

## CHAPTER 5

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# Post-Apocalyptic Inequalities: Race, Class, Gender, and Sexualities in *Firefly*

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On September 20, 2002, many American television viewers tuned in to FOX Broadcasting Company and were greeted with the image of stars in a black sky. As the night sky shifted into images of a futuristic world, a calm voice explained:

After the Earth was used up, we found a new solar system and hundreds of new Earths were terraformed and colonized. The central planets formed the Alliance and decided all the planets had to join under their rule. There was some disagreement on that point. After the war, many of the Independents who had fought and lost drifted to the edges of the system, far from Alliance control. Out here, people struggled to get by with the most basic technologies; a ship would bring you work, a gun would help you keep it. A captain's goal was simple: find a crew, find a job, keep flying.

With these words,<sup>1</sup> viewers were introduced to *Firefly*, a post-apocalyptic science fiction narrative exploring the adventures of nine people sharing a spaceship and their lives in a new world. Although the television show only lasted for one season, *Firefly* expanded into a media franchise including, but not limited to, a major motion picture (titled *Serenity*, 2005), comic books, novels, role-playing games, and a dedicated fan base referred to as "browncoats."<sup>2</sup>

Echoing recent trends and enduring patterns in the science fiction genre, *Firefly*<sup>3</sup> offers a speculative portrayal of human existence following the destruction of Earth, and, in so doing, reveals an attempt to imagine a social

reality under different sociohistorical circumstances. Set on a variety of planets and moons in the year 2517, the series makes use of technological advances, social and natural environments, and mystical possibilities that lie beyond the realm of human experience and observation. Similarly, the events of the series rest at the end of an alternate timeline wherein humans render the earth uninhabitable, develop the technological ability to colonize and migrate to another solar system, and fight a massive war in the new solar system that results in the domination of all humankind by a central authority (named the Alliance) characterized by the integration of Chinese and American cultural traditions.

Despite the proliferation of similar narratives—including *I am Legend* (2007), *After Earth* (2013), *The Walking Dead* (2010), *The Hunger Games* (2012), *The Book of Eli* (2010), and *Battlestar Galactica* (2004–2009)—in recent years, the social implications of these narrative patterns have received little scholarly attention to date. This chapter examines some ways in which this post-apocalyptic narrative reproduces existing societal patterns of inequality. Specifically, we examine how *Firefly*, despite being a futuristic vision of a post-apocalyptic world, reproduced contemporary societal notions of race, class, gender, and sexualities that facilitate the ongoing subordination of racial and sexual minorities, women, and lower-class (especially rural) people. Although the ability to create a new world could have provided an opportunity to present a more progressive future, our analyses reveal that *Firefly* replicates and reinforces social inequalities by transplanting existing stereotypes, hierarchical social relations, and notions of imperialism into their post-apocalyptic environment.

Importantly, social scientists have long conceptualized media representations as “enabling conditions” for the reproduction of social inequalities.<sup>4</sup> Rather than explicitly causing phenomena, behavior, or patterns within society, media depictions reflect existing patterns of inequality in the environments wherein they are created. As a result, the production, content, and consumption of media may be used to justify and encourage racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist understandings of the way the world is or should be.<sup>5</sup> Critically evaluating the content and implications of media thus offers an important avenue for making sense of existing social inequalities, as well as potential mechanisms for progressive social change.

To this end, research convincingly demonstrates that a wide variety of media offerings often reproduce societal patterns of inequality. In her examination of daytime talk shows, for example, Collins<sup>6</sup> found that such shows reproduced the devaluation of lower-class people and racial minorities by depicting them as irresponsible parents, unfaithful and promiscuous romantic partners, and morally deficient beings. Similarly, Ezzell<sup>7</sup> found that mainstream pornography, “men’s” magazines, and popular video games often

valorized sexual violence against women and notions of manhood predicated upon asserting control over women. Further, researchers have found that even seemingly progressive depictions of minority groups may reproduce systems of inequality by, for example, presenting racial minorities as magical beings devoted to helping white people reach their potential,<sup>8</sup> feminizing gay male characters,<sup>9</sup> or encouraging girls to focus upon the needs of others and downplay their own goals.<sup>10</sup> Whereas these studies do not explicitly focus upon post-apocalyptic media, they do suggest that there may be much to learn by examining the ways in which these depictions subvert and/or reproduce societal patterns of inequality. Building upon these insights, we examine the representation of race, class, gender, and sexualities in *Firefly*.

