Proof of Concept

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Dissertation Inquiry

Tropes of African American Representation on Screen

Chapter 3 Case Studies

- (King Kong, 1933) Misrepresenting cultures, perpetuating stereotypes e.g Hollywood treating Africa as wild, exotic, tribal savages.

- Birth of Nation (1915) Its portrayal of black men (many played by white actors in blackface) as unintelligent and sexually aggressive towards white women, and the portrayal of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) as a heroic force.

- Gone With the Wind (1936) Is considered a beloved classic by many, but perpetuates the stereotype of Black women happily serving White families.

- Get Out (2017) Jordan Peele created the film as he felt that there was a severe lacking of black representation in the horror film genre. He wanted the audience, regardless of race, to see the subtle racism through the protagonist's eyes. "It was very important to me to just get the entire audience in touch in some way with the fears inherent in being black in this country." – Jordan Peele (2017)

- Black Panther (2018) Features a predominately black cast. Pushes the boundaries of black representation in film. Uses a mainstream style of film; a superhero movie, and projects the complexity of black identity, politics and culture.

- Spider Man: Into the Spider Verse (2018) Resonates with a diverse modern audience. Although it is a fictional story, it also manages to reflect the diversity present in the real world. "I think that by them making this movie… and making it completely a representation of the world we live in and the families that are right next door to us, it's so important because for some kids this is going to be their first vision of spider-man," – Brian Tyree Henry (2018)

Key Themes and Issues

- Discuss African American representation in regards to how it is represented in film.
  - How was the media influencing society's views on African American culture
  - How was society influencing the media and film?
  - Who were the studios and the people working behind the films that inaccurately portrayed specific races?

- Harmful Tropes of African American Representation in Film.
  - How Misrepresenting cultures, perpetuating stereotypes was/is harmful to African American culture. e.g Hollywood treating Africa as the home of wild, exotic, tribal savages.
  - "The history of American cinema is also the history of American Racism."- Manohla Dargis. (2016)

- How representation of African American culture in film has changed over time.
  - What caused the change? Who or what influenced this change.
  - The American film industry's use of putting African American actors and actresses into stereotypical roles, which effected society's views of African American people e.g casting black actors as thugs and slaves. (Gone with the Wind, 1939)
  - Compare older examples of "representation" with newer, more accurate examples. E.g Comparing King Kong (1933) with Black Panther (2018).

Theoretical Frameworks and Theorists

- Neo-Marxism
  - A loose term for a 20th century approach to Marxism: The political and economic philosophy of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in which the concept of class struggle plays a central role in understanding society's allegedly inevitable development from bourgeois oppression under capitalism to a socialist and ultimately classless society.

- Critical Theory
  - A philosophical approach to culture, and especially to literature, that considers the social, historical, and ideological forces and structures which produce and constrain it. Look at Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud.

- Existentialism
  - Existentialism is a philosophy that emphasizes individual existence, freedom and choice. It is the view that humans define their own meaning in life, and try to make rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe. Norman Mailer, James Baldwin, Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, and Albert Memmi developed their existentialist critiques of race via a set of exchanges among themselves.

- Materialism
  - Is the methodological approach of Marxist historiography that focuses on human societies and their development over time. Historical-materialist concept of race is necessary in order to capture features of societies shaped by historically specific racisms. Karl Marx discusses this in his materialist conception of history.

Theoretical Frameworks and Theorists

- Post structuralism
  - A variation of structuralism, often seen as a critique, emphasizing plurality of meaning and instability of concepts that structuralism uses to define society, language, etc. Look at Jacques Derrida.
- Post colonial
  - Postcolonialism or postcolonial studies is the academic study of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonized people and their lands. Look at Jean Baudrillard, post modern theorist and ex-Marxist).
- Post modern Ahistoricism
  - Ahistoricism refers to a lack of concern for history, historical development, or tradition. Charges of Ahistoricism are frequently critical, implying that the subject is historically inaccurate or ignorant.
- Critical Race Theory
  - Similar to Critical Theory, Critical race theory is a theoretical framework that uses critical theory to examine society and culture as they relate to categorizations of race, law, and power. The founders of the critical race theory movement include such legal scholars as Derrick Bell, Charles Lawrence, Lani Guinier, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, Patricia Williams, and Kimberle Crenshaw.

Books

- The Subject of Film and Race: Retheorizing Politics, Ideology, and Cinema by Gerald Sim (2014)
  - "The book illustrates theoretical discussions with a diverse set of familiar films by John Ford, Michael Mann, Todd Solondz, Quentin Tarantino, Keanu Reeves, and others, to show that we must always be aware of capitalist history when thinking about race, ethnicity, and films."

- Race and Cinema by Diane Negra, Zélie Asava (2013)
  - Discusses Critical Race Theory, the history of Black/White screen politics and the history of Black representation in film. How race is used as a social framework.

- White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory by Jane Gaines (1988)
  - Discusses Psychoanalytic Theory and the gap in the field of film "Produced by the absence of a perspective on women of colour."

