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Field Investigation

On April 4th Westhampton College senior, Abby Muthoni, held a screening for her documentary *divURse: A Black Student Experience*. This documentary focuses on the black student experience at University of Richmond. Muthoni interviewed alumni and students in order to gage how they feel or felt about being a student at University of Richmond. This documentary analyzed how black students feel in predominantly white spaces, specifically the Robins School of Business, how some students feel like they are being used as the “token black person” at every event, and how things have changed since the first black residential student was on campus.

In this course, we have focused heavily on representation and race. This documentary also focused heavily on representation and race. Representation is defined as “the result of processes that invariably mean that certain aspects of reality are highlighted and others neglected” (Media/Society: Industries, Images, and Audiences 188). In this course, we have discussed how representation is used or not used in terms of media. The documentary discussed how the University of Richmond’s advertisements that supposedly show “diversity” techniques don’t offer an accurate representation of the student body. Usually with representation media tends to misrepresent using stereotypes or under represent a group of people; however, in terms of the University of Richmond they falsely represent black student population by placing them strategically into every advertisement for the university. This advertising technique helps the University of Richmond, and many other college campuses across the United States, admit more students of color. In this particular case, representation is being used in order to deceive and create false images for the “benefit” of those who may be underrepresented. This isn’t ethical because even though black students are shown enjoying the university in advertisements, most of the black students are miserable in actuality. Just because someone or a group is represented it doesn’t mean that it’s accurate. For instance on Master of None, Dev struggles with the fact that while there are Indians on TV, the characters are very one dimensional.

Another connection to this course, that I noticed in the documentary, was stereotype and the stigma around the Robins School of Business. The business school is very white male dominated and isn’t an inviting environment for black students. Black students or any students of color are very underrepresented in the the business school because the environment is far from inviting. There is this stereotype that black students only study in the sciences or humanities; however, in the documentary black students who are business majors were interviewed about their experience. The students who were interviewed explained how uncomfortable they felt just walking into the business school initially and how it took them time to adjust to the culture of the business school. In this course stereotypes have always been defined in relation to media portrayals, “systematic representations, repeated in a variety of forms from jokes and cartoons to news broadcasts, feature films, and television series” (Keywords). Stereotypes don’t have to be spread through media forms, they can also be spread through word of mouth. Even though they are many stereotypes about the business school more and more black students seem to be breaking the mold; however, their impact isn’t at the forefront of any media on campus like The Collegian.

During the event, the idea of “Media, Culture, and Identity” constantly crossed my mind because this student used a media form to explain the black culture on campus, and also helped further shape the identities of black University of Richmond students. This documentary is important because the lives of black students have not been adequately documented. Their stories and impact have been erased and looked over when viewing the history of the University of Richmond.

References

Croteau, D., & Hoynes, W. (2017). *Media/society: Industries, images, and audiences*. SAGE.

Ouellette, L., & Gray, J. (2017). *Keywords for media studies*. New York University Press.