### Racial Representations in *Firefly*

Superficial readings of *Firefly* could give viewers the impression of a racially progressive enterprise. By offering a series containing three people of color in primary roles and many examples of people of color in background settings, for example, the series offers more racial diversity in terms of casting than is common in mainstream media. In a similar fashion, the presentation of an interracial marital relationship within the main cast demonstrates recognition of the diversity of racial relationships in contemporary mainstream society. Whereas these representations are promising at the beginning of the series, a closer reading of the overall depiction of racial and ethnic relations reveals a tendency to rely upon and reproduce "controlling images"<sup>11</sup> that have long been used to facilitate and justify the subordination of people of color.

A notable example of such controlling images may be found in the portrayal of women of color as either overly masculine or highly sexualized. Zoe, a multiracial woman who serves as the first mate on the ship, for example, is typically depicted as a hypermasculine fighting machine (e.g., see her portrayal in the television show's opening credits) who often dominates her white male husband (e.g., see her argument with her husband concerning future offspring in episode 13) and is not even allowed an emotional reaction other than traditionally masculine reactions including anger, recklessness, and violence at the sight of her husband's death (see *Serenity*). In a similar fashion, the other woman of color in the main cast (named Inara and portrayed by a Brazilian American actress) plays the role of a "companion" (similar to a modern-day, high-end escort) wherein she is almost always dressed in a sexual manner, repeatedly referred to as a "whore" by the ship's captain, and often the site of white men's violence. Rather than fully formed characters capable of a broad spectrum of emotions and self-presentations, these characters are limited to longstanding racialized constructions of the "exotic lover" and the "overly masculine warrior woman."<sup>12</sup> Following Collins,<sup>13</sup> these controlling

images reproduce racial themes that justify the subordination (e.g., use for battle or sex) of racial minorities while bolstering existing sexual (e.g., moral sexual subjects do not sell access to their bodies) and gendered (e.g., women of color are not sexually passive and devoid of masculinity like white females) stratification systems.

Another example of these controlling images may be seen in depictions of the other racial minority in the main cast. Shepherd Book, an African American male, is constructed as a Holy Man with a complicated past who often provides spiritual and practical guidance to white crew members, rarely partakes in the battles, and is one of only two main characters to die (the other is the white male married to Zoe). While the portrayal of a spiritual man of color might seem unworthy of notice in isolation, Shepherd Book fits perfectly into a common media trope that researchers refer to as the "magical negro" (MN).<sup>14</sup> Especially popular in American media since the 1990s—see, for example, films like *Bruce Almighty* (2003), *The Green Mile* (1999), *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000), and *The Matrix* (1999)—the MN is usually a male person of color that exists within storylines for the sole purpose of helping white characters reach their true potential or navigate through times of personal turmoil.<sup>15</sup> Rather than providing an advancement in the social construction of racial minorities, such characters ultimately reproduce the subordination of racial minorities to the desires and dreams of white others, and provide white audience members with a "more comfortable" form of racial exploitation. Further, these depictions typically rely on the presentation of "good" or "moral" men of color as devoid of sexual and masculine development (Shepherd Book has no sexual plotline and stands in contrast to the more assertive white male characters), which reproduces sexual and gender hierarchies embedded within contemporary society.<sup>16</sup>

Importantly, Shepherd Book stands in stark contrast to the other two men of color that hold prominent speaking roles. Both of these characters (see episode 14 and *Serenity*) are presented as villains, and they reproduce widespread images of black masculinity predicated upon physical prowess and violence.<sup>17</sup> Not surprisingly, the white male captain of the ship ultimately defeats them both, albeit, in the case of the first character's defeat, with the assistance of a white female character. Further, the distinction between these two villains and the three people of color in the main cast also reproduces longstanding patterns of "colorism"<sup>18</sup> in American society, wherein lighter-skinned racial minorities like the three main characters are treated more favorably than darker-skinned racial minorities like the two villains. More than mere villains in a story, these characters echo the racial and color hierarchies within contemporary American society. Further, the presentation of black male villains echoes longstanding American fears about the potential

power and aggressiveness of men of color, and supports the oft-repeated theme regarding the ultimate victory of white masculinity.<sup>19</sup> Similar to the other controlling images noted above, the portrait of the villains ultimately serves to reinforce the combination of racial hierarchies and existing patterns of gender inequality.

