

Racism in movies analytical essay

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



Even in the twenty first century, race continues to dominate social experiences of Americans. Most of us may cringe at being called a racist but at a subconscious level, we are all influenced by racial stereotypes we have grown up with. These racial stereotypes are propagated by Hollywood movies and popular culture and slowly but surely change who we are and how we view the world around us.

The racial stereotypes are brought out beautifully in the 2004 movie Crash. The movie shows a myriad of people from different walks of life and different races who have their paths cross over a twenty-four hour period and how these racial stereotypes affect their interactions with each other.

The movie has a number of characters who start out with strong racial prejudice but over the course of the movie, realize how wrong these prejudices were. It is not possible to discuss each and every one of these characters and how they become aware of their racial prejudice but a few of these examples will help demonstrate how we are subconsciously misled by this stereotypes. Crash is a perfect example of how we subconsciously size up others and even ourselves based on the race and how these preconceived notions of race can be so wrong.

The character of Tom Hanson in the movie thought he was not racist but at a subconscious level he too was affected by the racial stereotypes just as many of us are unaware of how we subconsciously behave in a particular way in the presence of people of certain race. Hanson, a rookie policeman was outraged when his partner John Ryan pulled over an African American couple and harassed them.

Hanson felt that Ryan's actions are racist but Ryan tells him that at some level everyone is racist and he will realize this after he had been on the job for some time. Later, when Hanson, mistakenly shot Peter, his action was a direct result of a subconscious stereotyping. Hanson was the last person anyone, including Hanson, expected to be racist. However, when he shot Peter, Hanson realized that he too had been a victim of racial stereotyping.

This particular storyline is a perfect example of how we do not even know ourselves how we are affected by cultural stereotypes. In modern world, we are taught at an early age not to discriminate on the basis of the color of the skin and most of us believe that we are broadminded. Unfortunately, the racial stereotypes are all around us and we are constantly bombarded by these stereotypes through movies, newspapers, commercials and even through our discussions about these stereotypes with other like-minded people.

When we constantly see and hear that a the people of a particular race are much more likely to be criminals or snobs, we start seeing them as criminals or snobs even without realizing it. So Hanson saw a criminal in Peter, even without realizing it and by the time he realized it, Peter was already dead and Hanson was aware that he too was affected by cultural stereotypes.

Anthony, like many African Americans lived his life to reflect all the racial stereotypes of his race and doing so he and people like him strengthen the established stereotypes which makes it even more difficult for the society to become less racist. Anthony rationalized that since people already expected

him to behave in a certain way, there was no harm in doing so. So, he carjacked, stole, and refused to tip because it was expected of him.

Anthony believed that everyone around him was racist and judged him based on the color of his skin. He also believed that the white people were responsible for all the problems faced by black people and so by hurting the rich people he was only getting even. As it turned out, Anthony had got himself caught in these racial stereotypes.

He assumed that all black people were poor and traveled by bus and that all rich people were white. He even claimed that he would never rob a black person. So he was taken by surprise when he realized that Cameron, one of his rich, carjack victims was black. Anthony had built his own world based on his interpretation of racial stereotypes and found it difficult to except that people could exist outside of these stereotypes.

Like Anthony, many of us get caught up in the cultural and racial stereotypes we grow up with. So we subconsciously end up behaving and acting in a way that strengthen the cultural stereotypes. For example, the stereotype that black people are criminals is strengthened by the fact that a much larger percentage of those in federal prisons are African American.

Black people are also usually poorer than white people. Of course some of this can be attributed to the fact that historically black people were always discriminated against but these demographical facts tend to strengthen our cultural stereotypes resulting in most of us subconsciously developing or living these stereotypes.

Even when people are able to break the stereotypes and leave behind their past to become successful, very often they find that the past does not leave them and comes back to haunt them, as it happens with Cameron in the movie.

Cameron fell victim to stereotyping even though he did not fit these stereotypes and found himself defending his right to be rich and black both with the white policemen and the black criminals.

Cameron was a rich and successful movie director who had lived a charmed life and had little connection with other African Americans who lived a marginalized life. He had rarely if ever been a victim of racial discrimination. So when he was pulled over and harassed by white policemen, it shook up his self esteem and self identity.

Later, when Anthony called him “nigga”, he got enraged, even though it is common for black men to use the word when referring to each other.

According to Nadel, “use of the word nigger... speaks to an internalization of the colonizers’ label on the part of the colonized. This internalization and subsequent verbalization is a reflection of racial self alienation on the part of those who consciously or unconsciously make use of the word when referring to self or other” (Nadel 41).

This may explain Cameron’s anger at being called a “nigga”. Use of the word pushed his identity back to that of the colonized and for a man who had worked hard to leave behind this identity and build himself a new identity, the realization that he can never be free of past because of racial

stereotypes that people like Anthony further strengthen made him angry and embarrassed of the fact that he was black.

Even though modern Americans likes to believe that they are not racist, we can never completely rise above our conditioning and like Jean Cabot, often find ourselves judging people based on the color of their skin. According to Omi, “ in our society, one of the first things we notice about people when we encounter them is their race.

We utilize race to provide clues about who a person is and how we should relate to her/him” (Omi 551). In Crash Jean too found herself judging people just on the basis of race. So when she saw two black men coming towards her, she got scared because based on racial stereotyping, she expected all black men to be thieves and murderers. Later, she assumed that the Hispanic locksmith too would be a thief, once again based on racial stereotypes borrowed from popular culture.

As Omi mentioned, we often use race to size up people. Unfortunately, we do not usually use our personal experience of people of these races when forming our opinion about them. Most of the time, we depend on popular culture and the established stereotypes to decide how a person of a particular race would behave and not our own personal experience.

One reason for this could be that even in the modern world, we have little interactions with people of other race. Even when we do interact, we prefer to maintain a distance from them because we do not easily trust people of other races. These limited interaction prevent us from forming our own

personal opinions and force us to turn to popular culture that in turn makes us racist but feeding us racial stereotypes.

So we see that in normal for people to use the established racial stereotypes to judge other people even though we know that these stereotypes are wrong. Many of us do not have any personal reference point and so judge people based on how their race is represented in popular culture.

Even worse is that we may be so influenced by these stereotypes that many of us may actually subconsciously follow these stereotypes ourselves and in the process strengthen them. In the modern world, no one likes to be called a racist and many of us believe that we are above racism. But *Crash*, which is a very realistic reflection of life, shows how much we can be misled by the popular culture and how at a subconscious level, we may all be a little bit racist.

Crash. Dir. Paul Haggis. Bob Yari Production. 2004. DVD.

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