



# ***THE BOONDOCKS:*** **ARCHETYPES OF BLACK MASCULINITY IN A WHITE WORLD**

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## **ABSTRACT**

With American society being dominated and shaped by White men, Black masculinity takes on new shapes and forms as Black men seek survival within their surroundings. Through *The Boondocks*, a comic strip that has been syndicated into a TV show, five different archetypes of Black masculinity take the spotlight through the main characters in a satirical world virtually void of Black women in emphasis of the dynamics of Black men. Huey is a revolutionary, Riley is a Hip-Hop culturist, Granddad is a conformist, Tom is a traitor, and Uncle Ruckus is self-hating. No two methods to survival in White suburbia are the same, but what is shared is the collective need for the survival of the Black community, in that the characters never stop looking out for each other regardless of the stark differences in how they express their Black masculinity.

*Keywords:* Blackness, TV series, animation, race, masculinity, comics, Black culture.

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Dominant cultures exist in any given society. These cultures hold systemic power and benefit from the society they exist within being molded and shaped to fit their needs best. In the context of Social Identity Theory (SIT), a dominant culture can be considered synonymous with an “ingroup,” whose members hold asymmetric power over those in the “outgroup,” (Tajfel 98–99). Consequently, members of the outgroup are subject to different kinds of discrimination exerted by the ingroup to maintain such power (Tajfel 98–99). American society is no exception to this. From being right-handed to being able to see, American inventions, policies, and norms are largely shaped for those belonging to the dominant cultures. Of America’s dominant cultures, two arguably reign supreme above the rest in terms of the benefits conferred: being White; and being a man. The intersection of these two main racial and gender ingroup identities results in White men holding the highest systemic power in the United States, and many American inventions, policies, and norms are shaped by and oriented toward White men. Consequently, the lives of those existing outside of either (or both) of the aforementioned dominant cultures can be marred with the struggle to find alternative spaces

to survive within. Black men embody a prime example of this struggle, being racially excluded from cultural dominance.

Mainstream masculinity in the United States is a set of qualities that is shaped by and for White men, going back as early as the founding of the country itself by an ingroup of White men. Thus, Black masculinity has continually been challenged to find ways to survive in a society that was not made for it. This paper argues that there is no one way for Black masculinity to counter the Whiteness of contemporary American society, and for every way that succeeds in doing so, an archetype of Black masculinity is born. The framework for these archetypes is based on the Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) and its relationship with SIT (Trepte and Loy 1). Each archetype embodies a social category, specific to Black masculinity; in response to the struggles inherent to outgroup membership in the United States, Black men further differentiate in their approach to social life and survival. This paper labels and highlights five of these archetypes: Revolutionary; Hip-Hop Culturist; Conformist; Traitor; and Self-Hating. These five archetypes can be examined best through the lens of Aaron McGruder's comic strip-turned-TV show, *The Boondocks*, focusing in particular on the first season of the animated show. By drawing on existing scholarship and analyzing each main character through the archetype of Black masculinity that they embody, and then analyzing how the archetypes interact with each other for survival, I will employ *The Boondocks* to show how Black masculinity survives in an American society and gender roles based on Whiteness.

## I. BACKGROUND ON *THE BOONDOCKS*

Created by African American cartoonist Aaron McGruder in 1996, *The Boondocks* was initially a syndicated comic strip published online, as well as in American newspapers up until 2006. It was adapted as an animated series of the same name, of which the first season aired in 2005 on Adult Swim, the adult programming section of Cartoon Network. As a TV series, *The Boondocks* also later found airtime on Black Entertainment Network (BET), and ultimately ran for four seasons concluding in 2014. Both the comic strip and the TV series serve as prominent mediums for McGruder's commentary and criticisms on Black popular culture, which—during the run of both the strip and the show—were oftentimes considered controversial. Several episodes were revised or cancelled altogether, and the comic strip was relocated within a newspaper publication to reduce visibility or withheld altogether due to controversial topics discussed (Krueger 313).