### Social Class Representations in *Firefly*

Similar to the depiction of race in *Firefly*, the series' treatment of social and economic classes could initially be interpreted as somewhat progressive. For example, the villains tend to be either rich people benefiting from colonization or violent adversaries devoted to the pursuit of money. Considering that American media typically celebrate people that get rich via exploitation (e.g., the founding fathers of the United States) or through methods that have little to do with merit (e.g., many depictions of US presidents and leaders of industry), the portrait of all wealthy people as villains stands in stark contrast to existing norms, which may echo growing criticism of the concentration of wealth within 1% of the American population.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, *Firefly* echoes longstanding American appreciation for stories of self-made "men" who pull themselves up by their own bootstraps in the face of incredibly difficult odds. Specifically, the series focuses on the exploits of a group of heroes that, for the most part, would be considered "working class" in terms of cultural presentations, monetary possessions, and personal backgrounds. While the challenge against the power of rich people is once again promising on the surface, even if nestled within comfortable storylines about plucky heroes from the bottom strata fighting against corruption, the overall class representations offered in the series ultimately reproduce and implicitly justify existing economic inequalities.

Although the show's creators could have taken the opportunity to design an equitable economic structure created via peaceful means for their futuristic world, this is not the path they took. Instead, the series takes place within an Empire established through violent means and the colonization of other lands, worlds, and peoples. In fact, the form of imperialism represented in the show mimics our own world history by hoarding technological, monetary, and military resources within the central locations of the Alliance, while leaving the outer rims of the empire to make do with outdated and limited technology, weaponry, and economic resources. As scholars of socioeconomic status have long shown, such depictions, regardless of the creators' intentions, suggest that economic inequalities are natural, expected, and necessary parts of social life.<sup>21</sup> Further, such depictions reinforce the normalcy of violence, imperialism, and colonization by suggesting that these atrocities would likely

occur at any time and within any environment.<sup>22</sup> Rather than using artistic speculation to present the possibility of a more economically egalitarian world, *Firefly* thus asks viewers to accept economic inequalities as natural and inevitable manifestations of human experience.

Alongside the normalization of economic disparities and imperial governing structures, the series often reproduces existing economic class tensions by relying upon stereotypical depictions of upper and lower classes. In its representation of people on the outer planets, for example, the series draws upon cultural notions of “backward rednecks,” rural hostility and violence, and “quaint” small town traditions to define rural, lower-class people as utterly distinct from decent, economically prosperous folk (see, for example, episodes 1, 2, 6, and 7). Similarly, the series paints urban life as riddled with riches, style, and corruption wherein upper-class people automatically seek to abuse and oppress others (see, for example, episodes 2, 3, and 4, and *Serenity*). For example, the character of Simon, a white doctor raised in an upper-class home, often draws distinctions between the “rough” behaviors (e.g., drinking alcohol, engaging in lewd behavior, and using foul language) of the rest of the crew and the more “gentle” behaviors (e.g., engaging in conversation, valuing education, and having faith in people) of the people where he grew up. Echoing contemporary cultural distinctions between rich and poor, these representations thus reinforce and justify capitalistic beliefs concerning the inherent “difference” between economic classes of people.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, *Firefly* reproduces economic stratification by mirroring patterns of historical imperialism in their depiction of the Reeverers. Although the Reeverers are portrayed throughout the television series as violent savages that kill and eat other people, the companion film reveals that they became this way because of experiments conducted by the Alliance on the outer planets. Seeking to find a way to better control the working people of the empire, the Alliance tested chemicals that were supposed to reduce aggression in humans, but in so doing they killed the vast majority of test subjects and produced the hyperaggressive Reeverers. Similar to depictions of Native Americans, the Reeverers are basically deemed “savages” due to their response to the practices of their white overlords (i.e., experiments by the Alliance in the Reeverers case and mass extermination policies and relocation efforts in the Native American case).<sup>24</sup> Further, the use of Reeverers for medical experimentation echoes the experimental starvation, testing, and imprisonment of Native Americans (justified as a way to create a more docile and obedient Native population)<sup>25</sup> and experimental sterilization and drug-testing programs on African Americans (justified as a way to better control African American sexualities).<sup>26</sup> As such, the economic structure—as well as the imperial constructions of disadvantaged people—of *Firefly* recreates the sexual, economic, and racial

