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The Wreckage of Racism: *Crash* Film Analysis

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Billy Graham once said, “racism and injustice and violence sweep our world, bringing a tragic harvest of heartache and death” (Graham, 1998). For hundreds of years, racism has been a recurring issue that has caused misery and despair in many people’s lives. Hate crimes are a specific instance in which racism is taken to a whole new level. Race, sex, and gender are just a few of the many categories that are predominantly used as a basis of discrimination. Although racism is a widely discussed topic, it is still a relevant issue that needs to be addressed.

The movie *Crash* is an excellent portrayal of racism that follows different people and their difficult journey through discrimination. Prejudices are another important topic that is represented in the film in which people develop preconceived ideas and thoughts about others. The primary purpose of this film is to inform audiences and demonstrate discrimination and prejudices throughout many different situations. There are many instances of racism in this movie, but a specific event in the movie would be when the two Black men steal a car from a rich White couple, in which the White woman begins to be verbally aggressive towards people of color. There is also another situation in which a racist cop sexually harasses a Black woman in front of her husband. Racism is a significant theme that goes along with a moral message to treat others with respect and kindness regardless of their race or ethnicity. Throughout the movie we also see an emerging theme about how important it is to be thoughtful and careful when forming preconceived opinions about others. This is an important message that should be apparent to everybody by now, but sadly people still need to see movies such as *Crash*, in order to understand this is a major issue that still exists in today’s society.

The authors of *Understanding the Psychology of Diversity*, discuss the term, cultural stereotype, which is “a set of traits and characteristics that people associate with a particular social group” (Blaine & Brenchley, 2017, p. 95). This was evident in the movie when Sandra

Bullock's character was having the locks on her house changed by a Hispanic man. After she realized that he was a man of color, she demanded that the locks be changed again, because she felt that he would sell her key to his "homies". Although this man never did anything to give her that idea, she still felt threatened because of Hispanics' stereotypical culture. Another concept in the textbook that Blaine and Brenchley (2017) discuss are the ideas surrounding the term, out-group homogeneity effect, which is when we think that people who are members of the out-group are all alike and everybody in the in-group are all similar (p. 38). This is shown in the film by the two young Black men that steal cars from White people. These specific characters feel that all Blacks are in their in-group because they are all similar, while the White people are in the out-group because they are all hostile and judgmental. Although, their beliefs were confronted when they tried to steal an expensive car from a Black man. The fact that a Black man drove a nice and valuable car was surprising to them, because they were not familiar with seeing a man of color share the same qualities as a White person.

A particular part in the film that I thought was effective was when the wife who was sexually harassed got into the car accident, and she had to be saved by the same cop that inappropriately touched her earlier in the film. This was a compelling aspect in the film, because it demonstrated the theme that everyone should treat people with respect. When the cop was trying to save her life, the woman became terrified and would rather die than have this man save her life. His previous actions towards her almost cost her to lose her life. The audience can see that the cop became distressed and felt remorse about how he treated her earlier. This situation showed the audience that compassion and courtesy should be given to every person, no matter their skin color. Although, in my opinion, the most powerful scene in the film was when the White man shot one of the young African American men in his car because he believed that the

Black man was pulling a gun out of his jacket. This particular scene was very upsetting, because the young man died due to a negative stereotype and prejudice formed by the White individual. The young African American was presumed to have a gun due to the stereotype surrounding Blacks and criminal activity. This is a major aspect in the theme regarding how people's preconceived opinions about others can be dangerous, because it hinders the ability for people to truly get to know each other, which can result in life or death.

Although *Crash* had effective scenes that attributed to the various themes, it also had moments that seemed to have been ineffective. Overall, the movie sent a strong message, but there seemed to be too many different storylines which made it difficult to keep up. For example, I often found myself forgetting specific events that happened in each character's life, which only made me confused when they kept changing characters. Every main character also seemed to be a victim, and/or a racist which made it very difficult to follow considering this caused there to be many incidences that depicted racism and prejudices. Another detail in the movie that I thought could have been better, would be the relationship between the Black director's character and his wife and how they dealt with the racism together. The director's main conflict throughout the film was with himself, and how he felt humiliated, although as a married couple, I felt as if they should have faced this problem together and communicated. The lack of communication between the couple prevented the audience from seeing the interaction between them regarding the racist cop saving his wife's life. Married couples offer strong support systems and it would have been more interesting to see these characters work with each other rather than against each other.

In conclusion, the film *Crash* was a purposeful and noteworthy film that showed the audience the negative consequences of prejudices. It had themes surrounding the idea about treating people with respect, and not judging a book by its cover. The quote by Billy Graham

was evident in this movie, because the audience got to see a city full of heartache and death that is caused by the effects of racism.

References

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