The transition from comic strip to TV series thrust *The Boondocks* into an even greater spotlight for its nuanced takes of Black popular culture in America, allowing it to spark conversation and debate amongst the masses. The TV series references notable moments in American history as well as current events, making it the perfect lens through which Black masculinity in the United States could be analyzed; *The Boondocks* bridges the roots of Black history in America with the state of Black masculinity in the early 21st century. This bridge is evident in the satire and clear references to popular culture and world events that are constantly

disseminated throughout the series. The show employs an entirely Black and entirely male main cast set in a wealthy White suburb. Such context can be read as an allegory for the position that the Black community often represents in America as an outgroup existing in tandem with the dominant White society. Through its main cast, *The Boondocks* details the variety of self-categorizations/archetypes that Black men may chose in response to their environment.

## II. HUEY FREEMAN — REVOLUTIONARY

Named and modeled after the revolutionary leader of the Black Panther Party, Huey P. Newton (1942–1989), 10-year-old Huey Freeman is the primary protagonist and often the narrator of *The Boondocks* (Tyree and Krishnasamy 320). He is “the founder of 23 radical leftist organizations, including the Africans Fighting Racism and Oppression, or A.F.R.O” (Tyree and Krishnasamy 32). Modeled after a Black nationalist, Huey is always looking out for the advancement of Black people and “[he] is very critical of many aspects of modern African American culture, politics, racism, elitism, socioeconomics, and other societal ills” (Tyree and Krishnasamy 32). In the very first episode of the first season, “The Garden Party,” Huey continuously experiences a prophetic dream of himself informing privileged White people of the oppression set upon the Black community. He is often alone in these pursuits, as his grandfather (Granddad) warns Huey to not even dream of upsetting “White folks.” Regardless, seeking revolutionary change through activism is the only way that Huey knows in order to survive daily life as a young Black man. SCT proposes that an individual’s personal and social identity work together to guide behavior (Treppe and Loy 1), and such theoretical interpretation of social behavior is well manifested in Huey’s attitude. Huey recognizes his place as belonging to the society’s outgroup represented by Black men and rather than searching for a way to continue existence in the outgroup, the revolutionary youth looks for ways to restructure the power dynamics and bring the Black community into a social status as the dominant ingroup.

This desire to elevate the status of Black men in society grants Huey a notable sense of awareness regarding his community’s actions. In *Manliness & Civilization*, Gail Bederman postulates that any interaction between a Black person and a White person can be taken as a representation of the Black community and its ideals against the White community and its ideals, as did the famous boxing match between Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries (1–3). This refers to the principle of salience, which is a foundational component of SCT (Treppe and Loy 2). This principle suggests that certain contexts and situations can make one increasingly aware of a single social category above all others (Treppe and Loy 2). This is the lens through which Huey sees the world, and no other *Boondocks* character does the same. The many things that his fellow Black men overlook in *The Boondocks*, such as the opening of a stereotypically popular fast-food chicken restaurant (“The Itis”) or the lack of accountability from the Black community

towards R. Kelly's actions<sup>1</sup> ("The Trial of R. Kelly"), Huey fails to brush aside as just another happening in the world. Minimizing such events would not fit his nature as a revolutionary that seeks advancement for his people through awareness. Rather, Huey recognizes those aforementioned events as salient moments for Black people, through which their lack of membership in the dominant White ingroup is increasingly apparent; the Black stereotypes that those events purport pose a threat to any positive distinctiveness inherent to being a member of the Black outgroup.

Positive distinctiveness is the combination of ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation (Treppe and Loy 4). The separation of the ingroup and the outgroup relies on greater positive distinctiveness within the ingroup than the outgroup, so that the power is held by the ingroup (Islam 1782). Stereotypes and controversies feed the derogation of the outgroup and further divide the two groups (Treppe and Loy 9–10). This is why the stereotypes of fast-food chicken consumption and the controversy of R. Kelly's sexual misconduct are pressingly salient moments for Huey. Such threats dampen the revolutionary efforts that seek to transform the Black community into the dominant ingroup, which makes combatting these stereotypes and increasing positive distinctiveness a priority for Huey.

