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Race, Religion, and Rights: Otherness Gone Mad

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Race, Religion, and Rights: Otherness Gone Mad

Abstract
Inevitable yet often unnamed, the looming political radicalism of the late 1960s acts as something like a silent partner in the Mad Men narrative, relying on viewers' historical knowledge of the social tension outside Sterling Cooper to underscore the contrived nature of the world within it. Just as the series spans the period between the emergence of liberal and radical white feminist discourses, it also bridges key moments in the civil rights movement, from the boycotts, voter registration drives, and sweeping oratory of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., to the assassinations of civil rights leaders and activists; rioting in Watts and other cities; and the emergence of a black power movement. Historical hindsight lends dramatic tension to the Mad Men narrative, allowing the writers to focus their energies on character development. As series creator Matthew Weiner said: "I think there is a resonance to the kind of glory of that period, and the foreboding of what happened, that seems accentuated by the time that's passed in between. It didn't seem to be on anybody's mind then as it is now" (Tobias, 2008).

Disciplines
Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication | History of Gender | Journalism Studies | Social History | United States History | Women's History

Comments
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Inevitable yet often unnamed, the looming political radicalism of the late 1960s acts as something like a silent partner in the *Mad Men* narrative, relying on viewers’ historical knowledge of the social tension outside Sterling Cooper to underscore the contrived nature of the world within it. Just as the series spans the period between the emergence of liberal and radical white feminist discourses, it also bridges key moments in the civil rights movement, from the boycotts, voter registration drives, and sweeping oratory of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., to the assassinations of civil rights leaders and activists; rioting in Watts and other cities; and the emergence of a black power movement. Historical hindsight lends dramatic tension to the *Mad Men* narrative, allowing the writers to focus their energies on character development. As series creator Matthew Weiner said: “I think there is a resonance to the kind of glory of that period, and the foreboding of what happened, that seems accentuated by the time that’s passed in between. It didn’t seem to be on anybody’s mind then as it is now” (Tobias, 2008).

Because race-based activism and racist violence are so central to the history of the ’60s, *Mad Men*’s portrayal of civil rights and African Americans has been a subject of discussion and debate from its first season. Many critics have cited a dearth of well-developed black characters and have noted a certain ambiguity surrounding even those who make recurring appearances (Ford, 2013; Ryan, 2012; Boone, 2012; Mendelsohn, 2011; Peterson, 2009). Others have unfavorably compared what they consider a superficial treatment of racism with the writers’
nuanced treatment of sexism and anti-Semitism (Barkhorn, Fetters, & Sullivan, 2013; Seitz, 2013; Carveth, 2010). Film critic Wesley Morris took particular issue with the portrayal of race in the show's sixth season, observing that people of color seemed to serve as set pieces rather than dynamic characters: "One of my frustrations with Mad Men this year was this totally weird use of black people as sign posts. . . . It speaks to this privilege that these guys, these producers, have to get away with such things and not necessarily be held accountable for them" (Simmons, 2013).

For his part, Weiner has resisted a quick answer to calls for a deeper exploration of black experiences, saying he considers it racist to suggest a black character should be expected to deal with civil rights (Miller, 2012). Other critics have put forth an alternative perspective that gives priority to the show's primary project of investigating and critiquing white masculinity on the cusp of the feminist and black power movements. In this view, the relative lack of attention given to race is justified in the name of historical accuracy; even after decades of civil rights activism and the mass migration of blacks to northern cities, whites around the country remained relatively clueless about systemic discrimination (Bunch, 2013; Recktenwald, 2013; Colby, 2012; Watson, 2012). These critics suggest the series is being true to its purpose by highlighting the era's casual racism with offhand jokes and asymmetrical dialogue. Some also have commented on the informal segregation practiced by northerners at the time, including white liberals who might have supported equal opportunities for black Americans in theory but failed to integrate their own dinner parties (or else treated their black guests like tokens). For example, filmmaker and critic Aaron Aradillas argued: "Even though New York has always been a melting pot, Weiner is showing that even back then, when things were starting to mix, it was segregated. He knows the images we have in our heads of recent history are wrong" (Seitz, 2013).

As the complexity of the discussion demonstrates, media representation of race is not a simple issue of diversity in casting or the mimetic presence of minority characters. Representations of racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities contribute to a larger discourse about difference, or "otherness," in a society that likes to boast of its heterogeneity (Deo, et al., 2008). Sometimes the problem is one of symbolic annihilation, when an entire segment of the population simply does not exist in the constructed world of films or television programs (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Tuchman, 1978). But even when minorities are featured, how are they shown? Whose stories are being told? And what do those portrayals say about difference, identity, and history? Feminist scholar bell hooks has argued that films created by people of color are disproportionately made to answer for how they portray whiteness or blackness—and whose stories they choose to tell—while the creative decisions of white male producers are explained away with the notion of artistic integrity: "The assumption is that the art they [white men] create reflects
the world as they know it, or certainly as it interests them" (1996, p. 86). But rather than stop questioning any producers of media content, hooks argues we should question all producers, holding them accountable for the extent to which their media texts—especially those produced by majority groups—uphold or resist oppression (1996, pp. 86–95).

Such an examination calls for cultural analysis that does not isolate notions of difference but instead examines them as part of a larger system of discourse whose components intersect in ways that define a media text’s relation to social power. In the case of Mad Men, investigating portrayals of otherness requires one to look beyond the imprint made by individual characters to the relation those characters have with the larger narrative and with each other. This leads to some compelling questions: Who has subjectivity, and who is positioned against or outside that subjectivity? How is difference constructed, and what meanings do those constructions produce? The purpose of this chapter is to investigate Mad Men’s construction of three historical forms of otherness—blackness, Jewishness, and homosexuality—using a heuristic framework of abstract otherness vs. concrete otherness to explore discursive power as articulated through minority characters on the series.

