



The Contribution of Races to the Creation and Development of the United States of America in the Documentary Miniseries *America: The Story of Us*

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Every year, countless of articles, essays, theses, dissertations, encyclopedias, and other written papers, along with many audio and video materials aiming to inform the general public and scholars on the history of the United States of America, are generated. Produced to fill a void or to participate in the intellectual debate over specific subjects, these works sometimes shed new light on some events of the American history, confirming these very events and their impact on the course of history, or contradicting them, by providing new information often dug out from newly found or re-examined archive documents. Historians contemporary to the American Revolution did not know, for example, that Culper, Jr., one of the most active spies in George Washington's spy ring during the Independence war, was actually Robert Townsend, a man the British could not suspect of any seditious activity in favor of Washington's army as he was known to them as a British loyalist, "a member of the loyalist militia [who] writes for the loyalist press" (*America: The Story of Us*). This information was only discovered in 1939, that is, more than a century after the end of the war (*America: The Story of Us*) and it is now opening some new doors of investigation about the true story of that particular historical era.

With this example, and the many more that are accounted for every time new findings are unearthed, history appears as a dynamic field whose conclusions can eventually be altered or refined after prudent research has been conducted. This is, by the way, an accepted fact in the field as history is perpetually enriched by the different narratives and interpretations that each historical fact receives. In fact, "history relies on historiography, the study of history and its changing interpretations" (Couvares et al. 3). Where Puritans' contemporaries saw them as "the torchbearers of religious liberty and political freedom –brave pioneers of American democracy" (Couvares et al. 25), for example, Progressive historians viewed these very Puritans as insincere and intolerant (Couvares et al. 26). These two positions are undoubtedly conflicting in nature; and yet, they give a wider picture of who Puritans actually were. Recent



research does indeed confirm that Puritans had strong religious convictions. But, as expressed by James Truslow Adams, the religious dogma they lived by could not have led to a democratic environment as Puritans “repressed private choice and were intolerant in public life of any deviation from the ruling orthodoxy” (Couvares et al. 26).

As shown in the example above, both pro and anti-Puritan historians were concerned with some specific, though different, aspects of the Puritans’ lives. As a consequence, they employed divergent methodologies and narratives to get their ideas across. The firsts were specifically concerned with highlighting the grandeur of the spiritual enterprise undertaken by these devout Christians in the New World. The second, on the other hand, underscored what they believed to be the economically-motivated actions of these religious people while they were administering their territories in America. In sum, each of these two schools of thought narrates history with strong personal influences.

It is true that narrating history involves a certain degree of subjectivity as the narrator can be influenced by such elements as his or her own social background and status, race, ethnicity, prior education, etc (Couvares et al. 2-3). However, these human factors do not impair the reliability of history if “the historian remains faithful to the evidence and determined to test the accuracy and the adequacy of every historical account” (Couvares et al. 3). In fact, to avoid debates and conflicting interpretations, historians and researchers such as Ellen Swartz, Howard Zinn, and Andrea McArdle, to name a few, insist on the importance of not being biased when relating historical events. Concerning the issue of race that the present study intends to approach, this caution is important because when concealing, or distorting the truth to suit their ideological tenets, historians driven by Eurocentric views, for example, often give a subjective interpretation to racial minorities’ actions in the country while presenting European settlers, and Whites, in general, as the sole providers of progress and history.

“Whose version of history will this be?” (Garron) was the question some critics and historians asked themselves when the television channel *History Channel* advertised the future broadcast of *America: The Story of Us*, its twelve-part documentary miniseries on the history of the United States from its early days to the present. Their curiosity was finally quenched when the documentary premiered on April 25, 2010, in the United States of America. Like many historical documents about the U.S., it gives an extended account to the deeds of most of the individuals credited by the majority of Americans to have helped shape the country. In this register, such facts as the Pilgrims’ epic crossing of the Ocean and their



struggle to survive on a new land, George Washington's role as the Commander-in-chief of the Continental army facing the British Redcoats, Abraham Lincoln's election and its aftermath, the Lewis and Clark expedition, among other things, are fully covered, and their importance for the American history, emphasized.