violence of our present in the construction of a potential future. In so doing, *Firefly* ultimately tells viewers that the structural violence that established contemporary capitalism, the separation of our world into industrial and nonindustrial sectors, and international patterns of racial disparities are common and predictable outcomes of world-building, and that they are likely to occur in all times and places.

In fact, *Firefly* does not use the Reeveres to address similar issues in our world. Instead, the Reeveres are depicted as unsalvageable others, sacrificed to the Alliance forces so that the main characters can escape from attacks, and not even mentioned in the closing lines of the story (see *Serenity*). Further, the story ends with the Alliance still in power, and without any further attempts by the main characters to spread awareness about the cruel and tragic backstory of the Reeveres. The atrocities of the past—much as they are in contemporary American history textbooks<sup>27</sup>—are only mentioned to further the storyline of the main (mostly white) characters who demonstrate shock and disgust at what happened to the Reeveres without actually accomplishing any meaningful change or dissemination of this information after the fact (see *Serenity*). As such, the violent exploitation of the Reeveres and the role of this mistreatment and oppression in the economic might of the Alliance are offered to the viewers without critique or resolution. While these elements could have been used to shed light on the exploitation at the foundation of our own economic system, *Firefly* instead uses them only for dramatic effect, and, in so doing, implicitly justifies and normalizes such devastating societal patterns, both in *Firefly* and in our world.

### Gender Representations in *Firefly*

In terms of gender, *Firefly* mirrors the patriarchal organization of contemporary American society. Following Johnson,<sup>28</sup> a society is patriarchal to the extent that it is male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered. Although all men will not have power over all women in such an arrangement, men typically dominate positions of power and authority, the valuable resources and attributes of society tend to be associated with men and masculinity, and the cultural focus tends to be on men and what men do.<sup>29</sup> *Firefly* reflects each of these patriarchal patterns while promoting a version of manhood characterized by men's control over the environment and others.

*Firefly* can be defined as male-dominated throughout its entirety. Despite the numerous female characters, men hold all of the prominent positions within the storyline, including the leaders of the Alliance, the captain and pilot of the ship, the only doctors and religious leaders ever mentioned, and the vast majority of military roles. Similarly, most of the camera time is taken

up by the endeavors of the ship's captain, and when the occasional dispute breaks out within the group, his word is the final authority that others must follow. As such, the futuristic universe presented in *Firefly* could be considered a patriarchy.<sup>30</sup>

Patriarchal arrangements also tend to be male-identified (i.e., arrangements where men and what men do are identified as the primary sources of value) and *Firefly* is no exception. During numerous sequences, for example, characters emphasize the importance of being tough, strong, and cool under pressure, which are qualities historically associated with masculinities and male bodies within the context of the American popular imagination.<sup>31</sup> Further, the series regularly defines men as powerful beings and equates power with men's control over the ships and planets, which are typically referred to by feminine pronouns. In fact, the impetus to demonstrate manhood by controlling feminine "things" is explicit at times. In episode 7, for example, a rich white male explains that his son is "not a real man" yet because he has not "had" a woman. Similarly, in episode 13, the primary villain of the episode marshals a fighting force while demonstrating what "a woman really is to a man" by having a female prostitute perform fellatio on him in front of the crowd. In these and other examples, *Firefly* consistently identifies power with men and men's bodies, and demonstrates this identification through men's control over feminine others.<sup>32</sup>

