Racism in the Movie: The Green Mile

Frank Darabont wrote and directed the movie The Green Mile. The name “green mile” stems from the floor of Death Row, which is green. The film centers on the relationship between the white and the black race. The Green Mile delivers a tale of saddening spiritual uncertainty through shifting to and from extreme poles: it is comfortable and pleasant at one moment, and ferocious the next. In prison, where the movie is set, Paul Edgecomb is in charge of the Death Row in the Louisiana Penitentiary in the 1930s when the Great Depression has its grip on American. All Paul’s juniors are competent and humane, but one defies the odds, Percy. A gigantic black man is brought in as a prisoner one day, and he is John Coffey. He behaves nothing like a death row convict. By being in death row for the alleged double murder of white girls, John Coffey, a black man with rare abilities, strokes the sensitive subject of race in The Green Mile upon which this critical analysis is based on.

The Green Mile is a memory project where it is accessed through flashbacks of the now elderly Paul Edgecomb. The memory of Edgecomb is triggered by television images and sounds of people dancing to a familiar tune, which takes Edgecomb back to his days at the Penitentiary (Darabont). At the Penitentiary, John Coffey awaits his execution, but, in the meantime, he is befriended by white correctional officers who, with time, believe in his innocence. On the flip side, the corrections officers who believe John is innocent, are entirely powerless to stop his execution but are instead obligated to execute him, which they do (Darabont). Paul Edgecomb cannot offload the burden of John’s execution through his entire extended life. When viewed from the perspective of the white guards and Edgecomb, it is apparent that the white supremacy that reigns in the outside world is due to a lack of understanding the black people. The movie alludes that when whites, who previously did not have an interaction with blacks, interact with blacks, they get their perspective of life and accept them as human beings. The adversity in the current arrangement is that the power of judgment of blacks is wielded by privileged whites who might not have the chance to interact with blacks and instead, delegate the work of executing harsh penalties to their white brothers who fortunately or unfortunately understand the problem but can do nothing about it but perpetuate the unfairness. Modleski (1), in a critique of the movie, affirmed this sentiment and said that the film showed how white people engage their fear dominated imaginings of the black community, which allow the white to feel good when a black man dies to preserve the status quo.

At the scene of the crime, there is a flashback re-enactment of the crime. It is a scene to cringe on due to the ferocity of the rape and murder of the two young white girls. Viewers come closeup with a gang of white men with guns and farm implements moving through the field momentarily, giving the impression of an impending lynching (Darabont). This renews the memories of Jim Crow, slavery, and white supremacy. In the arms of a gigantic black man, is the body of a white girl and a weeping Coffey. Coffey tries to utter words demonstrating his remorse and his sorry stature. At this moment, the camera pans across the still head of a blonde girl and the muscular arms of Coffey. At this moment, the viewer cannot fail to associate black masculinity with the body of a lifeless white female child. It is a moment that, through cognitive bias, allows the viewer to pass judgment on Coffey instantaneously without caring whether he was there to help or a victim. The film, at this point, allows the viewer to experience how white supremacists perceive blacks, especially when they are caught in compromising

situations. The judgment on blacks is passed swiftly without seeking their side of the story, and sometimes, in a manner consistent with the doctrines of Jim Crow, white supremacy, and slavery. The scene, according to Owen and Ehrenhaus (143), emphasizes on the mythical 'black beast rapist.'

In a scene that captures the inverted relationship between blacks and whites, we meet Edgecomb escorting Coffey to use his powers for the rescue of a white warden's wife. The editing of the movie on this part shows Coffey and white guards in the bedroom of the white woman. The editing captures the power of Coffey as he moves over the mouth of the woman and covers it with his to such out the disease. As it happens, the lights flicker, the clock stops, and the ground shakes violently, a phenomenon Glenn and Cunningham (135) associated to black magic. This part emphasizes the importance of having a diverse community that allows peaceful coexistence for the benefit of all. Despite the powers that Coffey had, he was executed for a mistake he never committed, a common occurrence in the American justice system.

Racial disparities are a thorny issue in America. Blacks are often put in positions of disadvantage despite the benefits that arise from collaboration between races. Racial lines have been shown to cause immeasurable pain and death to blacks in the hands of whites without any probable cause.

Works Cited

1. Darabont, F., Hanks, T., Morse, D., Hunt, B., Duncan, M.C., Cromwell, J., Jeter, M., Hutchison, D., Greene, G., Rockwell, S. and Pepper, B., The green mile. Warner Bros., 1999.
2. Glenn, Cerise L., and Landra J. Cunningham.