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Acceptance of Equality

One of our biggest failures as a society is our struggle for acceptance of equality. Humans will always be tested, and it is our responsibility to overcome any challenge. They say we must learn from our past or we are doomed to repeat it. I believe we will always repeat our past, but it is our duty to rise to the occasion and be better next time around. Unfortunately, our biggest failure is to accept the fact that we are all equal. Racism and slavery have plagued our people and has become such a norm that it is openly displayed in our day to day lives. It is especially evident in media. Luckily, we have been getting better. Our evolution in accepting of the fact that every race is equal can be seen in the movies *The Birth of a Nation*, *Within Our Gates*, and *Lying Lips*.

Arguably the most infamous movie ever, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) serves as a perfect example of how society’s view on black people first started. It claims that the “bringing of the African to America planted the first seed of disunion" (02:54). Black people came to the Americas by force, as slaves, so to say that their arrival brought about the Civil War means that the treatment of black people was not the cause. This movie shows how even when they did nothing, black people received all the blame. This movie shows how black people were easy to throw under the bus. When there was a problem in society, black people were the first to blame. Through no fault of their own, black people became the scapegoat.

Flash forward to 1920 and we are shown a different side of black people. *Within Our Gates* showed the people of its time that black people were capable of decent acts, just as white people. The main character, Sylvia, was a beacon of hope and change in a society that saw black people as the root of all problems. In this movie, we see different view of black people. We see a side that shows the good people that black people actually are. Sylvia herself said she wanted others of “[her] race to help destroy ignorance and superstition” (19:55). This movie gave audiences a black protagonist who wanted to do something good for her community and inspire others to do so as well. She, just as this movie, gave audiences a hint of what was to come, the inevitable rejection of the stigma that black people were inferior.

In an even further jump in time, 1939, we get *Lying Lips*. This movie completely flips the narrative that black people are evil and places that label on white people. That same side of evilness that had been shown of black people had now been shown on white people. Benjamin tells the owner of the club that he has “too much respect for her, for [his] self, to persuade her to do what [you] know and [I] know is wrong” (10:05). This heroic character sets the example to white people on how a person should be treated. And it is his actions that inspire others to do the same. There will always be people like the club owner. But as long as there are people like Benjamin to do what is right, then everything will work out. It could be said that because this movie was made at the beginning of World War II, making white people the antagonist was a metaphor for the Nazi party which was in the rise. Whatever the reason, this movie portrayal of black people was completely different from their portrayal in *The Birth of a Nation*. It was a much more positive view on black people. This gave us, as humans, the motivation we needed to continue the mission to treat black people as our equals.

Racism is the greatest failure of mankind. It is not a problem that can be easily fixed. One of the reasons it is not so easy is because of the media’s portrayal of black people. Luckily for us, their portrayal has been getting better. Their portrayal in *The Birth of a Nation* was as degenerate savages. Yet, their portrayal in *Lying Lips* shows them as just people trying to do the right thing. It also helps that more and more black people have been getting involved in the movie making process. As stated by Jane Gaines, “black actors, writers, and directors have attempted to use these films as a way to make visible the issues blacks were experiencing in their lives, challenge the status quo, and suggest a method for moving forward.” This effort has certainly been paying off. Today we see plenty of black people on the big screen in moving and meaningful pieces of art.

Works Cited

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