**Abstract**

Racial polarization is still evident in American film, although explicit racism and discrimination is not. Through the use of academic journals, scholarly articles and film examples this paper examines the suggested existence of post-racial societies in films, and the use of racial stereotypes and colorblindness in these films to achieve an understanding of racial interpretations in America. Further, this paper exhibits how post-racial narratives in American film further perpetuate harmful stereotypes and false ideologies. I analyze multiple films for their inclusion of characters considered both uplifting and damaging in order to develop a clearer understanding of race representation in American film. I also analyze certain character archetypes, such as the white messiah and the welfare queen, and review how these are incorporated into “post-racial” films.

**Methods**

To begin developing this research paper I simply thought about race in American film. My topic of choice was originally the separation of black and white people I saw so commonly in films, namely the lack of interracial casts. I thought of *The Big Wedding* (dir. Justin Zackham 2013)and *Think Like a Man* (dir. Tim Story 2012); both romantic comedies have an ensemble cast of recognizable actors, yet only two characters of a differing race than the rest of the cast. Black American films with only two white characters are likely created in response to too many other films with all white casts and one or two speaking black characters. I was going to focus on how this polarization came about and why it still exists today, as well as who these kinds of films are marketed toward and what messages the convey about race in the United States. However, I realized that I may present a conflicting perspective since I am part of the audience the films like *Think Like a Man* are targeted towards, and I recognize the importance of representation as the motivation for this development. I also felt it may be difficult to research the marketing tactics and the social effect these films have on race relations. There were too many reasons for me not to choose this aspect of race and film, so I began to look at different angles.

I examined further the kinds of characters that “white films” are centered around. Drawing from my memory of films with white protagonists, the largest conflicts they face are situational and have to do with the characters they interact with. Conflict is usually on an individual scale and can be solved by the end of the film. But when I thought about black main characters, I noticed that they were commonly fit into a larger social and historical context; they were dealing with drug dealers in a bad neighborhood, failed education systems, gang violence and police brutality, or trying to find love while also being independent. While these situations are true for black people, the storylines black people were placed in were ultimately less character-based than those with white people. These conflicts speak to a larger scope of institutional oppression and many other issues that affect the black community. White characters were given social neutrality, while black characters were always reminded that they were black.

At this point I was reminded of the media outlets that argue that race is no longer relevant, yet there are countless films illustrate the institutional racism and stereotypes that still affect people of color today. The term “post-racial” is often used to describe the idea that race was no longer relevant, and I began to research the term in relation to American film. I used the articles that were cited in the reference sections of articles that supported my ideas and was also able to find research on black stereotypes, white savior archetypes, and colorblindness.

**Discussion**

While writing this research paper, I struggled mainly in areas of organization, coherence, and development of my own ideas. I was familiar with the topics that I was discussing in this paper, but this was the first time I was forced to articulate them on paper and support them with scholarly evidence.

At first I had difficulty formulating a research question although I knew what the object of my research was. My writing came across as unfocused because I hadn’t written explicitly what question my paper was answering and I was making general conclusions instead of relating each subtopic back to a greater theme. Once I broke down the overall message my paper was delivering, I was able to develop a clear research question and hypothesis.

Stemming from my lack of a research question and hypothesis came the problem of organizing my introduction to move fluidly between my personal narrative and how I arrived at my topic. The beginning of my introduction was largely general, and eventually was eliminated in order to make the section more concise. There was originally almost no connection between my narrative and my topic, so I had to formulate topic sentences that provided a fluid transition. This step became easier once I identified my research question and hypothesis.

I also had to adapt to providing my own analysis to support my ideas instead of just scholarly references. Research papers in the past have typically been based on factual topics, so a paper that involved sociological theories and ideologies as in this paper changed the way I research and the way I write. I was forced to provide my own ideas and then use scholars to support what I wanted to say, instead of referring to a source and writing about how it was true or false.

Aside from my own interpretations, I also struggled relay my understanding of these topics clearly. I frequently revised to make my statements more direct and less repetitive. My topic sentence was sometimes in the middle of my paragraph, which required me to reorganize. I found doing a backwards outline helpful for this and many of my other organizational issues, since it forced me to be more critical about my statements.

Overall, I did enjoy writing this paper and I learned that organization is my biggest challenge. The problem lies in my head primarily. I draw organization from being able to list my main ideas and evidence without going on tangents or presenting the information out of its written order. At certain stages in the drafting process I felt I couldn’t do that. In the future I will probably try to form a research question before researching and drafting. I’ll also probably work from outlines in the future that provide a topic sentence, evidence, and analysis to avoid having to go backwards and constantly revise.

Although we are wrapping up these research papers, this is the kind of essay that I feel I could continue to develop after this course is over. There are still valuable examples that I didn’t include that could seriously strengthen the argument. This could become a collaborative effort with other writers and researchers that can provide alternative perspectives. The largest challenge was organization because there was such a volume of relevant information that I needed to condense in order to fit the needs of my argument.