While *Firefly* explores the experiences of female characters at times, the overall focus of the series remains male-centered or fixed upon the endeavors of men. Throughout the entire storyline, men outnumber women in every scene except for episode 13, where the majority of the action takes place in a brothel. Similarly, there are entire episodes where the show primarily focuses upon specific male characters. In episode 10, for example, the plot revolves around two men (the ship's captain and pilot) fighting over a woman (the pilot's wife and the ship's first mate, Zoe), and in episode 14, the plot focuses upon a bounty hunter's search for River (a female crew member), which primarily involves him having an extended conversation with the ship's male doctor. Importantly, there were no complementary episodes where women were the primary focus of the plot or where women consumed most of the episode fighting about or searching for male characters. Episode 14 actually comes the closest, but since the entire story revolves around the attempts of one man (the bounty hunter) to wrestle control of River from another man (the ship's doctor), the episode ultimately reaffirms men's control of women. In fact, the greatest proportion of screen time for women involved them serving the needs of men (e.g., Zoe in relation to the ship's captain or the ship's companion with her clients), seeking the attention of men (e.g., the mechanic's crush on the doctor), or running away from men that wanted to harm



them (e.g., River seeking to escape the Alliance). As a result, *Firefly* presented a world for men where women typically played supporting roles.

This observation is especially striking since the show's creator (Joss Whedon) is often celebrated for creating shows with "strong" female characters. While many have debated this point, *Firefly* regularly demonstrates that some depictions of "strong" female characters may ultimately serve to reproduce patriarchal patterns. For example, *Firefly* offers "strong" female main characters like Zoe, a multiracial woman whose strength lies in military combat, but who serves at the pleasure of a male captain and exists within a limited depiction of black womanhood; Inara, a woman of color whose strength lies in the ability to sexually control men, but who also relies upon men for her value and protection; and Kaylee, a white woman whose strength lies in the ability to control the ship, but who spends most of her screen time chasing the affection of a man. In fact, episode 14 walks a similar tightrope wherein River demonstrates strength by outsmarting the bounty hunter, but does not actually handle his dismissal. Rather than leading him out of the ship and then pushing him into space herself, she leads him to the ship's captain who then dispatches him. Considering that either character could have pushed an unsuspecting person off of the ship, it is striking that the strong female character instead relies upon the strength of a male to accomplish this simple task. It becomes less notable, however, when viewed through the overall patriarchal depiction of gender throughout the rest of the series.

### Sexual Representations in *Firefly*

Alongside the elevation of men, patriarchal patterns of organization typically rely upon the devaluation of women and sexual minorities. Specifically, they are built upon foundational sexual beliefs that define women as objects for the pleasure and desire of males, and reserve masculine status, and the privileged social position that comes with it, for males capable of demonstrating heterosexual prowess.<sup>33</sup> In *Firefly*, this process is accomplished through the construction of female sexualities and the devaluation of sexual minorities. In so doing, *Firefly* reproduces sexual stereotypes that distinguish between overly sexual and asexual femininity, and that posit sexual minorities as separate from normative social relations.<sup>34</sup>

Echoing longstanding racial and sexual distinctions between pure, asexual femininity and sexually aggressive, promiscuous females,<sup>35</sup> *Firefly* presents the sexual habits of female main characters as either sexualized or desexualized. In the case of the white female crew members, the series presented innocent, shy, and timid women who either did not show any interest in sex (River) or demonstrated interest without the ability to acquire sex (Kaylee), and, in so

doing, essentially desexualized these characters. In contrast, the series portrayed the women of color in the main cast in a highly sexualized fashion, wherein one of them made her living from sex (Inara) and the other spent more time on screen having sex than any other character (Zoe). This twin process of sexualizing some women (especially women of color) and desexualizing others (especially white women) is part of a historical pattern wherein sexually aggressive women have been defeminized, attacked, and chastised while sexually passive women have been cherished, protected, and sought after to provide sexual services to dominant men.<sup>36</sup> Further, these depictions reinforce controlling images<sup>37</sup> of white women as pure beings in need of protection, and women of color as overly sexual beings that must be controlled.

