

The African Diaspora- what does it mean to you?

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REVENGE OF THE UNPRETTY

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As a fantasy/escapist movie junkie, I had LOVED the first transformers and so was anxious to see what this second movie had to offer; a move I would regret later. Aside from what in my opinion was bad plot, bad dialogue, and a bombarding with way too much visual imagery by excessive special effects; Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen left me irked because of one individual:

Megan Fox.

The first vision we get of Megan Fox, has haunted me since I left the cinema and continues to haunt me for reasons other than what you think and I will try to explain as best as I can.

It was an ordinary night. My Bahamian friend, My African American companion (and part time hairdresser for a reason I will never understand other than her true kind-heartedness, for my hair is always a hot mess) and I made our way into the cinema and waited anxiously through commercials and previews for Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen to begin. From the beginning, I am pretty much enjoying the movie until we are presented with Mikaela, Sam's paramour (who I was happy he was successful at getting, a cute cliché of the "geek" guy get's the "hot" girl) from the first movie, played of course by Megan Fox

The opening scene with Fox is deliberately done. She is straddling a motorcycle with a headset talking to Sam. She is dressed in cut off denim shorts, the shortness of which allows your eyes to progress up from tan legs, past her impossibly flat stomach--hidden underneath a cropped t-shirt-- and stop just at the right place to get a good peak of her ass cheek.

And suddenly, sitting in my seat I felt bad about the popcorn, and other concessions I was happily munching on, thinking that perhaps I should have started taking advantage of my job at the gym.

The focus is now on her face, with her fully glossed cherry lips upturned into a sneer, and lidded behind thick black (probably because of her mascara) lashes, lie her bright blue eyes that reminded me of the blue waters of the Caribbean sea.

I was struck by the blue of her eyes; where had I seen those eyes?

I am flung back to that place in my memory, my imagination recreates time as a child.

I sit playing with my Barbie doll, brushing her long straight and soft blonde hair, as she stared at me with lifeless blue eyes and cherry red lips.

Beautiful, I'd think so beautiful...

Back in the present my eyes move to stare at Megan's almost identical hair which falls dark, long and straight on the side of her head.

And I'd remember a time where I'd wear a t-shirt on my head and pretend as though I had hair as long as my Barbie doll. And I would stroke and stroke the cotton fabric, despite how ridiculous I looked.

Beautiful, I'd think, so beautiful...

But that was a long time ago. Time moves forward and here I sit...

Those of you in higher education institutions can appreciate how our minds have been shaped to look at things more critically; analyze any information that we take in, assess it and draw conclusions as to how it affects and adds to our discipline. As a Psychology major I have studied how gullible the mind is; a powerful tool yet fragile in how it can be molded to bend to the will:

"A subliminal message is a signal or message embedded in another medium, designed to pass below the normal limits of the human mind's perception..."

If my detailed description hasn't made it clear already, you get the message or at least the message I thought was being sent out in the way they chose to focus on her; the very fact that they had decided to have her straddling a hog in a pose as provocative as one that looked like it belonged in a nudie magazine; the very fact that although she worked in an auto shop she was dressed as though she was ready to go to the beach, with her unblemished skin and make up done to a tee. Clean, her white pants never soiled despite running through the sand (that they implied was all Egypt/Jordan was), and make up always on point; her lip-gloss forever popping!

Throughout the movie, as we were bombarded and bombarded with images of her, the message insisted upon itself:

This woman was beautiful.

"These messages are unrecognizable by the conscious mind, but in certain situations can affect the subconscious mind and can positively..."

And 'we' were supposed to be sexually excited by her

But as a woman whose sexual interest gravitates towards men, I wondered, what message I was supposed to be taking from this?

I supposed, that I was supposed to agree, and hold her as beautiful.

And probably, I thought, the many more movies I would see her in, the many entertainment magazine covers claiming her as the new Angelina Jolie, a sex symbol, would all agree (or at least most of the ones here) that she was the most beautiful woman in the world...

"...or negatively influence subsequent later thoughts..."

I sit in my living room, watching TV, admiring Miss Universe, with the most beautiful ladies in the world; no sorry, the Universe! And I watch as Miss Venezuela struts the catwalk in her swimsuit (showing off her cream coloured skin), her long and wavy brown hair and hazel eyes and cherry red lips...

Beautiful, I'd think so beautiful...

It's the top ten, Ghana doesn't make it past the introduction; Ghana never does. But I don't care because I'm rooting for Miss Venezuela. I jump up and down with glee as they call her to receive her crown and she glides so gracefully to be crowned the best woman to represent all the beauty of our universe...

Beautiful...so beautiful

“...behaviors, actions...”

And I remember at 15, sitting in the hairdresser chair, getting my hair relaxed for the first time. It burnt, it hurt, but the end result was straight black hair and no longer the kinky “nappy” hair I’d had before.

Beautiful, I thought, so beautiful...

But staring in the mirror in fascination of my new hair, I frowned when I realized it wasn’t as long as I would like and stayed stiff when I twirled, attempting to imitate those hair relaxer adverts, or those African American women in the hip hop videos (young and ignorant, I had yet to understand the weave).

But at least it wasn’t nappy no mo’...

“...attitudes...”

And I remember looking at my friend’s new coloured contact lenses for the first time. And I’d stared at her, with envy as deep as her new green eyes..

