *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (TNG 1987-1994), *Deep Space Nine* (DSN 1993-1999), *Voyager* (VOY 1995–2001) and *Enterprise* (ENT 2001-2005) – continue to cling to color-coded clichés despite the relaxation of television standards and practices casts serious doubt on validity of such interpretative restrictions. Indeed, the appearance of black actors as aliens in *Star Trek* has divided fans of the shows, some viewing their appearance as a capitulation to “political correctness” and contemporary identity politics, others as a repackaging of old racist stereotypes for new generations of racially insensitive television and movie viewers.

This is ironic, for at first glance, *TNG* seems to live up to, if not surpass, the reputation of its predecessor as socially enlightened entertainment. The new captain of the *U.S.S. Enterprise*, Jean-Luc Picard, lacks the swaggering, cocky self-assurance of Captain James Tiberius Kirk. For Kirk, history was an accessory whose patinaed artifacts decorated the walls of his stateroom. Picard, however, embodies it, reciting its lessons and applying them to the conundrums of command. Unlike his predecessor, Picard is a paternal, introverted, cerebral figure who appears sincerely committed to upholding the non-interference Prime Directive regardless of his own personal distaste for the outlandish practices of some of the alien civilizations he encounters. With Picard there is no rush to judgment, no haughty imposition of Federation values, none of Kirk's melodramatic, staccato recitations of the Declaration of Independence. On Picard's *Enterprise*, William Shakespeare and John Milton – not Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln – are the sources of moral and cultural authority – “Old Europe” triumphant. Picard, writes Pounds, is the embodiment of “western hegemony, especially as metaphorized through relationships with male and female whites, female and male Terran Others, and extraterrestrial Others” (Pounds, 177).

The original *Star Trek*'s vision of an Earth without national boundaries has, in later series, expanded to include the collapse of intergalactic boundaries as well. Nationality no longer serves as a marker of meaningful human difference. Aboard Picard's *Enterprise* there are no longer any Scots, Russians or Bantus, only Terrans and non-Terrans, the former possessing vestigial traces of their ethnic and cultural heritage. Klingons (Worf) replace Russians (Chekov) as the token enemy-turned-ally, reminders of the triumph of secular enlightenment – pan-humanoidism? – over archaic racial rivalries, ethnocentrism, and antagonisms. The human crew identify themselves proudly, if somewhat vaguely, as the homogenized spawn of the Terran diaspora.

Yet for all its cosmopolitanism, the crew of this new *Enterprise* is parochially anodyne, no more diverse than the Anglo-conformist humans and humanoid species that served aboard Kirk's some 80 years before. Indeed, it is more accurate to suggest that it is racial identity – not racism *per se* – that has been erased, Earth-bound nationalisms having been superseded by Terran chauvinisms that project old cultural and ethnic stereotypes upon an unassimilated and unassimilatable alien alterity. Noting the similarity of Ferengi in *DSN* to anti-Semitic stereotypes, Jeff Salamon identifies the franchise's penchant for projecting contemporary racial stereotypes upon imaginary Others. As in the early series, only assimilated, domesticated Others (the Vulcan Spock, the Klingon Worf,

or the human wannabe android Data) are accepted as full members of the *Enterprise's* extended family.

This is, in fact, a regular pattern in the *Star Trek* cosmology: patting oneself on the back for envisioning an Earth where all racial, ethnic, and religious bigotry has been wiped out (by, essentially, wiping out all racial, ethnic, and religious *identity*), and then turning around and projecting the coarsest stereotypes upon alien races. The Klingons – instinctive, physically powerful, explicitly sexual – are a white man's nightmare of black sexuality; the Vulcans – logical, inscrutable, slant eyed – are an explicit stand-in for the cold, calculating Japanese (Salamon 1993, 47; original emphasis).

Bernardi points out *Star Trek's* use of nonwhite members of that extended family has never been fully consistent, noting that its integrated supporting cast “was kept in the margins of most stories and in the background of most shots” (39). Pounds is more critical, noting that “the roles or occupations of *Star Trek's* ethnic characters seem limited to such categories as mechanics, waiters, security officers and without any romantic potential or ability to found and maintain a traditional family structure” (182).

As the original *Star Trek (TOS)* reflected its time, so *TNG* reflects those of a more humble, reflective age. America and the world had changed in the quarter of a century since the *Enterprise* first navigated the eddies of space-time to take its place in American popular culture. If Kirk's *Enterprise*, with its Kennedyesque captain at the conn, was a metaphor for the New Frontier, Picard's was a metaphor of the New World Order, though one whose cultural typography more clearly resembled that of the European Community than any envisioned by George Herbert Walker Bush. For on the bridge of this *Enterprise*, the American presence is supplemental, second to the leadership of its patrician European patriarch. Indeed, at a time when America's global position as economic superpower was being challenged by Japan, America, too, was “Number One” in name only.

The idealism which marked Kirk's twenty-third century is eclipsed in the twenty-fourth by Picard's more mature, cautious (read European) statesmanship. Once a symbol of American military and cultural hegemony, the *Enterprise* has acquired an aura of continental respectability and sophistication as Kirk's *Pax Americana* is superceded by Picard's *Pax Europa*, returning the Federation's Enlightenment philosophy to its European roots. This reversal of fortune, however, is consistent with the *Star Trek*

universe. For despite its paeans to pluralism, the future in *Star Trek* has always been a decidedly terra-centric one, with a particular Eurocentric bias.

The original series adhered to a Eurocentric model of the universe and its successors are no exception. “Advanced” civilizations are coded as white, inevitably Caucasoid, and often “classical” (Hellenic) in appearance, philosophy and culture, although these cultures may be depicted as moribund, their members effete at best. A partial listing of characters and episodes in which this trope appears includes: the ethereal Organians (“Errand of Mercy”), the Metrons (“Arena”), the Platons (“Plato’s Stepchildren”), the dilettantish Treymayne (“The Squire of Gothos”) and his subsequent reincarnation as the petulant Q (*TNG* and *VOY*), the white-clad humanoid, planet-seeding Progenitor of “The Chase” (*TNG*), the Roman-like aliens of “Bread and Circuses” (*TOS*), and in “Who Mourns for Adonais,” no less than the god Apollo himself. Conversely, “less advanced” cultures are consistently depicted as dark, often vaguely Asiatic Others who exist outside the idealized Greco-Roman tradition.

The *Star Trek* Writer’s Guide (1967) states:

Physically the Klingons are slightly oriental looking, dark complexioned, with bushy eyebrows that arch up at both ends . . . [The men] have no patience with women, even their own, and treat them as sometime useful animals” (Quoted in Whitfield and Roddenberry 1968, 257).

Their [the Romulans] only rule of life is that rules are made to be broken by shrewdness, deceit, or power. Cruelty is something admirable; honor is a despicable trait (257).

Only occasionally has *Star Trek* attempted to unfetter itself from this cosmic Great Chain of Being. “Space Seed” might have provided a context in which to raise provocative questions about race, power and nationalism. Instead, these issues are peripheral to the battle of wits between Kirk and the genetic Sikh superman Khan Noonian Singh (Ricardo Montalban). The Eugenic Wars – a literal Third World War in which thirty-seven million people in Africa and Asia are annihilated – is an intriguing and potentially provocative premise. Even more provocative is the episode’s unorthodox treatment of its genetic *übermensch* theme; in the original episode, Khan and his

followers are described by Dr. McCoy as “swarthy Mediterranean types,” a clear subversion of the conventional representations of genetic superiority by Nordic, Aryan types, although, tellingly, there are no Africans or East Asians visible among Khan’s clan. Although Khan’s presence suggests that these “swarthy” superhumans were the architects of the Eugenic Wars, the physical absence of other, even darker groups, suggests the latter might have been its intended victims. Yet for all these half-developed conceits, the episode is unable to break with traditional stereotypes of quasi-Oriental menace that depict Khan as a swaggering charismatic Genghis Khan, a clean-shaven Dr. Fu Manchu with delusions of cosmic conquest.

Perhaps aware of the potential for controversy had it remained faithful to the ethnic iconography of the original, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (TWOK, 1982) retreats to familiar conventions of Aryan supremacy, as the nova which destroys Khan’s planet of exile, not only has bleached his raven mane but also his once swarthy followers. Moreover, while the ending of the television episode left open the fascinating possibility of a future visit to the planet to observe the kind of society Khan had forged in exile, the movie merely treads familiar territory, retracing the brinkmanship between its two macho stars. Almost a quarter of a century later, a return to the genetic superman theme in *ENT* (“Borderland,” “Cold Station 12,” and “The Augments”) shows no improvement, as the representation of Khan’s eugenic precursors once again falls back on the superiority of iconic whiteness.