Articulating Otherness

Stuart Hall’s theory of articulation offers a useful approach for studying representations of otherness by focusing on the connections made within a cultural text, which combine to produce a discourse. Hall (1980) theorized that in societies predicated on inequality or dominance, articulation carries meanings about power and subordination that shape people’s identities, inform their interactions with one another, and frame their understanding of the world. The goal of the scholar, then, is to map the connections, or articulations, within cultural discourse in order to understand the ideological structures within which people think of themselves and others (Slack, 1996). As Lawrence Grossberg wrote: “Articulation is the production of identity on top of differences, of unities out of fragments, of structures across practices. Articulation links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics” (quoted in Slack, 1996, p. 115).

The concept of the Other—which Simone de Beauvoir called “as primordial as consciousness itself” (1949/1989, p. xxii)—is often invoked generically in terms of individual subjectivity but also is used in social contexts to identify who is an insider and who is an outsider, or who is “normal” and who is “different.” Racialized notions of the Other have been traced to 19th-century colonialism, which relied on a system of thought that would justify European domination and exploitation of territories in Africa, Asia, and South America (Byerly, 2006; Hall, 1997, p. 239). Colonialist discourse conceptualized white Christianity as the norm on
the basis of its "superior" history and positioned other races, nationalities, and religions as exotic and primitive. Such a construction laid the discursive foundation for European expansion into foreign lands on the grounds that indigenous populations needed the guidance and protection of their white conquerors, a discourse that would be repeated in justifications of slavery and genocide in North America. People of color were characterized as oversexed savages unable to control their impulses, provide for their children, or govern themselves. The "white man's burden" was to leaven the "tribal" nature of these populations, educating them on hygiene, religion, and Western propriety (Hall, 1997, p. 242).

Colonialist discourse has not only been invoked against blacks; it has also been used against Arabs, Jews, Muslims, the Irish, each new wave of immigrants to the United States, women of all races, and so on—demonstrating its foundation as a political rather than a scientific vocabulary (Said, 1979; Pieterse, 1992). Edward Said argued this conception of otherness reveals more about a dominant group than a subjugated one because it functions to articulate what the dominant group is in terms of what it is not. For example, Rodrigue (2010) has suggested Jews were "the original Other" in Christian-dominated Europe from late antiquity to the Middle Ages—stigmatized, ghettoized, and defined in terms that provided a template for modern racialized discourse. Christianity, he argued, could only be convincingly positioned as universal and concerned with the spirit if Judaism were defined as particular and concerned with the flesh. He noted similar binaries—civilized/primitive; universal/particular; high/low—in later forms of colonialist discourse that sought to explain racial differences. "Once difference has been marked," Hall wrote, "how it is then interpreted is a constant and recurring preoccupation in the representation of people who are racially and ethnically different from the majority population. Difference signifies. It speaks" (1997, p. 230).

One way of studying how otherness "speaks" for different minority groups is to identify when—and for whom—otherness is constructed as abstract and when it is constructed as concrete. For example, in his work on German discourses of otherness after the Holocaust, Altfelix (2000) called attention to philosemitism, a form of abstract otherness that sought to mitigate a strain of xenophobia that had followed the reunification of Germany. In response to the xenophobia, which had damaged the nation's image and economic relationships, a discourse of excessive "foreigner-friendliness" emerged that made it fashionable for Germans to over-emphasize their love of other cultures and make a spectacle of welcoming visitors. Despite this embrace of otherness, Altfelix concluded the new discourse still functioned to serve the needs of the dominant group—in this case, to demonstrate the country's anti-racism and historical distance from its xenophobia. The vocabulary of the discourse had developed in service to the majority and, despite its positive tenor, paradoxically relied on xenophobic notions of the Other as an abstraction: "Consequently, the in-group may be seen to be positively disposed towards the
Other without ever having to consider concrete interaction. The focus remains on the xenophile’s *approach, not his arrival*" (p. 44; emphasis in the original). Identification with the Other functioned primarily as a social cue and, however well-intended, actually reasserted the power of the majority to reject or accept the Other on its own terms.

A discourse of abstract otherness asserts a generalized notion of difference, defining minorities in relation to the majority rather than situating them in their particular experiences and history. Commenting on the abstract otherness often ascribed to black women, Mirza (2009) wrote: “We see glimpses of [the black woman] as she is produced and created for the sustenance of the patriarchal colonial and now postcolonial discourse. She appears and disappears as she is needed, as the dutiful wife and daughter, the hard (but happy and grateful!) worker, the sexually available exotic other, the controlling asexual mother, or simply homogenized as the ‘third world’ woman” (p. 8). Thus, difference is acknowledged but not examined, sometimes invoked to pay homage to the social reality of discrimination, other times situated in rhetorical roles that conveniently serve a dominant narrative. In either case, an abstract construction of otherness avoids the messy details: To borrow from Altfelix, the discourse *approaches* the experience of otherness but never *arrives*; that is, otherness is seen but not heard.

Concrete otherness, in contrast, emphasizes particularity by focusing on the material, on-the-ground experiences, histories, and perspectives of individual racial and ethnic minorities. If abstract otherness is quantitative, concrete otherness is qualitative; it prioritizes individual expression. The discourse gives definition to what otherness feels like, how it informs an individual’s choices and motivations, and how it shapes identity. Political philosopher Seyla Benhabib (1992), writing on the ethics of subjectivity, has insisted that any construction of concrete otherness within political discourse must include the other’s voice. For example, she warned against substitutionalism—the insertion of one’s own perspective for that of another’s (or an Other’s, to extend her argument)—on the grounds it would make a truly democratic discourse impossible. The mass media, which in modern, pluralist societies are charged with providing a forum for discussion and debate about the social good, must give the Other a voice, not just a presence, if they are to meet Benhabib’s standard for ethical discourse:

> Neither the concreteness nor the otherness of the ‘concrete other’ can be known in the absence of the voice of the other. The viewpoint of the concrete other emerges as a distinct one only as a result of self-definition. It is the other who makes us aware both of her concreteness and her otherness. Without engagement, confrontation, dialogue and even a ‘struggle for recognition’ . . . we tend to constitute the otherness of the other by projection and fantasy or ignore it in indifference. (Benhabib, 1992, p. 214–215)

* Benhabib was addressing otherness in the general moral positioning of self/other, not otherness in the sense of reified difference, but her argument has implications beyond her discussion of the Enlightenment ideal of universal citizenship.
Concrete otherness thus requires content producers to encourage a multiplicity of voices and raise the platform for those, like women of color, who have been silenced under the weight of complex, multilayered oppressions. This would answer a call long made by intersectional feminists, who have urged scholars to consider the differences and connections among ideologies regarding race, gender, sexuality, and religion. Patricia Hill Collins, for example, described how the material experiences of black women shape their realities and perspectives in ways not represented in the white-controlled media or in white social movements: “Groups unequal in power are correspondingly unequal in their access to the resources necessary to implement their perspectives outside their particular group” (1989, p. 749). Thus, it is important that feminist and media scholars not only study the mimetic appearance of otherness within a media text, but also that they conduct rich analysis of those representations of otherness to discern whose perspectives are articulated—and whose are left out.