There is perhaps no greater manifestation of Huey as a revolutionary figure than in "A Huey Freeman Christmas." In this episode, Huey is redirecting his school's Christmas play to counter the White-washed Christmas narrative that is supposed to be staged. He hires Quincy Jones as the music producer for the play, fires all his classmates and replaces them with professional actors, and portrays Jesus as a Black man, much to the dismay of his school's White administration. Even when faced with something as routine and blasé as an elementary school play, "Huey ponders how to bring consciousness to people" (Tyree and Krishnasamy 35). In the end, the play is well received by a small audience of critics but boycotted by the rest of town due to the firing of their children. However, the people that attended the play were deeply moved, and the play even inspired Huey's teacher to become a professor of African American Studies. Huey views the need "to bring truth to the 'ignorant masses' [as] a heavy and complicated burden" but a necessary one (Tyree and Krishnasamy 35). Increasing awareness among the Black community is Huey's way of increasing positive distinctiveness, leveraging the spreading of information through mediums such as plays and the media that can largely impact the degree of salience by which members of a group ascribe to events and issues (Treppe and Loy 7-10). Huey's ultimate aim is to educate his own people and inspire them to arise from their current social position by avoiding derogation and increasing their own value. Through the quest for advancement within his community, Huey stays afloat in his White surroundings as a Black man.

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<sup>1</sup> Since 1996, R. Kelly has been repeatedly sued and criminally charged for sexual misconduct with minors and child pornography, with most of the cases ending in settlement or acquittance, and he was also at one point married to a 15-year-old while he was 27 years old at the time. In June 2022, he was finally sentenced to 30 years in prison.

### III. RILEY FREEMAN—HIP-HOP CULTURIST

Riley is the juxtaposed, younger brother of Huey. He is considered quite the opposite of Huey, as Riley has an “excessive identification with [mainstream] popular culture” and “rebels against anything he thinks is outside of hip-hop culture of being ‘cool’” (Howard 160). Despite living an upper-middle class lifestyle in a wealthy White suburb, Riley truly “believes he is struggling in the streets to overcome ‘the man’” (Timmerman et al. 172). In his performance of masculinity as a Black man, Riley embodies “cool pose,” which feminist scholar Linsay Cramer defines as “a performance of individuality integral in Black culture” and “functions as a strategy for men and women who occupy Black positionality to both cope with White domination and White patriarchy and resist it concurrently” (Cramer 58). Cool pose is engrained in hip-hop culture as an emphasis on style and individual expression through music, dance, fashion, language, and more (Cramer 68). The need for performing the cool pose arises from centuries of “mistrust that the Black male feels toward the dominant society” (Howard 152).

In the context of SCT, the performance of cool pose feeds positive distinctiveness, where ascribing ingroup favoritism to the Black-created hip-hop culture gives membership in the Black outgroup credence that is not afforded to the White ingroup. Riley recognizes the societal and political power that the dominant White culture holds, but he also recognizes the immense societal power that the Black outgroup holds through hip-hop and defining what is “cool.” This gives distinctness to Riley’s approach to survival compared to Huey, as they both self-identify greatly with the Black outgroup and fundamentally would not stray from it. However, Huey seeks to transform the Black community into society’s dominant ingroup, while Riley labels the Black outgroup as cool and rejects the notion of being a part of anything other than his marginalized cultural community. As a Black man surrounded by the Whiteness of his spatial community represented by the upper-middle class suburb, Riley relies on the cool pose to survive this environment while also maintaining his Black identity and avoid assimilation into White culture.

In a similar manner to Huey, Riley heavily advocates for the success of the Black community, but through the attitudes connected to cool pose aesthetics rather than societal advancement. In “The Trial of R. Kelly,” Riley helps lead a protest in defense of R. Kelly that vastly surpasses the support of the prosecution. The young man sees more fault in the legal system itself and the victim rather than R. Kelly and asks the prosecutor, Tom DuBois, why “[he] should have to miss out on the next R. Kelly album for that” (“The Trial of R. Kelly”). Through his stance intrinsic to the performance of cool pose, the value of R. Kelly’s contributions to hip-hop outweighs the value of legality, which is purported by a system that is known to be systemically oppressive (Solomon 44; Pew Center 3). The value of an artist’s contributions to the ingroup favoritism of Black hip-hop culture is so high for Riley, that he even risks his life in “The Story of Gangstalcious” to protect rapper Gangstalcious when hitmen attempt to assassinate him multiple times. Protecting hip-hop culture and its members fosters a



community within Black culture that sees value in its products of music, fashion, and art which ultimately increases the positive distinctiveness of being Black. It is through that community that Riley employs his cool pose masculinity to survive the pressures of White culture and represents all other Black men who do the same.