Human racial antagonisms have not disappeared in the twenty-fourth century, they have simply been projected upon alien Others. As Dower (1986) notes in his analysis of racial perceptions of the enemy during the Second World War, race thinking is incredibly fluid, free-floating, and promiscuous. “A category as seemingly tight as ‘race’ overflows into categories pertaining to others in general” (13). Attributes ascribed to enemies during one period are ascribed to new enemies in other. The racial rhetoric Europeans and Americans had applied to Japanese during the war had previously been applied to blacks, Indians, and Chinese (10). At base, *Star Trek’s* images of the alien Other draw from the same “formulaic expressions of Self and Other” (10) transacted in the mundane world where, “patterns of lateral thinking [are] transferred laterally and attached to [. . .] new enemies” (14). In the *Star Trek* universe, an assortment of “enemy aliens” substitute for communists and belligerent Third Worlders. Although contradictions abound, they share a unity of vision, their projections telling us more about their creators and their kaleidoscopic racial phobias and obsessions than the

imaginary aliens they purport to describe. A rough outline of *Star Trek*'s protean racial imagery is summarized below; each serves as a palimpsest upon which contemporary racial stereotypes are reinscribed.

The Roddenberry penned "Omega Glory," the original *Star Trek*'s most reactionary and overtly racist episode, resurrects the yellow peril trope, depicting a post-apocalyptic parallel Earth occupied by menacing hordes of "Changs" (Communist Chinese). That it is one of the few episodes to feature nonwhites as aliens makes it all the more problematic given *Star Trek*'s self avowed progressivism. In fact, the equation of enemy cultures with despotic Orientals has become more obvious as the *Star Trek* universe has expanded. Ferengi, ultimate capitalist exploiters whose short stature, goofy, toothy grins and quasi-Oriental titles (Dai-Mon) suggest Japanese who, in the mundane post-cold war, Japan-ascendant, "Pacific Century"-obsessed world of the new series' original run came to replace Russians (*Star Trek*'s Klingons) as the ultimate threat to American hegemony in the national imaginary. Indeed, combining anti-Semitic and Orientalist tropes, the Ferengi evoke stereotypes of not only the "unscrupulous" Japanese businessman (Ferengi, in keeping with perdurable stereotypes that depict Japanese men as obsessed with white women and, to borrow the title of a popular 1980s book, staunch sexual chauvinists who have their women follow them "a half-step behind," not only lust after human (white) females but keep their own women naked) but also the "usurious" Jew, the "avaricious" Chinese merchant, and the "squabbling" Arab, all of whom have been depicted as sharing similar predilections. Chang, the Shakespeare-quoting Klingon general of *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* (1991), is yet another throwback to despotic Oriental villainy. Originally a signifier of oriental (Soviet) menace, Klingon imagery has expanded to combine stereotypes of black male militancy and Japanese neo-militarism. As Erik Davis (1994) has observed, "Taken solely as racial allegories, Klingons come off as galactic gangsta rappers with Afrocentric pride – like most liberal and mainstream representations of ethnicity, a thoroughly problematic blend of stereotype and positive imagery" (38). Romulan imagery cloaks Oriental despotism and Chinese totalitarianism in the trappings of imperial Rome.

As Chvany notes, while the racialization of Klingons "from swarthy foreigner" into "the domestic Black Other" "did not lead to simplistic black stereotypes" since they also "acquired a warrior code reminiscent to *bushido* and ritual swords that might be variants on Middle Eastern scimitars" (Chvany 2002,108), such stereotypes nonetheless survived

and when not projected onto the Klingon found expression in characterizations of other alien Others. Indeed, while the “ethnicity” of the Klingons is “contradictory and multivalent” (108), having earlier drawn from images of Eastern (Russian/Oriental) alterity, the coding of other alien races as black (sometimes *sans* dark-skinned alien makeup prosthetics) continued. Introduced to the *Star Trek* universe in the *DSN* episode “The Jem’Hadar,” the Jem’Hadar, a mercenary reptilian-like “race” genetically engineered by the shape-shifting Founders, is portrayed by a black actor (Cress Williams) in heavy prosthetic makeup, a casting decision that would continue in subsequent episodes. Indeed, there is little doubt that the Jem’Hadar have been deliberately coded as black. In “The Abandoned” (*DSN*), we learn that at birth Jem’Hadar resemble human infants but as they mature acquire their more reptilian appearance. Although the episode marks the first and only time we see a Jem’Hadar infant, it and its transitional child and young adult stages are played by black actors. In subsequent episodes, Jem’Hadar have been portrayed disproportionately by black actors in prosthetic makeup. The association of Jem’Hadar with blacks, however, does not seem fortuitous: the fact that in the ‘90s Jem’Hadar are portrayed predominately by black actors and are presented as a species of menacing soldiers with a programmed addiction to the drug Ketracel-white projects onto a fantasy landscape contemporary images from television news and film of black inner-city gangbangers addicted to another white narcotic – crack cocaine. In the script for “The Abandoned,” the second episode of *DSN* to feature the Jem’Hadar, Avery Brooks, the episode’s director, saw in the story a metaphor of “young brown men, and, to some extent, a story about a society responsible for the creation of a generation of young men who are addicted, who are potential killers”(quoted in Erdmann and Block 2000, 180). Similarly, according to *VOY* executive producer Michael Piller, the Kazon, the show’s resident villains, were inspired by L.A. street gangs (Kutzera 1996a, 76). The hive-minded Borg are saddled with imagery that harkens back to stereotypes of the nonwhite Other as undifferentiated, group-minded automatons that undervalue life, liberty, and self-determination, values thought to define the morally superior west. Most of these aliens are color-coded in physical appearance or attire toward the darker end of the spectrum. Even the Vulcans, the model minority of the Federation – once less than noble savages now turned Noble Savants devoted to logic, empiricism, and stoicism – retread classic Orientalist tropes – eastern exoticism, Judaic mysticism – which fuse East (Oriental inscrutability) and West

(rationalism) while exploiting insecurities aroused by chimeral equations that parallel racial jealousies directed at “intellectually aggressive Jews” and “Asian over-achievers.”

Star Trek's Great Chain of Being positions Vulcans beneath Terrans and above the more barbarous Klingon and Romulan species. Their intermediate position would seem to owe to the fact that although they are intellectually superior to *homo sapiens*, they lack the “proper” balance of logic and emotion, and are hence marginally inferior. Vulcans are the Federation’s model minority: they do not threaten its hegemony, and whatever potential for conflict has been avoided since, as dedicated pacifists, they retain a respectful distance from the Federation’s military arm, Starfleet, confining their contribution to science and diplomacy.³ Though no doubt coincidental, the status of the Vulcans in the Federation shows uncanny parallels to that of Japan in west. Both Vulcans and Japanese have renounced war because of past aggressions and, wary of military interventions, have devoted themselves to non-militaristic pursuits, though unlike the real world, *Star Trek* rarely interrogates the dynamics of this division of labor. Nor has the presence of a token number of Vulcans in Starfleet created much of a dilemma for the dominant Terran culture despite the Vulcans’ much-touted intellectual superiority. One might well imagine that such gross inequalities between humans and Vulcans would produce conflict – at least talk of quotas in Starfleet for deserving but disadvantaged humans – a prospect mooted by the Vulcan preference for the Vulcan Academy of Science over Starfleet.⁴

This structural racialism taints even *Star Trek's* more socially relevant episodes. In “The Cloud Miners,” a parable of American and South African apartheid, the “advanced” citizens of the cloud-city Stratos – a fair-skinned, and, to borrow anthropologist Ruth Benedict’s categories, Apollonian culture – are juxtaposed against “backward” dark-skinned, surface-dwellers, Dionysian types whose mental inferiority and irrational violent behavior are due to the inhalation of a toxic gas emitted by the mineral they mine. Although Kirk intervenes, providing the surface-dwellers with gas masks to filter out the toxic element, as Gregory Herbek (1991) notes, “The Troglytes [*sic*]. . . are still not allowed to share the beautiful cloud city – they continue to live in caves. Whether or not the author’s intention, the disheartening statement which the episode ultimately makes is that ghetto conditions can be improved, but those who live there will never join the larger society” (151). In the end the structure of society is not undermined but merely made more efficient. In a “Private Little War,” a metaphor, as jumbled as it is jingoistic, of the Vietnam War, the pacifist leader of a white-haired tribe

is betrayed by his wife, a member of a dark-haired tribe, who has fallen under the spell of Klingons who are supplying her people with weapons.