Black Otherness on Mad Men

From the beginning, the overwhelming whiteness of the characters on Mad Men has appeared to be a deliberate and integral part of the narrative. The series shines a harsh light on the comfort and superficiality of the majority, especially in its reactions to people of different races and ethnicities. The executives of Sterling Cooper are shown to blunder mindlessly between color-consciousness and color-blindness as they engage in behavior Stuart Hall (2011) classified as overt racism (an explicit belief in white supremacy) and inferential racism (prejudice based on unchecked assumptions). The most egregious display might be Roger Sterling’s blackface performance of “My Old Kentucky Home” (Episode 303) in the third season, which only Don Draper and Pete Campbell seem to find distasteful. But even an episode that centers on the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., functions mostly to define the white characters.

While the assassination episode, titled “The Flood” (Episode 605), makes a subtle allusion to differences in African American responses to the news, and thus avoids homogenizing black experiences, the plot mainly invokes their hyperaware double consciousness to highlight the ignorance afforded to those at the top. The most prominent black characters to appear in the assassination episode—two secretaries, one of whom works for Peggy Olson, the other for Don Draper—serve as foils for white women’s awkward reactions: Peggy’s moment of discovered emotion, which, in a parallel scene, is contrasted with Joan Holloway Harris’s forced show of sympathy. The climax of the episode is a passionate confrontation between Pete Campbell and Harry Crane, which similarly highlights competing white male responses to King’s death and to the decade’s pervasive racial tension. Harry expresses news fatigue and laments the loss of advertising revenue due to preempted television programming, while Pete yells that it is a “shameful, shame-
ful day” and cynically notes the industry’s opportunity to recoup the revenue with a “movie of the week” about a great man who died too soon. The episode’s discourse is firmly rooted in white consciousness, with black voices and experiences positioned outside, or “other,” to the dominant perspective.

Throughout the series, Mad Men leverages the time and place of the narrative to explicitly mark the otherness of anyone who is not white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant. White characters make jokes and commentary using a racist vocabulary that trades on easy stereotypes, and viewers are led to understand this was both common and acceptable for the period. The list of examples is long: Roger Sterling asks Don Draper if the agency has ever hired any Jews, to which Don replies: “Not on my watch” (Episode 101, “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes”). After executives have hired a Chinese family to occupy Pete Campbell’s office as a joke, he quips: “I took the Chinese out of the building, but I have a feeling in an hour I’m going to want to take them out again” (Episode 103, “Marriage of Figaro”). Betty Draper’s friend Francine refers to an action taken on a public issue by saying: “The board is trying to Jap us with a sudden meeting” (Episode 308, “Souvenir”). Roger says of ending a meeting with executives from Honda: “I have to warn you they won’t know it’s over until you drop the big one—twice” (Episode 405, “The Chrysanthemum and the Sword”). Then there are the more offhand insults—Bert Cooper referring to John F. Kennedy as “Boston Blackie” (Episode 107, “Red in the Face”); Ken Cosgrove criticizing one of Peggy’s ideas as “kind of Catholic” (Episode 212, “The Mountain King”); and Roger saying a Jewish company is open to any idea, “but it has to be cheap—surprise” (Episode 509, “Dark Shadows”). Despite their bigotry, the white characters remain sympathetic because they are given the benefit of viewers’ progressive view of history. Viewers, knowing the times they are a-changin’, are in on the gag.

This type of dialogue necessarily relies on an abstract construction of otherness to demonstrate, in a lighthearted way, the pervasive, overt prejudice before the social movements of the ’70s would challenge discrimination at the level of language and culture. Because the series takes place in New York City, ethnic and religious differences are more salient than they would be in a less diverse geographical setting. The characters generalize freely based on people’s race or ethnicity and use essentialist language such as “a Catholic,” “an Italian,” “a Jew,” “an Oriental family,” or “any Negroes” to reduce people to the one aspect of their identity—their perceived difference—that is the most salient to WASP culture. Viewers have permission to be entertained because they know this way of speaking says everything about the dominant group and very little about the marginalized. By invoking difference as a general concept deployed against many groups of people, the series avoids targeting any particular group and the joke remains on those at the top of the hierarchy rather than those at the bottom.
This same strain of humor is employed more subtly to reveal whites’ cluelessness—or inferential racism—on issues related to ethnicity, non-Protestant religion, and sexuality. For example, when Betty tries to recall the name of a childhood acquaintance who was Jewish, she fumbles: “Beth . . . Gold, Silver, or something” (Episode 106, “Babylon”). When Roger tries to convince a junior copywriter to work on a campaign for the company Manischewitz, he says: “They make wine for Jews, and now they’re making one they want to sell to normal people. You know what I mean. People like me” (Episode 609, “The Better Half”). When Don calls Michael Ginsberg’s voice annoying, the copywriter snaps: “It’s called a regional accent. Believe it or not, you’ve got one, too. We can’t all sound like Walter Cronkite” (Episode 504, “Mystery Date”). The series continually pokes fun at the insularity of mid-century WASP culture by showing the absurdity of its arbitrary boundaries. Humorous dialogue suggests the historical fact of otherness without examining it.

