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Media, Culture, & Identity

Professor Tilton

**Final Reflection**

Let me first start off by saying that this project was one of the most interesting things I have done here at the University of Richmond. This project was very fun to make, and it allowed for many creative ideas to flow and come to life. This project was actually very hard to make, but all of the hard work put into it was very rewarding when I saw the result. Being able to show my ideas of how media influences us by using forms of media made things so much more powerful. I really got to express how these depictions in media change the outlook that one has on a race or group of people. Seeing the evidence and not just reading it in a normal five paragraph essay also makes it easier to learn and remember, as it is more exciting and enticing to watch. Not only did I get to share my thoughts in a creative way about a topic that is close to my heart and have experienced in my life, I also got to a better understanding about media, culture, and society. I am really glad I got to share this and create this project.

First I should explain the topic of my video. My video was about the criminalization of young black men through film and music. With a project such as a videographic essay, there are a plethora of topics that can be chosen. But for me, this topic was the first and only one that came to mind. The criminalization of young black males is something that goes on everyday of our lives. *Especially* in the media. One look at certain news channels and you would think that the young African American male is the most dangerous living thing on the planet. These types of representations in the media are incredibly bad for a young black male. It creates a hostile environment, strengthening all of the stereotypes of this race that has been placed on them by other people. This is another reason why I picked this topic. I believe that it is important to know how stereotypes work and how they can impact the people being stereotyped. Also that it is important to understand how media enforces these stereotypes and what kind of influence they have. This one stereotype is very important to me because I have experienced this stereotyping first hand multiple times in my young adulthood. By store owners who have followed me through the aisles of the store waiting to catch me stealing something. By old and young white women outside of supermarkets that were struggling with all of the bags of things they just purchased, and when I asked if they needed help they looked at me nervously and said nothing but moved faster in order to get away from me and secure their belongings like I was going to steal from them. Or by woman in elevators that see me walk in and immediately clutch onto their purses with every fiber of strength that they have, protecting themselves from me as if my sole purpose of getting into the elevator was to steal from them. And I am not the first young black man to go through this.

This brings me to the argument of my piece. First, I must note that the keywords I chose were stereotype, representation, and race. Stereotype is defined in our book *Keywords for Media Studies* by Gray, Jonathan, and Laurie Ouellette, as “systematic representations repeated in a variety of forms” (Gray et al 2017). Race is defined as “a legal, social, and cultural invention rather than given in nature” (Gray et al 2017) that is used to classify one by their ethnicity. Representation is defined as “standing for something, a portrayal” (Gray et al 2017). These keywords were the obvious choices for me, as they go perfectly with my topic and argument. As I stated before, my piece was about the criminalization of African American men through film and music. The argument itself has two parts to it. The first part is how the glorification of representations of the worst situations in a young black males life can create and reinforce stereotypes of those people. When all that is shown about the life of a young black male is drive-by shootings, selling or doing drugs, stealing, or anything else that is illegal, it only strengthens the stereotypes that people have of that race of people. When someone from another race that lives outside the realm of the young black male sees these representations without knowing any context whatsoever, they come to believe that this is the only way of life for these black males. That murder and drugs and stealing is all that they know and can do. And because these things are illegal and so serious, this causes people to be afraid of young black males. It creates a fear based hostile environment that does nothing but leave a young African American male open to discrimination, hatred, and danger. Even the young males that are nothing like the representations that these stereotypes come from are affected by this. This is where we see the murder of innocent young black men come into play. Like the murder of Trayvon Martin, who was killed by a white man because he looked “dangerous”. Or when the police are called on a group of black men because they are just hanging out in front of someone’s store for too long and look “suspicious”. The people that are making these assumptions are doing so based off of the stereotypes that I have previously stated. This is why I want to bring light onto them.

The second part of the argument was that we as African Americans are part of the problem. By part of the problem, I am saying that we are also people that are showing these representations to the world without thinking about how it will impact us as a race. When some of the people with the power to influence use that power to glorify these criminalized acts, they are only hurting their own people and themselves. This is the reason why I chose all of my media. The movies that I picked and the music that I chose were all made by black artist. This was to emphasize that although they are using their power of influence to tell a story and show what their people have been going through and experiencing through their own eyes, a by product of that is people misinterpreting these stories and depictions, criminalizing the people in these stories. Another reason why I picked these specific pieces of media was because they are direct depictions of the stereotypes placed on us as young black men. The scene from “Menace II Society” when the kids were being followed around by one of the store owners. The drive-by scene from “Boyz In The Hood”. The scene from “Paid In Full” about selling drugs. These are all scenes that young black males, including myself, have experienced. I am all for letting the people know what happens in our lives and how it impacts us, but sometimes in doing so in such a violent manner we end up incriminating ourselves. This also hurts young black males because they end up trying to fit these stereotypes because they believe that this is the way that people outside of their race will see them anyway. So they help them out by becoming these stereotypes. That is where you see musicians do these criminalizing things in their music videos, such as the ones I chose in my video. We as African Americans must understand that we have the power to show different representations of what it is to be a young black African American male. Representations that depict us a regular people like everyone else, not just thugs or thieves or murderers. Like the last few that I chose from music by Kendrick Lamar and Jay Z.

In conclusion, by going through the process of making this video, I left with even more knowledge on media, culture, and identity. All three of these things are completely interlocked, one feeding off of the other. The media can easily influence a society’s culture and one’s identity through showing certain types of things. The representations shown in the media can affect how a culture forms or feels about certain thing. And the representation, or lack thereof, can heavily impact how one views themselves. It also impacts how others view other people, and depending on the purpose of the representation, it can have a negative or positive impact. Inversely, media feeds off of culture and identities, because the most popular people or cultures will be shown in a better light more often than not. This is a cycle that we see in our lives everyday. And in such a technologically ran world, we will continue to see this cycle. So we have to also continue to have a mind of our own, and try not to let the media have complete influence over how we view the world. When we do that, we will come to see less accidents where stereotypes and negative representations of people will affect how one interacts with a group or race of people. That is the world I wish to live in. One where we do not automatically believe what we see on the news or in movies, but what we see in person with our very own minds, and react based off of that.

**Works Cited**

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