

Feminism and the hunger games



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Feminism has always been dominated by white woman's issues, and often will leave out African American woman's struggles. Also in cinema, being black has often correlated to being problematic. In the movie, The Hunger Games we see two main female characters, Katniss a young white female and Rue a young black female.

In this essay I will be using feminist film analysis techniques and concepts, in particular a critical race theory lens, and bell hooks concept of the oppositional gaze, to shed light on the on going issues of black representation in the cinema. Even though The Hunger Games is seen by many as a pro feminist film, depicting a young woman conquering death without the help of a man, it fails to properly represent African American woman, and instead follows many stereotypes of black woman in film. Since media products are tools that shape the mind of society and assist in forming opinions on cultural identities and concepts, it is important to analyze them.

Through this film analysis I hope to expose the underlying layer of societies ways of thinking, and see how this way of thinking shapes black and white female characters. Firstly, it is important to recognize the differences in the roles Katniss and Rue play. Katniss (the white female protagonist) is depicted as a strong, complex, independent female warrior, and is very critical to the story line. Rue (the black female sidekick) is shown to be weak, timid, and is a far less developed character. Her role seems to be in place only to emphasize Katniss's character traits, and does not show her as female warrior, but instead as a helpless girl whom Katniss needs to protect. The relationship between Katniss and Rue is complex, and does steer away from the stereotype that white and black females cannot be friends, but instead

be must be competition. Their relationship shows Katniss as somewhat of a surrogate older sister to Rue and they build an alliance while in the game arena. Even though their relationship is seen as a positive female alliance, it instills the message that white woman have the upper hand. The directors of this film had an opportunity to build on Rue's character as well as Katniss and Rue's bond, but instead chose to kill her off shortly after her character was introduced.

Even in Rue's death scene the audience's sympathy was not towards Rue, but instead focused on Katniss's emotional pain while losing a friend.

Secondly, Bell Hooks writing on the oppositional gaze is a concept that I found prominent in this movie. Instead of the typical feminist film critique that the male roles in cinema hold a dominant gaze over woman, we now see a white female dominance over black woman. While Katniss is free from any gaze, Rue is still subjected to the white female gaze. In the entire Hunger Games movie Rue gets only a few shots, and majority of these shots are from Katniss's point of view. While these shots do provide background to Rue's character's, it doesn't allow the audience a chance to connect with her role, therefore they will continue to relate and sympathize with Katniss more. By choosing to film Rue from Katniss's POV for majority of the scenes, the movie follows the stereotype that black woman are in the position of other in a white dominated culture. Even when representations of black women were present in film, our bodies and being were there to serve, hooks argues. Rue's role in this film is consistent with Hook's claims that while black woman may be included in film, they're often playing roles that are only in place to serve meaning to more prominent white roles. Lastly, as a viewer it

is vital to view movies through a critical race theory lens. Critical race theory, is the view that race, instead of being biologically grounded and natural, is socially constructed and that race, as a socially constructed concept, functions as a means to maintain the interests of the white population that constructed it (britannica. com).

When viewing The Hunger Games through this C. R. T lens it could be assumed that African Americans were only included in this movie to fulfill a quota. Besides Rue, there were only two other speaking roles which black individuals played, and if taken out of the movie there would be no substantial differences to the story line. By including Katniss and Rue's relationship in the movie it allows a white viewer to feel satisfied with the inclusion of diversity, but doesn't make them give up their self imposed superior title, which places it in what I would like to call a racial comfort zone. In conclusion, I believe that The Hunger Games shows a lot of feminist film potential, but fails to properly represent black woman and their experiences. Through analysis of Rue and Katniss's roles we are able to see the differences in their character traits. While Katniss is a strong, active, and complex character, Rue is timid, relatively weak, and far less developed. Katniss is seen by the audience as a female warrior, and Rue is not. Rue mirrors the problems that white women were faced with in classical cinema, such as passivity in action, being the target of an oppositional gaze and never being the protagonist.