Although Earth-like Class-M planets are populated by humanoid life forms, those populations are, with few exceptions, Caucasoid in appearance: Asian and black aliens are rare. When they do appear, as in “Omega Glory” and “Code of Honor” (*TNG*), they merely replicate contemporary racial stereotypes. *TNG*’s “Code of Honor,” is the only *Star Trek* show to feature an alien culture modeled on Africa, but the results proved more disturbing than celebratory. Says Tracy Torme, a former creative consultant on the series, “I felt like it was a ‘40s tribal African view of blacks. I think it was kind of embarrassing. Not only was the ending like ‘Amok Time’ but it came dangerously close to ‘Amos and Andy’” (quoted in Altman 1990, 27). When black actors have appeared as guest aliens, their features are usually obscured beneath layers of prosthetic makeup – Paul Winfield (“Darmok,” *TNG*), Clarence Williams III (“To the Death,” *DSN*), Tom Wright (“Tuvix,” *VOY*), Tommy “Tiny” Lister (“Broken Bow,” *ENT*) – whereas for white actors a few nasal ridges, cursive spots, and cranial bumps suffice to mark their alien alterity.

The Prime Directive emerges as little more than a twenty-third century version of Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden.” Ultimately it is pragmatism not principle that is invoked whenever and wherever it is violated. It exists only as an ideological justification for preserving the Federation status quo. Nor, ironically, has the Federation’s appreciation of cultural diversity deterred it from ranking other cultures based on its own culturally biased criterion. Indeed, borrowing a page from wartime and postwar anthropology, planetary character – “aggressive” Klingons, “shrewd” Romulans, “logical” Vulcans, “sensual” Deltans – replaces national character as convenient shorthand for explaining otherwise inexplicable and problematic alien behavior.

While racism directed against human groups is presented as anachronistic, *speciesism* characterizes human relationships with alien lifeforms. One of the shows persisting conceits is the conflation of race, species, and culture that ultimately reduce alien species to unalterable racial essences. In the *Star Trek* universe, race and biology determine personality, the hybrid offspring of interracial and interspecies miscegenation like Spock and B’Elanna Torres ceaselessly engage in internalized wars with their conflicted hybrid selves, a conceit that appears as early as the original treatment in which a racially mixed white-Brazilian character, Jose Tyler, has inherited his father’s mathematic gifts and his mother’s fiery temperament (Whitfield and Roddenberry, 29).⁵

Even full-blooded Federation-assimilated rarities like the Klingon Worf, raised by a human family, must still fight the biological imperatives of his combative Klingon genome. According to *Star Trek*, biology is destiny.

Perhaps because *Star Trek* originally aired during a time when white liberals suffered under the delusion that racism was a primarily Southern affliction, the original show's only openly prejudiced character was Dr. McCoy, a native Georgian whose derogatory references to Mr. Spock's ancestry ("half-breed") and physiology ("pointy-eared devil," "green blooded Vulcan") but ability to relate with the black Uhura as an equal were meant to suggest the potential of human racial tolerance, even if that tolerance was limited to full-blooded humans.

Despite its pop anthropology, sustained political analysis of alien cultures has never been the franchise's forte, a tendency its writers indulge in "Reunion" (*TNG*) when Klingon Ambassador K'Ehleyer states, "I don't want to bore you with the intricacies of Klingon politics." With the exception of war narratives and Byzantine intrigues of ruling Klingon households, writers have typically passed up opportunities to explore the politics of the Klingon Empire and other alien societies and the Federation to focus instead on exoticism and action. "Coming of Age" (*TNG*) sets the stage for a promising story of ideological conflict within Starfleet, but its sequel "Conspiracy" quickly abandons the idea for an uncharacteristically grisly but safely derivative alien invasion scenario. *Star Trek's* political analysis seldom encroaches upon the sacred space of Self; Federation politics is instead obfuscated behind the stubborn naiveté of Roddenberry's anodyne utopianism. *TNG* and *DSN* have introduced the Bajora (or Bajorans), predominately white humanoid freedom-fighters/terrorists who have suffered under centuries of Cardassian occupation. In interviews the shows' creators sometimes equate the Bajora with the Palestinians, suggesting that *Star Trek* is not afraid to court controversy; yet to sustain the Bajora/Palestinian analogy, the Cardassians would have to represent Israelis. It is at this point that the analogy collapses, for the Cardassians are depicted as the Federation's enemy, more gray-skinned Nazis than Zionist occupiers and political allies.⁶

If the television shows and movies seem forever trapped in the moebius of self-congratulatory rhetoric, novels set in the *Star Trek* universe have attempted to add a dose of sociopolitical relevance to an otherwise artless product. Some, such as John M. Ford's *The Final Reflection* (1984) and Diane Duane's *My Enemy, My Ally* (1984) and *The Romulan Way* (1987), flesh out the show's alien cultures. This revisionist spirit can be

seen in other novels (*Captain's Honor* (1989), *Cry of the Onlies* (1989), and *Prime Directive* (1990), in which Kirk's violations of the Prime Directive have led to distressing consequences for the cultures he leaves behind. Still, noting that characters in the novels are "white by default," Michelle Erica Green laments that *Star Trek* remains "quite conservative in social matters," noting "*Deep Space Nine* has a black captain and *Voyager* a female captain, but in many ways their characters are held back because of their race and gender; they don't get to do all the things Kirk and Picard did, particular not in their personal lives" (Green, par 9).⁷

With the exception of *DSN*, none of these trends can be seen in recent incarnations of the series, *VOY* and *ENT* being content merely to trod already well-covered ground. Ironically, contemporary television shows from the 1960s (*East Side/West Side*, *Ben Casey*, *The Defenders*, *Name of the Game*, *I Spy*) have dealt with contemporary social issues more substantively than the original *Star Trek*, while in the 1980s episodes of *L.A. Law*, *Cagney & Lacey*, *Hill Street Blues*, and in the 1990s *ER*, *Ally McBeal*, and *The West Wing* have provided more food for thought, cogent social commentary, and diversity than any of its successors. Bernardi is correct to point out that "When these other minority groups were represented . . . it was often in the form of desexualized servants, loyal sidekicks, or unthinking savages" (33). Indeed, it is by no means an exaggeration to suggest that, for better or worse, Bruce Lee's Kato in *The Green Hornet* arguably has had more of an impact on American images of Asians than George Takei's Sulu, who – whether in the *Star Trek* universe or its twisted reflection – does not depart from the stereotypes Bernardi lists.

II. PURITY OF ESSENCE: SAFE SEXISM

Despite its professed liberalism, *Star Trek* remains irredeemably conservative in its treatment of gender and race issues. Strong women continue to disappear from the show's male-dominated landscapes with clockwork regularity – a trend that began as early as the show's pilot with the elimination of the original pilot's female Number One by network executives because of viewer "resentment and disbelief" (Whitfield and Roddenberry, 128). Independent, assertive women characters either meet untimely ends – security chief Tasha Yar ("Skin of Evil"), Klingon ambassador K'Ehleyer ("Reunion") – or are transferred to other posts – Lt. Shelby ("Best of all Possible Worlds"), and Ro Laren ("Ensign Ro").

Star Trek consistently depicts women as threats to patriarchal authority. Viewing them in the same manner as the paranoid Jack D. Ripper in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* viewed fluorinated water: a debilitating substance that deprives virile men of their "Purity Of Essence." Independent women are emotional, irrational creatures (aliens among men) whose unrestrained sexuality proves deleterious to patriarchal command structures and phallogentric mastery. In "Elaan of Troyius," it is the "uncivilized" Elaan, a Shakespearean shrew whose aphrodisiac tears cause men to lose control, who must be tamed by Kirk to deter an interplanetary conflict. In "City on the Edge of Forever," the beatific but baneful social activist Edith Keeler must be sacrificed in order to ensure America's participation in WWII and the defeat of Nazism. "Mudd's Women" learn from a paternalistic Kirk that they can still be attractive to men without a beauty-enhancing drug, an attractiveness that undermines the efficiency of the *Enterprise*'s human male crew. In "The Perfect Mate" (*TNG*), Kamala, an alien bride with the ability to shape-shift, relinquishes her personality to satisfy the demands of her groom. In all cases, men are the ultimate powerbrokers, the dispensers of wisdom; women must be sacrificed to the common good or find personal fulfillment by submitting to male desire.

As Tom Lalli (1990) has noted, the persistent sexism of *TNG* calls into doubt the belief that the original show's sexism was due solely to the social climate of the 1960s (40). To be sure, for the most part the original's glaring sexism has disappeared and the overt misogyny of episodes such as "Spock's Brain" and "Turnabout Intruder" are, with a few exceptions I will discuss shortly, relics of the past. While women are no longer treated as sexual objects for a priapic Kirk and have been given responsible roles aboard the refitted *Enterprise*, those roles and their responsibilities nonetheless remain traditional and maternal: doctors, nurses, counselors, and barmaids, roles not likely to challenge or threaten male viewers.