#### IV. GRANDDAD—CONFORMIST

While his grandsons each seek to resist the forces of White culture assimilation in their own ways, Robert Jebediah “Granddad” Freeman puts up little resistance to the systems of oppression. The man is a former activist from the Civil Rights Era and played a role in nearly every major event of the Civil Rights Movement, as seen in “Return of The King,” although many of those roles were minimal and even counterproductive, such as sitting next to Rosa Parks during the bus boycott and attempting to shift the public attention onto himself. Yet despite his past, he no longer fights “the White power structure, [but] is known to work with and manipulate it for his own advantage” (Timmerman et al. 172). It is through his flexibility in assimilating and conforming to the White mainstream culture and power structures that Granddad has managed to survive this long unscathed, and even prosper as he is now living his dream to leave a poverty-stricken life in the south side of Chicago for an accommodated life in White suburbia. For example, in “The Real,” Granddad poses as a blind man that is running a homeless shelter out of his home in order to receive expensive makeovers from TV shows such as *Pimp My Ride* and *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*<sup>2</sup> at no cost, simultaneously taking advantage of the dominant ingroup’s pity for the marginalized and living amongst the ingroup in their suburbia. While Huey is morally opposed to the plan (to avoid controversy) and Riley is overly enthusiastic about it (to increase the social value of their home and car), Granddad remains a true conformist in the middle, going along with the plan until it eventually backfires, upon which he reverts back to the next thing that will prolong his survival: parenting Riley and Huey.

Granddad’s archetype can be considered an example of what Trepte and Loy describe as “social creativity,” which is a strategic approach to taking advantage of the benefits of membership in a certain group without being an actual member of the group (5). Granddad takes advantage of whichever group will provide him the most benefit, but he crucially never denies his membership in the Black outgroup. Rather, he assimilates into White culture whenever convenient through his superficial behaviors. For his approach and stance, Granddad could be considered a cultural code-switcher. Code-switching is the use of multiple communicative styles in the same instance (Koch et al. 31). Such practice is often examined in the realm of linguistics, but it is traceable in behavioral tendencies as well. Granddad’s understanding of the positive distinctiveness held by both the dominant White ingroup and the

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<sup>2</sup> These are real TV shows, which represent one of the many real-life references to pop culture in *The Boondocks*.

Black outgroup leads him to play on each group's strengths when possible and code-switch back and forth in order to remain on the side that offers the most to gain in any situation and avoid derogation. Throughout the series, Granddad's conformity/code-switching is also manifested through his linguistic patterns—his functional deployment of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or Black English, as well as Standard English (Koch et al. 30)—and it can also be seen through his very clear decision to move his Black family to White suburbia in the first place.

Granddad's manipulation of the White power structure can perhaps be best seen through the very first episode, "The Garden Party," in which he sets out fancy cheese because "White people love cheese" and attempts to wine and dine with the upper echelons of White society at Mr. Wuncler's garden party to prove that he is sophisticated and worthy of living in the White suburbs—and thus avoid eviction. Yet, a few episodes later, Granddad showcases his ability to conform to Black culture when it is necessary as well. In "Granddad's Fight," the man fully leans into a "n\*gga moment," (defined by Huey in the episode as an abandonment of rational thinking that leads to self-destructive actions) despite several warnings from Huey not to, in order to physically protect himself and his masculine pride and even goes as far as to tell Huey that he "doesn't have a choice" when determining whether or not to fight Col. Stinkmeaner, another elderly man who publicly berated Granddad.

Granddad manipulates and conforms into whichever culture/group will provide him with the biggest benefit at any given moment. By being a conformer that constantly code-switches to whichever side is at the advantage, Granddad manages to thrive in a White society that has held back so many of his fellow Black men.

