

Aaron Klapheck

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Paper 2

Rush Hour and Racism

Black people can't drive and Chinese people all look the same. Not really, but these are a few of the stereotypes that I noticed were perpetuated in Rush Hour. Racial stereotypes of language, behavior, and perception were presented throughout Rush Hour. Rush Hour had a way of identifying the stereotypes many people hold and showing how ridiculous they can really be. Despite the heavy use of stereotyping, the underlying message of the entire film is that we can all get along despite our differences.

The first thing I noticed in the movie was when Carter (Chris Tucker), the black cop, drove into town he was driving like a lunatic. I felt that this was a perpetuation of the notion that black people can't drive. I noticed this stereotype because my wife once dated a black man and was pulled over nearly once every single month, usually for ridiculous reasons. As Carter was driving like a maniac he was also shouting obscenities to other drivers which I thought was pretty funny given his driving at the time.

A lack of trust between people of different nations was also very evident in the film. When the ruler of Hong Kong's daughter was kidnapped in the USA he did not trust the FBI to safely return her. This was evident when the ruler of Hong Kong stated: "My daughter is not an American!" and insisted that his own private agent, Lee, (Jackie Chan), be sent to fix the situation. This lack of trust was equally reciprocated by the USA when they tried to pair Lee with Carter, whose job it was to make sure that Lee does nothing of importance. The FBI stated: "We don't need no Hong Kong cop." I felt that this distrust was on a cultural level. This goes back to a time when Americans thought that the East gained its knowledge from the West.

One part in the movie I thought was particularly funny was when Carter described what his parents thought of their son being a LAPD cop. Carter said: "My mom tells people that I am a drug dealer." I found this to be very surprising. I don't know if African Americans really have this large a problem with law enforcement or not, but it sure is depicted as a serious problem in the media. Racism, or "our tendency to classify and to stratify people by their appearance," as described by Kottak, seems to be very prevalent when it comes to blacks and law enforcement. Seeing this stereotype pronounced so openly by Carter is what I believe makes it so funny.

By far the scenes of this movie which contain the most humor are in the interactions of Carter, the African American cop, and Lee, the Asian cop. The amount of racial assumptions made by each cop concerning the other was hilarious. Seeing all the racial assumptions, ones that most people think about in the quiet of their minds, being publically displayed by each cop made all the assumptions seem very ludicrous. The first American assumption made by many in the United States is that if a person is speaking to a non-native English speaker that does not understand the language, they tend to talk

louder and slower, as if this will somehow facilitate communication. Seeing Carter yell at Lee in English was quite funny. Another assumption is that people who look the same must know or be related to each other. "You might see one of your cousins around here," was Carter's remark to Lee when they entered China Town. This is again demonstrated by the fact that Carter seems to know almost all the black people he comes in contact with. I realized that I felt this way many times in my life and have only recently realized how silly this belief is. I thought this way mainly because when I saw African American people interact, they seem to know many of the other African American people around them. I know realize that I happen to know many of the white people who are around me because I just happen to be around them a lot, not because I know most white people.

Seeing derogatory racial labels being used so openly was also humorous. Hearing Carter refer to Lee as "Mr. Rice O-Roni" was an obvious racial characterization, but at the same time was said in a way that was quite funny. This reminds me of the time when relatives of mine were visiting with us. This story involves my wife's relatives from a small town in Michigan who got into a cab that happened to be driven by an Asian man. In relating the story, my relatives kept referring to the Asian driver as a "China-Man." It turns out that her uncle asked the man, "Do you eat rice everyday?" It was also pretty funny hearing that this cab driver actually did eat a cut of rice every day.

A good deal of assumptions were also made by each cop when it came to language. The first linguistic assumption was made by Carter when he yelled at Lee because he assumed that Lee did not speak English. Carter stood by his assumption until Lee finally spoke. Lee also made the same linguistic assumption about Carter until he spoke in Chinese. At that time Carter echoed Lee's response of why he didn't tell Lee that he could speak Chinese, saying "You assumed that I didn't speak Chinese." For many Americans this linguistic assumption is reversed though. Many Americans, especially vacationers, expect that the countries they visit will already know how to speak English. Not only that, some Americans are so arrogant that they will actually refer to the people of the area they are visiting as "foreigners."

After their trip to China Town the two detectives went to an African American club. Being out of his element, Lee mimicked Carter's behavior with the other black people present. Hearing Lee say, "Was-up my N**gars," was such unexpected behavior that I couldn't help but laugh. There are certain phrases that are culturally accepted for people to say within their own culture but not for people of other cultures to say.

A blatant stereotype that occurred was that Asian people are always quiet and reserved, whereas black people are loud and obnoxious. Lee's character was usually quiet and unassuming. However, on the opposite end of the spectrum, Carter just couldn't seem to be quiet, and usually got himself into more trouble than he was already in because he couldn't seem to keep his mouth shut. For example, when they are both in a fight together, Lee quickly responds by pulling out a martial arts move and disabling his opponent. Carter, however, spends a good deal of time making fun of, or verbally abusing, his enemy, giving them plenty of time to respond to his presents.

However, at the end of the movie, Lee and Carter turned out to be great friends despite their differences. They solved the crime, "got the girl," and even rocked out to the Beach Boys (a typical 'American' band) together. Bringing the message home that if Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker can get along, why can't the rest of us work through our differences? Friend chicken and chow mien anyone?

Bibliography

Kottak, Conrad & Kathryn Kozaitis. On Being Different; Diversity and Multiculturalism in the North American Mainstream. 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008. Page 110.