Addressing the issue of sexism in the *TNG*, Patrick Stewart states:

I feel our show falls rabidly short when it comes to addressing the question of women in society, certainly as far as we view it in the second half of the 20th century. I think there are some contradictions at work in what we do. On the other hand, Star Trek is in the vanguard. On the other, it is shamefully backward. There is still rampant sexism

on the written page. *You* don't see it because it gets cut out" (Uham 1990, 50; original emphasis).

Steward's comments are misleading. While he may be correct in stating that rampant sexism has been eliminated, a more insidious structural sexism continues to inform the series. In discussing the depiction of women in *TNG*, Marina Sirtis (Counselor Deanna Troi) has noted:

The women on this show are very non-threatening. I don't think it's realistic. It's not realistic for the 20th century, so it's definitely not realistic for the 24th century You don't see women in positions of power. You see female admirals, but I have to say the fans don't really care about our guest stars. They care about the regulars and what they really want to see are regular women having more power (Altman 1991, 39).

One need look only at "Angel One" (*TNG*) to see how little *Star Trek* had changed in its treatment of sexual equality. Once again it returns to the theme of matriarchy and, once again, its writers prove themselves not up to the task. As in "Spock's Brain" and Roddenberry's justifiably abysmal post-*Star Trek* pilot *Planet Earth* (1974), the episode depicts matriarchy as unnatural, primitive and oppressive, although the new chain of command aboard the *Enterprise* has created a division of sexual labor: Riker – not Picard – is entrusted with the task of phallic suasion. Riker proves himself up to the task, since by episode's end the planet's matriarch has decided that sexual equality makes for more aggressive – and more sexually satisfying – bedfellows. If the creators of *Star Trek* would have viewers believe that dick-polymacy leads to the Good Society, it would also have them believe that the future is a heterotopia. If "The Naked Now" (*TNG*) is any indication, every officer aboard the *Enterprise*, including the android Data, is "fully functional and programmed in multiple techniques of (heterosexual) pleasuring." In the episode, the normally sublimated passions of the crew are released by an invading plague, with only Geordi La Forge strangely immune to the aphrodisiac nature of the contagion.

If *DSN* is the black sheep of the *Star Trek* family, *ENT* is its atavistic inbred cousin. White male ascendancy is affirmed as we find yet another white male in the captain's chair, we are given our token black male and Asian woman, and a cat-suited

Vulcan female, the latter a transparent attempt to secure the same young male demographic as *VOY*'s Seven of Nine. "Bound," an episode from *ENT*'s fourth and final season, sees the return of the original show's green Orion slave "girls." Designed in part to parody *Star Trek*'s puerile, sexist past (or so one hopes), it is a far cry from more mature treatment of the theme of sexual slavery and Bajoran "comfort women" presented in *DSN*. Premiering only a few weeks after the events of 9/11, the *ENT* seemed to have a difficulty catching up with events in order to achieve a modicum of social relevancy. It was only during its third season that the show managed to shake off its complacency, abandoning its confusing and ultimately superfluous temporal Cold War story arc for that of the Xindi, whose terrorist attack on Earth prompts an interstellar war which, unlike the American republic's perpetual wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, is cut short by the show's dwindling public support (poor ratings), allowing the show's creators to develop a new narrative arc that strip-mined themes from its precursors and safely returned the show to the he-man heroics of the original series before its own timely cancellation in 2005.

The erasure of sexual diversity is not limited to the crew: planetary cultures are depicted as Apollonian and Dionysian but never Sapphic or Uranian. While alien characters have appeared in episodes as metaphors of and for homosexuals, they have never been depicted as actually homosexual in orientation. Ironically, while *Star Trek* adopts a libertarian attitude toward sex between consenting sentient lifeforms, its tolerance does not extend to humans who share a sexual orientation different from the presumably dominant heterosexual culture of twentieth-fourth century Earth.

This ambivalence toward gay sexuality is on full display in "The Outcast" (*TNG*) in which Commander Riker falls in love with Soren, a member of the androgynous J'naii, a species that has no concept of gender. Despite their androgyny, the J'naii are for dramatic purposes – which become transparent as the episode develops – all played by women. If the episode is meant as a progressive plea for gay rights, it fails miserably, for by casting women in the role of J'naii, Riker's love for Soren essentially remains conventionally heterosexual. This weakness has been pointed out by Jonathan Frakes, the actor who plays Riker, who notes, "I didn't think they were gutsy enough to take it where they should have. Soren should have been more obviously male. I'm not sure it was as good as it could have been if they were trying to do what they call a 'gay' episode" (quoted in Altman 1992, 78). Whatever dissonance might have been generated by Riker's love for the J'naii is mooted, since Soren's obvious femininity supplements

Riker's masculinity, and privileges heteronormativity. Similarly, we are told that in antiquity the J'naii did possess gendered identities but somehow they "evolved" beyond them. By asserting the evolutionary primacy of heterosexuality, the episode essentially subverts any progressive message: Riker's sexual attraction to Soren – who confesses to an "atavistic" sexual preference for males and regards herself as a gendered "female" – merely serves to re-impose heteronormativity. Moreover, the casting of female to play an androgynous but male-coded role serves to finesse viewer sympathy just as so-called race pictures of the 1940s and 1950s sought to have white audiences sympathize with blacks by casting white actors in the role of light-skinned mulattoes. In any case, neither Riker nor viewers is forced to confront conventional attitudes toward gender, something that might have been accomplished had a male been cast in the role. In the end, Riker's heterosexuality is unquestionable and unquestioned. The episode ends on an ambiguous note: In a rash attempt to rescue his lover, Riker beams down to the planet only to find that the "deviant" Soren has been brainwashed (or, from the perspective of the J'naii, "cured") and now accepts androgyny with the blissful conviction of a religious convert. The denouement is contrived, offering a safely convenient out lest contemporary homophobic viewers take umbrage and accuse the show of openly sanctioning homosexuality.

In "The Host" (*TNG*), an episode some have touted as a groundbreaking examination of sexual preference, Dr. Beverly Crusher falls in love with a dying Trill – a symbiotic slug-like species – housed in the body of a humanoid male host, but she rejects it once it acquires a female host. According to Mark Altman, a "gay rights message" was not intended by scriptwriters or the episode's director Marvin Rush, who stated, "There was, or could have been a homosexual aspect to it. We chose not to go that route. I felt it was more about the nature of love, why we love and what prevents us from loving" (Quoted in Altman 1992b, 73). Apparently for Rush the "nature of love" is exclusively heterosexual. Rush's comment invites inquiry as to why Crusher abruptly rejects the Trill after its gender transformation, but he assures us that homophobia had nothing to do with it, since homosexuality apparently does not exist: "The rejection [of the symbiont] wasn't because of any homosexual bent, per se, it's just *because in our culture and our society, people are heterosexual and want the companionship of a male because they are female*" (ibid. emphasis added). It is unclear whether the culture and society to which Rush refers is that of the *Star Trek* universe, the real world or both.

Such conservatism also informs *Star Trek*'s depiction of the family. Family life, often hinted at, is seldom shown. In those rare instances where it is depicted, it is either anachronistically nuclear given the demands of five-year missions (some novels do allude to group marriages) or composed of largely dysfunctional single-parent units.⁸ The maintenance of the traditional family remains primarily women's work, if the delegation of responsibilities in the relationship between Miles and Keiko O'Brien, one of the few nuclear families depicted on the shows, is any indication.⁹

III. RACIAL PUERILISM

Like its sexism, *Star Trek*'s racism has grown more sophisticated with time. No one can fault the original show for its depiction of blacks as dignified and competent individuals at a time in American history when such roles were rare. Nonetheless, blacks – and women – continue to be cast in traditional roles that are all too familiar despite their futuristic setting.

