

Pride and Prejudices

By Allison Barr

The year is 2017. It has been 152 years since slavery was ruled illegal in the United States, and only 53 years since the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. If only abolishing racism was as clean of a cut as abolishing laws. Racism is an act of someone being discriminated against because of their race. This causes people to act differently, usually negatively, towards the victim of racism. This can be in the form of offensive language, a disbelief in racial equality, hate crimes, stereotypes, slurs, and more. When passing these acts (which these are only two of several race-related laws), it was to be hoped that racism would stop there. That unfortunately was not the case. Though the law has rid of this kind of hatred, it still lingers among Americans today. Racism is found through derogatory name-calling, stereotypes, and not treating others as equals. There are still many people in the world who do not believe those of different skin colors deserve the same rights. It is devastating to see this sort of behavior still exist 53 years after this law was passed with the intent to cease racism. The question is, *why* does racism still exist amongst society members if the law ruled it out years ago? Some argue because it is so deeply implemented into media, that pop culture is responsible for present day racism. But, it is not. If racism is still prevalent in America today, then it is not the media that is keeping it alive, but it is Americans instead.

Racism still exists in America's modern society. It stems from the arrival of the English in 1607, and pushed thousands of Native Americans out of their homes. The next big event after that, was hundreds of years ago when Americans captured people from Africa and forced them to work for free on their plantations. Both these acts were

completed with the intent for a more successful colonization. This has not been a recent problem. It does not stop there, though. The current problem is that even after all America went through to abolish the many race-related laws, there are still instances of racism. It is because it is so deeply imbedded into our society, that people are still carrying out these beliefs. Racism exists because of the people who still believe the races are unequal. There are instances of people who commit hate crimes and organize rallies to show their belief that their race is superior. These are only to name a few of the ways this issue is still seen. For example, in August of 2017, there was a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. It was known as the, "Unite the Right Rally". Hundreds of these people marched to protest every race that was not their own. It got violent, and one person was killed. Even if racism is not seen this extravagantly all the time, it still exists in everyday life. Most of the time it is subliminal. People are influenced by their parents, their surroundings, and the dark history this country has. These are the most common reasons that racism still exists. The "Unite the Right Rally" was held in an area of the country that was a hub for slavery in the 1800's. Acts like these, show that they are still influenced by their region's history.

Two authors and their essays are to be taken into account when discussing racism. The first being *In Living Color: Race and American Culture* by Michael Omi. Omi is an American professor at the University of California, Berkeley, who works with Racial: Theory, Politics, Identity, and Culture. His essay revolves around racism in modern American society, and especially in pop culture. The second essay being addressed, is, *Being "Masculine of Center" While Black*, by Dani McClain. McClain is a

current writer at The Nation magazine; a liberal, political and cultural magazine in America. She writes from the perspective a black woman, and about the mistreatment faced by those similar to her, and those African-American woman who present themselves as more masculine. These two authors bring strong points and different perspectives to the topic of racism in America today, and are interpretive sources for what is responsible for racism.

It has been argued by several authors that racism still exists, because the media has not let go of it. Michael Omi published a piece on racial prejudices in popular culture. This essay titled, *In Living Color: Race and American Culture* discusses racial inequalities and stereotypes in movies, music, and television. Most of these, that he argued, were present and started in the media. This includes stereotypes and racist castings in movies. His main point was that popular culture is the main contributor for present-day racism. He does not write about the aftermath of this idea, hence leading one to believe that racism does not exist outside of pop culture. The first example Omi presents, is when he talks about television programs. He writes, "In August, the National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations bestowed the "Golden Pete Awards" on television programs, commercials and movies that were deemed offensive to racial and ethnic groups. *Saturday Night Live*, regarded by many media critics as a politically "progressive" show, was singled out for the "Platinum Pit Award" for its comedy skit "Ching Chang", which depicted a Chinese store owner and his family in a derogatory manner" (Omi, 540). *Saturday Night Live* would be regarded as a liberal, progressive television show, but after watching the skit, it is concluded that it displayed a case of

inferential racism. Inferential racism is racism that is more subtle. In this instance, the source making the remarks may sometimes not even realize it is offensive. It can also be seen in the form of generalizations. An example of inferential racism would be asking a person of color where they're "really from", or saying, "wow your English is really good". These are examples of inferential racism because phrases like these are implying that they are different from white people. Inferential racism is heavily influenced by prejudices. No one vocalizes racist expressions towards the Chinese characters in the show, but the skit plays up the stereotypes from this race. They acted out a dramatization of a Chinese accent, the stereotype that Asian parents are strict on their children, and used a jumble of sounds to represent them talking in Chinese. What makes it even more racist, is the actors being white. *Saturday Night Live* did not invent these racist actions. It can be seen in everyday life that people make fun of other's native languages, and believe in these stereotypes. This TV show is just a reflection of how Americans act. The characters being white add to this belief that the skit is almost a critique of this idea. It brings awareness to the absurdity in people's actions. Omi's examples in media, are just reflections of racism in real life.

