Stereotypes Of African American Men And Teens In Media: The Blind Side And The Hate You Give

The movie, ‘The Blind Side’ written and directed by John Lee Hancock in 2009, is a prime example on how African American men and teens are represented throughout television and media. There are multiple impressions, identities and groups that have been recognized and represented throughout. The blind side portrays their African American characters as broken teens with no education, drug addicted and “gangster’s”. This isn’t to say all African American’s are drug riddled with no education but this puts a strong impression on the audience to believe the group should be avoided and even thought less of than other social groups. One major technique was proved through the predominantly rich, white, residential part of Tennessee in which Leigh Ann Tuohy lives in being compared to ‘hurt village’ where Michael is from. The continuous shift between the two settings is a major technique used to remind the audience of Michael’s violent and unwanted background. There are many other ways in which the blind side specifically gives off the negative representation of “big mike” through personality traits given to him, the language he uses and gestures associated with him. This still occurs in today’s society as the media carry’s on to give a bad image towards the specific group: because of this, African Americans are often heavily stereotyped and prejudged due to the racial discrimination within society and media.

Looking further into movies and television that continue to utilize this representation and stereotype, include ‘The Hate You Give’. Throughout this film, “the director wishes to protest against police brutality” says Amandla Stenberg who plays Starr: the teenage girl seeking her voice despite the fact she’s growing up in a tough black neighbourhood whilst attending a predominantly white prep school in another part of town. During the film a weekend house party was broken up by gunshots which seems to be an unfortunate normality in the community. Khalil, Starr’s childhood friend offers to drive her home before being shot dead by a police officer as the 17 year old boy reached for a hairbrush. This incident immediately reminds the audience of common killings from police officers due to racial discrimination and stereotyping. Throughout the investigation, police pursue to blame the victim and Starr whilst she faces a complication from the local gang leader pressing her to keep quiet for fear of being involved, and a civil rights lawyer longings for her to testify in hope of justice for Khalil. This movie strongly speaks up about a common occurrence of stereotyping black, African American men in hopes to show that black lives matter, an important international activist movement that originated in the African American community to campaign against violence and systemic racism towards black people.

A white man by the name of griffin, tells the story of how he darkened his skin with dye, medicine and intense UV rays in order to experience what it was like for African Americans in the pre-civil rights, south of the 1950’s in the film ‘Black Like Me’. Over the course of six weeks Griffin speaks that he was harassed, followed and threatened by racist whites and got a true insight on the rough, sad yet reality of many black lives. In the end his assumption that the blacks were treated as second class, then changed to what he says 10th class, this implies that the lives of the blacks are underestimated and treated much poorly than expected. Griffin took this experiment seriously and helped voice the issue as its clear he was treated this way due to the stereotypes that white people hold on the group of African American’s for many reasons,

mainly the media. Prejudice and racism also lead to the way griffin was treated, the 'pre-judgment' based on ignorance which is a normal human response to racial, social, sexual and other forms of differences.

This issue is further shown in the movie ‘Gridiron gang’, as a councillor at a juvenile detention centre decides to turn the young inmates into a football team, aiming to give them a sense of self-respect and social accountability. However, leading into the movie he faces opposition from high-school coaches who do not want their players facing “criminals” on the field. The negative stereotype of young African American boys is obvious and clear to the audience specifically from the storyline alongside other events. The movie title alone is enough to show just how stereotypical this is: football and gangs together in a predominantly black or coloured jail is communicating with society, that African Americans are violent gangsters.

These films span over a great period of time from 1964-2018 and individually deal with a factor of racism.