Beautiful, I thought, so beautiful...

... for I knew my vision was perfect and I wouldn’t be allowed to get contact lenses—I hadn’t yet been informed about the non-prescription kind. No matter, I would suffer in silence and keep my dull blackish brown eyes...

“belief systems and value systems...”

Watching Megan Fox (and most of the females in the movie) being displayed in all her “sexy” glory, I swallow back my thoughts, or rather, I choose to deal with them after I’m done watching the movie. I am not going to let my overly critical nature ruin this movie for me. Simultaneously, I am hoping that I will be compensated with an equally stimulating view of Josh Duhamel or Tyrese, who have been in fatigues the whole time. However, by the time the movie ends, I don’t recall even seeing them in a vest. But I do recall an unpleasant view of John Turturro’s ass.

And after having left the cinema long ago and thoroughly dissatisfied, I lie in my bed; some days after; walking to the gym late for work again, I reflect (as usual) on this further. I remember sitting in a women’s studies class with Diane Harriford as part of the larger ‘Sistah Power!’ program...

...I am in the cafeteria of a middle school in Poughkeepsie; I am surrounded by a smaller group –out of a larger group—of younger women of colour; most of them are African-American. The youngest is 7 the oldest is 10 and we are talking about how the media influences our perceptions of beauty. I hold a magazine page in my hand, with a model on it, point to it and ask—of course after a short debate over whether or not she was Alicia Keys or Rihanna, I can’t remember which:

“Do you think she’s beautiful?” I ask the young group.

The general consensus is that yes she is,

“Why,” I press further, “Why d’you think she is beautiful?”

“Because...because...because...”

I smile.

Only 7 & 10, instinct picked up in my developmental psychology class tells me that they don't quite have the vocabulary or the awareness to articulate what exactly it is they feel, so I urge them some more; some lawyers might call it leading:

"What makes her beautiful, is it her hair, her eyes, skin colour, clothes, what?"

They shout yes to each and I pick the ones I want, the ones I've been trained to target; hair and skin colour.

"What makes her hair beautiful?" I insist, searching for the answer I'm looking for. The answer that I was sure a seven year old black female, as I'd once been, would have given, "What makes her skin beautiful?"

The general consensus is that her cream coloured skin is very 'nice', and that it is because her hair is long and wavy...

"But what about me?" I argue against the logic of their young reasoning. "I'm dark-skinned and have short hair, does that mean I'm not beautiful..?"

Internalized racism occurs when people targeted by racism are, against their will, coerced and pressured to agree with the distortions of racism.

I am in high school again, someone is talking to me about how everyone calls this girl "Blackie" because she's so 'black'. I laugh, amused by the person's tone, and relieved as well as grateful that even though I am dark-skinned I am not as dark to merit such a name.

In our societies, racist attitudes are so harsh, so pervasive, and so damaging that each of us is forced at times to turn racism in upon ourselves and seemingly agree with some of the conditioning, internalizing the messages of racism.

But a part of me mostly laughs out of sympathetic embarrassment.

We come to mistreat ourselves and other members of our group in the same ways that we have been mistreated as the targets of racism.

My head aches. I shake it, wishing to rid myself of such thoughts but I cannot. Three years of studying the situation of black people, our violent histories of subjugation, subordination of the physical, psychological and spiritual kind won't let me; three years of studying how human beings are so susceptible to social pressures beyond our control in a way that is so simple and yet so complex, won't let me; the problem of skin bleaching (a practice some people believe makes them more "beautiful") in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and in the African-American community, won't let me; being passed over for any kind of service, for a 'white' person won't let me; being told that I would be last if ranked according to skin colour and attractiveness by a random stranger, won't let me:

"I'm dark-skinned and have short hair, does that mean I'm not beautiful..?"

The general consensus is no, and in their sweet little voices they declare that although this girl is beautiful, Big sister Nana too is beautiful.

My heart soars to know these girls have a better chance of escaping, as mere children, what I could not until more than twice their age.

I smile back and assure them that we are all beautiful, but each in a different way and beauty is in their intelligence, their talent, their beliefs and values. One girl comments on the “hot sexy man” at the back of the page; I laugh. That is a topic for another day...

Psychologists and other social scientists are not the only ones with insight into the human mind. Any writer/artist of any kind can understand that most possess the talent and gift of manipulation; our manipulation of our various languages or images or colours, sounds etc., with which we create our work. Most are intuitive and have a keen insight into human behaviour and emotions which they often time replicate in their works—and so many have the power to elicit and pull on the emotions and minds of their audience, playing them like a fiddle

The better the artist, the more power they have. Is knowledge not passed down through the media? The books we read, the films we watch? The music we listen to?

Movie-makers are such artists who wield such power. But most are oblivious to this power, most are oblivious to how much they impact or are impacted by the things people tell and show us, even though their intentions may or may not be honourable.

And hopefully I have used that same power in this message to impact you and open your eyes to see what I see in the world. Whether you choose to agree with me or not is fine.

A Girl Like Me
Youth Documentary
07:08 min
Director: Kiri Davis
Producer: Reel Works Teen Filmmaking

Other Sources:
<http://www.rc.org/uer/InternalizedRacism.html>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subliminal_message

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