Ever since a struggling Kirk was forced by sadistic, mind-controlling aliens to kiss a reluctant Uhura in "Plato's Stepchildren," *Star Trek* fans and trivia buffs have promoted the series as a pioneer in the depiction of interracial romance. According to Nichelle Nichols, the actor who played Uhura, studio executives initially suggested that Spock kiss Uhura, believing it more acceptable for an alien to kiss a black woman "than for two humans with different coloring to do the same thing" (quoted in Shatner 1993, 285-286). It may be suggested that the same mentality lurks among television executives who in subsequent series seem comfortable dealing with interracial romance only when it suggests sexual relationships between actors portraying humans and aliens or takes place in the mirror universe. It is necessary here to qualify this statement by noting the exception: Miles and Keiko O'Brien. As historian Gary P. Leupp (2003) points out in *Interracial Intimacy in Japan*, western culture has often coded Asians, particularly Japanese, as white, or quasi-white, allowing relationships between white men and Asian women to escape categorization as "interracial," a practice that may account for the continued referencing of the infamous kiss scene between Kirk and Uhura as the "first interracial kiss on network television," despite the existence of scenes between white (male) and Asian (female) characters that predate it. In fact, *interracial* romance is nothing new to American television and film: the submissive Oriental female has long been a staple of Euro-American culture, high and low, from Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*

to James Mitchner's *Sayonara*, and network television has offered viewers its share of romances between white men and Oriental and wild "Injun women" (albeit, the latter, always played by white women) (Russell 2005). While NBC executives may have fretted about the reception of Kirk's over the shoulder, camera-obscuring encounter with Uhura in the American South, few eyebrows were raised over Kirk's passionate tryst with Asian Francis Nyuyen ("Elaan of Troyius").¹⁰ Tellingly, like American desegregation, the mixing of black and white in "Plato's Stepchildren" is forced, quite literally commanded from above. The treatment of Uhura in *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* (1989) belies the myth of sexual equality in *Star Trek*, for the viewer is expected to believe the only contribution a competent female officer can make to the securing of an enemy stronghold is to divert attention by performing a fan dance, certainly not much of an advance since "Mirror Mirror" in which Uhuru flexed her abdominals at a lascivious alternate universe Sulu in order to distract him from the activities of her male colleagues. Uhuru's role in *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* (1991) returns her to the subspace switchboard.¹¹

"Let That Be Your Last Battlefield" is the least successful of the original show's attempt at social allegory. In it, we encounter the mutually hostile humanoids Bele and Lokai whose faces are divided down the center, one side black the other white, though on opposite sides. Eventually we learn that their self-destructive hatred of each other is based on this reversal of pigmentation, with Bele representing oppressive white authority and Lokai militant black nihilism. The episode's intent is to offer a Swiftian cautionary tale of contemporary American race relations yet it avoids presenting even a modest proposal to the resolution of the conflict. Indeed, this may be one of the rare instances in which the Prime Directive is actually upheld. How much more provocative had Kirk and crew openly sided with the oppressed Lokai. To have done so, however, would have been to condone Lokai's actions (thievery, the destruction of private property, terrorism), something *Star Trek's* creators apparently could not bring themselves to do. The episode's self-righteous sermonizing conceals the fact that by adopting a stance of moral relativism, the *Enterprise* sides with the status quo, for once Lokai seeks sanctuary aboard the starship neutrality ceases to be a legitimate option.

TNG's treatment of race and sexuality is positively reactionary. In many ways *TNG* is even less progressive than its predecessor. It strains credulity that in the eighty or so years since the *Enterprise's* initial voyages of discovery, it has, as I have already mentioned, with only one exception ("Code of Honor") never encountered an alien

civilization that is predominantly and physiognomically black or culturally African. *TNG* has, however unconvincingly, tried to come to terms with the sins of the original series. Perhaps the most significant change has been the addition of a black actor (Michael Dorn) to the cast in the role of the Klingon, Worf, marking the few instances of an alien played by a black actor.¹² Yet despite such nontraditional casting, Worf is little more than an extraterrestrial Mr. T. whose trademark Mohawk and gold chains have been replaced by cranial ridges and a metallic Klingon sash. Worf is yet another version of the aggressive black male sidekick safely domesticated by his more levelheaded white companions and whose sexuality must be either obscured or exoticized.

In "Justice," Worf declines interspecies sex with a libertine Caucasoid female alien, content to exchange only a chase hug, lest, apparently, she be injured by his physical strength. Not that Klingons are entirely sexless. "Emissary" provides viewers are invited to witness Worf and K'Eyley engage in a Klingon mating ritual, a sadomasochistic variation on Vulcan finger-play that is apparently consummated when the female's palms bleed. Given the fact of K'Eyley's own Human-Klingon heritage, Worf's concern for human frailty seems oddly misplaced. Yet the casting of blacks as Klingons in *TNG* and subsequent series only makes explicit what most African American viewers already knew: these new Klingons were black folk.¹³

If *Star Trek* has never been comfortable with female sexuality, it has been even less comfortable with black sexuality. Sexuality remains the prerogative of the shows' white male leads. Unlike Worf, Geordi LaForge (LaVar Burton) does not represent a sexual threat in need of neutering. It wasn't until the show fourth season that a love interest was introduced ("Galaxy's Child"), a cerebrally celibate dry dream initially staged in the *Enterprise* holodeck, suggesting more adolescent crush than mature passion. Another attempt ("Aquiell") to pair Forge with a female partner proved equally sterile. The character's bland asexuality has prompted some fans of the show to read him as gay (a similar reading has been placed on *VOY*'s Harry Kim, whose romantic relationships with women have generally been inept, infrequent, and fleeting ("The Persistence of Vision," "Ashes to Ashes," "The Disease")).¹⁴

The La Forge character also plays off a relatively new stereotype of black males which casts them as affable but emasculated techies more comfortable among cold machines than warm-blooded women, a conceit whose genealogy can be traced back to *Mission Impossible*'s Barney Collier, but which has since branched off to include Norton Drake of TV's *War of the Worlds*, Grant Collier, son of Barney, in the new *Mission*

Impossible, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*'s Miles Dyson, and *Bloom County*'s black pre-adolescent hacker Oliver Wendell Jones. *Star Trek* may itself have contributed to the conceit with the character of the neurotic Dr. Richard Daystrom, adding to it the stereotypes of black mental instability, although a more subversive reading of the character interprets Daystrom's all-consuming bitterness – like that of his distaff counterpart Dr. Janice Lester – as a defensive response to a Federation that fails to recognize the achievements of overly ambitious outsiders.¹⁵

As Pounds points out, *Star Trek* “differentiates between whites and ethnics over issues of technique and technology. Technique is associated with the mind and technology with the body “Whereas the white male Starfleet officer is directly associated with command (technique), the ethnic officer is only permitted control over technology” (182). *TNG* replaces Uhura – glorified switchboard operator and erstwhile sex vamp – with the enigmatic Guinan, bartender to the stars, Miss Kitty to the galaxy. Guinan not only fulfills the show's penchant for casting women in nurturing, caretaker roles but as a black female trope, she evokes a long legacy of domestic stereotypes saddled upon black women. One would think that given her 700 years and wealth of insight, Guinan would be commanding a starship not serving its crew. However, just as '60s viewers were not ready for an assertive female Number One, a quarter of a century later they were not ready for a female captain of the *Enterprise*, let alone a black one, a few ephemeral appearances in the franchise aside. Eventually, the *Enterprise* did get its first female captain, although Katherine Janeway is, like her initials, a kind of reverse James Kirk who never quite jelled with the show's young male demographic, a fact which eventually led the show's creators to introduce the cybernetic cheesecake of Seven of Nine in a desperate attempt to boost ratings. Guinan makes explicit that which was only implied in the original series. Third World types have always been an enigmatic presence in the *Star Trek* universe, their personal histories as obscure as their given names. Like Uhura, Sulu and Worf, Guinan is a one-dimensional afterthought, whose presence, albeit conspicuous, does not suggest an authentic appreciation of cultural pluralism.

Traditionally, Starfleet Command has been populated by distinguished black commodores (a tradition that continues in the films), albeit non-recurring characters – Commodore Stone (Percy Rodriguez, *TOS*), Admiral Harry Morrow (Robert Hooks, *TWOK*), Admiral Richard Barnett (Tyler Perry, the 2009 *Star Trek* remake). With *Enterprise*, however, white male authority is restored. In 1993, as if in response to the paucity of black continuing characters in command positions, *DSN* set sail with a black

commander in charge. Given the dearth of dramatic leading roles for blacks on American television, the casting of Avery Brooks as Commander Benjamin Lafayette Sisko is to be applauded, though it remains problematic. First, although the twenty-fourth century is supposed to be color-blind, the color line of the twentieth remained. In an interview with *Starlog* magazine, Berman has stated that race had nothing to do with Brooks casting as Sisko, pointing out that “black, white, Asian and Latin” actors were considered and assures the interviewer that Brooks was “the best actor, not the *best* [sic] black actor” for the part (quoted in Spelling 1993, 43; original emphasis).¹⁶ The casting of a black actor, however, had a butterfly effect on other casting decisions, which suggests something of the mind-set of the show’s creators. Both Sisko’s wife and son are played by black actors, as is his love interest Kasidy Yates, a fact that contradicts the show’s premise of a color-blind future. Indeed, Berman is emphatic on this point: “The Commander’s son *had to be the same race* as Sisko. That was *the only rule* we had to adhere to when casting the son. After we had Avery we needed a black child. Because we had no idea who would get the role of Sisko [at the time] we interviewed boys of all races. Once we had Avery, we limited our search for a Jake down to black kids we liked” (Spelling, 45, emphasis added).

