

Examples of stratification in the movie trading places essay sample

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Trading Places provides many examples of stratification. Throughout the movie the actions, words and appearances of its characters and their surroundings show the true-to-life stratification that exists in society. As the movie progresses, the separation of the upper and lower classes becomes more defined. The main characters wind up on top but the paths they take are marked by the unfairness, prejudice and stereotypes associated with stratification.

Even from the opening credits the differences in classes are evident. The images of Philadelphia flashing on the screen provide contrasts between the upper and lower classes. The producers used statues of a war hero to portray the upper class and the famous statue of Rocky to represent the lower. The subway and the long lines contrast sharply from Coleman making breakfast for Winthorpe and chauffeuring him to and fro. It simply shows lower class people waiting while the well-to-do are being waited on.

What struck me most was the snobbishness displayed by Winthorpe and the Duke Brothers when they ran into their employees. They always had to be greeted to first before returning the gesture. It was always a respectful "Hello, Mr. Winthorpe" or "Good morning, Mr. Duke" followed by an impassive "Yes..." or "Hello, so and so." Sometimes, as was the case with the Duke Brothers and their multitude of servants, they didn't respond at all. The polar opposite was shown when Ophelia went as far as to slap a friend of hers on the butt when they greeted one another. Imagining Mortimer high-fiving his brother, let alone giving him an ass slap, makes me laugh. People of the same level of society tend to be friendlier with each other and more willing to converse while contrasting classes overlook each other.

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The character I related to most, by not being a rich, pretentious prick, even changed his ways once he rose in class status. Billy Ray became pompous and looked down on those who he once shared the same class status with. He yelled at them during his party for spilling drinks on his Persian (emphasis on Persian) rug and for not using coasters. He even went so far as to call Coleman his own slave. A man who was faking war injuries to beg for change was now belittling people for putting out cigarette butts on his hardwood floor. It just didn't sit right with me for Billy Ray to be acting this way.

Ironically, even with the same status, the Duke Brothers treated Billy Ray as an inferior and unintelligent human being. They described the commodities market to him in a fashion that portrayed him as an idiot. It goes back to them stereotyping Billy Ray, calling him a simple Negro (a "very musical people"), with drug problems, from a broken home. Paul Fussel described it best when he said, "You have to feel superior for the right reasons, and having money is not one of them."