**Native Americans**

Before Columbus arrived in the "New World" there were no Indians, and the only reason he called them Indians was because at first he thought he had landed in India. The indigenous peoples of North America certainly didn't call themselves Indians, and they did not even think of themselves as one people. At the beginning of European immigration, there were over 300 distinct Indian languages in North America. But through stereotyping, the White European imposed a collective identity upon the Indians. And it was in the process of being stereotyped by whites, that Indians began to think of themselves as one race. What it meant to be an Indian was defined by Whites and imposed upon Native Americans. Even the common names of Indian tribes -- Navajo, Sioux, Cheyenne, Blackfoot, etc. -- are usually the names whites gave them, and those names were rarely complementary.

Throughout American history, the perceptions of Native Americans changed in response to the natives' usefulness to whites. When the early colonists needed them to stay alive or help fight a war, the Indians were thought of as brave and noble savages. When the Indians got in the way and threatened the white man's plans, they were stereotyped as animalistic and bloodthirsty savages. The Indian, who had been important when trade and exploration were the keys to overseas involvement, became an inconvenient obstacle to settlement of the lands to the West.

During the course of the seventeenth century many Indians were forced to assimilate into white society. Over the years they became dependent upon the modern tools brought by the European -- the knife, gun, kettle, and fishhook. Gradually those Indians who stayed on the Eastern Seaboard lost their forest skills. Their culture slowly changed under the pressure of contact with the white European culture.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the West was considered a wilderness ripe for exploration and economic development, and the region's inhabitants were envisioned as part of a natural order to be overcome in the name of progress. To justify their violent acts against the Indians, Americans created a self-justifying rationalization: as inferior beings, Indians were destined to vanish off the face of the earth.

The stereotype of the hostile savage helped decrease a sense of guilt, which happened when men whose culture was based on the concept of private property embarked on a program to dispossess another group of people of their land. Having created the conditions in which the Indian could only respond violently, Americans defined the native as brutal, beastly, savage, and barbarian and then used that as a justification for the genocide that followed.

**Latinos**

Hispanics have been portrayed by the media as lazy, unintelligent, greasy, criminal, and alien. Their contributions culturally, economically, and historically have never been properly documented or appreciated. Instead, Hispanics in general, and American Hispanics in particular, have been the victims of racist stereotyping in an unbroken string of images and portrayals that began with the battle over Mexican land in the Southwest as America expanded during the frontier era.

In the United States, especially in the Southwest, “Manifest Destiny” meant taking land from Mexico, displacing Mexican landowners, conquering the natives, and exploiting them as cheap and expendable labor. In order to rationalize the displacement of the Southwest Hispanics, as they had done with American Indians in the East, Latinos—whether U.S. citizens, newly arrived migrants from the south, or Latin Americans in their own countries—were thought of as lesser humans.

During the California Gold Rush, as many as 25,000 Mexicans arrived in California. Many of these Mexicans were experienced miners and had great success mining gold in California. Some Whites believed their success was a threat and began intimidating Mexican miners with violence. Between 1848 and 1860, at least 163 Mexicans were lynched in California alone.

An anti-Mexican law enacted in 1855 in California was thinly disguised as an anti-vagrancy statute but commonly known as The Greaser Act. The law defined a vagrant as "all persons who are commonly known as 'Greasers' or the issue of Spanish and Indian blood... and who go armed and are not peaceable and quiet persons." The law was repealed a few years later.

In the 1940s, imagery in newspapers and crime novels portrayed Mexican American zoot suiters *(a type of suit that became very popular and was worn by many Latino youths)* as criminals. Anti-zoot suiters sentiment began a series of attacks on young Mexican American males in Los Angeles, which culminated in what became known as the Zoot Suit Riots. During the worst of the rioting approximately 5,000 servicemen and civilians gathered in downtown Los Angeles and attacked Mexican-American zoot suiters and non-zoot suiters alike.

Hollywood operates on stereotypes as a shorthand way of defining characters in ways that are easy for audiences to identify and digest. But a steady diet of negative stereotypes as portrayed in the media can be very destructive to young people if there are also very few positive role models that they can identify with.

**Asians**

Between 1850 and 1930, about one million Asians from China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and India came to the United States. But by the second half of the 19th Century a backlash had developed. Asian immigrants and the assimilation of Asians into society was said to pose, "the greatest threat to Western civilization and the white race" and increasingly restrictive laws were passed, first to keep Asians out of the skilled trades, then to restrict further immigration, and later to end all Asian immigration…

Chinese men were stereotyped as degenerate *(having low moral standards; not honest, proper, or good)* heroin addicts whose presence encouraged gambling and other immoral activities. In what became known as the Chinese Massacre of 1871, Chinese-occupied buildings were ruined and residents were attacked or robbed in Los Angeles' Chinatown by an angry mob of over 500 Whites. The county coroner confirmed 19 Chinese deaths at the hands of the mob and some estimates put the number of deaths at 84. In 1872, all ethnic Chinese were barred from owning real estate or business licenses in California…

During the late 19th Century and early parts of the 20th, anti-Asian sentiments were very common. The anti-Asian movement led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and Gentlemen’s Agreement (with Japan) of 1907, both of which severely limited immigration from Asia. In the 1920s politicians responded with the Japanese Exclusion Act and the American Immigration Act, limiting the number of Asian immigrants because they were considered an "undesirable" race…

At the height of anti-Asian sentiment during World War II, the United States imprisoned over 100,000 American citizens of Japanese descent *(ancestry)* in internment camps. At the same time, the Japanese-American 442nd Infantry Unit was fighting in Europe. These soldiers served with uncommon distinction, earning more combat decorations per man than any other unit in American history. Veterans returned home after the war to a country that was openly hostile to those of Asian descent.

This hostility was reflected in film, where clear stereotypes began to emerge defining ethnic lines of “good” Asians and “bad” Asians on film in response to Japan’s role in the war. Predictably, Asian Americans actors would spend most of the war years cast as sinister Japanese, often in films now viewed with some embarrassment. There were still “good Asian” roles being written–but they were restricted to Caucasian actors while Asian Americans played the villains.