The series also depicted sexual minorities in overly sexual ways in the few instances where the topic arose. In the case of the ship's companion (Inara), the series contained one episode (episode 10) where she provided services for a female client. During this episode, however, Inara's business is portrayed quite differently. Whereas Inara generally meets her clients away from crew members, the female client is escorted past the crew, who, in turn, react in shocked and sexually suggestive ways. Similarly, whereas Inara is generally only shown with her clients for a moment or two before and after their "business," this episode shows her working on the female client by giving her a massage and shows the two of them kissing. Although her experiences with male clients are primarily private, this plays up the sexual content of her experience with another woman for the benefit of both the rest of the crew and the (presumably) male audience.<sup>38</sup> *Firefly* thus reproduces social patterns wherein female sexual minorities are utilized to please male audiences.<sup>39</sup>

Alongside the aforementioned examples, women are often sexualized throughout the background of the overall story. In episode 13, for example, viewers are shown a visit to a brothel where Jayne (a white male crew member who often serves as the "muscle" of the group) and the ship's captain take advantage of the "services" offered. Importantly, the reactions of these two men mirror societal standards for masculine sexuality by having Jayne (the brutish, aggressive male character) jump at the chance for service and Mal (the masculine leader of the group) initially refuse service before giving in to his seemingly natural urges. In so doing, this depiction reinforces societal beliefs about the inherent and inevitable sexual desire of males, while also differentiating between the ways in which two stereotypes of men (e.g., powerfully aggressive workers versus more restrained and rational leaders) respond to such urges. In another storyline (see episodes 6 and 11), a former companion (a white female named Saffron) continuously uses her sexuality to manipulate, rob, and take advantage of men. In so doing, the storyline reflects long-standing societal notions that women's sexuality is not simply a matter of desire, but rather something women use to control and take advantage of men.<sup>40</sup>

Considering that there is no mention of Saffron actually wanting sex, this depiction defines her sexual prowess—rather than an aspect of her self or urges—as merely an instrumental weapon that may be used against the (supposedly) natural sexual desires of men.<sup>41</sup>

These patterns find their culmination in the limited depiction of sexual minorities aside from the aforementioned example of Inara. In fact, the only other explicit mention of sexual minorities' existence in the *Firefly* universe occurs in episode 13 when the proprietor of the brothel offers her "boys" to the ship's captain. With the classic uneasiness typically associated with homo- and biphobia, as well as heterosexual masculinity,<sup>42</sup> the captain quickly and emphatically informs her that he is not interested. The only other mentions of sexual minority experience occur within the context of homo- and biphobic jokes made by the primary male characters. In these scenes, as well as the scenes noted above, *Firefly* presents a futuristic world where heterosexuality remains dominant, homo- and bisexualities remain unnerving and worthy of ridicule, same-sex activity between females is sensationalized for the male gaze, and women's sexualities are still limited to a no-win decision between asexual purity and promiscuous disgrace. Despite the passage of over 500 years, it would thus appear that little progress has occurred in the realm of sexual relations.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, *Firefly* presents a futuristic, post-apocalyptic world wherein humans have migrated away from our current environment and built a brand-new civilization far from Earth. Rather than take the opportunity to construct a fresh new world with more progressive social and political structures, relationships, and norms, however, the series reflects and reproduces many of the problems contained within our current social arrangements. As a result, the future presented throughout the series bears greater resemblance to our current social problems than to an actual exercise in creativity. Specifically, *Firefly*, despite a few superficial suggestions of potential progress, reproduces racial, classed, gendered, and sexual stereotypes that facilitate the ongoing subordination of racial and sexual minorities, women, and lower-class people.