In a more serious commentary on otherness, the series emphasizes the marginalization of African Americans by depicting them in roles of servitude, at the mercy of white people. The first scene of the pilot episode features a black server lighting Don’s cigarette; as Don tries to engage him in conversation, the man’s boss stops by to make sure he is not being “chatty,” although the man has not uttered a word (Episode 101, “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes”). Throughout the series, people of color are shown as restaurant servers, elevator operators, domestic workers, and cab drivers. Whereas the bigoted language used by whites serves to develop individual characters, the placement of blacks in low-level occupational roles serves as a commentary on structural oppression. As Hollis, the black elevator operator well-known to Sterling Cooper executives, says pointedly in a conversation about Marilyn Monroe’s death: “Some people just hide in plain sight” (Episode 209, “Six Month Leave”).

Even characters that make recurring appearances—such as Carla, the Drapers’ housekeeper, and Dawn, Don Draper’s secretary later in the series—get relatively little screen time. But for viewers who might have assumed this was an oversight rather than a narrative decision, the writers had a subtle but unmistakable message at the beginning of the sixth season. That season begins with Don and Megan Draper on vacation in Hawaii. Upon their return, Megan, an actress on a soap opera, receives the latest script (Episode 601, “The Doorway”). “One scene,” she remarks with disappointment. “I take somebody’s coat and offer them a drink.” Don’s reply is straightforward: “That’s what maids do.” By Don’s logic—and, viewers might infer, the writers’—it would be disingenuous to elevate a role’s importance within a fictional text if the same role is unimportant in the social structure being depicted. Soon after Megan and Don’s conversation about her script, Dawn makes her first appearance of the season by dutifully taking Don’s coat as he arrives at the office and noting that he already has coffee. This mirroring
of dialogue and action serves to explain the position of black characters on *Mad Men*: Roles for blacks are limited now because they were limited then.

Contributing to the show's discourse of abstract otherness is the fact that black characters rarely speak to each other on *Mad Men*; indeed, they interact almost entirely with whites. During the first five seasons, only once did a black character independently direct speech toward another black character. That was when Betty Draper and Mona Sterling had left an upscale restroom and one attendant remarked to the other: "Those purses get any smaller, we're gonna starve" (Episode 102, "Ladies Room"). This dynamic changes slightly in the sixth season, when Dawn meets an unnamed friend for dinner on two occasions. One of their conversations focuses on Dawn's loneliness as the only African American in her office and one of relatively few in her building (Episode 604, "To Have and to Hold"). Her friend mentions a mutual acquaintance Dawn was said to have bumped into at work, but Dawn corrects her, saying the two of them had simply nodded to each other without uttering a word. Again, the dialogue explains a creative decision: Black characters do not speak to each other because they are navigating a majority-white environment, which requires them to keep a low profile. Still, one is reminded of the Bechdel Test for women in film (Sarkeesian, 2009), which *Mad Men* fails if it is applied to African Americans: (a) Are there at least two black characters with names? Yes. (b) Do they talk to each other? Rarely. (c) About something other than white people? No. Dawn's friend remains nameless, so their conversations do not count under this test. In fact, the only time one named black character directs speech toward another named black character is when Paul Kinsey introduces his girlfriend, Sheila, to Hollis, the elevator operator, and Sheila says simply, "Nice to meet you" (Episode 210, "The Inheritance"). This brief interaction has been orchestrated by a white character to serve his purpose of performing racial tolerance and cannot be considered substantive dialogue.

Blacks on the series do not appear to have an existence outside the presence of whites, who are shown as central to black experiences, conversations, and livelihoods. In four seasons, for example, very little personal information is revealed about Carla, the Drapers' housekeeper, other than her husband's name is Louis; she has been married for almost 20 years; she has children; and she attends church near the farm where the Drapers get their apples. As a character, Carla primarily functions to reveal information about Betty Draper, as discussed in Chapter 6 by Kimberly Wilmot Voss in her analysis of the portrayal of Betty. For example, when Betty happens upon Carla listening to a radio broadcast of the funeral for four black girls killed in a Birmingham church bombing, Carla turns off the radio and remains silent as Betty apologizes for the loss, then offers an opinion: "I hate to say this, but it's really made me wonder about civil rights. Maybe it's not supposed to happen right now" (Episode 309, "Wee Small Hours"). Carla's silence speaks volumes by reminding viewers of the power dynamic in play—it is not safe
for Carla to speak authentically in the home of her white employer—but the effect is to leave a black woman's otherness in the realm of the abstract rather than give it voice.

On only a couple of occasions does Carla speak her particular truth. The first is when Sally Draper has stolen money from her grandfather and Carla is anxious to find it before she gets blamed. She is respectful but testy with the old man, who mistakes her for his housekeeper, who is also black:

CARLA: Maybe it fell out of your pocket.
GENE: It didn't.
CARLA: Well, I didn't take it.
GENE: I didn't say you did.
CARLA: Not yet.
GENE: Will you stop it, Viola?
CARLA: My name's not Viola. It's Carla.
GENE: Do you know Viola?
CARLA: We don't all know each other, Mr. Hofstadt. (Episode 303, “My Old Kentucky Home”)

The dialogue expresses Carla's dread and impatience as she is forced to bear the burden of white people's racist assumptions. The episode also foreshadows Carla's firing at the end of the season, when she will be made a scapegoat for the mistakes Betty has made as a parent. Threatened by the close relationship Carla enjoys with the children and unnerved by what Carla has seen of her mothering, Betty seizes the chance to fire her at the first perceived slight (Episode 413, “Tomorrowland”). Their final exchange is compelling for the stored-up emotion it releases as well as its allusions to socioeconomic structures that differently affect white and black women:

BETTY: Do you think I enjoy doing this? After all these years? I won't have it, Carla.
CARLA: Well, someone has to look after those children.
BETTY: Really? And where are your kids? Are they all doctors and lawyers?
CARLA: You'd best stop talking now.
BETTY: Where are you going?
CARLA: I'm going to say goodbye to the children.
BETTY: Do you think that's a good idea right now? It'll just upset them more. Some other time. (Episode 413, “Tomorrowland”)

Carla cannot afford to be a stay-at-home mother, which Betty well knows, nor are her children likely to have many financial and educational opportunities available to them. Thus, Betty's cruelty has a racial edge to it. But her final words—“some
other time”—seem to convey viewers have not seen the last of Carla, so Betty may yet have to reckon for her behavior.