The question then must be why? Why is the race of Sisko’s son and wife the least bit relevant in a universe where humans and aliens mate freely, cross interspecies boundaries with ease, and produce hybrid offspring without medical intervention? Here the show’s fundamental racial conservatism not only betrays the show premise but is disturbingly anachronistic. The answer is painfully obvious: *DSN* reflects the values and assumptions of writers and producer and the social realities of the twentieth century America. Indeed, ironically, had they truly attempted to ignore race, by casting across the color spectrum, they might have run the risk of fueling – not subverting – the racial stereotype that African Americans, with the exception of Bill Cosby’s fictional Huxtables, were incapable of maintaining stable, loving, patriarchal, nuclear families.

Still, *DSN*, as something of the black sheep of the *Star Trek* franchise, is its most race conscious incarnation, if by race one means its acknowledgement that racial boundaries – particularly those defined in terms of black and white – continue to exist, albeit in attenuated form, even in the future. Part of this race consciousness is acquired simply by the fact that the show’s lead is, to borrow the words CNN’s Wolf Blitzer once used in a far different context to describe the victims of Hurricane Katrina but which speak to the inability to see beyond skin-color even when we profess we do, “so black.”

As a study in contrasts, Benjamin Sisko is the mirror Jean-Luc Picard. In selecting Avery Brooks to play the role, the casting director could not have picked a “blacker” actor, Brooks having at the time just portrayed mystery writer Robert B. Parker’s imposing pre-Samuel L. Jackson *über*-black antihero Hawk for several years on ABC’s *Spenser for Hire* (1985-1988) and its spin-off *A Man Called Hawk* (1989). In fact, according to Brooks, it was his close identification with the character that prompted the show’s creators to have the actor refrain from shaving his head or growing a goatee until the fifth season of the series, despite his desire to do so (Kaplan 1997, 28).¹⁷ Interestingly, it is only after this visual transformation that Sisko’s blackness becomes an issue in such episodes as “Far Beyond the Stars” and “Badda-bing, Badda-bang.”

Of all the series, “Far Beyond the Stars” comes the closest to explicitly confronting race, specifically antiblack racism, though in ways that may not have been intended. Ironically, the episode draws attention to the fact that almost half a century after the events confronting the fictional black science fiction writer Bennie Russell, the *Star Trek*’s writing staff, including the episode’s scribes, remain essentially white and male. The road to a color-blind twenty-fourth century is a long one, one which, in a reversal of canon, turns out not to be as colorblind as previous depicted. During season seven, writers Ira Behr and Hans Beimler followed up with “Badda-bing, Badda-bang,” an episode, that “marks the first time Sisko or any other *Star Trek* character . . . has identified himself in dialog as black” (Epsicokhan, par. 2). In the episode Sisko admits to disliking a holosuite program set in a 1960s Las Vegas nightclub because it fails to acknowledge the antiblack racism of the period.

THE CELESTRIAL CLOSET

While an improvement over earlier series, the treatment of gender issues in *DSN* continues to adhere to traditional conventions and taboos, particularly *Star Trek*’s patent aversion to homosexuality. While the space station setting and the aliens encountered there may be new, the Gamma Quadrant remains as monogamous, patriarchal, and heterosexual as any the franchise has depicted, albeit perhaps slightly kinkier. “Rejoined” is credited with having the first screen kiss between two female characters in a *Star Trek* episode. However, interpreting the episode as a statement on homosexuality or as an indication of a lessening of the franchise’s homophobia is misplaced given the context in which the action occurs. For while the scene does involve two actors of the

same sex engaged in a passionate kiss, the characters involved – the Trill Jadzia Dax and her previous male Trill lover who now occupies a female body – are acting out heterosexual desires. In a sense, the episode seems to be an attempt to answer critics who complained *TNG*'s "The Host" had not gone far enough. It is hard to suggest, however, that the episode opens any new doors for the depiction of gay sexuality, given the tolerance of contemporary American popular culture for lesbianism, in fantasy if not in reality.¹⁸

Despite publicly stating on numerous occasions his desire to add a gay character to the franchise, the idea was resisted by Roddenberry's subordinates and even Roddenberry himself. David Gerrold, whose "Blood and Fire," an allegory about AIDS for *TNG*, was to have introduced the first homosexual characters to the franchise, has suggested that Roddenberry himself was ambivalent about the idea if not outright disingenuous in his avowed support of it.¹⁹ Following Roddenberry's death in 1991, producer Rick Berman assumed control of the franchise, but despite the efforts of writers to develop gay characters for *VOY* and support for the idea from Leonard Nimoy, Patrick Stewart, and Avery Brooks, the taboo remained (Barrett and Barrett 2001, 191). If, as some maintain, Roddenberry was an obstacle, he was certainly not the sole one, since it is hard to explain the lack of progress on the issue even after his death. On the other hand, if network executives were to blame, it is difficult to imagine why they remained so resistant to the appearance of gays on the shows given the fact that gay characters had been featured on other television shows since the 1980s, and had appeared in other *Star Trek*-related media, including novels and comic books. The closest a non-mirror universe regular *Star Trek* character has come to homosexuality is Phlox, the Denubian physician who is, at best, bisexual. Unequivocally and exclusively homosexual characters – human or alien – have yet to appear in the *Star Trek* canon.

This is not to suggest that *Star Trek* regulars are not occasionally read as queer. Kira's sexuality, like that of many *Star Trek* characters – including, most notoriously, those depicted in fan-generated K/S fiction in which Kirk and Spock are lovers – has been read as lesbian by some viewers. Davis describes Kira as a "dyke goddess" (Davis 1993, 46). Minkowitz pronounces Jadzia Dax "the most vibrant transsexual in television history" (ibid., 46). Interestingly, the creative minds behind *Star Trek* and network executives have not discouraged such readings and have even contributed to them, particularly where issues of sexual orientation involve female characters. Kira is one of the strongest women in the *Star Trek* franchise, inviting speculation about her sexuality.

The response of the show's writers has been a kind of legerdemain where what is offered with one hand is taken away with the other. Apparently uncomfortable with Kira's strength, they "softened" the character's look in subsequent seasons. At the same time, they confirmed speculation about Kira's lesbian proclivities in episodes of the show set in the mirror universe in which her evil twin is revealed to be something of a bi-sexual libertine. At the same time, however, the "default" universe Kira was developing a safely heterosexual romantic attraction to Odo, the space station's "male" shape-shifting security officer.

Fetishized fantasy sapphism is regularly on display in episodes set in the mirror universe ("Crossover," "Through the Looking Glass," "Shattered Mirror," and "Resurrection," "Emperor's New Cloak"). Significantly, it is only in the *evil* mirror universe that the norms of the *Star Trek* universe are subverted; not only are taboos against (female) homosexuality finessed there but interracial sexuality as well: it admits bisexuality and also permits Sisko and his alter-ego to engage in sexual relationships with both Kira ("Crossover") and Dax ("Through the Looking Glass"), though separately and in different episodes. Overt displays of male homosexuality activity, however, remain taboo.

Enterprise is perhaps the least daring of all the shows in the franchise, as reactionary as the original *Star Trek* was progressive despite the many limitations outlined in this paper. Not only are positions of command and authority confined to white males and women reduced once more to sexual exotica but racism has returned to the *Star Trek* universe, though now humans are its targets as they must confront the prejudices of supercilious, xenophobic Vulcans who, as early episodes of the show revealed, find humans not only illogical but malodorous as well ("The Andorian Incident," *ENT*). If humans in general have been put in their place so, too, have nonwhites. Ensigns Hoshi Sato and Travis Mayweather are little more than colonized subjects (chauffeur and receptionist, respectively), avatars of the original series that channel Sulu and Uhuru. Although they are granted full-name status, they are given little to do on the show while their white male co-stars are free to develop grow.

Writes Donna Minkowitz (2002) in *The Nation*:

So, watching the first season of the latest *Trek* vehicle, *Enterprise*, I've felt . . . nausea and horror. It takes *Star Trek* so far backward that it's like Buffy becoming a sex slave chained to a bed for the rest of her television career. Set

in *Trek's* "past," 100 years before Kirk's time and just 150 years after our own, *Enterprise* depicts the first humans to have contact with alien races. Emphasis on races: the interplanetary politics seem to have been framed by Pat Buchanan. Though there are two token humans of color on the ship, humans are heavily coded as white and male.