But the documentary miniseries does not stop there. It also gives a detailed account of the contribution of such people as Prince Estabrook, an African American, Crispus Attucks, a mulatto of Native American, European, and African descent, and Sacagawea, a young Native American girl, to name only these three figures who also found themselves at the heart of events that either led to the birth or to the subsequent development of the United States of America. Introduced through live re-enactments or with the support of computer-generated images that give the documentary miniseries a certain visual attractiveness, these people, and many more, are also presented to the United States, and the whole world, as iconic figures of the American history.

The present article aims to show that the documentary miniseries *America: The Story of Us* does more than simply harping on about all the already known and generally accepted icons of the American history. It intends to demonstrate, after analysis of each of the episodes that are articulated around the manifest celebration of the American ingenuity, that one of the implicit objectives of the documentary miniseries is encapsulated in the word "us" present in its title. "Us," here, is examined under the paradigm of the inclusive contribution of all the races to the birth and development of the United States of America with an emphasis on the role played by racial minorities in this historical undertaking.

The study also shows that the document miniseries deconstructs and reinterprets the history of the United States of America by putting racial minorities and ordinary people at the heart of the unfolding American history, contrary to the peripheral role Eurocentric historians often give them. Analysis of these minorities' contribution are thus carried out in light of the theory of *deconstruction* as it is understood by *Poststructuralists* and with the support of views held by *new social historians*. To do so, both commented and uncommented reenacted historical facts in the documentary that help shed light on the constructive role played by each race are examined and interpreted in the present article.

I. The Inclusive Character of "Us" in the Birth of the United States of America



Semantically, “us” is a pronoun that relates to the presence of at least two people. Thus presented, it can be asserted that it bears an inclusive character as it derives from the addition of one, or many more elements, to an initial one. In the case under study, it symbolically stands for the addition of all the American citizens, at the exclusion of none. More importantly, the pronoun “us,” here, represents the interconnection of all the experiences lived by all the races that make up the American racial salad bowl. Similarly, it advocates the acknowledgement of each and every citizen’s achievement, no matter what their races are.

“US” also stands for the United States. Consequently, the title of the documentary miniseries leaves no room for any hidden interpretation. It clearly suggests instead that the story of the United States of America is a shared heritage that has benefitted from the contribution of all the people and races that have peopled it since its early days to today.

Conceptually, *America: The Story of Us* draws upon literary and history theories that permit to analyze history from an inclusive standpoint. Two of them are the *new social history* theories that emerged towards the end of the 1960s and *Poststructuralism* that arose at the beginning of the 1980s. Based on an interdisciplinary approach, the *new social history* theories are concerned with studying and helping people to understand the social role played by such groups as gays and women and historically marginalized minorities in the United States of America. Poststructuralism, and precisely the notion of deconstruction conveyed by a theorist like Jacques Derrida, is also perceived in the documentary miniseries under study. All through its different episodes, indeed, the history of the United States is presented from a perspective that does not make the Caucasian the center of the story, as Eurocentric historians typically assert. In *America: The Story of Us*, races that have often been left at the periphery of history, namely Native Americans, Asian Americans, and African Americans are also given exposure and are presented as being at the center of the unfolding history.

For years, indeed, many history books have denied certain races their participation in the creation of the United States of America. Their contents have often only underscored Eurocentric ideologies, emphasizing exclusively Europeans’ undertakings in the New World instead of giving a complete and balanced account of what each race has accomplished for the good of all (Swartz 341). The same biased views are to be found in some curricula designed for American public schools for years (Loewen 137). In these school materials intended for



grade schools, master scripts underplay or distort minority races' achievement, at best, or ignore them altogether (Loewen 137).

