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ES112

**Cultural Artifact Analysis: Chocolate Rain**

With over 42 million views, "Chocolate Rain" Original Song by Tay Zonday is the 62nd most viewed video on YouTube.com since the website began. Although it is considered by many to be just another strange viral video, one can see that it has a much deeper meaning after analyzing the lyrics from an ethnic studies perspective. "Chocolate Rain" challenges how race is seen in most of America in terms of housing, economics, and how we think racism is no longer an issue.

"Chocolate Rain, raised your neighborhood insurance rates. Chocolate Rain, Makes us happy 'livin in a gate" (Tay Zonday, Chocolate Rain). Without much analysis, it is easy to see that Tay Zonday is inferring that this "Chocolate Rain" he sings about is how most of America sees African Americans. Through our reading in class and by just looking around it is apparent that when you live nearby a neighborhood that primarily houses blacks, your insurance rates will go up. This is all because of some hidden bias that all blacks are dangerous and therefore insurance should cost more in that area. Tay Zonday also follows up with the second line which explains the reason for all of the gated communities. Some people think that it will keep them safe from the "Chocolate Rain", because they think of danger when they see an African American. This relates to McIntosh's "White Privilege" essay in our textbook. McIntosh states under the list of white privileges, "If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live"(McIntosh, White Privilege, RCGUS pg178). By connecting what Tay Zonday and McIntosh are saying, the point can be made that whites would rather live in their own neighborhoods away from blacks, and in order to do that some Real Estate salesmen won't show blacks the entire selection of houses in a good neighborhood.

Between 1996 and 2002, the median net worth in dollars of black households dropped 16.1%, while all households gained an average of 12.2% (Collins and Yeskel, Billionaires R Us, RCGUS pg343). From an ethnic studies standpoint, having one race drop in net worth more than the average person gained is unacceptable. Chocolate Rain shares similar feelings towards this subject, with lyrics such as "Chocolate Rain, dirty secrets of economy. Chocolate Rain, turns that body into GDP"(Tay Zonday, Chocolate Rain). By replacing the words "Chocolate Rain" with "Racism", it's very clear what Tay Zonday is trying to convey in this part of the song. Even though America as a whole doesn't see race as a part of economics, it plays a bigger role than most people expect. The second half of that lyric also links skin color to GDP, which is an accurate observation but one that most people overlook. It is amazing to think that just from skin color, blacks are already worth one tenth of what an average household is worth (Collins and Yeskel, "Billionaires R Us", RCGUS pg 343). Another lyric that also brings education based on economics into the picture is "Chocolate Rain, the bell curve blames the baby's DNA. Chocolate Rain, but test scores are how much the parents make"(Tay Zonday, Chocolate Rain). In a chain reaction of sorts, people of any race with lower income tend to not have the opportunities available to send their children into the best educational system available. With race added onto that, blacks are at an even more severe disadvantage, as Tay Zonday points out. The "bell curve" references the common grading scale used in most schools, where the grades the class gets resembles a bell shape, with the tip being a "C" grade. By saying that the bell curve is strictly based on a child's DNA, Tay Zonday is saying that we overlook race in the education system, and when a black child doesn't do well America tends to blame it on the child's parents and DNA rather than the fact that they are being discriminated against in lots ways. All of that discrimination added up makes it very hard for some children to do well in school because of economics or other things.

One of the worst parts about studying racism in an ethnic studies perspective is when you find out most of America thinks racism isn't an issue anymore. "Chocolate Rain" has many verses in which this is the main topic. For instance, "Chocolate Rain, build a tent and say the world is dry. Chocolate Rain, zoom the camera out and see the lie" (Tay Zonday, Chocolate Rain) really makes use of Tay Zonday's "Chocolate Rain" metaphor. America has built a tent around its citizens to protect us from this rain of racism. Even though it is still raining everywhere around us, we don't see the effects of the rain in our dry tent. It is the same thing with racism, we block it out and try not to see it but the reality is that there is still racism everywhere around us. Another key verse is "Chocolate Rain, worse than swearing worse than calling names. Chocolate Rain, say it publicly and you're insane" (Tay Zonday, Chocolate Rain), in which Tay Zonday infers that if you think racism still exists, people will think you are insane because of how America is today. We don't want to think that racism still exists, so we block out everyone who thinks it does by deeming them insane.

With buried statements on everything from housing, economics, and hidden racism, Tay Zonday's song "Chocolate Rain" has a much deeper meaning than most people see at first. What seems to be a silly, viral, repetitive song is really a well thought out resistance against racism. There is hope for ethnic studies scholars, however. If a song like this can become very popular even in a still racist America, hopefully we can be open to change in the future.

**Word Count:** 991 Words

**Youtube Video URL:** http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwTZ2xpQwpA

Note: Lyrics are included in the (more info) section of the video

**Bibliography:**

Zonday, Tay. "Chocolate Rain." *Chocolate Rain Original Song by Tay Zonday*. 22 Apr. 2007. Web. 21 Oct. 2009. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwTZ2xpQwpA>.

Rothenberg, Paula S. *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*. 7th ed. New York: Worth, 2007. Print.

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