All the previous *Star Trek* series, over three decades, have been about becoming progressively more catholic, more aware of the astonishing diversity of the galaxy, the provincial limitedness of one's own assumptions and one's own potential to harm people who are different. The newest offering is a frank vehicle for white male suprematism [*sic*] and resentment (Minkowitz, par. 5).

This time around writers and television executives seem to have chosen to openly court its demographic, appealing to young adolescent white males of a post Gulf War I America in which military might not diplomacy determine one's place in the universe. Indeed, the opening montage and theme song evoke a kind of America-centric (one would never guess the Soviets preceded America into space) nostalgia that valorizes and normalizes white American male domination.

CONCLUSION

It is impossible to separate *Star Trek's* imaginary universe from our own. Like modern-day liberals, *Star Trek* has elected to sit on its laurels, pointing with pride to its past progressivism. *Star Trek* has taken the easy road, avowing its liberalism while doing little to boldly advance a truly progressive agenda. Or rather, it might be equally argued that the faults with *Star Trek's* liberalism are the very faults of American liberalism at the dawn of the new millennium.

To challenge the myth of *Star Trek* is to challenge the myth of American racial and sexual justice. The contradictions inherent in *Star Trek* go beyond the ability of commercial television to accommodate other voices and whether it is capable of (or desirable for it) to combine topical social commentary with entertainment. Those who promote *Star Trek* as socially relevant seek only to open a crack in the social mirror in which our conceptualization and construction of the Other are reflected – not to shatter them. If this is true, then one must conclude that *Star Trek's* claim to social relevance is

little more than a pretense and that its failure to fully contest these conventions itself constitutes a profoundly political gesture, even if its allegories of race and gender lack such profundity. There is, however, nothing particularly pedantic in recognizing that with skillful writers with something to say, entertainment and social relevance are not mutually exclusive, as writers of literary SF such as Octavia Butler, Ursula Le Guin, Michael Moorcock, Joanna Russ, Harlan Ellison, Philip K. Dick, Terry Bisson, Robert Silverberg, and Samuel R. Delany have demonstrated.

Star Trek's future mirrors that of an America that has yet to embrace its own racial, cultural and sexual diversity and which of late has grown increasingly uncomfortable with its outward manifestation. That the gatekeepers of American popular culture would laud *Star Trek* as a form of enlightened social critique is reflective of the tendency of American society to obscure the lasting legacy of intolerance behind self-congratulatory national mythologies. If *Star Trek* must be faulted for its Panglossian vision of the future, the fault lies in large part in the very structure of the discourse of race and gender in contemporary America and their treatment in the mass media.

To be truly regarded as myth, *Star Trek* must serve the function of myth, allowing society to come to terms with conceptual conundrums in order to confront and resolve them. Although *Star Trek* has created an elaborate imaginary space, it has yet to develop a paradigm that permits the articulation of such a meditative discourse. Instead it lapses back into familiar formulae – classic clichés of racial and sexual otherness – which draw liberally from the stagnant reservoir of received ideas, comfortably unexamined stereotypes and fallacious assumptions about the Other. Ironically, American society has seen more changes over the last half century than were ever imaged in the *Star Trek* universe: the denuclearization of the American family, the LA uprising, military interventions in Grenada, Bosnia, Libya, Somalia, the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, same-sex marriage, and the election of a multiracial president. Demographically, the last quarter of a century has seen the browning of America, with nonwhites projected to attain majority status by the middle of the twenty-first century, a situation that has already become a reality in a number of American cities.

Yet despite such diversification, the future in *Star Trek* continues to be drawn in paler shades. Indeed, it is revealing to compare human racial diversity in *Star Trek* to that depicted in other science fiction films. Both *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) and *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003) depict a future in which blacks and browns are a dominant presence, although nowhere do the films themselves explicitly allude to race or attempt to explain

why they are so numerous, though the films in the end fail to fulfill their subversive potential as they are flawed by a narrative in which a white Messiah emerges ascendant over both machines and his dark-skinned followers. One might also contrast *Star Trek's* take on race where being alien and being black are mutually exclusive to that of *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai* (1984), which introduces aliens who are black in both their adopted human form as well as in their natural state, something the film presents, refreshingly, as a simple matter of fact. Simon Wells' remake of *The Time Machine* (2002) reconfigures the class divisions of H.G. Wells' original into more explicitly racial ones in which the child-like Eloi are, unlike the 1960 George Pal version, decidedly nonwhite and their subterranean Morlock tormentors mutated whites. Each of these films has managed to populate itself with black- and brown-skinned peoples without having to explain their presence, offering it as an organic part of the worlds they envision, a feat that continues to elude the creators of *Star Trek*.

Over forty years after the original series initial run, it is still virtually impossible to conceive of future incarnations of the franchise constructing narratives centered on a transsexual Asian female commander, her teenaged Latina daughter, her Vulcan wives and Orion husbands, setting sail to explore a non-anthropomorphic universe. J. J. Abram's 2009 cinematic reboot of the original series offers more of the same heterosexual white male heroics, sounding the retreat, initiated with *ENT*, from the modest advances of *DSN* and *VOY*. Nor has the Federation ever come across a single alien civilization in which homosexuality was the norm, or an advanced, non-militaristic alien civilization whose members are identifiably nonwhite human or humanoid in appearance. Nearly a half century after its maiden voyage, there remain places where *Star Trek* timidly refuses to go. While *Star Trek's* creators have certainly weaved narratives rich in the ambiguities and contractions cited by Davis in the epigraph that opens this paper, *Star Trek* has failed to fulfill the function of myth. Indeed, the greatest myths generated by the franchise are those that exaggerate its status as socially progressive programming, for the secret gardens it has opened have all too often led down familiar paths rather than fulfilling its promise of exploring uncharted dimensions of raced and gendered lives.

NOTES

¹ The pretense of social relevance is echoed in George Lucas's *Star Wars* saga. In several interviews, Lucas has suggested that the original trilogy was an allegory for the Vietnam War. If anything, however, *Star Wars* was, a glorification of war, ushering in an orgy of video arcade and later digital violence that would be transformed into reality during Gulf

War I. It is difficult to take Lucas' statement of political conviction seriously, particularly after learning that he had decided to change Han Solo, originally written as a black character, to white lest his romantic involvement with Princess Leia rub white Southerners (and, no doubt, box-office-watching Fox executives) the wrong way (Pollock 1990, 151.) Luke's incestuous interest for his sister was apparently of little concern. Chaffing under accusations of racism, Lucas' added a black character, Lando Calrissian, to the sequels (in a role not that much different from the black sea captain in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*). More recently, some commentators have read the prequels as an antiwar commentary on the Gulf Wars I and II, although it is hard to take such readings seriously considering the saga glorifies and invites audiences to sympathize with a petulant, genocidal tyrant. Also see Akao 2004 and 2005 for a discussion of black racial stereotypes in *Star Wars*.

²Trek BBS, www.trekbbbs.com/threads/showflat.php?Number-4810488, accessed October 2005. The site's "SF and People of Color" thread (<http://trekbbbs.com/showthread.php?t=79197s>) contains a lively, impassioned fan discussion of race in *Star Trek* and other science fiction television shows. Just as views of American race relations differ across racial lines, with blacks generally being less optimistic in their assessments, evaluations of racial representation in *Star Trek* tend to differ across racial lines as well, with black posters rating the franchise as less progressive than whites, who generally dismiss their complaints as so much "politically correct," "victim-conscious," "race-card playing" nonsense. Clear racial lines are drawn in one thread, which argued that blacks were disproportionately represented as alien warriors and security personnel. Posters who reject the proposition that *Star Trek* has such a racial bias have argued that the rationale for using black actors to portray, say, Klingons is simply utilitarian not racist: the dark skin of blacks makes them perfect candidates for the role of a dark-skinned alien species. One wonders, however, why, if this were the case, blacks were not initially hired to portray Klingons during the run of the original series or, conversely, why white actors have historically so frequently been employed as black-, yellow-, and red-face performers on stage, screen and television. The answers to those questions point to the inextricable imprint of race as it has been performed and interpreted in American popular culture.

³ Alas, the parodic confrontation *In Living Color* scenario, *The Wrath of Farrakhan*, in which Mr. Spock announces with impeccable logic that given his advanced intellect and physical strength he – not the "Caucasoid" Kirk – should be in command of the *Enterprise* is never played out in the series.

