The Dynamics Of Race And Class In The Blind Side

“Faced with an image on a screen, we no longer know if the image testifies to the existence of that which it depicts or if it simply constructs a world that has no independent existence” (Casetti 95). Sutured Reality: Film, from Photographic to Digital explores how the products of popular culture depict society and its members by further examining how they influence each other. The article highlights how films construct our superficial lenses of race, class, and gender. Film has the ability to offer society “a representation of things without ever having need of things themselves, thanks simply to the elaboration of algorithm” (Cassetti 95). Simply put, media’s products are rooted within our cultural norms however these norms are reinforced through these products. Cassetti emphasizes how films attempt to challenge traditional norms, but rather reestablish them.

Produced in 2009, The Blind Side prides itself in being a movie based upon the reality of offensive lineman, Michael Oher. The film centers itself upon Oher’s rise from poverty to full potential most notably through the assistance of the Tuohy family. The dynamics of both race and class are seen in this movie through subtle yet apparent ways. The Blind Side presents a unique opportunity for analysis as it exposes social constructs but in doing so establishes an altered depiction of race and further reinforces the dominant ideologies that are instilled within us through popular media.

It is not uncommon for the white savior cinematic trope be a dominant marketing strategy and The Blind Side is no exception. Films like James Cameron’s Avatar and Tate Taylor’s The Help display strikingly similar narratives: a white messianic individual resurrects a non-white individual from their blundering demises. Throughout The Blind Side we see Leigh Anne Tuohy bringing Michael out of the depths of poverty. Having slim to no lines at all, the mere words that are uttered out of Michael’s mouth are to give thanks to the Tuohy’s family. This white savior trope positions white culture as superior and this common cinematic complex has only served to reinforce the ideology of white superiority.

Though the film attempts to challenge racial norms, viewers of The Blind Side are bombarded with reminders of the corruption Big Mike escapes. Michael’s crack addict mother, the gangsters in the ghetto, as though the film gives Michael a voice the film presents Michael with only two options: fall into slums of the ghetto or rise in social standing with the aid of the Tuohys. This further reinforces the notion within our culture that minorities are put in positions that only the superior can address. Viewers are then presented with the sequence in which Tuohys must teach football to Michael. The film goes so far as to depicting that the only way to explain Michael football is through simple terms: “This team is your family. You protect them.” Further expressing how Michael as an individual is too “incapable” of understanding the sport but when given advice from Leigh Anne all becomes clear. This further establishes that Michael is incapable of thinking on his own, however, according to the true Michael Oher this depiction of his character boggles him as he reiterates that the whole notion of the Tuohys teaching him football is false (Newton). This then begs the question: Why is this the narrative that sells? It is because society itself is drawn to the thought of a film that challenges these societal norms. However as a society, we tend to forget that these films reflect reality and due to this it becomes a cycle of perpetuating these norms, rather than challenging racial stereotypes, The Blind Side

blindly details all the long racial stereotypes our society has long tried to stay clear of. The Blind Side demonstrates a contemporary example of how media reflects our cultural, societal norms and stereotypes and with this becomes a prime example of why we must remain suspect.