Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Throughout this volume I use the terms "global" and "transnational" somewhat interchangeably, although I understand "global" to refer to a range of institutional and cultural developments that include both super- and subnational configurations. By contrast, "transnational" refers to cultures and industries that span national boundaries.
2. I use the term "African American" to refer to people and cultures of Black African descent living in the United States. By contrast, the term "black" refers to all people and cultures of Black African descent. As I hope becomes clear throughout these pages, I define blackness as a *political* identity rather than an essentialist racial identity, which exhibits significant differences from dominant political identities due to radically different historical and contemporary experiences. At the same time that I recognize that blackness is cross-cut by countless forms of difference as well, I believe that the maintenance of struggle against all forms of oppression is a key, shared feature of black communities everywhere. Consequently I also use the term "black" to refer to oppressed minorities who are not of Black African descent but who have chosen to call themselves black as a means of expressing resistance and solidarity with minority groups elsewhere.
3. I do not substantially attend here to processes of decoding, or the meanings that viewers derive from African American television imports, except that I see programming as a constant process of encoding and decoding among multiple interpretive communities, only one of which is the audience. While studies of audience decoding are undoubtedly vital for understanding the overall cultural significance of African American imports in specific locales, *Black Television Travels* investigates how industry professionals around the world act as cultural mediators in selecting and scheduling African American television and how those decisions shape worldwide circulation patterns and production practices. Consequently issues of audience reception primarily come into play in the analysis only when industry insiders recognize them and allow them to influence their decisions, or as contrasts to the ways insiders understand the cultural processes of African American television trade.
4. Black Entertainment Television (BET) International operates several low-rent transnational channels. While it does employ local programmers and content in the United Kingdom, its status as one of hundreds of digital channels offered on the Sky satellite service minimizes the channel's cultural impact. Beyond the United Kingdom, the service is offered on similar kinds of satellite services that target viewers across multiple territories. For this reason, I do not attend to BET International in this study; instead, I concentrate on dominant trends in programming and industry lore in various decades, with the exception of chapter 6, which addresses non-U.S. black television trade.
5. This limitation exists because local television stations, which are the primary syndication buyers, strip reruns five or six days per week, while networks air new episodes

only weekly. In other words, local stations burn through episodes much more quickly than the networks do. In order to minimize the frequency of repeating episodes, which might turn viewers off, most local programmers believe that they need a run of at least sixty-six episodes, or three seasons.

6. For the first three years, as much as 70 percent of syndication revenues for Hollywood television shows can come from abroad, but that number starts to decline steeply thereafter.

CHAPTER 1

1. By comparison, overall production costs for network television series in 1980 had risen an average of only 40 percent since the 1977–1978 television season ("On the Rise," 1980; Russell, 1975).
2. As evidence of the competing and often contradictory discourses and cultural currents that *Roots* unleashed, Herman Gray gives two related but quite different readings of the impact of the miniseries. In *Color Adjustment* (Riggs, 1991), Gray argues that *Roots* was largely focused on criticizing personal, rather than institutional, forms of racism. In *Watching Race* (1995), he writes that the miniseries "opened—enabled, really—a discursive space in mass media and popular culture within which contemporary discourses of blackness developed and circulated" (78). In particular, Gray credits *Roots* with helping to create the conditions for the 1980s Afrocentric movement and the popularity of black studies within the academy.
3. It has long been assumed that Africans brought to the New World were stripped of their names and rechristened with Western names, though more recent research contradicts this assumption (Thornton, 1993). Nevertheless, the idea that African Americans had lost their names was prevalent even among African Americans at the time of *Roots*' broadcast. Perhaps the most famous incidence of this assumption was Malcolm Little's decision in 1953 to rename himself Malcolm X, in an attempt to both escape the influence of the slave master's last name and mark the absence of his true, African name (Haley, 1966).
4. Indeed, the miniseries itself was a product of transnational television exchanges. Beginning its life when PBS stations imported such limited-installment BBC series as *The Forsythe Saga* (1967) and *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (1970) in the early 1970s, the miniseries was first adapted to U.S. television in 1974, when ABC aired an adaptation of Leon Uris's novel *QB VII* in two three-hour installments during prime time. The American version of the limited-installment series subsequently found agreeable buyers in overseas markets.
5. These different programming strategies reflected the different remits of the two systems: the Western European system favored diversity by creating space for a larger number of different television shows to be aired, while the commercial system favored predictability of viewer behavior, which weekly series encouraged, in order to deliver consistent audience numbers to advertisers. In addition, most public service broadcasters at the time had formal or informal quotas on the percentage of imported programming they could air, and a weekly series with no clear ending could eat up a lot of that time. Consequently, conventional American series were a hard sell in Western Europe and much of the rest of the world.
6. International coproductions bring together producers from more than one country, with the idea that the final program will air in all partners' markets, and perhaps get

sold elsewhere as well. It has become a dominant form of television production funding in an era of globalization, particularly for public broadcasters and cable networks. The arrangement offers foreign broadcasters who are partners to the deal a significant amount of leverage over the final product.