## V. TOM DUBOIS—TRAITOR

Named after both W.E.B DuBois and Uncle Tom, Tom DuBois is an intellectual Black man that almost completely lacks what most people would consider to be a connection to Black culture. Tom is Black by appearance but "has assimilated to the dominant White culture of Woodcrest, married a White woman, prides himself on his Irish heritage, and speaks with an exaggerated White accent," marking his traitor-ship into Whiteness and White masculinity (Timmerman et al. 173). His assimilation into White culture has come with nearly all of the ingroup benefits, as he "is the most educated character in the show and the only regular character with a 'white'-collar job as District Attorney of Woodcrest" (Timmerman et al. 173).

Tom and Granddad both employ social creativity to take advantage of the benefits that come with membership in the White ingroup despite being members of the Black outgroup. However, unlike Granddad's temporary assimilations in and out of White culture, Tom's near-permanent residence in White culture leaves him unprepared for the realities that he faces when his identity as a Black man is foregrounded. For example, in "A Date with the Health Inspector," Tom is falsely accused of a crime because he "fit the [generic] description" of the perpetrator as a Black man. Tom is faced with his greatest fear of being sent to prison

and anally raped (on top of it, for a crime that he didn't commit), which is a reality that many Black men are aware of and experience (Rowell-Cunsolo et al. 59). His fear of "[being] made 'somebody's b\*tch' by means of anal rape" leaves Tom in tears while Huey is unfazed and Riley even finds humor in Tom's predicament, reminding him not to "drop the soap" (Cooper 1186).

Tom is a representation of the Black men that make it out of the confines of White society's oppression of Black people and try to never look back. In order to survive, he aligned himself with the societal group with the most power and stayed put, abiding by the dominant culture values and expectations. Any momentary regression back into his Blackness—which serves as a stark reminder that he and other Black men can never entirely be a part of White culture—shakes up Tom's White world.

Drawing on the parameters defined by SCT, Tom exhibits a degree of depersonalization, which is a redefinition of one's self-concept to fit within a certain group (Trepte and Loy 7). His very character is a reference to the embodiment of Black depersonalization and the main character of Harriet Beecher-Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: Uncle Tom. However, Tom only exhibits a partial degree of depersonalization, which is alluded to in the inclusion of W.E.B Du-Bois, a well-educated Black author and sociologist, as the other half of his character reference.

Riley and Huey lived the majority their lives in the predominantly Black south side of Chicago (before being forcibly moved to Woodcrest) and never seek to leave Black culture. Granddad code-switches back and forth between Black and White culture for his own advantages, but any time he spends in White culture is as an assimilating poser as he is always deep down rooted in his Black identity. Tom resides in White culture and rarely strays into Black culture, making his assimilation nearly complete and rather permanent. Yet, there is one final character that takes this progression into White culture even further and gives contrast to the degree of depersonalization that Tom exhibits.

## VI. UNCLE RUCKUS—SELF-HATING

With a name alluding to both Uncle Tom and Uncle Remus (a fictional southern Black man within Black culture that tells folktales about life for Black people on plantations<sup>3</sup>), Uncle Ruckus is a White supremacist that worships the very existence of White people (Timmerman et al. 172). He is a self-proclaimed White man living with "revitaligo...it's the opposite of what Michael Jackson got" ("The Trial of R. Kelly"), leveraging once again a renowned popular culture reference. Uncle Ruckus has a profound belief in the White supremacist notion that African Americans are an inferior race. His views on Black people align with the "Black buck and jezebel" stereotype that is outlined in feminist scholarly literature (Edgar 152). When it

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<sup>3</sup> Stories of Uncle Remus date back to the late 1700s and most of the stories were first documented by Joel Chandler Harris in the 1880s. Prior to their documentation, the stories were passed down verbally throughout the Black community in the southern US.



comes to Black people “[Uncle Ruckus] wouldn’t exactly call them people, but yeah...[he] has a deep distaste for negros” (Collier 174). From the very first episode, Uncle Ruckus shows his disdain towards Black people by harassing Granddad, Huey, and Riley at the garden party and singing an original song titled “Don’t Trust Them New N\*ggas Over There” for the White partygoers in an attempt to ostracize the new Black family in town (“The Garden Party”).

