



THE AFRICA NARRATIVE

a project of the University of Southern California's
Norman Lear Center

Contact: [Laurie Trotta Valenti](mailto:trottava@usc.edu) or [Michelle van Gilder](mailto:michelle@crisscrossglobal.com)
310.850.7105 917.825.7556

[USC Norman Lear Center Unveils Major Initiative to Change the Way Americans See Africa](#)

First Step: Find Out How Africa Is Depicted in the Media

*Findings Reveal that Africa and African Characters Barely Register on US TV;
When They Do, Stereotypes of Poverty, Violence and Crime Dominate*

LOS ANGELES; JANUARY 31, 2019:-- A seminal [report](#) released today by the USC Annenberg [Norman Lear Center's Media Impact Project](#) reveals that Americans seldom see mentions of Africa or Africans on popular television shows or in the news; and when they do, the portrayals are often negative and stereotyped.

[The Africa Narrative](#) is a global initiative harnessing the power of the arts, media and entertainment, business, education and philanthropy to engage the world in new stories of Africa. The initiative is based at the Lear Center's Media Impact Project at USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, in partnership with [CrissCrossGlobal](#), an international communications consultancy. The initiative will broaden awareness of the region and its 54 nations through research, communications campaigns and collaborations with partners from Africa, the US and around the world. [Africa in the Media](#) is the inaugural research project, with an initial focus on measuring US media depictions of the continent and their impact on US attitudes and engagement with the region.

Although a 2015 global [Pew survey](#) revealed that Africans were among the world's most optimistic about their economic prospects, Africans and experts of the region argue that Western news and entertainment media still focus predominantly on disease, poverty, corruption, famine, armed conflict and stories about Westerners who appear as saviors. This despite the fact that African innovation, entrepreneurialism, music, fashion, art and a new generation of creators, innovators and business leaders are increasingly making their mark on the world stage.

Recognizing that media can greatly influence the way people form opinions, [The Africa Narrative](#) seeks more balance, diversity and nuance in Africa storytelling that does justice to realities of the continent and its 54 countries. As a first step toward that goal, [Africa in the Media](#) aims to understand African depictions and ultimately their impact on African tourism, trade and investment.

Researchers at the Lear Center's [Media Impact Project](#) conducted a major content analysis that involved some 700,000 hours of television news and entertainment and 1.6 million Twitter posts over the month of March 2018. These were monitored for mentions of *Africa*, *African*, or the names of any of the continent's 54 nations. Content was analyzed for a range of factors designed to reveal not just the number of Africa mentions but also their content and tone. Partners from [BrandsEye](#), a global opinion mining company, analyzed the tweets for their sentiment. Results confirm the argument that Africa is mostly ignored and widely stereotyped in the media when it does appear.

Key Findings from Africa in the Media Report:

Africa and Africans barely register on US television

- Stories about Africa appeared infrequently on US television: a mention appeared once in every five hours of TV programming. Viewers were seven times more likely to see references to Europe.
- Out of almost 700,000 hours of programming, there were only 25 major scripted storylines about Africa.
- Only 13% of entertainment storylines that mentioned Africa included an African character, and 80% of the roles were minor. When African characters did appear, 46% spoke 10 words or less.
- Only 31% of African characters were women.
- 20% of all unscripted entertainment mentions of Africa were on the game show *Jeopardy*.

Depictions of Africa are broadly negative

- Overall, viewers were more than twice as likely to see negative depictions of Africa than positive ones in major storylines about Africa.
- Most mentions of Africa (43%) appeared on national or local news. After politics (32%), crime garnered the most mentions (16%) while the topic of business and the economy accounted for just 8% of news coverage.
- Over one-third (35%) of African mentions in TV shows were about crime. Many were told on America's most popular shows such as *Law & Order: SVU* and the *NCIS* franchises.
- Of the 25 major scripted storylines about Africa that appeared on television during March, 14 centered on crime.
- Of the 5 topics tracked on twitter (animals, corruption, crime/terrorism, Diaspora and Poverty), crime/terrorism had the most mentions (8%) with South Africa and Nigeria the countries most associated with the topic.

Africa as a Country

- 44% of TV shows and movies only mention "Africa," with no reference to a particular country.
- On Twitter, "Africa" by far received the most mentions (27%) — more than any individual country.

Out of a continent of 54 countries, five nations grab the bulk of attention:

- Five countries — Egypt, South Africa, Kenya, Seychelles and Congo — accounted for almost half (49%) of all mentions of any African nation, although there is variation by type of content.

Black Panther and Africa

Coverage of *Black Panther* exceeded that of African travel, sports, education, health and environment in all programming. *Black Panther's* fictional African homeland, Wakanda, would have placed fourth behind Egypt, South Africa and Kenya in our rankings of most mentioned countries. Viewers were equally likely to see Africa-related references to the film as they were to see coverage of Trump's "s***hole" comment about Africa during that same time period.

Some shows get it Right

Encouragingly, the research uncovered some rich sources of storytelling and identified African characters that have emerged in recent years in Hollywood scripted entertainment that counter stereotypes historically associated with Africans. These include the erudite Nigerian moral philosopher Chidi on NBC's *The Good Place*; Dayana Mampasi, a Zimbabwean human rights lawyer turned CIA agent played by South African Pearl Thusi in *Quantico*, an ABC series that ran from 2015-2018, and Mina Okafor, the brilliant doctor of Fox's *The Resident* portrayed by Guyanese-born Shaunette Renee Wilson.

Recommendations: Five areas where content creators can elevate Africa storytelling

1. **Increase** the number of stories that mine the rich and diverse cultures and histories of Africa — including in children's programming — and develop more scripted content that doesn't focus on crime.
2. **Include** more African characters in stories and give them larger speaking parts.
3. **Make** one half of African characters female.
4. **Expand** the focus from Egypt, South Africa, Kenya, Congo and Nigeria to the continent's other 49 countries.
5. **Collaborate** with African content creators, including those from the first and second generation.

The Africa Narrative is an ongoing, multi-year effort. Building on initial support from the **Ford Foundation** it will continue to conduct research, spearhead communications campaigns, and collaborate with private, public and non-profit partners to elevate Africa storytelling and ultimately improve engagement with the continent.

Summary of key findings; [Africa in the Media full report](#); report on how **President Trump's "sh***hole" remark** changed conversation on Twitter.

www.theafricanarrative.org / Twitter: [@54 Narratives](#) and [@MediaMetrics](#) / Instagram: [AfricaNarrative](#)

###