Abstract otherness functions to define a dominant group’s social position and perspective, and so it is on Mad Men. When race or civil rights come up in any significant way, the plot centers on the racism, or anti-racism, of white characters. For example, the appearance of an African American love interest for Paul Kinsey, a leftist copywriter at the agency, establishes his egocentrism as he carefully grooms his progressive image. Joan Holloway calls viewers’ attention to this self-serving performance of liberal earnestness: “You, out there in your poor-little-rich-boy apartment in Newark or wherever. Walking around with your pipe and your beard, falling in love with that girl just to show how interesting you are. Go ahead. What part is wrong?” (Episode 202, “Flight 1”). Later in the season, Paul lends weight to this assessment when he tries to back out of a plan to travel south with his girlfriend, Sheila White, as part of the civil rights effort to register black voters. “If you don’t mind, I’d rather face Mississippi and those people screaming at me and maybe getting shot after I go to California,” he tells her, even claiming he has more to lose: “You can always get another job at a grocery store. I can’t just walk into an ad agency” (Episode 210, “The Inheritance”). When Paul’s trip to California is canceled, he is forced to make good on his promise. The last scene shows him holding forth on a crowded bus as it bumps down the road, offering a befuddled justification for his line of work in light of his liberal pretensions: “Advertising, if anything, helps bring on change. The market—and I’m talking in a purely Marxist sense—dictates that we must include everyone. The consumer has no color” (“The Inheritance”).

Even when they are well-intended, the white characters on Mad Men clumsily exploit their relationships with people of color. When Pete Campbell discovers Admiral televisions are outselling other brands in cities with large black populations, he hatches a plan to market Admiral specifically to black buyers (Episode 305, “The Fog”). Wanting more information, Pete tries earnestly to hold a one-man focus group with Hollis, the elevator operator. The subtext of their dialogue reflects the distinctions one might draw between the men’s social roles and existences, underscored by the metaphor offered by the elevator itself. Pete occupies a position of privilege, which enables him to be open about his ideas and his ignorance. This lack of artifice comes through in the questions he fires at Hollis—“Really? Color?”—and his desire to have a direct conversation about “the American dream,” a discussion Hollis knows can never happen. “It’s just us,” Pete tries to convince him. “It’s just Hollis and—” “—Mr. Campbell,” Hollis pointedly finishes (“The Fog”). For job security and perhaps on principle, Hollis remains closed to Pete, revealing nothing about his life or consumer behavior. Nearly all of Hollis’s responses to Pete’s badgering are constructed in the negative—“I didn’t see a difference,” “I can’t say,” “I don’t want trouble,” “I don’t know,” “I don’t
watch”—signaling both his cautiousness and his unwillingness to speak for an entire demographic. The closest he comes to honesty is when he finally snaps that he does not even watch TV: “Why should I? We’ve got bigger problems to worry about than TV, okay?” Perhaps Hollis would be more persuaded by Pete’s progressivism if it were aimed at, say, integrating the nation’s schools rather than his client’s advertising. A form of resistance, Hollis’s reticence denies Pete the opportunity to appropriate his knowledge. Pete is nonplussed when Hollis does not trust him, failing to recognize that although he can leave the elevator and the conversation at will, Hollis is stuck physically and metaphorically. “Every job has its ups and downs,” Hollis comments wryly as the door opens and Pete steps off.

As the series progresses into the late ’60s, the narrative makes more references to urban rioting, civil rights protests, and the Vietnam War, using mise-en-scene and narrative ambiguity to convey the increasingly unsettled national mood. For example, the jarring scene that opens the fifth season marks a break from previous seasons. It shows a street protest demanding more jobs for African Americans, which leads white men from another ad agency to shout insults and throw bags of water from their office window (Episode 501, “A Little Kiss”). The scene signals that race and civil rights will be addressed in a bigger way in the series, but the foreign setting and unfamiliar characters situate the event outside the main narrative. Gazing upon the ’60s from the perspective of whites, the series reifies the characters’ belief that issues of race and ethnicity are external to their desires, motivations, and social mobility. It is clear change will come to Sterling Cooper from outside, not from within.

Sterling Cooper’s executives act reluctantly and incrementally to avoid becoming the target of groups looking into discrimination in the advertising industry. Don’s new secretary, Sterling Cooper’s first black hire in the administrative ranks, is brought on only because dozens of black job applicants have responded to a fake advertisement published to embarrass the agency that had thrown water on protesters (Episode 502, “A Little Kiss, Part 2”). The new secretary’s name, Dawn, evokes a new day but also provides opportunities to poke fun at the haplessness and racism of some Sterling Cooper executives. By making her name a homophone with her boss’s name, the writers can accentuate the contrast in their respective social positions and play with a discursive link between her otherness and Don’s foreigner status as a man in disguise, navigating a world that was not supposed to be his. This allusion to Don’s otherness is made throughout the series, such as when a black intruder purports to have raised Don as a child, leading Bobby Draper to ask his older sister, “Are we Negroes?” (Episode 608, “The Crash”). Indeed, as the sixth season closes, Don is taking his children to his dilapidated childhood house in Pennsylvania, where an unfamiliar black child is standing on the porch. The imagery suggests a parallel between Don’s impoverished childhood, which will forever set him apart, and the otherness of African Americans.
While Dawn has been more developed than other black characters on the show, she, too, usually acts as a foil for the white characters. For example, when Peggy finds her preparing to sleep in the office rather than take the subway to Harlem for fear of violence, Peggy is initially confused—“You’re not a nurse . . . Oh, right”—before realizing Dawn is alluding to the recent race riots, not the murder of student nurses, in Chicago (Episode 504, “Mystery Date”). This conversational trope, repeated with other white characters, shows the difference between black and white consciousness with regard to the ongoing social unrest. In this episode, Peggy invites Dawn to stay with her overnight. While they drink beer on her couch, the interaction is halting as Peggy tries to play the role of white savior:

