



The Muted Hybrid: Analyzing Hybridity and its elements through the lens of a third multiracial generation as observed in *How Jack Became Black*

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Abstract

- Multi Racism as a polyphonic discourse addresses the issues of the lack of hybridity in thought among the supreme colonialists who have demarcated the diversified through the process of discriminating against their voices which, in a racist colonist's perspective does not deserve to be voiced. To the supreme colonist or in this text, the white race who have occupied most of America, the thought of being further separated from being identified as a pure race without having to give up their ethnic roots to merge with another, is looked at as a disturbing loss in the retainment of their colonial roots and their power to be the only authoritative symbol. Eli Steele, the father, being the second generation spawn to a first-generation interracial couple, expresses the dilemma he faces in identifying not only his race but also the race of his children (Jack and June) who are part of the third generation. The struggle to choose a primary race to gain admission into or rather fit into any strata of the society takes a toll on their life in being not just subjected to racism and identity politics but also not being accepted, one as a normal human being without labels and two, as someone belonging to a hybrid community.

Keywords:- polyphony, hybridity, racism, supreme colonialist, identity politics

Thesis Statement:- Hybridity when explained through a polyphonic discourse will not only explain the validation of the voices of the oppressed but will also through the monologic truth of race determine the collective consciousness of the multiracial community.

Introduction

Multiracial acceptance has been a poignant reminder over-time to those who have had to face an identity crisis, racial prejudice, and segregation from society. *How Jack Became Black* is an American documentary film that focuses on the life of third-generation as well first-generation multiracial people who have had to fight against identity politics to establish their diversity in race to be considered as a form of belonging to a world that requires them to be part of a category or to identify under a certain racial background. The documentary addresses questions such as if America will have to see the face of change in identifying even more diverse roots of race in the long run leading to a clash of identity crisis and politics and the uncertain distant future for those who cannot be identified under one racial category. The objective of this paper is to analyze the concept of hybridity through the struggle of a community that is denied rights to education, referred to as people who stain the purity of a race as a result of being an offspring to mixed parents as well as being questioned on the authenticity to be considered as belonging to any race for that matter.

Primary Text

How Jack became Black is an American documentary film directed by Eli Steele in the year 2018. This documentary was created with the idea of foreseeing America's future where more than 20% of the population would be identified as belonging to two or more races. Filmmaker Steele identifies himself as part of three races, African-American, Native American, and Jewish. The diversity only intensifies for his children who will have to face an uncertain future when asked to tick the box for the primary race thereby asking them to detect the genes of the most prominent race. One in ten percent of US marriages tends to be mixed-race marriages. The children born from these parents, therefore, face a hard time trying to either fit into one or all of those cultures or face an identity crisis by not being able to identify under one. The primary question that arises is that, why does race have to be a category at all? Does it really matter- the racial boxes that are asked to be ticked in schools, colleges, and other institutions? Does humanity have no role to play to consider them as humans rather than people belonging to different boxes on the basis of which they will be regarded in society? What's worse is if Steele decides to not tick a box, then the staff or representative might just choose one based on his appearance. The dangers of identity politics is a foreign concept that they have failed to be educated on wherein ticking off one race among others may fail to present them with certain benefits, ones that they are not aware of. The discourse of hybridity is however observed only from the point of view of one country, specifically America. The viewpoints and perspectives of other countries have not been taken into consideration.

The Black American dream and the Politics of Color

The dream that every black American had was to finally be able to walk out in the open, to be able to be identified as a human being, or at least this was Martin Luther King's dream. Steele introduces this context in the documentary where he says that according to Luther, judging a person by their skin color was the worst form of oppression that a black American faced. The reason as to why he brought this into context was to prove that ticking black from the list of races he could choose would mean that his son would face dire consequences and racial bias for identifying as black. Luther's dream would be reduced to a utopic vision again and black people will face a dystopian future. The discourse of skin color when it comes to politics has also been widely spoken of in the documentary where he compares Trump's victory to cultural identity wars and the increase in

the polling of votes for DeBlasio's when his son began campaigning for him. We can't really say that he used his son's color as leverage in the election nevertheless it is a matter to be delved into in detail since it was because his son was black and knowing that black is a minority, black people started extending their support to vote for DeBlasio.

