

Race: the power of illusion write up essay



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“ Race: The Power of Illusion” is a video composed of three episodes that questions the mere concept of race. However, the first episode of the said video entitled “ The Difference Between Us” presented certain contemporary fields of science that tested the widely accepted idea of race, which is the classification of humans into three or four groups that is commonly based on what the eyes could see (California Newsreel, 2007). According to the said 56-minute episode, Historian of Science Evelyn Hammonds stated that the word race is an idea and/or a term that was coined to classify groups of humans on the basis of their biological, social, and cultural distinction (California Newsreel, 2003). This definition was what most people understand; and being one of these people, it was also what I believe it to be.

The video showed different areas, concepts, and examples that were used as justifications for the idea of race. The most common of these was physical traits. The public could distinguish a race from the other through their appearance. Familiar examples of these were the color of the skin, shape of the eyes and form of the hair (California Newsreel, 2003). There have been certain physical quality(ies) that became stereotype(s) or standardized image(s) of a specific group; for instance, African Americans, who were dark-skinned, were called Blacks/Negroes and Native Americans were called Whites because of their skin colors. Aside from the physical aspect, physiological structure and performance was also mentioned in the video.

There was a part that there have been a discussion about Negroes ruling on Olympics and that they advance in sports, which some rumors like they have additional muscle in their legs gave reason to. It also mentioned that the said

race possesses special features, which helped them excel in the field of sports. As an example, they brought up some parts of Jesse Owens' story before he became an athlete and his accomplishments as one (California Newsreel, 2003). Another area that helped in the concept of race was the location, culture and social context. As we all know, different locations have distinctions among its culture and social environment.

These could have an effect on an individual's line of thinking, as well as his way of living, which made a specific group different from the other (California Newsreel, 2003). Lastly, genes or the biological aspect also contributed to the idea of race. Just like the saying "blood is thicker than water", people could not escape the fact that they belong to a specific race even though they live in a different location. They could learn a different culture and live in another place; but they could not erase the roots of their race in their blood. This was one reason there are a lot of crossbreeds of races in the world (California Newsreel, 2003). There were many immigrants from the past so there were possibilities that the race they belonged to have been distributed to their new location.

After watching the first episode of "Race: The Power of Illusion", my concept of race has been changed. I have read some articles that helped me form a new concept about race. According to Ann Morning, races could be defined into an essentialist and a constructionist views based on her interview among university professors in 2001 and 2002. In an essentialist view, races were defined as classification of people based on their inherited natural biological characteristics.

On the other hand, the constructionist view described races as non-scientific in nature that have been formed because of social situations such as political, historical and economic (Morning, 2006). Through these definitions and the video I watched, race is not just a group of people who lives in the same place and experiences the same things, but also a group who shares the same traits though far from each other.