PEGGY: So . . . what were you going to say?
DAWN: I was going to say—
PEGGY: —Go ahead. You can talk.
DAWN: I’m trying to. (Episode 504, “Mystery Date”)

On the wall above them are several drawings that appear to show black people in tribal attire, a colonialist aesthetic that complements Peggy’s condescension. Reaching out to Dawn, Peggy shows empathy that she has not displayed toward other secretaries: “We have to stick together. I know we’re not really in the same situation, but I was the only one like me there for a long time. It’s hard” (“Mystery Date”). However, despite this show of sensitivity, there comes a moment when Peggy is forced to confront her own prejudice. As she tidies the living room before heading to bed, her gaze rests upon her purse. She hesitates, clearly wondering whether it is safe to leave it with Dawn, whose face hardens when she catches Peggy’s doubt. When Peggy gets up the next morning, she finds a thank-you note Dawn has folded and pointedly left on top of the purse. Viewers learn something about Dawn’s motivation in the sixth season as racial tension builds outside the agency before King’s assassination. Meeting an unnamed friend at a restaurant in a black neighborhood, Dawn alludes to an incident at work that has landed her in trouble. A white secretary asked Dawn to punch her time card so she could leave work early, and the two were caught (Episode 604, “To Have and to Hold”). The women’s conversation is noteworthy within the series for providing competing black perspectives on the white power structure and their relation to it:

FRIEND: I told you, those girls aren’t your friends.
DAWN: Yes, they are. She got in more trouble than me.
FRIEND: Why do you think she asked you? You can’t say no because you’re too scared. All they see is, “Yassuh.”
DAWN: Everybody’s scared there. Women crying in the ladies’ room, men crying in the elevator. Sounds like New Year's Eve when they
empty the garbage, there’s so many bottles. And I told you about that poor man hanging himself in his office.

FRIEND: Wow, they got it so bad. They must all be jealous of you.
DAWN: What am I going to do—throw a brick through their window? I want to keep my job. So I’m going to keep my head down.

FRIEND: Well, I couldn’t do it.
DAWN: Well, you don’t have to. You’re getting married—and dinner. (Episode 604, “To Have and to Hold”)

The dialectic between these perspectives does more than raise the issues of inferential racism, assimilation, and economic incentives. It also particularizes black experience in a concrete way. The dialogue conveys larger truths about the stress endured by a black woman working in an all-white environment, but it does so through an individual lens; it unpacks black otherness and offers multiple interpretations of the experience. The topic of the conversation is still white people, but its purpose is to elucidate black perspectives based on shared knowledge. This portrayal of concrete black otherness is unusual at this point in the series and more similar to the way Jewishness is depicted.

Jewishness: Otherness Made Concrete

*Mad Men* speaks of Jewishness in a more concrete way than it does blackness. Jewish characters on the series are given a history and a voice through which they articulate the experiences that inform their consciousness as religious minorities. During the first season, this knowledge is communicated by Rachel Menken, the head of her family’s department store, who seeks the help of Sterling Cooper to expand the reach of her business. Rachel is a savvy, independent businesswoman who is cognizant of the discrimination she faces as a Jew and a woman: “You were expecting me to be a man. So was my father,” she graciously responds to Don’s surprise upon meeting her (Episode 101, “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes”). The meeting goes sour from there, however, as it becomes apparent the agency’s executives have pigeonholed her, resisting her vision of something greater for her company. “What kind of people do you want?” Don asks testily. “I want *your* kind of people, Mr. Draper,” Rachel retorts. The executives insist that is not possible because Menken’s does not have the cachet of the high-end establishments Rachel mentions. “What Don’s saying is, Chanel is a very different kind of place,” Pete explains. “It’s French. It’s continental. It’s—.” “—not just another Jewish department store?” Rachel interjects. “Exactly,” Pete finishes, having already suggested Menken’s might be more satisfied with a Jewish ad agency (“Smoke Gets in Your Eyes”). Rachel reasserts her independence: “If I wanted some man who happened to be from the same village as my father to manage my account, I could have stayed where I was.” Faced with both sexism
and anti-Semitism, Rachel shows herself capable of enduring both while accepting neither. Her confidence stems from class privilege—Roger later reminds Don she is worth $3 million—but also from the outsider's advantage of knowing her antagonists better than they know her.

Don is narratively yoked to Jewishness the same way he is connected with blackness, but the discursive connections are made via specific references to Jewish history and culture rather than a nebulous idea of difference. After he stomps out of the meeting—"I'm not going to let a woman talk to me that way"—rather than address Rachel's criticism, he arranges to meet her for a drink to smooth things over ("Smoke Gets in Your Eyes"). He questions her motivation for being in business rather than getting married, which gives her the chance to point out the sexism inherent in the assumption that she should have to choose. More significant, however, is the empathy and common ground Rachel establishes with Don. "I don't know what it is you really believe in," she tells him, "but I do know what it feels like to be out of place, to be disconnected, to see the whole world laid out in front of you the way other people live it. There's something about you that tells me you know it, too." Their budding relationship allows the writers to pass the microphone to a Jewish character with an invitation to identify the material information specific to her perspective. This approach still leaves a minority with the burden of educating the majority, but the result is a portrayal of otherness made concrete by locating it within a particular understanding. Rather than the more general education African Americans must give to the white characters—"We don't all know each other"—Jewish otherness is contextualized with material facts.

