
An Analysis of Slavery in Ethnic Notions, Southpark and Race: The Power of an Illusion

Ethnic Notions argues that African Americans were portrayed on television and in theater acts in the most convenient way to those in power. This is shown when slavery was in full bloom and the majority of America was for slavery; African Americans were portrayed as simple people, or in the movies the most common was the big black women servant. She was often very loving to the family who she was serving and seemed very content with her life. Then when slavery started to become an issue, slaves were portrayed drastically different manner.

Once people started to get a negative view of slavery then slaves were portrayed as a people reverting to a certain savagery and that they needed the “white man” to help them. So these African Americans slaves were portrayed in a manner to keep them at the social level that those in power wanted them. It a perfect cycle of they were portrayed in a manner so people, the American population, saw them, the slaves, in that manner and then in turn believed them to act in that manner. Race: The Power of an Illusion tackles these ideas in a different yet similar manner.

When starting the documentary, Race: The Power of an Illusion, poses the question of what is race, and separates the races? Now normally people may think of race as something biologically, yet that could not be further from the truth. Race is a social construct that has lived on since the time of the slaves to further the white males of the times. It is an illusion, and in turn a social construct. It is all a story, a fugazi of society. The documentary brings up probably the most commonly “known” thing about race and that is that black athletes have an advantage over white athletes. The belief of the time was that blacks must have something different in their bodies to give them a physical edge. Obviously these claims are false and grounded in fictional science, but it was used as a reason to explain why black athletes where beating white athletes in the eugenics age. Race may not be “real” in terms of biology, as there are such small differences in people of different skin colors, but race is real in terms of how we view a person.

Race is very much real in how we view a person. This could even be seen back in the slave age as Thomas Jefferson wrote that black people were savages, while calling Indian people brave warriors, because they were closer to being white. This idea that “race” can classify a person has continued on and still lives in modern day stereotypes.

When asked to watch a television show my immediate thought went to South Park and the World War Zimmerman episode. In the episode Eric Cartman is trying to befriend Token, the token black character, because of the George Zimmerman verdict. Cartman believed that black riots would destroy the world, and was trying to stop them through Token. Now obviously this kind of social commentary is that of satire, but the underlying idea that black people are savages still resonates as it did in Ethnic Notions and Race: The Power of an Illusion. Even after hundreds of years people still have this idea that we as a society, we being white people, still should fear black people.

South Park as a whole because it actually has a very balanced class as Token, the black character, is rich. Kenny is the poor white trash, and all of the main characters, Cartman, Stan,

and Kyle are all white males of the same social standing. It is similarly balanced in the sense of gender as it has Wendy, the strong female character, who often opposes Cartman and even beats him up. So overall it only dives into social issues to highlight and sometimes satire what we as a country feel. This could be the black riots I mentioned before, or how they poked fun at how many people are afraid of transgender people. While *Ethnic Notions and Race: The Power of an Illusion* directly tells the story of race, *South Park* does it indirectly. In *South Park* race, gender, and class all work together, when needed, to highlight an issue in our country or around the world.

gradesfixer.com