Unlike the history materials and school textbooks mentioned above, *America: The Story of Us* approaches historical events with a much different attitude towards racial minorities. The first example of the commitment of its producers to deconstruct the history of the United States of America as it has been told for decades and reinterpret it comes in the acknowledgment of the contribution of Native Americans, Asian Americans, and African Americans to the building of the nascent country. This point is exemplified by the unequivocal assertion of the role and status of the newly arrived Africans in the New World. Though the first reference to these Africans in the documentary series introduces them as slaves, as most history books do, the documentary quickly goes on to underscore their active role in the establishment of the new colonies. This is illustrated by Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. of Harvard University when he says: “Twelve years after the founding of Jamestown, Africans were playing a shaping role in the creation of the colonies” (*America: The Story of Us*). This episode equally mentions the landowner status of some of these Africans in Virginia, just a few years after they landed on the shores of Jamestown (*America: The Story of Us*).

Asserting the decisive role played by Africans at the onset of the American history, years before the colonies were even known as the United States of America, is critical and notable information. Indicating that some of these Africans –even though their number was marginal– owned “their own land in Virginia” (*America: The Story of Us*) is equally important and is in a break with the history of slavery as it is often told. Indeed, such a precision about this particular condition of the first Africans to have ever arrived in the New World is often not provided in history books, let alone documents conveying Eurocentric ideologies such as the ones held by White Supremacists, for instance (Swartz 341). It is only with the birth of the New Social History movement, and particularly the creation of its Black or African American history subfield, that such information has started to be made public (Couvares et al. 274). By disclosing it, *America: The Story of Us* is thus conveying the idea, like new social history does, that attention has been directed towards “slave narratives, diaries of farm wives and artisan workers, letters and articles in obscure newspapers, broadsides and pamphlets, court and police records, institutional memoranda and reports” (Couvares et al.



16), and that “these and many other sources [have consequently given] up their secrets” (Couvares et al. 16).

The very mention of Crispus Attucks, the first casualty on the road to independence, is also an acknowledgement of African Americans’ contribution to the birth of the U.S. in *America: The Story of Us*. This fact is important because Crispus Attucks’s heroism in front of the Redcoats and his determination to defend the prerogatives of his colony are often overlooked by many historians. This negligence and many more are underscored by Clinton Cox’ book entitled *Come All You Brave Soldiers: Blacks in the Revolutionary War*, for example. Exclusively presented under racially-biased terms after being the first casualty at what is known as the Bloody Massacre or the Boston Massacre, Crispus Attucks is tagged by such historians as Hiller Zobel, John Phillip Reed, and Thomas Bailey, who happened to be the president of the Organization of American Historians, as a mere slave, a rioter, and a hooligan (McArdle 103). John Adams, the then defender of the soldiers responsible for the bloodshed that took place that day on King Street, also made use of the same terminologies, trying to make Attucks appear as a murderous mulatto (McArdle 55) troubling the “‘respectable’ Bostonians” (McArdle 56). By saying so, John Adams and the supporters of this line of thought deprive Attucks of his American citizenship, excluding him from the American community that was being built. They even go as far as to blame him for the whole carnage (McArdle 56). In *America: The Story of Us*, none of these words is ever used to qualify Crispus Attucks. In fact, Attucks is straightforwardly referred to as an “African American;” which restores him in his membership of the burgeoning American citizenship.

Also, *America: The Story of Us* indicates that African Americans were present when gunshots were heard at the Lexington showdown between the town’s militia and the British army in spring, 1775. The documentary miniseries even goes on to specifically point out that some of these African Americans were free men and that they were in the number of the sixty militiamen who engaged in the face-off against the British army. Equally notable is the mention of one of them, Prince Easterbrook, as being the first person to get shot for the cause of independence when the Revolutionary War started. Like his African American and white counterparts, as the documentary indicates, he was a regular member of the town’s militia, a volunteer who was ready to fight and free his country from British dominion and exploitation.

Information such as the ones divulged above are in line with one of the new social historians’ objective which is to make public information relating to small social groups or



minorities whose history is often neglected or deliberately ignored. Like new social history that gives back to communities their past, be it glorious or not, *America: The Story of Us* strives to give a sense of pride and dignity to the whole African American populations. It does so by explicitly saying that these populations are partakers in the birth of the nation through their determination and sacrifice during the war of independence and that they are also American “Patriots.” This piece of information is important because most documents distort the historical truth by not mentioning any African American Patriot, as confirmed by Kate Salley Palmer in her book entitled *Almost Invisible: Black Patriots of the American Revolution*.

