Reflection Essay

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Reflection Essay

Exploring Masculinities: Identity, Inequality, Continuity, and Change is a famous book that analyzes masculinities in different times, contexts, and embodiments. It provides an extensive study for understanding masculinities studies from a variety of perspectives. Two readings ‘Remaking Manhood through Race and “Civilization”’ by Gail Bederman and “Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man- Introduction” by John F. Kasson, and the two documentaries “The mask you Live in” and “Tough Guise 2” are analyzed in this essay.

# Remaking manhood through Race and “Civilization”

Gail Bederman in Remaking Manhood through Race and “Civilization” states that manhood is not created by universal biological ideas; it is rather created by changing ideologies. Commonly termed as “masculinity” today, manhood is a dynamic and continual process. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, for the establishment of white middle class as the standard citizen of the American nation, masculinity was fashioned along gender and racial lines by the American middle class. According to Bederman, gender is an ideological and historical process that is dynamic and always changing. Race is another category that links identities and power. In America, male power was linked to whiteness. Powerful manhood was associated with white supremacy by the Americans.

During the 19th century, the citizenship rights in America were associated to manhood rights that included white males only. The African-Americans were placed in the category of “dependents” that was the same as women. To prove their masculinity, the African American males started enlisting themselves in Army during Civil War. They considered it the only way to get civic power through gender. The Americans always linked gender with race as they considered manly power to be the racial supremacy of the civilized white men. The white males who explored the primitive tribes of Africa were regarded as civilized heroes(Remaking Manhood through Race and “Civilization” – Gail Bede by Evelyn Jajou on Prezi n.d.) .

The perfect example of manly superiority is the comparison of white civilized men to the dark-skinned men in several contexts and venues. The white men belonging to middle class linked the manhood to the primitivism and savagery of the dark men, whose manhood they claimed to share. Bederman states that the whites to maintain their racial authority, gender, and class introduced the term “civilization”. The civilized men were the protectors of women, and were self-controlled, and the white women spiritual, delicate, and devoted to home. The savage men, on the other hand, were non-civilized as they abandoned their children, raped women, and even dressed like women wearing skirts and jewelry. The savage women carried burdens like men, were aggressive, and did all labor like the males.

**Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man- Introduction**

John F. Kasson in “Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man- Introduction” discusses the forces of modernity that affected men’s sense of who and what they are, which led to crisis in America. The three exemplars of power mentioned by Kasson are the amazing escape artist Harry Houdini, the great bodybuilder and international vaudeville star Eugen Sandow, and the fictional hero Tarzan by Edgar Rice Burrough. Each of them was a perfect representation of both modern commodity and ancient ideal of manhood. These figures are mentioned in the rich cultural and historical context because of their self-development and self-fulfillment. By examining the lives of these males, Kasson states that masculinity took a turning point due to modernity. The symbol of white males became a symbol of both resistance to modernity and modernity itself (“Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America” - The New York Times 2001)

**The Mask you Live in**

The documentary film “The Mask you Live in” is an exploration of the harmful notions related to the masculinity in the American culture. It mentions the impacts of gender representation and gender socialization in the American society. This film negotiates America’s narrow definition of masculinity by following boys and young men who struggle to stay true to themselves. The film includes clips of men talking to each other about masculinity, and shows several interviews of both females and males. A strong emphasis on the father-son relationship was seen throughout the film along with the kind of parenting attitude that is responsible for exacerbating negative societal hopes for men and boys. The psychological and sociological statistics presented in the video are very frightening. The documentary film emphasizes that there is a need to look at the bad behavior of the boys, the reasons behind it, and some effective ways of solving this problem (The Mask You Live In - Trailer n.d.).

**Tough Guise 2**

In the Documentary film “Tough Guise 2” an argument is presented that states that the men’s violence in America is deeply rooted in the inability of American society to think beyond the outmoded ideals of manhood. Mass shootings, bullying, violence against women, gay bashing, American Militarism, and day-to-day gun violence are responsible for the challenges to authority and traditional male power. The ethnic, racial and class differences prevailing the society are examined in the video. According to that, media plays a major role in depicting the images of manhood to the society, and in making and shaping the personal and cultural attitudes of the people. It argues that the culture of violence in America is always linked to the Violence of masculinity, which teaches boys that being physically tough, dominant, and violent are the signs of manhood. This documentary is informative as it represents a shocking news of boys and men getting homophobic, sexist, and violent messages from almost every corner of culture such as television, movies, sports, pornography, and even the politics. Tough Guise 2 is an empowerment and encouragement to the people that makes them realize the truth of masculinity. It encourages them to put up the false ideas that engaging in violence or destruction makes the person a real man or masculine (Digital 2014).

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