

Remember the Titans: A Film Analysis

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There are those who would believe that racism is a thing of the past. Jim Crow laws and segregation are no longer in place, and racism disappeared with them. The reality of the situation is that racial discrimination has just evolved. It is now a subtle and unconscious shadow that lurks behind racial jokes and closed doors. There are areas in the United States where poor African Americans must drink contaminated water or must protest for injustices on the street. These inequalities highlight the present state of racism in society, and make it obvious that the discrimination and prejudice against race is more alive than ever. The people who believe that racism is a thing of the past are simply turning a blind eye to current inequalities because they do not conform to their definition of bigotry. A solution to this voluntary blindness is media, which can be an effective aid in painting an accurate image of the reality that racial minorities live every day. The movie “Remember the Titans” is a prime example of how to alert people of the constant threat of racism, and of how to help in reducing prejudice and discrimination.

American football is clearly one of the country’s most beloved sports. The movie creates a connection with the average American when it uses a popular sport to demonstrate racial issues and resolution methods to solve them. If the story of “Remember the Titans” was reduced to its basic components, the main idea is building and training a football team with biracial members and coaches. The story is not a new one by any means, because sports movies often involve mismatched teens improving through team effort and a determined coach. What is definitely different is that the movie chooses to make racism the obstacle to beat for the Titans. The Virginia town itself goes through a life-changing journey as they watch the team break social schemas and become a truly racially integrated group. Of course, there are also small subthemes such as gender stereotypes. Sheryl Yoast is portrayed as a football-loving tomboy who in several occasions is pointed out as odd or different when compared with Nicky Boone, her complete

opposite. Another big point in the movie is the fact that Coach Boone is chosen over Coach Yoast as the team's head coach, and everyone believes it is due to the fact that Boone is African American. The movie makes it obvious that Yoast is more qualified for the position, but due to the recent racial integration of the high school, the school board has chosen Boone. These themes enrich the movie's content and create a vivid image of the reality of the era and the consequences of desegregation.

One of the unique concepts of this movie is that not only was racism featured as a serious issue, it was also reduced, and a true racial integration was achieved by the coaches. Coach Boone undertakes the feat of training the students of T. C. Williams how to play football better, and at the same time, how to play football together. Boone and Yoast begin their training camps with the wrong strategy of dividing the team in two groups, with the White members in Yoast's team and the Black members in Boone's. This creates an environment of competition, which has been proven to create greater problems of prejudice and discrimination as demonstrated by the Robbers Cave study conducted by Sherif (1961). Coach Boone seeks to resolve this by simply forcing the groups to share space together by rooming and eating together, which increases the tension between the team members. Boone also tells the team that they are now required to get to know each other individually. Although this exercise is forced upon the teenagers, it is a good example of contact hypothesis, where people are put together, and get to know each other (Allport, 1954). This is successful in at least one pair of boys, Gerry and Julius. These boys meet the prerequisites necessary for the contact hypothesis to take place because they are personally interacting with each other as students and teammates which makes them of equal status. The young men are forced to interact as roommates and during practice making for a sustained interaction that becomes cooperative when they realize that their stereotypical thoughts and

discriminatory actions are preventing the team to succeed. When Gerry and Julius argue about neither of them co-operating, they come closer and create a common goal. The two teenagers are initially portrayed as the stereotypical White boy who uses his rich influential parents to obtain his goals, and the Black boy who is hostile and unable to be a team player. These stereotypical images help to dispel the idea that they could only accept each other because they are the exception to the rule when it comes to Black or White people (Blaine, 2013). Gerry and Julius defeat all odds by staying friends until Gerry's death and this lifelong friendship is proof that Coach Boone's strategy of contact hypothesis worked for them.

Making a movie relatable is an incredibly difficult effect to create for moviemakers. If the audience cannot connect to the movie in any way, then they will disengage from the images playing in the screen. The movie magic will be broken and the viewer will form the impression that the movie was boring or bad because they did not enjoy the experience thoroughly.

"Remember the Titans" has a strong magnet for Americans, as already mentioned, because it features an incredibly popular sport. It was a smart move from the creators of the movie to use this sport as the carrying vessel for their racial message. If the movie had been only about the topic of racial integration in a high school, for example, then it would have lost part of its audience. The students needed something to unite them, and football was the glue that helped integrate both races for the Virginia town. The movie created a relatable environment for the viewer to immerse in, but was careful enough to keep the movie realistic. There were still people who opposed the racially integrated team and school. The person throwing the brick at Coach Boone's home and the fact that most of the African American students stayed in their hometown and did not continue their football careers demonstrated the fact that equality and justice are not established in the town and the country in general.

The movie had a powerful message about racism and it delivered it in an outstanding way. However, this was not the only topic displayed in the story. Sheryl Yoast is reprimanded several times for demonstrating her passion for football and the way she dresses. It is clear that this was something that the director wanted the audience to notice as there are several scenes with Sheryl and Nicky that demonstrate their differences and the way they are treated accordingly to those differences. Yet, Sheryl's defiance of the stereotype is not completely accepted, only begrudgingly acknowledged. Coach Boone tells Sheryl to go play dolls with Nicky and Sheryl declines since she would rather discuss football. Boone never apologizes or makes her feel invited to accompany him. Sheryl is sometimes used as comic relief in the movie, with her rants about the plays and the players themselves but is not often taken seriously, even by her father. Coach Yoast allows his daughter to be present in the field at practice but doesn't really take her commentary seriously, and is often seen sweeping her away when she becomes too engaged with someone. It is somewhat disappointing to see an important gender equality and stereotype issue be so well represented in the portrayal but not resolved. If Sheryl had received a more serious response from Coach Boone when she acknowledged his skill as a coach, then the gender and age stereotypes could have been reduced as well. Instead, the scene was a comic one, and his response only made it more present that she was a young girl who didn't have a strong say in the game for men.

Racism is an issue that society faces in the present and will face in the future. It is too deeply ingrained in the minds of people thanks to media portrayals and old beliefs of racial groups. The only difference between the past and present racial attitudes is that now people are not so obvious about their discrimination and prejudice. In the past African Americans were kept in literal chains, working their lives away for the rich. In the present they are kept in the

figurative chains of poverty and inequality, working their lives away for the rich who have white privilege and better possibilities. However, there are ways to break this pattern of discrimination. One way to spread awareness is to use the same media that helped create these stereotypical portrayals. “Remember the Titans” helps viewers understand that desegregation did not mean immediate acceptance or abolishment of racism from the minds of racists. The film also exemplifies how to begin reducing the bigotry that exists between races.

References

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