Another example Omi uses of racism in media is film that is influenced by its audience. Omi writes, "...all racial minorities have been portrayed as "less than human"...Latinos are portrayed as being prone toward violent outbursts of anger; blacks as physically strong, but dim-witted; while Asians are seen as sneaky and cunningly evil." (Omi, 544). These stereotypes are prejudices, forms of racism, and generalizing statements that I do not agree with. But, these originated from how

people began to see others of different races. Film did not invent these stereotypes. The people watching them did. Another, more specific example Omi gives is how whites see Asians. He writes, "...all minorities have been portrayed as 'less than human.'" Also, Omi says, "It is somewhat ironic that *real* differences which exist within a racially defined minority group are minimized, distorted, or obliterated by the media. 'All Asians look alike', the saying goes, and indeed there has been little or no attention given to the vast differences which exist between, say, the Chinese and Japanese with respect to food, dress, language and culture." (Omi, 544). This is demonstrated in movies, but originated in real life. He even mentions the phrase, "All Asians looks alike", which is a common saying in American culture, but not mentioned in film. This racist notion began in early American history. For example, filmmakers would cast any kind of Asian actor to portray any character of Asian descent because the, mainly white, audience could not tell the difference. So, pop culture played on this instance of racism after society started it. Omi writes that media is responsible for racism, when this this is not the case.

Dani McClain talks about the idea of being "masculine at center" and on top of that, being black in America. Being "masculine at center" is a term for a female who presents themselves in a more masculine way. It's not necessarily gender dysphoria, but more of a form of gender expression. McClain tells about the discrimination that those who identify as this face. She recalls the testimony of Malkia Cyril, who was harassed outside of a bar for accidentally backing her car into someone's parked motorcycle. McClain writes, "Cyril says she was also called a "dyke" and "stupid" by

bystanders in the crowd that gathered, many of whom were white and male, according to Cyril and another witness..." (McClain, 552). Cyril testifies, "They were reading me as a butch. They were reading me as a black woman. They were reading me as a masculine woman. The combination of those things is why they felt they could be so physical towards me." (McClain, 552). This account is an example of overt racism. Overt racism is more so abrupt. Examples of this kind of racism would be voicing derogatory terms, segregation, and unequal rights. These actions did not stop after the 1960's, but just occur less so. The way she was treated for a minor altercation, shows the way people react differently due to prejudices against someone. Had Cyril been a male, or at least white, the bystanders would have acted differently. The men did not harass Cyril because someone in movie did, and they were influenced by it. This story was shared recently, further proved that it is in people's blood to act violently against another because of their race.

But contrary to both of these, is the argument that racism does not exist at all. Many are oblivious to the problem. Some could say that because there are no longer laws involving racism, it is a thing of the past. The Equal Opportunity Act was established in 1972, which was a law that made it illegal to discriminate someone based on their race. Segregation was abolished, and all rights were granted for everyone. This allowed for everyone of every race to be given the same opportunities, so why is there still a problem? Michael Omi presents the ideas of racial beliefs. He writes, "...the United States was a society shaped by racial conflict. The establishment of the Southern plantation economy, Western expansion, and the emergence of the

labor movement, among other significant historical developments, have all involved conflicts over the definition of *color line*.” (Omi, 541). These are all racially shaped events that occurred in the past; hence Omi’s use of “was”. America no longer has plantations or slaves, or racist laws, therefore it could be argued that racism does not exist. This side would also argue that inferential racist skits like “Ching Chang” on *Saturday Night Live* are not racist because there are no examples of overt racism. In the skit, “Ching Chang”, the characters are never voicing racial vituperation. Some would see no issues in a white actor portraying an Asian character. “Ching Chang” is an all inferential racism. The opposing side would argue this belief that inferential racism in the media is not an issue because it is not overt, or direct. They would also say that people who find a problem with inferential racism are reading too much into it, and it is not an actual problem because it is not literal or vocalized.

To further counter this argument using McClain’s article, is to present the argument that race was not a factor in the angry acts voiced towards Cyril. The men that yelled at Cyril were at a bar and they were drunk. They could of been angry towards her just because they were intoxicated, not the fact that she was black. McClain writes, “Cyril says a black male employee of the bar pushed and restrained her.” (McClain, 552). This proves that this employee, did not take into account that she was black, and fought against her anyway. There was no evidence of overt racism or sexism in this case, but it was all implied due to her differing characteristics. Many could argue that instances like these are being made too big of an issue out of nothing.

But, the people who say that racism is not a problem today are the people that are adding to the problem.

Racism, unfortunately, has not gone anywhere. This is because of the the deep history of racism America has. It has not gone away since the beginning of America, whether it be pushing the Native Americans out of their own land, or bringing over slaves from Africa. Such events have been abolished in the past, but left significant stigmas behind. Racism is worse in the south, for example, where the “Unite the Right Rally” was, because of it is where slavery was most prominent. There have also been the most hate crimes in this region. These events have shaped our current society. Racial slurs are still being used because they used by the generations before us before us. Racism still exists because of our tragic history. The severity of racism has deteriorated over time, even though it is still present in society and pop culture. We can only hope that one day, it will be gone all together.