The case of *Firefly* reveals the importance of attending to the ways in which post-apocalyptic media may reinforce, justify, and reproduce existing social inequalities. Rather than simply creating a universe out of thin air, the people producing media draw upon the cultural beliefs, values, and ideals of their own experience, and, in so doing, may, regardless of their intentions, reproduce harmful patterns of action, ideas, and discourses within their works. These practices may in turn naturalize and normalize socially constructed patterns of oppression and privilege including, but not limited to,

racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and imperialism. Alternately, the people who produce media could be encouraged to use these opportunities to educate media consumers regarding existing and historical patterns of inequality, and to create representations of more progressive and equitable possibilities. Although media producers are in no way obligated and may have to risk financial resources to do so, such actions could bolster efforts toward social change instead of facilitating the ongoing subordination of minority communities. Since we all possess the power to decide what types of media we support, the responsibility falls upon each of us to make media consumption choices that encourage positive social change.

### Notes

1. It is important to note that subsequent iterations of the *Firefly* storyline have changed parts of this monologue and backstory. Further, readers should be aware that FOX aired the original episodes out of order, and, as a result, this "beginning" actually takes place at the beginning of episode 2 of the series.
2. "Browncoats" was a nickname given to soldiers on the Independents' side against the Alliance in the Unification War, which was subsequently adopted by the series' fan base in much of the media accumulated since the beginning of the series.
3. Throughout this chapter, we use the phrase "*Firefly*" to refer to the television series and the companion film, *Serenity*. While there are many other components within the overall franchise, we limited our analyses to these cultural artifacts.
4. See, for example, Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, Sixth edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010); Michael Schwalbe, *The Sociologically Examined Life: Pieces of the Conversation* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007); Michael Schwalbe, Sandra Godwin, Daphne Holden, Douglas Schrock, Shealy Thompson, and Michelle Wolkomir, "Generic Processes in the Reproduction of Inequality: An Interactionist Analysis," *Social Forces* 79 (2000): 419-452.
5. See also Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African-Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Laura Grindstaff and Joseph Turow, "Video Cultures: Television Sociology in the 'New TV' Age," *Annual Review of Sociology* 32 (2006): 103-125; Robert Jensen, *Getting Off: Pornography and the End of Masculinity* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).
6. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.
7. Matthew B. Ezzell, "Pornography, Lad Mags, Video Games, and Boys: Reviving the Canary in the Cultural Coal Mine," in *The Sexualization of Childhood*, edited by S. Oflman, 7-32 (Westport: Praeger, 2009).
8. Matthew Hughey, "Cinethetic Racism: White Redemption and Black Stereotypes in 'Magical Negro' Films," *Social Problems* 56 (2009): 543-577.
9. Thomas J. Linneman, "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Will Truman? The Feminization of Gay Masculinities on *Will & Grace*," *Men and Masculinities* 10 (2008): 583-603.

10. Kathleen E. Denny, "Gender in Context, Content, and Approach: Comparing Gender Messages in Girl Scout and Boy Scout Handbooks," *Gender & Society* 25 (2011): 27-47.
11. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.
12. Ibid. Also see Miguel Picker and Chyng Sun, *Latinos Beyond the Reel: Challenging a Media Stereotype* (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2012) for usage of this image especially in relation to Hispanic women.
13. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.
14. Hughey, "Cinethetic Racism."
15. Ibid.
16. See Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe, "Men, Masculinity, and Manhood Acts," *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009): 277-295.
17. Ibid.
18. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.
19. Ibid.
20. James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, Revised edition (New York: Touchstone Publishing, 2007).
21. Schwalbe, *The Sociologically Examined Life*.
22. Schwalbe et al., "Generic Processes in the Reproduction of Inequality."
23. Candace West and Sarah Fenstermaker, "Doing Difference," *Gender & Society* 9 (1995): 8-37.
24. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*.
25. Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (New York: South End Press, 2005).
26. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.
27. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*.
28. Allan G. Johnson, *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2005).
29. Schrock and Schwalbe, "Men, Masculinity, and Manhood Acts."
30. Johnson, *The Gender Knot*.
31. Michael Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (New York: Harper, 2008).
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999).
35. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.
36. Ibid.; Ezzell, "Pornography, Lad Mags, Video Games, and Boys"; Johnson, *The Gender Knot*.
37. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*.
38. Ezzell, "Pornography, Lad Mags, Video Games, and Boys."
39. Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*.
40. Kimmel, *Guyland*.
41. Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*.
42. Ibid.