- The Representation of the Black Male in Film by Chris Miller (1998)
  - Disscusses commerical American cinema; The way the film industry portrays Black people serves the interest of the White class."How Blacks are portrayed on the screen, which in turn, defnies how Black audiences see themselves."

- Passing Films and the Illusion of Racial Equality by Karen M. Bowdre (2014)
  - The topic of progression and how Hollywood made "An empty gesture toward racial inequality." Also discusses industry practices and casting decisions. E.g Hollywood continuing to cast White actors in exclusively Black roles.

Key Images

Figure 1. Gone With The Wind (1936) a Black woman serving a White family.

Figure 2. Black Panther (2018) The poster shows the predominantly Black cast.

Figure 3. King Kong (1933) African Americans portrayed as exotic savages.

Figure 4. Get Out (2017)
The Black protagonist in the suburbs, meeting his girlfriend's White family, with a Black woman serving them.

Online Articles

- 'Get Out' Sprang From An Effort To Master Fear, Says Director Jordan Peele – National Public Radio (2017)
  - An interview with 'Get Out' director; Jordan Peele. Discusses African American tropes in the horror film genre, and his own Bi-Racial identity.

- Our interview with "Get Out" director Jordan Peele – Jennifer Brett, Atlanta Buzz (2018)
  - Peele talks about the positive reception of 'Get Out' and how the film promotes the conversation of racism in "A way that's fun".

- Black Panther is a gorgeous, ground breaking celebration of black culture – Tre Johnson, Vox (2018)
  - A discussion about how Black Panther brought in rave reviews and sparked conversation all over social media and traditional media alike. "It's about more than the latest superhero's journey; it's also about Black culture's journey."

- Is Miles Morales Finally Getting His Due As Spider-Man? – Abraham Riesman, Vulture (2018)
  - Analysing the history of Miles Morales in the Spider-Man comics, and how his character has been received in the film 'Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse'.

- 'Into the Spider-Verse' and the Importance of a Biracial Spider-Man – Richard Newby, Hollywood Reporter (2018)
  - A discussion about how it is important to address Miles Morales as Bi-Racial and not just "Black Spider-man". Also discusses history of Spider-Man Comics and how important having a Bi-Racial protagonist is as a role model for Bi-Racial children as there is a rare amount of representation for them in films to relate with.

Online Articles

- 'Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse' Review: The Superhero Movie We Need – David Erlich, Indiewire (2018)
  - A film review that talks about how not only is it important to have a person of colour as the protagonist, but also how diverse the rest of the cast of the film is, and how revolutionary the animation of the film is.

- 'Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse' Team Talks Diversity: 'Modern Heroes for a Modern World' – Nate Nickolai, Variety (2018)
  - A film review that features an interview with Brian Tyree Henry, who plays Mile's father in the film. "Morales represented a new type of superhero: a young man of colour who could show kids that anyone can be a superhero."

- How to fix Hollywood's race problem – Nadie Letif, Laila Letif, The Guardian (2016)
  - An article that discusses the film industry's failure to represent people of colour and also talks about "Tired racial stereotypes".

- Hollywood, Separate and Unequal - Manohla Dargis , A.O. Scott, The New York Times (2016)
  - A discussion about The 2016 Oscar nominations (#OscarsSoWhite) and the history of racism correlating with film history in America.

- Black Film Theory: Fighting the Illusions of White Supremacy in Cinematic Narration – Part One – Andre Seewood, Indiewire (2014)
  - Discusses Film Theory in regards to Black filmmakers, Applying David Bordwell's theory of "Cognition and Comprehension" to race and cinema.

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○ Johnson, T. (2018) 'Black Panther is a gorgeous, groundbreaking celebration of black culture.' In: Vox [Online] At: https://www.vox.com/culture/2018/2/23/17028826/black-panther-wakanda-culture-marvel (Accessed on 30.01.19)

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Illustration List

- Figure 1. *Gone With the Wind* (1936) From: *Gone With The Wind*. Directed By: Victor Fleming. [Film still] USA: Selznick International Pictures. At: https://www.hindustantimes.com/hollywood/75-years-later-racism-has-not-gone-with-the-wind/story-YzFyBmlzGkAcDe4FmQ4WbP.html (Accessed on 03.02.19)

- Figure 2. *Black Panther* (2018) From: *Black Panther*. Directed by: Ryan Coogler. [Poster] USA: Marvel Studios. At: https://store.hmv.com/film-tv/dvd/black-panther-(1) (Accessed on 03.02.19)

- Figure 3. *King Kong* (1933) From: *King Kong*. Directed by: Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack. [Film Still] USA: RKO Pictures. At: https://voxatl.org/media-stereotypes-black-men/kingkong_059pyxurz/ (Accessed on 03.02.19)

- Figure 4. *Get Out* (2017) From: *Get Out*. Directed by: Jordan Peele. [Film still] USA: Blumhouse Productions, QC Entertainment, Monkeypaw Productions. At: https://www.publicbooks.org/virtual-roundtable-on-get-out/ (Accessed on 03.02.19)