The episode of *Mad Men* that best embodies concrete otherness is titled "Babylon" (Episode 106). This episode is worth extensive examination because of its explicit focus on the Jewish experience, which hews to Rodrigue's conceptualization of Jews as "the original Other" and at the same time suggests a metaphor for broader notions of existential exile. The main plot development is a solicitation from the Israeli Ministry of Tourism for a campaign to raise Israel's profile as a destination for American tourists. Like Rachel Menken, the Israelis have indicated they would like a more "traditional" approach than any of the Jewish agencies would provide. To design a campaign the agency can successfully pitch, the creative team at Sterling Cooper digs into research on Jewish and Israeli history for insight on the motivations people would have for visiting the nascent nation-state. Gazing at a photograph of concentration camp casualties, Don remarks, "I see why they want the guns." The team comments on violence in the region, as well as Israel's liberal politics—"It's positively Soviet," says Pete Campbell—but also notes conservative Americans' embrace of Leon Uris's *Exodus*, the best selling novel about the founding of Israel.
A subsequent conversation between Don and Rachel serves to critique the burden placed on minorities to share knowledge of "their people" at the request of the majority and to educate those in a dominant social position about the nature of prejudice. "I'm the only Jew you know in New York?" Rachel chides Don after he has asked for her advice. When he replies that she is his favorite, she responds, "Jesus, Don, crack a book once in a while," noting that she is not an expert on Israel, "and something feels strange about being treated like one" ("Babylon"). Rachel's reluctance to act as a spokeswoman for all Jews anticipates Hollis's dodging of Pete Campbell's similar questions about blacks. Unlike that dialogue, however, this one leaves the realm of the abstract and endorses material knowledge and concrete experience as a better path for understanding otherness:

RACHEL: I don't know what I can say. I'm American. I'm really not very Jewish. If my mother hadn't died having me, I could have been Marilyn instead of Rachel. No one would know the difference.

DON: What is the difference?

RACHEL: Look, Jews have lived in exile for a long time, first in Babylon, then all over the world—Shanghai, Brooklyn. And we've managed to make a go of it. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that we thrive at doing business with people who hate us.

DON: I don't hate you.

RACHEL: No, individuals are wonderful.

DON: That's not what I meant.

RACHEL: I don't know. A country for "those people," as you call us, well, seems very important.

DON: Why aren't you there?

RACHEL: My life is here. My grandfather came from Russia, and now we have a store on Fifth Avenue. I'll visit, but I don't have to live there. It just has to be. For me it's more of an idea than a place. (Episode 106, "Babylon")

Here, the writers do not claim to be offering the Jewish perspective, only a Jewish perspective, informed by a particular history and shared experiences. Cultural understanding is given individual expression while highlighting the nature of the difference that separates Rachel and Don. Rachel emphasizes the systemic nature of discrimination by calling subtle attention to the fallacy of Don's claim of exceptionalism and gives voice to a third-generation assimilationist perspective.

Rachel does not speak of the Holocaust during her meeting with Don, beyond noting Adolf Eichmann's recent arrest in Argentina. However, the specter of mass extermination is referenced visually as Don and Rachel's meeting cuts to a scene of women being herded into an observation room at Sterling Cooper. Once the women have entered the room en masse, one of them says, "What, no
lunch?” as the perspective narrows to an unsettling shot of Joan bolting the door (“Babylon”). Joan admits the women have been lured into the room under false pretenses; they are actually there to test lipstick for Belle Jolie. A stern researcher, speaking in a German accent, gives them further instructions and male executives gather festively behind one-way glass to watch and remark on the women. Their point of view serves to emphasize the women’s dehumanization and powerlessness under the male gaze. “At what point do we start running electricity through the chairs?” Pete asks sardonically. The scene unquestionably evokes the horror of Nazi gas chambers and experiments on captive subjects. Rhetorically, an analogy is drawn between the persecution of Jews and the oppression of white women, whose humanity is shown to be slowly eroding under the objectification and surveillance of capitalist, patriarchal forces.

The discursive circuit linking multiple, layered oppressions is completed at the end of the episode with an acoustic performance of “The Waters of Babylon,” a musical adaptation of Psalm 137. The psalm is about the Jews’ exile from Jerusalem and evokes a combination of sorrow, resistance, and longing that plays out a sequence of scenes showing women dressing and making themselves attractive: Rachel putting on jewelry, Betty applying lipstick on Sally, Joan zipping up her dress and leaving a hotel with a caged bird Roger Sterling has given her. As the song ends, Roger and Joan stand apart on the sidewalk, waiting for cabs. Their separation and their silence, broken only by the impersonal sounds of the city, bring to mind a profound alienation on the part of the oppressors and those they oppress; both are in exile from their humanity.

*Mad Men* will bear witness to the Holocaust in a different way through the character of Michael Ginsberg, a new copywriter hired at Sterling Cooper about the same time Dawn becomes the agency’s first black secretary. In contrast to Rachel Menken, who is poised and pedigreed, Ginsberg (as his colleagues call him) is offbeat, outspoken, neurotic, and funny—the online magazine *jewcy* called him “a Woody Allen caricature—twitchy with a darkly off-kilter sense of humor” (Friedman, 2013). When Peggy tells him his portfolio has a strong voice, he quips: “That’s what they said about Mein Kampf: Kid has a voice” (Episode 503, “Tea Leaves”). If Rachel is the embodiment of cultural assimilation, Ginsberg is the ethnicized, exaggerated Jewish character. He offends Peggy and talks too much during his initial interview, yet Roger Sterling insists on hiring him, telling Peggy: “Turns out, everybody’s got one now. Tell you the truth, it makes the agency more modern, between that and it’s always darkest before the Dawn out there” (“‘T’ Leaves”).

Ginsberg’s distinct personality belies the ambiguity of his roots, which he tries to keep separate from his professional life by initially claiming not to have a family. The story Ginsberg eventually tells Peggy in an episode aptly titled “Far Away Places” (Episode 506) is difficult to comprehend, even for him, and pronounces
his otherness. "I'm from Mars," Ginsberg says by way of introducing just how different he is from everybody else. Born in a concentration camp to a woman who died there—"It happened," Peggy's boyfriend, Abe, later assures her of this phenomenon—Ginsberg's father met him at a Swedish orphanage when he was 5 years old and adopted him. This strange but steady relationship is portrayed as culturally traditional and loving. After Ginsberg informs his father he has gotten the job at Sterling Cooper, the older man embraces him and recites a prayer in Hebrew over his head ("Tea Leaves"). The father repeatedly nags his son to find a woman. He sets him up on a date with a Jewish girl and admonishes him: "You! You're going on the ark with your father" (Episode 605, "The Flood"). But when his father shows up at his office, Ginsberg hustles him out, embarrassed by the encroachment of his roots into the new life he is inventing for himself (Episode 506, "Far Away Places"). Ginsberg's double life invites comparisons with Don's—once again suggesting Don's instinctive understanding of otherness—but there is a difference: Ginsberg has been raised by a loving father figure. The boy is not the father of the man, as an earlier episode alluded is the case with Don (Episode 608, "The Crash").