“Revolution,” the second episode of the documentary provides another piece of information that is also often absent from documents relating the American Revolution. As a matter of fact, this episode indicates that the outcome of the war, and therefore the future of the nascent country, would have been totally different if another African American contribution had not been made to the Continental army. Indeed, when smallpox entered the major rebel army’s camp at Valley Forge, George Washington’s sergeants resorted to an old African American knowhow that helped stop its spread. They applied a preventive treatment known to African slaves that consisted in inoculating to the healthy soldiers live viruses taken from the sick. As stated in the documentary, it was “one of the most daring experiments in US military history” (*America: The Story of Us*). And it paid off. Only a few people died as a direct result of this experiment. The rest of them developed immunity to the disease and were fit enough to continue to drill and prepare for battle under the command, or with the support, of scores of newly arrived European immigrants who joined their cause.

Credit is indeed given to these new immigrants who joined the rebel army’s ranks for a number of reasons. They were an important part of the 60% of Washington’s ragtag army’s recruits that the documentary miniseries said to be made up of “convicts, free slaves, and immigrants.” These new recruits’ role in the War of Independence is noteworthy but is nowhere close to that of Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben who played a pivotal role in the transformation of George Washington’s inexperienced rebel army into a skilled one. A former captain of the Prussian army himself, he formed the first elite corps of the American army to whom he imparted a new fighting spirit and attitude, taught close combat, the efficient use of the bayonet, the importance of maintaining weaponry, and



hygiene, among other things. The newly trained soldiers were, in turn, entrusted the mission to train sections of the army put under their command (*America: The Story of Us*).

In the end, the rebels prevailed and freed the United States of America from the British Crown.

Native Americans' contribution to the birth of the United States of America, too, is underscored in the documentary. The Pokanoket tribe from the Wampanoag Nation, in particular, is acknowledged for the help they provided the Pilgrims with during the harsh winter of 1621. Also, contrary to many history documents that only account for the context that gave birth to the first Thanksgiving celebration, *America: The Story of Us* informs the general public that the contribution of Native Americans was instrumental to the very survival of the first colonies and their subsequent development and expansion. In fact, with the period of peace that came about between the Wampanoag and the Pilgrims, came “a period of prosperity that would transform America” (*America: The Story of Us*). Here, too, following new social history methodology which consists in reporting whatever information is dug out from neglected sources, the documentary restores Native Americans in their humanism by quoting Edward Winslow, one of the chroniclers of the Plymouth colony. Praising their good heart, he said that they had found “the Indians to be very faithful in their covenant of peace with us [...]. They are very trusty, quick of apprehension, ripe-witted and just” (*America: The Story of Us*).

II. The Contribution of Racial Minorities to the Development of the United States

Expansion to new territories of the country after independence was won from the British greatly benefited from Native Americans' collaboration and good knowledge of these lands, even though this was done at their expense. The Meriwether Lewis and William Clark expedition that “helped to frame US expansion into the American West” (Richards 4), for example, would not be successful had it not been for the support of the Native American tribes they met during their voyage. One person in particular participated in avoiding the failure of the expedition: Sacagawea. When faced with incalculable dangers during their perilous journey, as stated by the narrator in *America: the Story of Us*, the group survived. The narrator goes on to say that “they owe their survival to a sixteen-year old Native



American girl. Sacagawea, of the Shoshone nation, guides them, finds wild food, and saves their precious million-word journal from an overturned canoe” (*America: the Story of Us*)

By giving credit to this Shoshone girl for the success of the Lewis and Clark expedition, *America: The Story of Us* takes an unequivocal stance on a subject that often sparks harsh debates among historians. Indeed, Sacagawea is often denied a leading role in this exploratory mission commissioned by President Thomas Jefferson at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Many historians assert that Lewis and Clark probably knew more of the landscape than she did. Nelson, for example, contends that her presence was only useful “on two occasions, when they were passing through country she remembered from childhood” (10). In the end, however, the expedition she took part in, along with an African American who is shown in the film but whose name is not mentioned, permitted to gather a wealth of information that helped advance science and agriculture. The expedition also “uncovered the route to the most valuable commodity: beaver” (*America: the Story of Us*). The abundance of that animal and its profitability would soon lead to the birth of a whole new breed of frontiersmen and American heroes. It is that perceptible contribution to the expedition, and to American history in general, that is brought to the fore in *America: the Story of Us*. Here again, it is “the Indian point of view [which] was, for more than two centuries after Jamestown, of little concern to historians” (Couvares et al. 61) that is conveyed.

