

Media studies

Media



Racism is the theory that people from one race are superior to the other. It asserts the separatist view of the different races in terms of physical characteristics, cultural patterns and modes of behavior ("Racism"). Racism results into many forms of prejudices and inequities in terms of education, employment, social respect and the like. In the US, one of the races that have been severely discriminated is the African Americans.

The history of mass media in the United States laid witness to various racial discrimination experienced by cultural minorities. Perhaps the most noticeable form of discrimination is that of the employment opportunity in the mass media wherein only 16.2% of all employees involved in mass communication were from the minority groups (Mohammadi, 1995). To give more emphasis, only 8.9% are African American, the rest are Latins, Asians and etcetera. From the numbers given above it is evident that the media do not give equal opportunities to these minorities.

However, what the public often fail to notice is the discrimination and mockery that the African-Americans experience in movies and other TV shows. Though the African-American TV host Oprah Winfrey is now enjoying much success and popularity, we need to have a deeper understanding for us to notice the hidden mockery in blockbuster hits of today. One fine example of such is the science fiction comedy Men in Black which is loved by many. The first release of the movie in 1997 grossed over 500 million dollars world wide and was later on followed by a sequel in 2002 which also gained much success. It was enjoyed by everyone including myself, however a deeper analysis would reveal the stereotypes given to African Americans and the discrimination that's well hidden in the guise of comedy.

Will Smith, a black comedian, is famous for his humor and in the movie he capitalized on it so well. However, he is placed side by side with the well composed, organized, calm and respected agent played by Tommy Lee Jones who is a white American. In the movie, Will Smith was a black agent who was incompetent in handling weapons and often complicates situations only for it to be solved by Tommy Lee Jones. The stereotype of blacks being incompetent in professional work is shown in the movie while hailing the whites as the great problem solver and savior of the blacks. Simple stereotypes as these often go as jokes and are pretty much enjoyed by many; however the social impact of these stereotypes should be given more emphasis.

The next movie is that of Julia Styles and Sean Patrick entitled Save the Last dance. It's a romantic movie in 2001 which revolved around the Application of Julia Styles in a dancing school. It was also a top grosser and was even voted as the most romantic movie in 2001 and won the MTV best kiss award. The movie was pretty obvious in stating the discrimination experienced by a white female white American and a male black American couple who lived in a city occupied mostly by blacks. In the movie, Sean and Julia ended up together in a supposedly “ happy ending”, however if we take a deeper look, white supremacy is evident as she won the heart of Sean who is a cream of the cream in his school.

Sean is a promising student with a lot of admirers in his school only to be smitten by the gorgeous white American therefore snagging the opportunity of black Americans to have a decent black man in their household. Though the movie aimed to show the struggles of the lovers in the process of

fighting for their love, it only magnified the discrimination experienced by the blacks and the unequal opportunities especially when it comes to relationships. The movie further stressed that white women are more talented and beautiful and would therefore have better chances in ending up with a descent man. Their love story is a mockery to all African American Women.

It seems that the media landscape in America has been reduced to black and white. The border of colors is evident though movie makers try to hide it with a veil of humor and drama. The stereotypes and the types of roles given to African Americans clearly show how this nation discriminates towards people with color.

Furthermore, the roles given to African Americans are mostly of the goons with guns who deal with crimes and often sell drugs in sidewalks. Often they play menial jobs as car technicians and the like. These roles create a stereotype of African Americans in the mind of all whites. This further strengthens social stratification in our society. Now we need to ask is this reality? Are these roles as close as it is in real life?

Though we can argue that in reality there are a lot of African Americans who are successful in what they do and are now rich and powerful. However we can never hide the fact that the ratio to those African Americans who are rich and powerful and those who are still mired in poverty is not equal. Even if many African Americans have climbed the economic ladder, most of them are still poor and poverty stricken. Poverty then leads to crime, thus, this is

where movie makers get their stereotypes. Movies of gangsters only try to depict the realities in the ghettos.

As what we have mentioned above, these stereotypes greatly affect the social stratification of this country. Perhaps we can't blame the media for such discrimination. After all they only try to portray reality in how they view it. Maybe we ought to examine society upon which the media and the movie makers cater to. Maybe then we will be able to realize that these stereotypes will remain as long as the audiences are willing to pay the tickets for a movie that enables them to laugh at the mockery of the current state of discrimination in this country. The movies are reflections of who day to day reality. The roles that actors portray is as close to reality as we may think, if we cannot erase the landscape of black and white in our own society then that landscape will prevail even on screen.

References

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