Differing from a traitor such as Tom, who recognizes his origins in an outgroup and consciously tries to assimilate into the ingroup—albeit without being a proper member of it—Uncle Ruckus finds survival by denying ever being a part of the Black outgroup in the first place. This phenomenon, in the context of SCT, is an advanced form of depersonalization and is considered “individual mobility” (Trepte and Loy 7). Whereas someone exhibiting depersonalization such as Tom places a large emphasis on their connection to their preferred social group and attempts to gloss over existing roots in their own culture, someone exhibiting individual mobility is choosing to completely transfer over and exist in a different social group, disowning any claims to their previous home (Trepte and Loy 7). By rooting himself in White culture for the entirety of his existence, Uncle Ruckus attempts to escape the plights of Black people. It is important to note, however, that this approach does not work flawlessly for Uncle Ruckus, as he still finds himself in a Black man’s place from time to time. For example, in “The Story of Gangstacious” he is held at gunpoint by a rival rapper and his entourage, and in “The Garden Party” all of the White party guests withhold their outrage over his racist song, “Don’t Trust Them New N\*ggas Over There,” because they view Uncle Ruckus as a Black man who can say the N-word. Uncle Ruckus is the only main character that views himself as a White man, and those few moments of being treated like a Black man would serve as a reminder of his inability to wholly detach from his Black identity, but Uncle Ruckus is so entrenched in his White identity that those potential reminders do not faze him, whether they come from Black or White people alike.

For Uncle Ruckus, it is not enough to distance himself from Blackness and place favoritism in White culture, but he must also put Black culture down through hate and insults performing overt social derogation. No character in *The Boondocks* achieves the range in their racial slur vocabulary like Uncle Ruckus does, and his insults are all directed towards Black people, whereas he places White people (and especially men) on a pedestal. In “The Passion of Reverend Ruckus,” he goes around preaching about White Jesus and how President Ronald Reagan is the literal savior that welcomed him to “White heaven” in a prophetic dream, conflating religious, racial, and conservative ideologies. Uncle Ruckus is very specific about race in his prophecies, because “every time Uncle Ruckus opens his mouth, he preaches publicly or visits a talk show to express his views on blonde haired, blue-eyed Jesus, he reaffirms the power associated with hegemony” (Collier 173). Despite Uncle Ruckus’s claims, all the other characters still see him as a Black male, and that may be the only reason why they still interact with him throughout *The Boondocks*. Regardless of Uncle Ruckus’s actions and hatred, he is

still considered a Black man by the rest of the main cast and thus his survival is important to the Black community around him.

## VII. ARCHETYPE INTERPLAY

Huey, Riley, Granddad, Tom, and Uncle Ruckus each possess a different style of survival for Black men in a White society and yet they interact and rely on each other often throughout *The Boondocks*. However, before one can dive into how they interplay with each other, it is important to note a fundamental factor missing from the equation: women. There are no female main characters in *The Boondocks*; the only recurring female roles are Tom's wife and his daughter, Jazmine. The absence of female characters in *The Boondocks* creates a fictional society with a shortage in female leaders, role-models, and mother-figures, which is a satirical reverse to not only the reality that Black culture exists in today, but to the longstanding concept of the Black matriarch.

The Black matriarch could be considered one of the archetypes that Black women take on in response to being part of an outgroup much like Black men (and as women even more-so than Black men due to the intersectional discrimination they are subjected to as women and members of the Black outgroup). As early as 1965, the Black matriarch has been explored in academic literature, with Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965) (also known as *The Moynihan Report*) often being the source of discussion. The Black matriarch is a category of Black women that spearhead and keep together a family unit and oftentimes an entire community as sources of leadership and authority (Moynihan 20). This archetype is pervasive in Black popular culture, as evident with references in movies such as the *Big Mama* series starring Martin Lawrence and Tyler Perry's slew of films starting the fictional character "Madea Simmons<sup>4</sup>," and in music through artists' monikers such as Big Momma Thornton and Ma Rainey. Questionably, *The Moynihan Report* proposes that the Black matriarch is the root of the struggles that the Black community faces, that a family unit ought to be led by a man with a woman as the secondary authority figure, and that a Black woman-led household is deviant (Moynihan 18–19). Critics of Moynihan's work cite the lack of control that Black female slaves had over their own families and procreation as evidence that the Black matriarch is not where Black oppression is rooted (Davis 4). Others criticize the lack of inclusivity inherent to the concept of the Black matriarch, acknowledging that it is possible to for a variety of successful leadership structures to exist in a family, as well as a Black woman's existence outside of a family unit altogether (King 40). *The Boondocks* creates a world in which both criticisms are explored. Black men are shown living outside of normative family units (Uncle Ruckus being the only example in the main cast) and voiding the cast of any female