⁴ Stresses in Terran-Vulcan relations would not be examined until *ENT*, in which Vulcans are now depicted as supercilious speciesists who stifle human interstellar ambitions. It is only during the final season of the series that anti-Vulcan human sentiments are explored ("Demons" and "Terra Prime"), and then only in a contrived story about the genocidal machinations of an organized group of radical xenophobic humans.

⁵ That the distribution of traits follows gender stereotypes of rational males/emotional females is equally evident.

⁶ Like most alien species in *Star Trek*, Cardassians and Bajora are open to multiple racial readings that reflect certain historical and contemporary sociopolitical contexts and the biases of viewers. If Bajora can be read as Palestinians, they can also be read as Jews and their Cardassian oppressors as German or British. Bernardi notes that some viewers read Cardassians as Arabs, in particular Iraqis, quoting a fan who maintains Cardassians represent the latter "because of the way they have treated Bajora, the existence of labor camps, ethnic cleansing and the torture of Captain Picard" (166) and that such a correlation "assumes troubling stereotypes of Arabs (e.g., torture, claims of poverty, etc.)" (ibid.). Obviously, the context here is the first Gulf War, which has allowed for a more open expression of anti-Arab stereotypes. Yet it is worth pointing out that despite

growing public awareness in the United States about the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, there appears to be a reluctance to draw explicit parallels between Cardassians and Israeli's despite the fact that the Israeli occupation is colonialist in nature and should raise the same issues about racism and exploitation as other more commonly referenced readings. Indeed, this myopia is replicated in American popular entertainment, which is generally marked by the absence of a discourse critical Israeli policy toward Palestinians, while images of Arab terrorists have become its staple.

⁷ Unlike racial and ethnic minorities whose visually marked presence in genre works set in the future signals their continued existence (and may serve to remind insightful viewers that until recently most genre fare has assumed the future to be prominently if not exclusively white), the depiction of sexual orientation requires some behavioral sign to signal its presence: An intimate kiss between two individuals of the same gender or a passing line that informs viewers that, say, the spouse of a character is of the same sex. While David Gerrold struggled to have the *Star Trek* universe admit gays, only to see various incarnations of the series refuse to depict non-sensationalistic homosexual relationships as an *unremarkable* part of the future and instead toy with various manifestations of lipstick lesbianism, not only was mainstream television beginning to depict such relationships but genre shows like the BBC's *Doctor Who* introduced its viewers to the roguish, unabashedly bisexual Captain Jack Harkness in 2005, including a man-to-man kiss scene, without much fanfare or public opprobrium. Indeed, Harkness has become one of show's most popular characters as well as the star of the spin-off series *Torchwood*. Ironically, the 2009 *Star Trek* feature film seems content to follow the advice of NBC executives who argued for a Spock-Uhura pairing, while *Caprica* (2010-2011), the Syfy Channel's short-lived spin-off from the critically acclaimed remake of pulpishly derivative 1970s *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009), explores new ground by featuring non-apologetic depictions of interracial group marriage and a major gay character.

⁸ Families in *Star Trek* tend toward the dysfunctional. Single-parent families include: Dr. Beverly and her son Wesley (*ST*), Worf and Alexander (*TNG*), Carol and David Marcus (*TWOK*), Benjamin and Jake Sisko (*DSN*), and Samantha and Naomi Wildman (*VOY*). While the Sisko family moved toward happy familial closure with Benjamin's marriage to Kasidy Yates, by the end of the series "the Sisko" has forsaken his family to assume (presumably temporarily) his place among the spectral prophets of Bajor. So much for the myth of absentee black fathers.

⁹ Novels and comic books often offer a more progressive vision of the *Star Trek* universe. Roddenberry, writing as Kirk, addresses rumors of Kirk and Spock's sexuality in the novelization of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979), though his remarks are confined to a footnote and the rumors are denied, while leaving open the possibility that Kirk had engaged in bisexual relationships. Bisexual and homosexual characters as well as group marriages and alternative lifestyles and household arrangements have also appeared in the novels.

¹⁰ Both episodes were produced in *Star Trek*'s third season. Although written first, "Elaan of Troyius" (episode 57) was aired on December 20, 1968, "Plato's Stepchildren (episode 67) aired a month earlier on November 22." See Uram 1996, 90, 98. Whether the script called for an Asian actor to play the part of Elaan is unknown.

¹¹ It is puzzling that while NBC network censors reportedly would not allow Barbara Eden's navel to be seen in *I Dream of Jeannie* (1965-1970), Nichelle Nichol's navel is unobtrusively on display in "Mirror, Mirror." However, before one celebrates this as yet another *Star Trek* "first," it is useful to recall that the show aired at a time when despite prohibitions against televised nudity did not apply to bare-breasted African women in

travel documentaries nor, apparently, did the belly button ban apply to navel maneuvers by nimble “Nubians.”

¹² Black have portrayed aliens in the original series but generally in non-speaking background roles. A Swahili-speaking black male does appear briefly in the “The Man Trap” (*TOS*), one of many guises assumed by a shape-changing alien creature that adopts various human forms sexually attractive to humans in order to gain their trust and kill them. His function as a sexual lure for Uhura dictated that he had to be black lest the bugaboo of miscegenation be raised.

¹³ The reading of Klingons as “black” is nothing new. As interviews with gay moviegoers in Jeffrey Friedman and Rob Epstein’s *The Celluloid Closet* (1996), the documentary version of Vito Russo’s study of the gay image in American film, make clear, just as some gays have read certain characters in mainstream Hollywood films as homosexual, even when this was only subtly implied by the filmmakers or was not their intent, I would point that, as a black youth growing up in Harlem in the 1960s and 1970s, an era when black audiences were starved for non-traditional images of blacks, some blacks, including myself, read the original Klingons as “black” well before their actual portrayal by black actors from the 1980s onwards, even though this reading was one not intended by the show’s creators.

¹⁴ In Jeri Taylor’s novel *Pathways* (1998), we learn that Harry Kim’s best friend at Starfleet Academy fell in love with him, incorrectly assuming Kim was gay. Other male characters read as gay by fans include Elim Garak, the Cardassian tailor/spy (*DSN*), British security officer Malcolm Reed (*ENT*), and bridge officer Lt. Hawk (*First Contact*, 1996). Some have suggested that the relationship between Dr. Julian Bashir and Miles O’Brien is latently homosexual. As for female characters, Seven of Nine (*VOY*) has been rumored to be lesbian and/or bisexual, as have Janeway and Tasha Yar (*TNG*).

¹⁵ Not intent with forging new stereotypes, the franchise has followed the lead of others in the cinematic science fiction genre. In *Star Trek V: The Undiscovered Country*, Admiral Cartwright (Brock Peters, reprising his role from *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*), is revealed to be a Federation traitor conspiring to provoke a war with the crumbling Klingon Empire. Significantly, his co-conspirators are all aliens: the Klingon general Chang, the Vulcan Valeris, and the Romulan Ambassador. Cartwright joins the growing ranks of treacherous blacks in SF/F films, including Lando Calrissian (*The Empire Strikes Back*), the black pirate captain from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the techno-plagiarist Miles Dyson (*Terminator 2: Judgment Day*), Benny, the shuckin’ and jivin’ mutant cabbie from *Total Recall*, and the foppish mayor from *RoboCop 2*.

¹⁶ Although the casting of Sisko was not racially limited, producer Rick Berman states that several other black actors were considered before Brooks was chosen, including Carl Weathers, Tony Todd, and James Earl Jones. It seems somewhat disingenuous of Berman to insist that Brooks was chosen because he was “the best actor” and to deny that race was a consideration when he drops the names of only black actors considered for the part (Spelling 1993, 43).

¹⁷ In the Kaplan article, Berman defends the decision essentially on the grounds that as the franchise already had a bald lead in Patrick Stewart’s Picard, it did not need another.

¹⁸ Even so, the episode was not without critics who objected to the “lesbian” kiss scene. Some affiliates chose not to air the episode; others deleted the scene entirely. Show writer Ira Steven Behr was stunned by the negative response to the episode: “My idea that sci-fi fans are socially far-thinking, that they are in many ways liberal, leftist, humanist, whatever, was totally blown apart by some of the incredible comments we received.... There’s a strong conservative strain in the American soul and maybe it’s there in sci-fi, too. I don’t think we were saying anything that was that extraordinarily out of line, but

maybe we were and that's pretty sad "(Quoted in Kutzera 1996b, 46). Rene Echevarria, the episode's co-author, however, states that viewer response ran "ten-to-one pro" (ibid.).¹⁹ See Altman 1992a and Kay 2001. In 2008, an independent, non-studio affiliated version of the script directed by Gerrold was finally produced for the online *Star Trek* fan-film web site Star Trek Phase II.

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