CHAPTER 2

1. As with every axiom of industry lore, the belief that sitcoms featuring African American characters did not sell abroad had its detractors. Ron V. Brown, senior vice president of international sales for Embassy Telecommunications, claimed to have sold the integrated sitcom *Diff'rent Strokes* (1978–1986) to broadcasters in more than seventy territories, including the French commercial channel TF1 ("U.S. Programmers Converge," 1986). While such widespread international syndication is impressive, some comparison with other programs and companies can help put it in perspective. The following year, the dramatic series *Little House on the Prairie* (1974–1983) sold in more than a hundred markets and *Dallas* (1978–1991) in more than ninety. What is more, Embassy's sitcom-heavy program catalog garnered only about 10 percent of overall revenues from international sales, running well behind more drama-heavy distributors such as Metromedia, which earned 35 percent of its syndication revenues abroad. Obviously, then, Brown's insistence that his sitcoms sold well abroad must be taken with a grain of salt. In fact, the article placed Brown's comments at the end of a section about the consensus among industry insiders about the poor performance of sitcoms abroad, clearly marking them as a minority viewpoint. Nevertheless, Brown's comments remind us that industry lore is not uncontested, but rather consists of competing ideas and interests.
2. While most English-speaking whites were far from antiracist, support for apartheid at the time among English speakers was significantly lower than among Afrikaans speakers, though a slight majority of English-speaking whites did support most apartheid policies (Rhoodie, de Kock, and Couper, 1985, 331).
3. The linguistic breakdown on TV2 and TV3 is less clear, as several of the titles are given only in English.
4. In fact, the SABC channels provided more locally produced programs in South African languages, so under most current scholarly definitions, we would consider them more domestically relevant than Bop-TV. Domestic relevance, however, may come as much from how television channels imagine and address viewers in relation to one another as it does from the total amount of domestically produced programming that they air.
5. It is interesting, though by no means surprising, that even the contemporary American programs focused on traditional white folk culture rather than modern, multicultural musical or entertainment programs.
6. Of course, the same may be said of TV1's Afrikaans programming, except that ballet, classical music, and Christianity are all arguably more organic to Afrikaner culture.
7. Of course, the channel's status as a commercial venture designed primarily to advertise Sowetan businesses to Sowetan consumers helped guarantee this privileging of black viewers.
8. To some degree *Project UFO* (1978–1979), which aired against TV3's showing of *Good Times*, also reflected the integrationist identity of Bop-TV, as the show's regular cast included the African American actress Aldine King as a secretary working for white

male Air Force officers investigating UFO sightings (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0077065/). Just as importantly, as an imported drama, *Project UFO* drew attention to the limited nature of the SABC's program imports. That is, because the only all-black American series at the time were older situation comedies, TV2 and TV3 were restricted to imports in this genre. Bop-TV, by contrast, could import a wider range of genres, including science fiction, and the juxtaposition of the two imports at the same time reinforced this fact. Consequently, even when airing U.S. imports, the black South African channels came across as comparatively restrictive. The made-for-TV movie *The Jesse Owens Story* (1984), which tells the story of an African American athlete overcoming racial bias to become an Olympic champion, airs at 8:30 on Bop-TV, and works similarly (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0087501/).

CHAPTER 3

1. It is difficult to say with certainty the precise revenues that Viacom received from selling rights to *The Cosby Show* internationally, but a close examination of the company's financial reports from the time gives us a good sense of how profitable the show was. In the first two years of the show's run, revenues from foreign exports remained steady or fell slightly, but from 1986 until 1989, exports grew between 12.2 percent and 29.3 percent, totaling more than $20 million by decade's end. Of course, not all of these revenues can be attributed to sales of *The Cosby Show*, but the series was certainly the most popular international property owned by Viacom at the time (Viacom, 1985b, 1987, 1991).
2. In fact, in 1987 Viacom reported $770 million in unfulfilled domestic distribution contracts, owing chiefly to revenues from *The Cosby Show* that it was unable to collect because, although the contracts had been signed, the show had not yet reached a sufficient number of episodes to be released into syndication (Viacom, 1987).
3. Still, the main significance of the series' international popularity for Viacom probably had less to do with direct revenues and more to do with increasing the company's reputation as a successful international distributor at a time when global program markets were growing more lucrative.

CHAPTER 4

1. What is more, according to Cohen, the popularity of Moesha with teenagers allowed him to "platform" his sales or sell first to a smaller channel and, based on that success, sell to a larger channel. In this way, African American youth series such as Moesha and Fresh Prince allowed for more flexible sales approaches than earlier African American shows.
2. Durán's claim that there is no black population in Mexico is inaccurate. See, for example, Mitchell, 2008.

CHAPTER 5

1. This distinction within the African American community was popularized by the comedian Chris Rock's stand-up routine "Niggas vs. Black People," which aired in 1996 on the HBO special *Bring the Pain*.
2. Fox's *Cleveland Show* (2009–present) offers another contemporary example of "edgy" animation featuring African American characters traveling overseas. A spin-off of *Family Guy* (1999–present), created by Seth MacFarlane, *The Cleveland Show* focuses

on Cleveland Brown's return to his hometown and his struggles to make his second marriage work, as well as the challenges of integrating stepfamilies. The show's "edginess" comes from its gross-out humor, especially long-take vomit gags and sex jokes, as well as random references to eighties black styles, music, and popular culture. The show does not use the word "nigger" as liberally as does *The Boondocks* or *Chappelle's Show*, perhaps because the character who voices the main character is white, but the word does show up with some frequency. *The Cleveland Show* has appeared on Comedy Central branded channels and comedy channels across Europe, Asia, and Latin America.

3. I do not mean to suggest that all web series, or all web series produced by or addressing African Americans, are derivative of televisual aesthetics. Certainly a number of creative and smart web series are currently being produced. Aymar Jean Christian maintains a list of these series on his blog at http://blog.ajchristian.org/. However, the web has been inundated recently with television writers and producers seeking to get their series picked up by creating online buzz (Alemoru, 2010), and given their career aspirations and privileged access to wider distribution on television, the industry lore about how best to reach desirable viewers tends to transfer over from cable.

CONCLUSION

1. The narratives of these shows tend to deal with the political complexities of representing African Americans as street criminals by identifying potential black suspects, but exonerating them at the end, usually by arresting a corrupt white businessman, politician, etc.

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