Jedediah Smith, also known as Jed. Smith, is one of the hunters that followed in the paths of the Lewis and Clark expedition, taking advantage of the knowledge Native Americans had of the lands he ventured on. In fact, he would not have been successful in his hunting and commercial enterprise had he not understood the importance of collaborating with Native Americans. This decision he made, the narrator in the documentary comments as being a “smart” one. To ensure maximum security for himself and his companions, he even took a Native American on his team. As a result, the Crow helped him navigate through the wilderness. The narrator in the documentary says that they “show him ancient shortcuts, sell him horses, [and] nurse his sick men back to health” (*America: The Story of Us*). By and large, they taught him “wilderness survival” (*America: The Story of Us*). Jed. Smith “died a rich man” (*America: The Story of Us*) after having taken full advantage of the knowledge displayed by the Native Americans and having coupled it with his own abilities. He, too, opened up routes for more frontiersmen who would soon push on further West (*America: The Story of Us*).



Roads sure permitted Americans to move further west, but this westward expansion would soon be accelerated by the transcontinental railroad Abraham Lincoln decided to revive and finish. Because it required an important manpower, the construction of the railroad saw the introduction of thousands of Chinese in to the United States of America. More than any other race present, they sacrificed their lives to make this project a reality. About 1,500 of them died as a result of the blast of these volatile explosives or after having been crushed down by rockslides. Many more got maimed or badly wounded by the time the railroad joined the East to the West (*America: The Story of Us*). Chinese were predominantly called upon because it was easier to ship them from China than transport thousands of Americans from the territories on the East. They were also more profitable than the local manpower as their pay was a fraction of that of the Irish immigrants or Civil War vets embarked on that engineering challenge for the time (*America: The Story of Us*).

In “Heartland,” the sixth episode of the documentary, former African American slaves are shown moving west after the issuance of the Homestead Act. They, too, owned lands and helped develop that part of the country and the Great Plains. As such, they were pioneers and frontiersmen among whom some ended up becoming cowboys. Indeed, “One out of three cowboys is Hispanic or African American” (*America: The Story of Us*); a fact so often overlooked by history books that the general public has no idea about, as underscored by Professor Henry Louis Gates in the documentary. And yet many of the thousands of African Americans who had just recovered their freedom and left southern states in direction of Texas found a job as cowboys (*America: The Story of Us*) and helped feed America. They convoyed millions of cattle from Texas to towns like Abilene and Dodge City in Kansas and Ogallala in Nebraska (*America: The Story of Us*).

Also significant is the active participation of many Native Americans, and particularly the Mohawks, to the construction of the skyscrapers that sprung up during the Gilded Age (*America: The Story of Us*). This information is to be found in “Cities,” the seventh episode of the documentary. Skilled workers nicknamed “roughnecks” for their lack of fear when working hundreds of feet above the ground, they erected the steel structures and glass and concrete outer layers of the tallest buildings that had ever existed in the country. With the population growth and the mastery of the mass production of steel by Andrew Carnegie came an increased demand for high buildings and Native Americans’ know-how. Thus, many of the



American Indians found themselves at the heart of the construction of the cities of the modern United States of America.