Steele also recalls the life of Trayvon Martin, a black teenager who was shot on suspicious accounts by a Hispanic-white man named Zimmerman. The news that became a worldwide sensation and a starting point to the movement "Black Lives Matter" only got to that height because they identified the killer as white and not as Hispanic-white. It was not a case of racial profiling since the man himself hailed from a hybrid family but the news channels omitted that bit of information to draw unwanted attention towards racism. Since black people have been facing oppression for so long, this purposefully misidentified news only agitated the black community even more which led to the streets advocating black people's rights. Zimmerman himself was a child born to hybridity which would mean that he did not intentionally kill the boy because of his color. The other underlying problem that Steele identifies is that a black person or anyone other than a white person if seen walking around a neighborhood, is immediately termed suspicious, drunk, or on drugs. This is one of the major complications of identifying as anything except white. In a society such as this, if Steele is to enroll his multi-racial children into a school or any other institution, he can never know what harm will befall them or on what grounds any illegal issue they may be blamed for. Belonging to more than one race or culture seems like an interesting history to be part of until society starts unanimously blaming the minority for all the crimes or anything that seems skeptical to them.

Hybridity, Multicultural literature and Ethnic Absolutism

People's ability to adapt and accommodate diversity in race contributes to the retention of hybridity in society and the promotion of human agency. If the culture of people represent their voices, their way of living, and the world they inhabit, then, cultural hybridity entails a change in their actions and meanings. More attention would then have to be paid to hybridity's ability or inability to empower other social groups and educate them of the importance and influence they have in society. Is hybridity self-described or is it self-ascribed is a debatable question that we often find ourselves spiraling into. For hybridity to survive, communication is vital and for people to communicate, live in harmony with each other, every individual should have good discernment when it comes to promoting human agency especially when there is a capital force acting in power.

This hybridity also works at par with cultural hybridity as it involves understanding and accepting the cultural background of a person to accept the person themselves. Homi Bhabha believes that cultural hybridity gives rise to a new era of representation, meaning, and negotiation. Controversies, according to him, can happen anywhere from a socio-political context to a classroom. There is a much deeper connection between the instances in the book with how students and readers of this generation have perceived sensitive topics like racism, marginalization, oppression, multiculturalism, and so on. The deficit thinking theory proposed by Walker (2011) states that students are labeled, looked down upon based on their socio-economic status, cultural traditions, ethnicity, and so on. Teachers think that they can demotivate students based on their ethnic background to use it as an excuse to label their failure in not just the work they do but also in failing to be part of a certain class/group of society. This kind of thinking provokes students to analyze such novels in the light of their own problems, thus being able to comprehend the situation as explained. A neutral approach where they can understand the reason behind the atrocity committed against the given space/ platform to learn and understand the situations is what is necessary to be propagated in a classroom space by mentors (Weiner 2006

). It all comes down to the instructor to be able to intercept multicultural literature as it should be and teach the students the value and importance of such literature because they have the highest form of influence primary to sources of media (Walker 2011), Fong and Sheets (2004), and Suh, Hinton, Marken and Lee (2011).

Ethnic absolutism arises from the perspective of people taking into consideration the biological race of a person to claim racial differences for segregation. This is just another fancy word created by white supremacists to define the existing racism or in other words to sugarcoat their actions to defend their racist perspective. This comes alongside the theoretical framework of “Bodies Out of Place” which offers a counter-frame narrative to the whites frame of superiority where they assume that they possess superior knowledge and power over all other sectors of society. The whites fear of blacks or any other minority rising to power has led them to create an ontological expansion of their space so as to give them a feeling of enjoying and establishing everlasting supremacy over them. The normative feature of whiteness extends a feeling of safety to them, which in turn becomes the somatic norm which is later enjoyed by those who are placed in power positions. This concept has very clearly been drawn out in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee as well, where the lawyers and the judicial system who consist of white people refuse to believe that a black man is innocent. Acknowledging that the black man was innocent strips them of their power to condemn him as well as to accept that not all black people should be seen as convicts. Moreover, the fear of black people’s uprising against the wrongful conviction would also force them to rethink their stance of not providing them the space to be acknowledged as a community of their own.

Conclusion

Accepting people and their culture has never been an easy task as far as any country is concerned. Documentaries like those of Eli Steele’s come across as a strong aspect in showcasing the relevance of mixed race, hybridity, and multiculturalism where the importance of acceptance is strongly advocated, and the hindrances of not being part of a culturally diverse society are voiced. Black people and those belonging to other minority groups live in the eternal fear of being rejected, shunned, and cast out from the white’s utopia. To render a space to these diasporic people, the feeling of accommodation has to be inculcated in the minds of the white chauvinists. The real injustice primarily happens in the minds of the oppressors who are unable to figure out what it feels like to be on the oppressed side, as Harper Lee in her novel says, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view.” It is a sin to kill a mockingbird, but it is an even greater sin to have realized the sin and resume the horrid action, a lesson that will probably never see the light in the eyes of the sinful until they have been deemed free of colorblindness.

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