

Racism of The Osage People: *Killers of the Flower Moon* Film Analysis

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Killers of the Flower Moon is a film done in 2023 that received many awards for its portrayal of the Osage Native American peoples after the discovery of oil on their land in Oklahoma in the 1920s along with how the FBI solved many mysterious deaths of the Osage. I wanted to see the movie based on its theatrical previews but quickly realized after watching that it would be great for this assignment after reading the assignment details. The entire movie included aspects of social difference, stereotypes, prejudice, sexism and racism of the Osage Nation along with greed for their newfound wealth.

The movie begins with a group of Native Americans discovering oil on their land. Shortly thereafter a town is seen along with a railroad, and it appears as though the Native American people are accepted by Anglos for their newfound wealth. You can see the Osage draped in jewelry, driving fancy cars, large lots of land with cattle and even Anglos driving as their chauffeurs. However, as the movie unfolds, you learn that Anglos are more conniving and are working together in finding ways to take the wealth of the Osage. Anglos are marrying the Native American women and then the women and their families suddenly become deathly ill. The money of the Osage Native Americans is setup, so the inheritance passes to those in the family tribe. The Anglo men in the movie go to extraordinary measures to wipe out entire Native American families so that they can instead inherit the monies. They go to great lengths to wipe out an entire ethnic culture.

The film follows a man, Ernest, fresh from war returning home to his uncle's place. The uncle is a prejudice man against the Osage and although he acts as a friend to them is manufacturing their demise through Anglo/Osage marriages and work contracts. He also has an superiority complex that is evident in the way he speaks to his nephew upon his return from war.

In particular, he sets Ernest in the path of Mollie, one of the wealthiest available single Osage women by making him her chauffeur. As the Osage are mysteriously dying without investigations, Mollie is determined to have the government sent help. In the meantime, she marries Ernest and then the whole family starts to become ill or has an accident and dies. Eventually, after a home explosion in the Oklahoma town, the FBI shows up and begins investigating all the mysterious ways in which these Native Americans are dying. While other people carry out the deeds it is Hale (Ernest's uncle) who is behind all the deaths. It is his grand master plan that has made these people sick, had then executed or lead to their demise in some way.

In the first twelve minutes of the film, Hale, who calls himself the king of the Osage Hills, has a conversation with his nephew Ernest, who has just returned from war, and begins asking questions about his physical abilities, his drinking and his preferences in women. Although he is using a calm tone the underlying racism, stereotyping and prejudice is implied by his questioning. He asks him if he likes "red" women referring to the Native Americans (p. 91). The nephew responds that he likes all women especially the heavy, soft ones. The way Hale continues to speak to his nephew is as though he is daft. He even tells him to smarten himself up. That he should not talk just for the sake of talking but if he is talking be smart about it (p. 28). Hale refers to the Native Americans as sharp people "because they worked it, so they determine who gets head rights to the oil". He mentions that the Osage have horrible lands, but that God got the last laugh because he put the oil on the Osage land (p. 65). Before we hit twenty minutes into the film, Hale is again speaking Ernest about the Native Americans. This time more specifically, Mollie. He tests the waters to determine if Ernest is interested in Mollie, when it is confirmed, he proceeds to give information that Mollie is a "full-blooded estate" referring to her money from

the oil found on Osage land. He even says, “now that is something a man can work with”. As though the only reason to be interested is because of the financial gain but also in a display of sexism (p. 118). His social difference is very evident at this point as he continues to manipulate his nephew into considering marriage with Mollie to get the estate money (p. 65).

There is another scene in the movie where one of Mollie’s sisters dies. In their home there are Anglos and Native Americans. Extensions of the blended family. There is an elderly Anglo couple at the dining room table talking about how uncivilized it is to have all these people in the house. How unclean the home is. They also start discussing two small children sitting at the table eating. One child is Osage, and the other is of mixed heritage (Anglo and Osage Native American). The woman makes a comment about how you would never know the lighter skin one was a half breed. The gentleman calls both children “little savages”, reflecting yet another example of racism (p. 92). The woman proceeds to say that the children can’t help who they are. The gentleman then compares the children to an eclipse that God has created for no reason displaying a prejudice toward and a social stigma on the children (p. 199, 221). In this same excerpt another of Mollie’s sisters arrived drunk. She is known by the men in town in a familiar way and is a heavy drinker. Hale discusses with Ernest at this gathering that the sister, Anna, carries a gun and with her behavior is going to mess with the wrong person one day. Shortly after this gathering Anna is found raped and dead in a nearby creek. Self-fulfilling the foretold prophecy by Hale (p. 43). In all reality, this was designed by Hale to rid Mollie’s family of yet another heir to their family fortune.

Killers of the Flower Moon is a great example of many concepts in the book. Although it only looks at Anglos and Native Americans it has many examples of prejudice, racism, greed, social differences, stereotypes and self-fulfilling prophecy. There are even examples of social

stigma and sexism throughout the film. This film was very intense and very well done to exhibit how the Osage were mistreated in the 1920s in efforts to steal their land, oil rights and money because of the theory of Manifest Destiny and superiority complexes. In the end, the Osage Native Americans get the help they need from the FBI and both Hale and Ernest are arrested for deaths of many of the Osage. The Osage fortune and culture is saved because of one brave woman who would not give up the fight.

References

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