The contribution of minority races such as the Native Americans, Chinese Americans and African Americans has also always been felt at the cultural, gastronomic, scientific, intellectual, and sports level. The Joe Louis and Max Schmeling boxing episode represents an important example that backs this last point. The first fight between them took place on June 19, 1936 and got the attention of fifty-seven million listeners around the world (*America: The Story of Us*). Joe Louis, the African American symbolized democracy and a multicultural America, and Max Schmeling, the German embodied Nazi's totalitarianism and Aryan racial exclusion. The fight saw the victory of Max Schmeling which came to be seen as the victory of the rising German superpower against America as a whole. Considered as the "most politically charged fight of all time" (*America: The Story of Us*), the rematch brought the whole American nation together. As commented by Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., it "cemented the unity of the people of the United States." Thus, "for one of the first times, if not the first time in American history," Gates pursued, "America symbolically was being represented by a Black." Joe Louis won, and America jubilated and felt the bonds of unity on that day of June 22, 1938. In the country, seventy million of Americans had listened to the rematch on their radio (*America: The Story of Us*).

Two years after this boxing feat that resonated all through the world, African Americans would once again step up to save democracy and the prestige of their country. After Pearl Harbor was hit early in the morning of December 7, 1941, by Japanese zero aircrafts, many African Americans enlisted and fought on all fronts when the United States entered World War II. Hundreds of them would lose their lives on June 6, 1944, a day to be remembered as the Normandy landing, or D-Day (*America: The Story of Us*). Thousands more would not make it home alive among the one million who were drafted (*America: The Story of Us*). Back home, the multiracial America was participating in the war effort by manufacturing airplanes, tanks, general purpose vehicles also known as jeeps, ammunition, helmets, and everything that was used by the American troops and their allies on battlefields (*America: The Story of Us*).

All through the documentary miniseries, this contribution of the racial minorities to the development of the United States is asserted with the support of reenacted historical



scenes and computer-generated images that reinterpret some particular parts of the American history.

III. The Use of Cinematic Techniques to Revisit the History of the United States

America: The Story of Us is a picturesque acknowledgment of the contribution of all the races, and especially minorities, to the construction and development of the United States of America. This is first vividly exemplified by the very presence of President Barack Hussein Obama, the first African American president the United States has ever had since its creation, at the opening of the documentary. This introductory scene with this black president announcing the documentary is a symbol all of its own as it sets the tone for an important visual representation of all the minorities.

For decades, indeed, the members of the racial minorities have been underrepresented and misrepresented in mainstream media (Ward 284). The documentary miniseries *America: The Story of Us* takes the opposite approach and shows Native Americans, Asian Americans and African Americans at numerous stages of the story. The supporting narration of each of the scenes portraying some of the well-known and not-so-well-known members of these racial minorities also helps to understand their contribution to the development of the US. In the very short trailer that repetitively introduces each of the twelve main parts of the miniseries, for instance, Harriet Tubman of the Underground Railroad is portrayed as a freedom fighter; a laudatory term that only the new social historians, and particularly their African-American counterparts, are susceptible to make use of. This Harriet Tubman scene is itself immediately followed by the portrayal of Americans who would stop at nothing in their pursuit of a better life. Among the faces present in this very scene is that of the runaway slave and whaler, John Thompson, backed by the following narration: “We transform our dreams into the truth, our struggles to become a nation” (*America: The Story of Us*).

The scenes mentioned above have all been shot according to a specific cinematic technique called “the art of the frame” (Yahnke) which permits to put the members of these minorities at the center of the historical actions they took part in. Indeed, each of the parts of the documentary miniseries in which some members of the racial minorities are present in is carefully framed or composed so that they can be seen. And this visibility is everywhere, from the very first scenes of the documentary to the twelfth and last episode entitled “Millennium.”



The position of actors at any part of the different shots determines indeed their relative importance in the scene being reenacted. Close-ups and extreme close-ups, for example, are a powerful tool for underscoring the significance of a character and his impact on the unfolding story. They are also used to elicit viewers' emotions and their adhesion to the story being told, to the history being reenacted (Yahnke). In *America: The Story of Us*, close-ups of the actors representing some of the key historical figures are to be found in all the twelve episodes of the miniseries. Even the brief introductory trailer makes use of them.