Sympathizing with Ginsberg's loneliness after he confesses his origins, Peggy gently asks if there are others like him. Ginsberg quietly responds: "I don't know. I haven't been able to find any" (Episode 506, "Far Away Places").

**Homosexuality: Otherness in Limbo**

*Mad Men*’s portrayal of homosexuality includes components of both concrete and abstract otherness. Like blackness, the marginal status of homosexuality at mid-century is signaled from the beginning of the series. But unlike race, homosexuality is obscured, rather than pronounced, by the prevailing social hierarchy. For example, the writers play with their asymmetrical knowledge of the character of Salvatore “Sal” Romano to insert clever lines that will later draw viewers' attention to the professionally necessary practice of gay men passing as heterosexual in the office. The first episode is full of covert references to Sal's sexual orientation, most notably his feigned incredulity when making this comment: "You mean a person could act one way and be thinking the exact opposite?" (Episode 101, "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes"). As viewers become increasingly aware of Sal's closeted status, they are also led toward an understanding of why his career depends on this ability to blend into the white male power structure, requiring that he publicly assert a muscular heterosexuality through the objectification of women and a traditional marriage. During the first season, Sal's stunned response—"Are you joking?"—to a male acquaintance who has questioned why he is afraid to act on their mutual attraction alludes to the professional and physical danger faced by gay men and women in the years just before the Stonewall riots of 1969 (Episode 108, "The Hobo Code").
Sal's ever-present fear turns out to be justified when he loses his job after refusing the advances of Lucky Strike scion Lee Garner, Jr. (Episode 309, "Wee Small Hours"). Prior to this climactic episode, Don Draper has learned of Sal's homosexuality during a business trip and appears indifferent as long as Sal keeps his affairs private—a piece of advice cleverly delivered through Don's proposed tagline for the London Fog advertising campaign: "Limit Your Exposure" (Episode 301, "Out of Town"). However, upon firing Sal after wondering why he did not simply satisfy the desire of Lee Garner, Jr., for the benefit of the agency, Don mutters with disgust: "You people" (Episode 309, "Wee Small Hours"). This contempt for Sal's integrity is a far cry from Don's later disapproval when Joan sleeps with a Jaguar dealer during the show's fifth season, as discussed in Chapter 4 (Episode 511, "The Other Woman"). The similarity of the situations faced by Sal and Joan—and Don's conflicting perspectives on them—articulates the nature of homosexual otherness during the '60s. In Don's view, Sal should be willing to trade his sexuality for the sake of doing business because even if one considers it to be a legitimate aspect of his identity, it has no worth in the larger culture. The heterosexuality of a white woman, on the other hand, is central to her value in relation to the male power structure, and therefore it must be protected. For Joan to engage in a sexual exchange lowers her worth in Don's eyes even if she, herself, has received a good return on her investment.

This nuanced treatment of homosexuality in relation to a patriarchal status quo is emblematic of a concrete discourse on otherness. However, the plot twist is noteworthy because Sal's character serves a mostly symbolic function until that point. Indeed, Sal's firing generated a large amount of discussion and disappointment among fans, which Matthew Weiner acknowledged in an interview: "More than with any other character, I've had lots of conversations about that. I wanted to tell the story of how incredibly unfair it was for Sal, and that's the sacrifice I made. It's a gigantic moment in the series" (Dionne, 2013). Prior to Sal's dismissal, the character received relatively little screen time, his appearances serving either to mark his difference or to evoke a devil-may-care zeitgeist: "Should we drink before the meeting or after? Or both?" (Episode 101, "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes"). A similar character appears in the enigmatic Bob Benson, who cons his way into a job at the start of the sixth season and is revealed to be gay when he makes a subtle overture to Pete Campbell (Episode 611, "Favors"). This is representative of queer characters on Mad Men, who reside outside the principal narrative and pop up to show clumsy displays of attraction, including Sal's crush on Ken Cosgrove (Episode 207, "The Gold Violin") and a lovelorn plea from Joan's roommate, Carol, that Joan engage in sexual intimacy by pretending Carol is a boy (Episode 110, "Long Weekend").

These contrived moments allow viewers to "see" homosexuality outside of bars or other gay-specific contexts, which are not represented in the series but
were much more likely to be the site of queer activity in the ’60s. The odd, unwanted advances display a gay presence on *Mad Men*, but they also seem to rationalize the erroneous, misplaced fear about a predatory sexuality that lay beneath the era’s rampant homophobia. In this sense, gay men and women are seen but not heard, leaving their experiences and motivations in the abstract. Questions remain about some of the recurring characters, such as whether Sal will return—Don’s last words to him, “You’ll be fine,” suggest the possibility he will at least continue to have a career (Episode 309, “Wee Small Hours”)—and whether Bob Benson will play a larger role now that he has befriended Joan and facilitated Pete’s exit to California (Episode 613, “In Care Of”). As long as the arc of the characters remains unfinished, so will the discourse on homosexuality put forth by *Mad Men*.

The qualitative differences in the discourses surrounding blackness, Jewishness, and homosexuality on *Mad Men* suggest the usefulness of comparing and contrasting media constructions of otherness. The analysis raises important questions about the representation of difference in contemporary culture: Is there a right way? If so, how might producers accomplish it? Citing recent debates over the representation of race, cultural critic Judy Berman (2013) wrote:

> Taken together, the endless arguments . . . suggest that American culture has reached an impasse—and developed something of an obsession—when it comes to white artists portraying characters of color. If they don’t, they’re whitewashing; if they do, they’re appropriating or misrepresenting. That the criticisms on both fronts are, in large part, not only valid but crucial makes it even more difficult to imagine a way forward.

Indeed, it would be nearly impossible for a single television series to present the concrete perspectives of every possible group. However, at the very least, this analysis suggests the importance of diversity in the ranks of writers, producers, and directors. Ensuring a range of people has access to the means of cultural production is the only way to do justice to the myriad histories, experiences, and perspectives in a multicultural society.