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<sup>4</sup> "Madea Simmons" is a fictional female character and main character in a series of films that are popular amongst African American audiences. Madea is a Black matriarch and is played by male actor/comedian, Tyler Perry.

leadership eliminates any arguments that the Black matriarch is the root of Black oppression. Rather than expound on the Black matriarch being a deviant power structure in the Black community, *The Boondocks* satirically creates a power structure that is truly deviant with regard to how Black communities in America are typically shaped today.

Fathers, male leaders, and male role-models are the groups that are often in short supply in Black communities today, perpetuated by the stereotype of absent fathers and the high incarceration rate of Black men in America, among other factors. According to a 2018 New York Times article by David Brady et al., single parenthood is one of the four indicators of poverty (together with forming households at a young age, lack of education, and unemployment), a reality that has characterized many Black households for centuries. Furthermore, according to 2016 US Census data, approximately 5,000 Black households have both parents present, whereas approximately 6,000 Black households are composed by a single mother and her children (US Census Bureau). The statistics suggests that it is more common for a Black household to have just a mother rather than both parents, and yet *The Boondocks* portrays a world bereft of Black mothers, and in doing so highlights how Black men can support each other subverting stereotypes and normative configurations.

With the role of mother/matriarch absent, the men find themselves covering affective positions usually connected to mother figures when needed. For example, in “Granddad’s Fight,” when Granddad is feeling sad about himself it is the revolutionary Huey that steps in and fills the motherly role of comforter (Jenkins 94). This is a deviation from his usual revolutionary survival strategy, as “traditionally, the mother figure comforts... Huey continues to show his maternal instincts by providing [Riley and Granddad] support, even if they are troubled by an obstacle he warned them about” because their survival is linked to his own survival within their White environment (Jenkins 94). In times when parental figures such as Granddad or Tom occupy a needy or distressed position, Huey and Riley step into a parental role to counter and help them survive despite their differences. In “A Date with the Health Inspector,” Tom is given one phone call in jail and in his time of need, he turns to Huey, the Black revolutionary character that is anything but assimilated into White culture like Tom. In “Guess Hoe’s Coming to Dinner,” Riley and Huey are the ones that must prevent Granddad from losing everything they own to A Pimp Named Slickback and Cristal. Even Uncle Ruckus helps out; in “The Real,” he poses as a homeless man to help Riley and Granddad in their scheme to scam mainstream TV shows for free rewards. From the Black revolutionary all the way to the White supremacist, the Black archetypes are flexible in their positions within society in order to help each other survive. They embody their individual strategies for survival, but in the end seek for the survival of each other as part of the Black community as well.

A unifying thread throughout each of the five main characters is the pursuit of positive distinctiveness. Huey seeks to attain it by decreasing the derogation of the Black community. Riley seeks to attain it by focusing on the favoritism that Black culture holds. Granddad combines both Huey and Riley’s approaches but applies it to only himself to achieve consistent

positive distinctiveness no matter which social group holds it. Tom seeks to align himself with the group in possession of the most positive distinctiveness, and Uncle Ruckus completely rejects the notion that he was ever apart of Black culture, finding positive distinctiveness by both derogating the Black community and displaying great favoritism for the White community. Each archetype chases positive distinctiveness because the group or individual that wields it also wields the societal power that comes with ingroup membership. The adaptation towards survival by these five archetypes is to seek and obtain increased sociocultural power.

Throughout *The Boondocks*, the archetypes of Black masculinity manifest themselves through the five main characters. Focusing on each character highlights their take on personal survival and power struggle through a society that is dominated and controlled by White culture. And while not all five characters reside inside the Freeman family unit, they all rely on each other from time-to-time to fill in the gaps within the community's support structure to keep their community afloat, even with little to no women present. In the end, their personal survival is essential, but they comprise virtually all the Black males that reside in their White society, so supporting each other is also essential. Archetypes manifest at the individual level, but the survival of the community is paramount and necessitates the breaking of archetypical molds.

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