Flashbacks are also profusely used in the whole documentary miniseries. Consisting in bringing back or showing again past scenes that help understand present ones, they give a lot of exposure to the contribution of the racial minorities all through the documentary. They also establish a kind of cause and effect relationship between the past and the present. In "Superpower," the eleventh episode of the documentary, a flashback endeavors to recapitulate an important chunk of African Americans' notable deeds and also point out all the pain this minority has gone through for centuries because of the color of their skin. As such, this part acts as a catharsis whose goal is to raise the viewer's awareness of a collective wrong that befell this minority and to expiate what the documentary considers as a scar on the face of the American history. This flashback clearly seeks to right a wrong by reaffirming the shameful nature of slavery and, more importantly, insist on the essential role African Americans have always played in the prosperity of the United States of America.

The use of the indirect interview technique that consists in having the interviewee speak about a topic while the interviewer is neither heard nor seen is also a cinematic technique that gives the message conveyed by the documentary a certain strength and reliability (Yahnke). In *America: The Story of Us*, such people as Margaret Cho, Ieoh Ming Pei, and Vera Wang, all from Asian descent, Sean "Diddy" Combs, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Annette Gordon-Reed, John Legend, Colin Powell, Al Sharpton, Michael Anthony Strahan, from the African American community, Soledad O'Brien who shares both Cuban and Australian descent, and Robert Warrior who is a Native American, were thus offered the possibility to freely speak to the viewer and express their views on some particular episodes of their country's history. Like Richard Norton Smith, Jimmy Wales, David Petraeus, Al Camarillo, and Donald Trump, their fellow citizens from the white community, they highlighted the multiracial nature of the United States since its early days, emphasized the



contribution made by all the races to build the nation, acknowledged and regretted the collective wrongdoings and praised the American ingenuity.

The narration style promoted by the voiceover narrator is also supportive of the idea that minorities' contribution should not be downplayed or ignored. Even information that might appear trivial is related so as to show how important racial minorities' contribution to the development of the U.S. was. For instance, the name of the inventor of a state-of-the-art harpoon is apparently not important. But by stating that it was invented by the runaway slave Lewis Temple, credit is thus given to African Americans whose work in the whaling industry made the American industrial revolution possible (*America: The Story of Us*). Indeed, as stated in the documentary, everything at that time ran on oil. Both domestic lighting and the burgeoning factories depended on it (*America: The Story of Us*). Also, the whaling activity became profitable to a point that it yielded a staggering “eleven million dollars a year” (*America: The Story of Us*) to the economy of the North at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Conclusion

America: The Story of Us is a strong advocate of the participation of all the races, and particularly of minority races, to the birth and construction of the United States of America to this day. With the support of live reenactments, historical archive pictures and computer-assisted images, the documentary miniseries exposes the accomplishments of some unknown, or partially known key figures of the American history such as Lewis Temple and John Thompson, two former African American slaves, whose activities in the whaling industry participated in pushing the country into the modern industrial era. The contribution of thousands of anonymous members of the racial minorities is also accounted for. This is evidenced by each scene of the documentary in which they are symbolically represented by actors belonging to their respective racial groups.

America: The Story of Us also sheds a new light on some of the episodes of the American history by either reinterpreting them or providing information that underscore the pivotal role played by some members of the racial minorities. The help the Wampanoag provided the Pilgrims during the 1621 winter did not just lead to what is known today as Thanksgiving. In the documentary miniseries, the viewer is told that the harmony that was



established between these two communities led to the Pilgrim's prosperity and to a much bigger territorial expansion of the latter. The important exposure of African Americans in the different wars the country was engaged in, and particularly World War II, is also an attempt to set the record straight and acknowledge their contribution.

In *America: The Story of Us*, history is thus presented without the racial bit that steers it towards a single race. The very presence of all the commentators and the nature of their comments make *America: The Story of Us* a documentary that underscores the idea of inclusiveness. Indeed, the intervention of Brian Williams, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Robert Warrior, Margaret Cho, who are respectively European American, African American, Native American, and Asian American, to name only these commentators, translates, in a symbolic way, the producers' will to acknowledge the role played by all the races at each major step of the life of the American nation.

Because *America: The Story of Us* is fraught with information relating to each race's contribution to the creation and development of the United States of America, further studies derived from this documentary miniseries could investigate them individually, focusing either on African Americans' contribution only, or on that of any other race. Such studies would bring more in-depth knowledge about what each community has actually brought to the country.

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